



State of Siege, Albert Camus

State of Siege

Characters in the Play

First Part Prologue

Second Part

Third Part

STATE OF SIEGE

A PLAY IN THREE PARTS

To JEAN-LOUIS BARRAULT

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

THE PLAGUE - WOMEN OF CADIZ

THE SECRETARY - MEN OF CADIZ

NADA - AN OFFICER

VICTORIA - A HERALD

THE JUDGE - A FISHERMAN

THE JUDGES'S WIFE - AN ASTROLOGER

THE JUDGE'S DAUGHTER - AN ACTOR

DIEGO - A MERCHANT

THE GOVERNOR - A PRIEST

THE ALCALDE - A BOATMAN

BEGGARS, GUARDS, TOWN CRIERS

L'ÉTAT DE SIÈGE (STATE OF SIEGE) was presented for the first time at the THÉÂTRE MARIGNY, Paris, on October 27, 1948, by the COMPAGNIE MADELEINE RENAUD-JEAN-LOUIS BARRAULT, with incidental music by ARTHUR HONEGGER.

FIRST PART

PROLOGUE

A musical overture built around a theme recalling the sound of an air-raid siren.

When the curtain rises the stage is in darkness.

The overture ends, but the drone of the siren persists in the background.

Suddenly a comet rises stage-right, then glides slowly across the blackness of the sky toward stage-left, showing up in outline the walls of a Spanish fortified city and the forms of some people standing with their backs to the audience and gazing up at the comet.

A clock strikes four. The dialogue that now begins is barely comprehensible, a muttering of broken phrases.

It's the end of the world.

Don't talk nonsense!

If the world is dying ...

The world, maybe; not Spain.

Even Spain can die.

On your knees, and pray for mercy!

It's the comet of evil.

Not of Spain; there'll always be a Spain!

[Two or three people turn their heads. Some shift their positions cautiously. Then all are motionless again, while the buzzing in the air grows louder, shriller, more insistent, and, taken up by the orchestra, acquires the tone of a threatening voice. The comet, too, swells prodigiously. Suddenly a woman screams; at her scream the music stops abruptly and the comet dwindles to its original size. Gasping for breath, the woman rushes away. There is a general movement of the crowd. The ensuing dialogue, pitched slightly higher than before, is easier to follow.]

It's a sign of war.

That's sure.

It's nothing of the sort!

That depends.

Nonsense! It's only the heat.

The heat of Cadiz.

That's enough!

It's terrifying, the noise it makes.

It's deafening!

It means our city's doomed.

Alas, poor Cadiz! You're doomed!

Quiet! Quiet!

[They are gazing again at the comet when a voice is clearly heard, that of an OFFICER of the Watch.]

THE OFFICER: Go back home, all of you. You have seen what you have seen, and that's enough. Much to-do for nothing, and nothing will come of it. Cadiz is still Cadiz, after all.

A VOICE: Still, it's a warning. Signs in the heavens are sent to warn us.

A VOICE: O great and terrible God!

A VOICE: There's a war coming—it's a sign of war.

A VOICE: That's all old wives' tales, you dolt! We have too much intelligence nowadays, thank goodness, to believe such superstitious nonsense.

A VOICE: So you say! And that's the way one's sure of running into trouble. Stupid as pigs, that's what you clever folk are. And, don't forget, pigs end up with their throats slit.

THE OFFICER: Go back to your homes. War is our concern, not yours.

NADA: Ah! I only wish it was! But what happens when there's a war? The officers die in their beds, and it's we who get it in the neck.

A VOICE: That's Nada. Listen to him! Nada the halfwit.

A VOICE: Tell us, Nada. You should know. What does that thing portend?

NADA [he is a cripple]: You never like what I have to tell you. You always laugh at me. Why not ask that medical student instead; he's

going to be a doctor soon and he should know.... Me, I talk to my bottle. [Raises a bottle to his lips.]

A VOICE: Diego! Tell us what it means.

DIEGO: What does that matter to you? Keep stout hearts and all will be well.

A VOICE: Ask the officer what he thinks about it.

THE OFFICER: The officer thinks you people are committing a breach of the peace.

NADA: The officer is lucky. He does his job and has no use for highfalutin ideas.

DIEGO: Look! It's off again!

A VOICE: O great and terrible God!

[The buzzing starts again, and the comet crosses the sky as before. Voices in the crowd.]

Stop!

That's enough!

Poor Cadiz!

Listen! It's sizzling!

It means we're all done for.

Keep quiet, damn you!

[A clock strikes five. The comet fades out. Day is breaking.]

NADA [seated on a milestone, chuckling ironically]: So there you are! I, Nada, luminary of this city by grace of my superior wit and knowledge, drunkard out of disdain for everything and my loathing for your

esteem, flouted by you because I alone have kept intact the freedom that comes of scorn—I. Nada the prophet, am moved to give you, now that the fireworks are over, a warning, gratis and guaranteed correct. So let me tell you, we are in for it, definitely in for it—and we're going to be in it, up to the neck.

Mind you, we've been in for it quite a while; only it took a drunkard like myself to know that. For what? you ask me. That's for you to guess, my brainy friends. I formed my own opinion long ago, and I've no intention of departing from it. Life and death are one, and man's a faggot for the burning. Yes, you're heading for trouble, take my word for it; that comet was a bad omen, sure enough. A warning to you all.

Ah, you don't believe me? Just as I expected. Provided you eat your three meals, work your eight hours a day, and pay the keep of your two women, you think that all is well and you're in step. And so you are, marching in step like a chain-gang, mighty pleased with yourselves, treading the good old beaten track. Only, my worthy friends, don't forget you're marching to calamity. Well, there you have my warning, my conscience anyhow is clear. But you need not worry; they are bearing you in mind up there. [Points to the sky.] And you know what that means. They're holy terrors.

JUDGE CASADO: That's enough, Nada. I will not permit blasphemy. You have been taking liberties—disgraceful liberties—with the Creator far too long.

NADA: Oh, come now, judge! Did I say anything about the Creator? I heartily approve of all He does. For I, too, am a judge in my own fashion. I've read in books that it's wiser to be hand in glove with Him than to be his victim. What's more, I doubt if God is really to blame. Once men start upsetting the appplecart and slaughtering each other,

you soon discover that God—though He, too, knows the ropes—is a mere amateur compared with them.

JUDGE CASADO: It's rascals of your sort who bring these celestial warnings. For, mark my words, that comet was a warning. But it was meant for those whose hearts are evil. And who of you can say his heart is pure? Therefore I bid you fear the worst and pray God to pardon your offenses. Down on your knees, then! On your knees! [All kneel, NADA excepted.] Fear, Nada! Fear and kneel!

NADA: It's no use asking me to kneel. My leg's too stiff. As for fearing—I'm prepared for everything, even the worst, by which I mean your precious piety.

JUDGE CASADO: So you believe in nothing, wretched man?

NADA: In nothing in the world, except wine. And in nothing in heaven.

JUDGE CASADO: O Lord, forgive him, for he knows not what he says, and spare this city of thy children.

NADA: *Ite, missa est.* Diego, stand me a bottle at the Sign of the Comet. And tell me how your love-affair's progressing.

DIEGO: I am engaged to the Judge's daughter, Nada, and I'll ask you to stop insulting her father. You're insulting me as well.

[Trumpet call. A HERALD enters, accompanied by a group of the Watch.]

THE HERALD: These are the Governor's orders. Let each of you withdraw from hence and return to his work. Good governments are governments under which nothing happens. Thus it is the Governor's will that nothing shall happen here, so that his government may remain benevolent as it has always been. Therefore we apprise you, the townsfolk of Cadiz, that nothing has occurred to justify alarm or



discomposure. And accordingly, as from this sixth hour, each of you is ordered to deny that any comet has ever risen on the horizon of our city. All who disregard this order, any citizen who speaks of comets otherwise than as natural phenomena, past or to come, will be punished with the utmost rigor of the law.

[Trumpet call. The HERALD withdraws.]

NADA: Well, Diego, what do you think of that? Clever, ain't it?

DIEGO: Clever? I'd say ridiculous. Lying is always a fool's game.

NADA: No, it's good administration. What's more I heartily approve of it, since its object is to knock the bottom out of everything. Ah, how lucky we are to have such a Governor! If his budget shows a deficit or his good lady shares her bed with all and sundry, he just writes off the deficit and turns a blind eye to her goings-on. Cuckolds, your wives are faithful; cripples, you can walk; and you, the blind, can see. The hour of truth has struck!

DIEGO: Don't play the bird of ill omen, you old screech owl! For the hour of truth is the hour of the deathblow.

NADA: Exactly. Death to all the world, I say! Ah, if only I could have the whole world before me, tense and quivering like a bull in the arena, his small eyes red with fury and the foam on his pink muzzle like a frill of dirty lace! Old as it is, my arm wouldn't falter, I'd slit the spinal cord with one clean cut, and the huge brute would topple over and fall and fall through the abyss of space and time down to the crack of doom!

DIEGO: You despise too many things, Nada. Save up your scorn; some day you'll need it.

NADA: I need nothing. My scorn will see me through till my last hour. And nothing on this rotten earth of ours, no king, no comet, no moral code, will ever get me down.

DIEGO: Steady, Nada. Don't exalt yourself like that or we shall like you less.

NADA: I am above everything now—I have ceased to feel the need of anything.

DIEGO: No one is above honor.

NADA: And what, my son, is honor?

DIEGO: It is what holds my head up.

NADA: Honor is merely a natural phenomenon, past or yet to come. So—cut it out!

DIEGO: Have it your own way, Nada. Anyhow, I must be off; she's expecting me. That's why I don't believe in your gloomy prophecies; I'm too busy being happy. And that's a full-time occupation, which calls for peace and good will everywhere.

NADA: I have told you already, my son, that we are in it already, up to the neck. So abandon hope, the comedy is starting. In fact I've only just time enough to hurry to the market and drink a bottle to the triumph of death.

[All lights go out.]

END OF THE PROLOGUE

After some moments the lights go up on a scene of animation. Gestures are brisker, everyone moves to a faster rhythm. Music. Shopkeepers

take down their shutters, thus clearing the foreground of obstructions, and the market place comes into view. A CHORUS, composed of the populace and headed by the fishermen, gradually fills it. Their voices are exultant.

CHORUS: Nothing is happening, nothing will happen. Fresh fish! Fresh fish! It's not disaster threatening, but summer coming in. [Shouts of joy.] No sooner ends the spring than the golden orange of summer, launched across the sky to crown the season of the year, bursts above Spain in a shower of honey, while all the fruits of all the summers of the world—butter-yellow melons, luscious grapes, figs oozing blood, and apricots aflame—pour down in torrents on our market-stalls. [Shouts of joy.] Here ends their long, swift course in baskets from the countryside where they drank deep of sweetness and the juices of the soil till they hung drooping over meadows blue with heat amid innumerable springs of living water which, drawn through roots and stems, wound its way to their hearts, in a never-failing honeyed flow, swelling them out and making them heavier day by day.

Heavier, ever heavier! So heavy that in the end they sank through the limpid air, set to trundling over the lush grass, took ship on rivers or traveled along roads from the four points of the compass, acclaimed by joyful shouts and the clarion calls of summer. [Brief bugle-calls.] So now they throng the cities of men in testimony that the fathering sky has kept its tryst with fertile mother earth. [All join in a shout of triumph.] No, we have nothing to fear. Summer has come again, bringing largess, not disaster. Winter and its hard fare lie far ahead. Today we have cheeses scented with rosemary, and the gifts of smiling seas—mulletts, dories, fresh sardines, and lobsters. The goats' milk froths like soapsuds, and on marble slabs the red meat frilled with crisp white paper and redolent of clover proffers for men's nourishment blood and sap and sunlight. Here's to the flower of the year, the cycle of the

seasons ringing their changes! Let's drink ourselves into oblivion, nothing will happen!

[Cheering, shouts of joy, trumpet calls, music. At the corners of the market place little scenes are enacted.]

FIRST BEGGAR: Give alms, good man! Hey, grandmother, spare a penny!

SECOND BEGGAR: Better now than never!

THIRD BEGGAR: You see what we mean, eh?

FIRST BEGGAR: But of course nothing's happened, needless to say!

SECOND BEGGAR: But perhaps something's going to happen. [Steals a watch from a passer-by.]

THIRD BEGGAR: Prove your charity. It's better to be on the safe side.

[At the fish stalls.]

THE FISHERMAN: My John Dory's fresh as a daisy. A flower of the sea. What have you got against it, lady?

THE OLD WOMAN: That ain't no John Dory; it's a dogfish!

THE FISHERMAN: A dog-fish indeed! I'll swear no dogfish ever entered my shop—not unless you're one yourself, old witch!

THE OLD WOMAN: Shame on you, young scalawag! Look at my white hair.

THE FISHERMAN: Get out of here, you old comet!

[Suddenly all stop moving, their fingers to their lips. VICTORIA is standing at her window, behind the bars, DIEGO facing her.]

DIEGO: It's been ages since we were together.

VICTORIA: You foolish boy, we were together at eleven this morning.

DIEGO: Yes, but your father was there.

VICTORIA: My father said "Yes." And we were so sure he was going to make difficulties!

DIEGO: It shows how right I was to go and put it straight to him.

VICTORIA: Yes, Diego, you were right. While he was thinking it over I shut my eyes, and I seemed to hear a thudding of hoofs in the distance, coming nearer and nearer, louder and louder, till my whole body was shaken by the thunder of their onrush. But then I heard my father's voice. I heard him say "Yes." It was the first dawn of the world. And in a sort of waking dream I saw love's black horses, still quivering, but tamed forever. Waiting for us. Yes, it was for us that they had come.

DIEGO: I, too, was neither deaf nor blind. But all I heard then was the throbbing of my blood. Swiftly yet serenely joy welled up in my heart. City of light, my city, now you are mine for life—until the hour when the earth folds us in her embrace. Tomorrow we shall ride away together, you and I, on the same saddle.

VICTORIA: Yes—speak our language, even though to others it may sound crazy. Tomorrow you will kiss my mouth. I look at yours, and my cheeks burn. Tell me, is it the south wind?

DIEGO: It is the wind of the south, and it burns me, too. Where is the fountain that will cool its flame? [Goes up to the windows, and, thrusting his arms between the bars, grips her shoulders.]

VICTORIA: Ah, it hurts, loving you so much, so fiercely much! Come nearer!

DIEGO: How lovely you are!

VICTORIA: How strong you are, Diego!

DIEGO: With what do you wash your cheeks, to make them white as new-peeled almonds?

VICTORIA: With pure water, but love adds its balm.

DIEGO: Your hair is cool as the night.

VICTORIA: That's because every night I wait for you at my window.

DIEGO: Is it, then, clear water and the night that have given you the fragrance of a lemon tree in flower?

VICTORIA: No, it is the soft wind of your love that has covered me with flowers in a single day.

DIEGO: The flowers will fall.

VICTORIA: But then the fruit will ripen.

DIEGO: Winter will come.

VICTORIA: But winter shared with you. Do you remember that little song you sang me once—what ages ago it seems! Isn't it true as ever?

DIEGO:

When I am lying in the grave

And many a century has rolled past,

Were mother earth to ask me,

“Have you forgotten her at last?”

“Not yet,” I would reply.

[A short silence.]

But you’re silent, dear. What is it?

VICTORIA: I’m too happy to speak. Drowned in happiness!

[In the ASTROLOGER’S booth.]

THE ASTROLOGER [to a WOMAN]: The sun, dear lady, was entering the sign of the Balance at the hour of your birth. This means that you are under the influence of Venus, the sign in the ascendant being the Bull which, as we all know, is ruled by Venus. Thus you are naturally affectionate, amiable, and impulsive. You should be gratified by this conjunction, though I am bound to warn you that the Bull discountenances marriage and so your charming qualities well may run to waste. Also I see a conjunction of Venus and Saturn which likewise disfavors marriage and children. What’s more, this conjunction augurs queer tastes and may point to stomach trouble later on. But you needn’t feel alarmed. All that’s needed is to be out in the sun as much as possible. Sunlight not only stimulates the mind and morals but is also a sovereign cure for diarrhea. So, my dear young person, be sure to choose your friends among the bulls, and don’t forget your disposition is a lucky one, and the coming years have plenty of good things in store for you; in fact, you may look forward to a happy life.... My charge is six pesetas. [Pockets the money.]

THE WOMAN: I’m much obliged to you, sir. You’re quite sure about what you’ve just been telling me, aren’t you?

THE ASTROLOGER: Quite sure, you can depend on me. But there’s just one thing I ought to add. Nothing happened this morning, that we’re all agreed on. None the less, what has not happened may throw out my

horoscope. I'm not responsible for what hasn't happened. [The WOMAN goes away.] Ladies and gentlemen, let me cast your horoscopes. The past, present, and the future guaranteed by the fixed stars. The fixed stars, mind you! [Aside.] For if comets take a hand in it, I'll have to look round for another job. I might try for the post of Governor.

A GROUP OF MALE GYPSIES [speaking together]: A friend who wishes you well.... A dark lady smelling of orange blossom.... A holiday in Madrid.... A legacy from an uncle in America....

A GYPSY [by himself]: After your fair boy friend dies, lady, you'll be getting a dark letter ...

[On a mountebanks' makeshift stage in the background, a roll of drums.]

AN ACTOR: Open your pretty eyes, sweet ladies, and you, my noble lords, lend ear. You have before you the most renowned actors of the whole kingdom of Spain. I have induced them, not without great pains, to leave the Court and come to your market place, where they now will play for your good pleasure that famous one-act piece *The Phantoms* by our immortal bard Pedro de Lariba. I warrant it will take your breath away, good people. Such is the genius of our bard that at its first performance this play was ranked among the greatest masterpieces. And so much did His Majesty the King delight in it that he insisted on having it played before him twice a day, and indeed would be watching it at this very moment, had I not convinced my friends here of the desirability of performing it in this market place and making it known to the public of Cadiz, the most enlightened public of all the Spains.

So step forward, ladies and gentlemen; the show is going to begin.



[The performance begins as announced, but the actors' voices are drowned by the hubbub of the market.]

Fresh fruit! Fresh fruit!

Come and see the lobster-girl—half lobster, half woman!

Try out hot sardines! Straight from the frying-pan!

Come and see the king of jail-breakers! No prison bars can hold him.

Laces and wedding trousseaux. Fit for queens.

Buy my tomatoes, lady. They're sweet and tender as your heart.

Painless extractions. Your teeth out in a jiffy, without a twinge. Come to Pedro, the wizard dentist!

NADA [staggering from the tavern]: Smash everything! Make a stew of the tomatoes and the lady's heart! Lock up the king of prison-breakers and let's extract the wizard dentist's teeth! Lynch the astrologer, who can't predict what's coming to us! Let's roast the lobster-girl and eat her, and to hell with everything—except what you can drink!

[A richly clad foreign MERCHANT enters the market, followed by a bevy of girls.]

THE MERCHANT: Come and buy my ribbons, guaranteed the genuine Comet brand.

VOICES IN THE CROWD: Ssh! Ssh! You mustn't use that word.

[Someone whispers the explanation in his ear.]

THE MERCHANT: Come and buy my pretty ribbons, guaranteed the genuine—Constellation brand.

[Customers crowd round him. The GOVERNOR and his staff enter the market place and take their stand facing the populace.]

THE GOVERNOR: Worthy townsfolk, your Governor wishes you good day. He is pleased to see you gathered here as usual and carrying on with the activities that ensure the peace and prosperity of Cadiz. I am glad to see that nothing's changed, for that is as it should be. I like my habits, and change is the one thing I detest.

A MAN IN THE CROWD: No, Governor, nothing has changed; as we poor people can assure you. We live on olives, bread, and onions, and, as usual, haven't a penny in our pockets at the end of the month. As for boiled fowl, we have the consolation that others eat it every Sunday; it never comes our way. This morning there was quite a to-do in the town and overhead. There's no denying we were scared. It almost looked as if a change was coming and all of a sudden we would be forced to live on chocolate creams. No wonder we were startled! But thanks to your kindness, Governor, we know now that nothing has happened, and our ears misled us. So, like you, we feel at ease again.

THE GOVERNOR: Your Governor is pleased to hear it. Nothing new is good.

THE ALCALDES: How right the Governor is! Yes, nothing new is good. We, the Alcaldes of Cadiz, possess the wisdom of age and long experience, and we prefer to think the poor of our city were not indulging in irony when they spoke just now. For irony is destructive of virtue; a good Governor prefers constructive vices.

THE GOVERNOR: Meanwhile, let nothing move! I stand for immobility.

THE DRUNKARDS FROM THE TAVERN [grouped round NADA]: Yes, yes, yes. No, no, no. Let nothing move, good Governor. Right now everything is spinning around us, and that's exceedingly unpleasant. We, too, would much prefer immobility. So let all movement cease. Let everything come to a stop—except wine and folly.

CHORUS: Nothing's changed. Nothing's happening. Nothing has happened. The seasons wheel sedately on their axis and, up above, the tranquil stars are following their appointed courses. Geometry in its wisdom condemns those mad, erratic stars that burn the prairies of the sky with their fiery tresses, disturb the gentle music of the spheres with squeals, and the eternal laws of gravity with the wind of their speed; which make the constellations creak on their hinges and drive stars into collision on the highways of the firmament. Yes, thank heaven, all is as it should be, the world has kept its balance. This is the high noon of the year, the season of stability. Summer is here; happiness is ours. Nothing else counts, for we stake all on happiness.

THE ALCALDES: Since the universe has habits, all the more thanks to our Governor for being the champion of habit. He, too, disapproves of runaway horses. His realm is trim and tidy everywhere.

CHORUS: We shall behave well, never fear, since nothing changes or will change. What foolish figures we should cut with our hair streaming in the wind, bloodshot eyes, and screaming mouths!

THE DRUNKARDS [grouped round NADA]: Damn all movement, say we! Keep it down and under, and let's stay put forever. This happy realm will have no history if we let the hours glide by without a jolt. Summer, dear sleepy summer, is the season nearest to our hearts, because it is the hottest—and the thirstiest!

[The siren theme of the overture, which has been droning in the background for some minutes, suddenly rises to an ear-splitting stridence, and there are two ponderous thuds. One of the actors on the raised platform, while moving to the front and gesturing, staggers and topples over the edge among the crowd, which surges in on the fallen body. Complete silence follows; no one moves or speaks.

A sudden commotion; DIEGO is thrusting his way through the crowd, which slowly draws apart, revealing the prostrate man. Two doctors come up, examine the body, then, moving aside, confabulate excitedly.

A young man accosts one of the doctors, and in pantomime, asks for an explanation; the doctor makes a gesture of refusal. But the young man is persistent, and seconded by the bystanders, presses him to answer, grips his shoulders, shakes him, and finally grapples with him until their faces are quite close, their lips almost touching. A gasp, a quick intake of breath is heard—as though the young man were snatching a word from the doctor’s mouth. Then he moves away and after great efforts, as if the word were too big to be got out, ejaculates:

“Plague!”

Everyone sags at the knees and totters. Meanwhile the word travels from mouth to mouth, louder and louder, faster and faster, while all take to their heels and circle wildly round the dais on which the GOVERNOR has taken his stand again. The movement quickens, becomes a frantic swirl of agitated bodies: then abruptly all form into groups and remain quite still, while an old PRIEST speaks.]

THE PRIEST: To church, all of you! Know that the hour of reckoning has come and the ancient doom has fallen on our city. It is the penalty with which God has ever visited cities that have grown corrupt; thus it is He punishes them for their mortal sin. Your screams will be crushed down within your lying mouths and a burning seal set on your guilty hearts. Pray the God of justice to have mercy and forgive your sins. Get you to the church, and pray. [Some hasten to the church. Others keep moving, like wound-up toys, in circles, while a passing bell is tolled. Upstage, the ASTROLOGER begins speaking in a matter-of-fact tone, as if he were making a report to the GOVERNOR.]

THE ASTROLOGER: An ominous conjunction of hostile planets is taking form in the houses of the sky. It forbodes famine, drought, and pestilence for all and sundry....

[His voice is drowned by the shrill chatter of a group of WOMEN.]

THE WOMEN [speaking in turn]: Didn't you see? There was a huge beast fastened on his throat, sucking his blood with a noise like a stomach-pump.

It was a spider, a big black spider.

No, it was a little green spider.

No, it was a sea-lizard.

You didn't see properly. It was an octopus, big as a baby.

Diego! Where's Diego?

There'll be so many dead there won't be enough living to bury them.

Oh. it's too horrible! If only I could get away!

That's it. For heaven's sake let's go away!

VICTORIA: Diego! Where's Diego?

[Throughout this scene the sky teems with signs and wonders, while the siren theme swells and rises, adding to the general alarm. A man runs out of a house, screaming: "The end of the world is coming! In forty days the Last Trumpet will sound!" Another wave of panic sets the crowd gyrating, crying after him: "The end of the world! The end of the world in forty days!" While constables of the Watch arrest the prophet, a SORCERESS steps forward, crying herbal remedies.]

THE SORCERESS: Here's mint and sage, here's balm and rosemary, saffron, lemon peel, almond paste. Mark my words, these remedies have never been known to fail. [A cool wind rises as the sun begins to set; all raise their heads and gaze up at the sky.] The wind! The wind is rising. No plague can stand up to wind. So the worst is over, take my word for it.

[But, no sooner has she finished speaking than the wind drops, the wail of the siren rises to its shrillest, and two thuds, somewhat nearer and much louder than before, shake the air. Two men in the crowd fall down. Those near them totter, then begin to back away from the bodies. Only the SORCERESS remains, with the two men at her feet; each has the plague marks on his groin and neck. They writhe convulsively, move their arms feebly, and die, while darkness slowly falls on the crowd, which gradually disperses, leaving the corpses lying in the center of the stage.

Complete darkness.

Lights come on in the church and in the Judge's house, while a spotlight plays on the Governor's palace. The action shifts from one place to another, beginning at the palace.]

AT THE PALACE

FIRST ALCALDE: Your Honor, the epidemic is developing so rapidly that we have no hope of fighting it. The contamination is far more widespread than people realize; but I venture to suggest it would be wiser to keep them in ignorance. In any case, it is the outlying districts that are most affected; these are congested areas and inhabited by the poorer classes. Tragic as is the present state of things, this is something to be thankful for.

[Murmurs of approval.]

AT THE CHURCH

THE PRIEST: Approach, and let each one confess in public the worst thing he has done. Open your hearts, you who are damned! Tell each other the evil you have done and thought of doing, or else the poison of sin will stifle you and will lead you into hell as surely as the tentacles of the plague.... I accuse myself, for my part, of having often lacked in charity.

AT THE PALACE

[Three pantomimed confessions occur during the following dialogue.]

THE GOVERNOR: All will be well. The annoying thing is that I was to go hunting. These things always happen when one has important business. What shall I do?

FIRST ALCALDE: Do not by any means miss the hunt—if only to set an example. The city must see what a serene brow you can show in adversity.

AT THE CHURCH

THE CONGREGATION: We have left undone those things which we ought to have done and done those things which we ought not to have done. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us.

IN THE JUDGE'S HOUSE

THE JUDGE [surrounded by his family, reading from the Psalms]: "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence."

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: Casado, cannot we go out?

THE JUDGE: No, woman. You have gone out far too much in your life. And that has not brought us happiness.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: Victoria has not come home, and I can't help fearing that some evil thing has happened to her.

THE JUDGE: You showed no fear of evil where you yourself were concerned. And thus you betrayed your honor. No, you must stay here; this house will be an oasis of calm while the storm rages all around. We shall remain behind locked doors so long as the plague lasts, and if God is willing, we shall escape the worst.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: You are right, Casado. But we are not alone in the world, others are out in the storm. Victoria may be in danger.

THE JUDGE: Let them be, and think of the household. Of your son, for instance. Get in all the stores you can lay hands on, and never mind the price. The time has come for hoarding. Make your hoard! [Continues reading] "He is my refuge and my fortress ..."

AT THE CHURCH



THE CHOIR [intoning]: “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night;  
nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction  
that wasteth at noonday.”

A VOICE: O great and terrible God!

[The market place is illuminated. People are moving, swaying, to the  
rhythm of a copla.]

THE CHOIR:

Thou hast signed in the sand,

Thou hast written in the sea:

Nothing endures but misery.

[Enter VICTORIA. A spotlight plays on the scene that follows.]

VICTORIA: Diego! Where’s Diego?

A WOMAN: Busy with the sick. He’s doctoring all who ask his aid.

[Moving across the stage, VICTORIA runs into DIEGO, who is wearing  
the plague-doctors’ mask. She swerves aside with a little cry of fear.]

DIEGO: Do I scare you so much Victoria?

VICTORIA [joyfully]: Oh, it’s you Diego! At last I’ve found you! Take off  
that ugly mask and clasp me in your arms. Hold me tightly, as tightly as  
you can, and then I shall feel safe from everything. [He does not move.]  
What is it, darling? Has something changed between us? For hours and  
hours I’ve been hunting for you everywhere; I was so horribly afraid  
you might have caught it. And now I’ve found you, you are wearing that  
mask, that ghastly reminder of the disease. Do please take it off and  
hold me in your arms. [He takes off the mask.] When I see your hands,

my mouth is parched—kiss me! [He does not move. She continues in a lower voice.] Oh, kiss me, Diego; I'm dying of thirst. Have you forgotten that only yesterday we pledged our vows? All night I lay awake, waiting for this day to come, the day when you were going to kiss me with all your might. Please, Diego ...

DIEGO: I am torn with pity for these poor people, Victoria.

VICTORIA: So am I. But I have pity for us, too. That's why I've been searching for you, calling out your name in all the streets, and stretching my arms out, longing for your embrace. [Moves closer to him.]

DIEGO: No, don't touch me!

VICTORIA: Why not?

DIEGO: I feel like another man, a stranger to myself. Never have I been afraid of any human being—but what's happening now is too big for me. Even honor is no help; I'm losing grip of everything I clung to. [She comes toward him again.] No, please keep away. For all I know I have the infection already and might pass it on to you. Wait a little, give me time to get my breath; all this horror is stifling me. Why, I've even lost the knack of laying hold of men so as to turn them over on their beds. My hands shake too much and I'm half blinded by my pity. [Groans and cries in the distance.] You hear? They're calling for me. I must go to help them.... All I ask, Victoria, is that you take great care of yourself—for the sake of both of us. We shall see it through, I'm certain.

VICTORIA: Do not leave me.

DIEGO: All this will end, like a bad dream. It must! I am too young, and I love you too much. I loathe the very thought of death.

VICTORIA [with a quick, impulsive movement toward him]: But I, Diego—I am living.

DIEGO [shrinking from her]: How shameful, Victoria! The disgrace of it!

VICTORIA: What do you mean? What's there to be ashamed of?

DIEGO: I believe that I'm afraid.

[Again a sound of groans. He hurries away in their direction. The townsfolk are seen again, moving to the rhythm of a copla.]

CHORUS:

Who is wrong and who is right?

Truth is but surmise.

Death and death alone is sure,

All the rest is lies!

[Spotlights on the church and the Governor's palace. Psalms and prayers in the church. From the Palace the FIRST ALCALDE harangues the populace.]

FIRST ALCALDE: These are the Governor's orders. As a sign of penitence regarding the calamity that has befallen us and for the prevention of contagion, all public gatherings and entertainments are forbidden from now on. Also ...

[A WOMAN in the crowd starts screaming.]

THE WOMAN: There! Look there! Those people are hiding a corpse. It shouldn't be allowed. We'll all catch the infection. Why don't they go and bury it?

[General confusion. Two men step forward and lead away the WOMAN.]

THE ALCALDE: I am instructed also to let you know that the Governor has taken the best medical advice and is now in a position to reassure our townsfolk as to the probable course of this epidemic that has broken out so unexpectedly. The doctors agree that all that is needed is for a sea wind to rise, and it will sweep away the plague. So, with God's help ...

[Two tremendous thuds cut him short, followed a moment later by two more; meanwhile the death knell tolls incessantly and a sound of prayers issues from the church. Then all sounds cease abruptly, and in a startled hush, all eyes turn toward two approaching figures, strangers to the town, a man and a woman. The MAN is fat, bare-headed, and wears a sort of uniform on which hangs a medal. The WOMAN, too, is in uniform, with white cuffs and collar. She is carrying a notebook. They walk forward to the palace and salute the GOVERNOR.]

GOVERNOR: What do you want of me, strangers?

THE MAN [in a courteous tone]: Your post.

VOICES: What's that? What did he say?

GOVERNOR: This pleasantry is ill-timed, my man, and your impertinence may cost you dear.... But probably we misunderstood your words. Who are you?

THE MAN: Ah, that you'd never guess!

FIRST ALCALDE: I don't know who you are, stranger, but I do know where you will end up.

THE MAN [quite calmly]: You fill me with alarm.... [Turns to his companion.] What do you think, my dear? Must we really tell them who I am?

THE SECRETARY: Well, as a rule we break it to them more gradually, of course.

THE MAN: Still these gentlemen seem in a great hurry to know.

THE SECRETARY: No doubt they have their reasons. After all, we are visitors here and it's up to us to conform to the customs of the country.

THE MAN: Very true. But mightn't it trouble the minds of these good people, if we declare ourselves?

THE SECRETARY: Better a little trouble than a discourteous act.

THE MAN: Neatly put. Still, I must say I feel scruples....

THE SECRETARY: You have the choice of two alternatives.

THE MAN: I'm listening.

THE SECRETARY: Either you speak out, or you don't. If you do so, they will know at once. If you don't, they will find out later.

THE MAN: Nothing could be clearer.

THE GOVERNOR: That's enough of it! However, before proceeding to extreme measures, I call on you, for the last time, to tell me who you are and what you want.

THE MAN [still in a matter-of-fact voice]: I am ... the Plague—if you really must know.

THE GOVERNOR: What's that you said? The Plague?

THE MAN: Yes, and I must ask you to hand over your post to me. I hate having to rush you like this, please take my word for it; but I shall have a lot to do here. Suppose I give you two hours to transfer your functions to me? Do you think that would be enough?

THE GOVERNOR: This time you have gone too far, and you will be punished for this outrageous conduct. Officers of the Watch!

THE MAN: Wait! I should dislike having to use coercion. Indeed it's a principle with me always to behave in a gentlemanly way. I quite understand that my conduct may surprise you and of course you don't know me—yet. But, quite sincerely, I hope you will transfer your functions to me without forcing me to show of what I am capable. Can't you take my word for it?

THE GOVERNOR: I have no time to waste, and this tomfoolery has lasted long enough. Arrest that man!

THE MAN: I suppose there's no alternative. Still I must say it goes against the grain. My dear, would you proceed to an elimination?

[He points to an OFFICER of the Watch. The SECRETARY briskly crosses out an entry on her notebook. A dull thud. The OFFICER of the Watch falls. The SECRETARY scrutinizes him.]

THE SECRETARY: All correct, Your Honor. The three marks are there. [To the others, amiably] One mark, and you're under suspicion. Two, and you're infected. Three, and the elimination takes effect. Nothing could be simpler.

THE MAN: Ah, I was forgetting to introduce my secretary to you. As a matter of fact, you know her, though perhaps her sex misleads you. And of course one meets so many people, doesn't one ...?

THE SECRETARY: Oh, I wouldn't blame them for that; they always recognize me in the end.

THE MAN: A sunny temperament, as you see. Always smiling, punctual, trim, and tidy.

THE SECRETARY: That's nothing to my credit. The work's so much easier when one's surrounded by fresh flowers and smiles.

THE MAN: How true! But let's return to our immediate business. [To the GOVERNOR] Have I made it sufficiently clear that you'd do well to take me seriously? You don't reply? Well, I can understand your feelings; I startled you just now. But I can assure you it was most distasteful, having to take that line. I'd have much preferred a friendly arrangement, based on comprehension on both sides and guaranteed by your word and mine—a gentleman's agreement, as they call it. Indeed even now it's not too late for that. Would two hours suffice for the formalities of handing over? [The GOVERNOR shakes his head. The MAN turns to his SECRETARY.] How tiresome all this is!

THE SECRETARY [tossing her head]: Yes, obviously he's one of those obstinate men. What a nuisance!

THE MAN [to the GOVERNOR]: Still, I particularly want to get your consent. In fact it would run counter to my principles if I took any steps before securing your approval. My charming secretary will proceed to make as many eliminations as are needed to persuade you to co-operate—of your own free will, of course—in the small reforms I have in mind.... Are you ready, my dear?

THE SECRETARY: My pencil's blunt. Just give me time to sharpen it and all will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

THE MAN [sighing]: How I'd loathe my job, if it wasn't for your cheerfulness!

THE SECRETARY [sharpening her pencil]: The perfect secretary is sure that everything can always be put right; that there's no muddle in the accounts that can't be straightened up in time, and no missed appointment that can't be made again. No cloud but has a silver lining,

as they say. Even war has its advantages and even cemeteries can turn out to be paying propositions if the grants in perpetuity are canceled every ten years or so.

THE MAN: How right you are! Well? Is your pencil sharp enough?

SECRETARY: Yes. Now we can set to work.

THE MAN: Fire away, then!

[He points to NADA, who has just come forward; NADA lets out a drunken guffaw.]

THE SECRETARY: Might I point out, sir, that this fellow is the sort that doesn't believe in anything, in other words the sort of man who can be very useful to us?

THE MAN: Very true. In that case let's choose one of the Alcaldes.

THE GOVERNOR: Stop! [Panic among the ALCALDES.]

THE SECRETARY: Ah! A good sign, Your Honor!

THE MAN [courteously]: Can I do anything to oblige you, Governor?

THE GOVERNOR: Suppose I let you take my place, will the lives of my family and the Alcaldes be spared?

THE MAN: Why, of course. That, as you should know, is customary.

[The GOVERNOR confers with the ALCALDES, then turns to the populace.]

THE GOVERNOR: Citizens of Cadiz, I feel sure you understand that a great change has come into our civic life. In your own interests it may be best that I should entrust the city to this new authority that has sprung up in our midst. Indeed I have no doubt that by coming to an arrangement with this gentleman I shall be sparing you the worst; and, moreover, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that a government



exists outside your walls which may be of service to you in the future. Need I tell you that, in speaking thus, I am not thinking of my personal safety, but ...

THE MAN: Excuse my interrupting. But I should be grateful if you would make a public declaration that you are entering into this excellent arrangement of your own free will, and that there is no question of any sort of compulsion.

[The GOVERNOR looks at the MAN; the SECRETARY raises her pencil to her lips.]

THE GOVERNOR [obviously flustered]: Yes, yes, that's understood, of course. I am making this agreement of my own free will. [Edges away, then frankly takes to his heels. A general move begins.]

THE MAN [to the FIRST ALCALDE]: Be good enough to stay. I need someone who has the confidence of the citizens and will act as my mouthpiece for making known my wishes. [The FIRST ALCALDE hesitates.] You agree, I take it? [To the SECRETARY] My dear ...

FIRST ALCALDE: But of course I agree, and I feel it a great honor....

THE MAN: Excellent. Now that's settled, will you be kind enough, my dear, to make known to the Alcalde the rules and regulations he is to promulgate to these good people, so that they may start living under state control.

THE SECRETARY: Regulation Number One, drawn up and promulgated by the First Alcalde and his Committee.

FIRST ALCALDE: But I haven't drawn up anything yet!

THE SECRETARY: We're saving you the trouble. And it seems to me you should feel flattered at the trouble our department is taking to frame these regulations that you will have the honor of signing.

FIRST ALCALDE: Quite so. All the same ...

THE SECRETARY: This regulation shall carry the force of an edict issued and validated in pursuance of the will of our beloved sovereign, for the control and charitable succor of all citizens infected with disease, and for the issuance of by-laws and the guidance of all personnel appointed under the said edict, such as overseers, attendants, guards, and gravediggers, who will be bound by oath strictly and punctually to carry out all such orders as may be given them.

FIRST ALCALDE: Might I know the point of all this rigmarole?

THE SECRETARY: It's intended to get them used to that touch of obscurity which gives all government regulations their peculiar charm and efficacy. The less these people understand, the better they'll behave. You get my point? Good. Here are the regulations that I'll ask you to have proclaimed by the town criers in every district, so that they may be mentally digested by your townsfolk, even by those whose mental digestions are most sluggish. Ah, here they come, the town criers. Their pleasant appearance will help to fix the memory of what they say in the minds of their hearers.

[The town criers line up.]

VOICES IN THE CROWD: The Governor's going away! The Governor's leaving us!

NADA: And he has every right to do so, remember that, good people. He is the government and governments must be protected.

VOICES IN THE CROWD: He was the government, and now he's nothing! The Plague has stepped into his shoes.

NADA: What can that matter to you? Plague or Governor, the government goes on.

FIRST TOWN CRIER: All infected houses are to be marked on their front doors with the plague sign—a black star with rays a foot long, and

headed by this inscription: “We all are brothers.” The star is to remain in place until the house is reopened. Any breach of this regulation will be punished with the utmost rigor of the law. [Withdraws.]

A VOICE: What law?

ANOTHER VOICE: The new one, of course.

CHORUS: Our masters used to say they would protect us, but now we are forsaken. Hideous fogs are gathering at the four corners of the town, swamping the fragrance of the fruit and the roses, tarnishing the luster of the season, deadening the joys of summer. Alas, poor Cadiz, city of the sea! Only yesterday the south wind, desert-born and wafting to us perfumes of the gardens of Africa, was sweeping across the Straits, breathing its warm languors into our maidens’ hearts. But now the wind has dropped, and nothing else could purify our city. Our masters used to assure us that nothing would ever happen, but that man was right; something is happening and we are in the thick of it, we must escape while there yet is time, before the gates are closed on our calamity.

SECOND TOWN CRIER: As from today all essential foodstuffs must be placed at the disposal of the community—that is to say, they will be doled out in equal and exiguous shares to all who can prove their adhesion to the new social order.

[The First Gate closes.]

THIRD TOWN CRIER: All lights must be extinguished at nine p.m. and no one is permitted to remain in any public place after that hour, or to leave his home without an official permit in due form, which will be accorded only in very special cases and at our good pleasure. Any breach of this regulation will be punished with the utmost rigor of the law.

VOICES [crescendo]: They are going to close the gates. The gates are closed.

No, some are open still.

CHORUS: Ah, let us make haste to those that still are open. We are the sons of the sea. Away, away! The sea is calling us to happy places without walls or gates, to shores whose virgin sands are cool as maidens' lips, and where our eyes grow dazzled gazing seaward. Let us go forth to meet the wind. Away! Away to the sea! To the untrammelled waves, to clean, bright water, the shining winds of freedom!

VOICES: To the sea! To the sea!

FOURTH TOWN CRIER: It is strictly forbidden to give help to any person stricken with the disease, except by reporting the case to the authorities, who then will take the necessary steps. A favorable view is taken of reports made by any member of a family as regards any other member or members of the said family, and such reports will entitle their makers to the double food ration, known as the Good Citizenship Ration.

[The Second Gate closes.]

CHORUS: The sea, the sea! The sea will save us. What cares the sea for wars and pestilences? Governments come and go, but the sea endures; how many governments has it engulfed! And how simple are its gifts! Red mornings and green sunsets, and from dusk to dawn the murmur of innumerable waves under the dome of night fretted with myriads of stars.

O vast sea-spaces, shining solitude, baptism of brine! Ah, to be alone beside the sea, facing the blue expanse, fanned by the wind and free at

last of this city sealed like a tomb, and these all-too-human faces clamped by fear! Away! Away! Who will deliver me from man and the terrors that infest him? How happy I was but a little while ago at the summit of the year, taking my ease among the fruits; when nature was kind and smiled on me. I loved the world, Spain and I were at one. But no longer can I hear the sound of the waves. All around are panic, insults, cowardice; my brothers are sodden with fear and sweat, and my arms are too weak to succor them. Who will give back to me the waters of forgetting, the slumbrous smoothness of the open sea, its liquid pathways, long furrows that form and fold upon themselves? To the sea! To the sea, before the gates are shut!

A VOICE: Take care! Keep clear of that man who was just beside the corpse.

A VOICE: Yes, he has the marks.

A VOICE: Keep away! Don't come near me!

[They drive the man away with blows. The Third Gate closes.]

A VOICE: O great and terrible God!

A VOICE: Quick! Get what's needed, the mattress and the bird cage. Oh, and don't forget the dog's collar. And the pot of mint as well. We can munch it on our way to the sea.

A VOICE: Stop thief! He's stolen our damask tablecloth, the one we used at my wedding.

[The man is pursued, caught, belabored. The Fourth Gate closes.]

A VOICE: Be careful, don't let people see our food.

A VOICE: I haven't anything to eat on the way; spare me a loaf of bread, brother. I'll give you my guitar, the one with the mother-of-pearl studs.

A VOICE: This bread is for my children, not for those who call themselves my brothers when they want something off me!

A VOICE: Just one loaf! I'll give all the money in my pocket for a loaf of bread, just one!

[The Fifth Gate closes.]

CHORUS: Quick! Only one gate is left. The Plague moves faster than we. He hates the sea and wants to cut us off from it. Out there the nights are calm, stars glide above the masthead, mirrored in the blue. What's the Plague after in this city? He wants to keep us in his clutches, for he loves us in his fashion. He wants us to be happy, not in the way we like, but in the way that he approves of. Penitential pleasures, cold comfort, convict happiness. Everything is turning hard and dry, no longer do we feel the cool kiss of the wind upon our lips.

A VOICE: Do not leave me, priest; I am one of the poor men of your flock. [The PRIEST begins to walk away.] Look! He's going.... No, stand by me, it's your duty to look after me, and if I lose you, then I've lost all. [The PRIEST quickens his steps. The poor man falls to the ground with a great cry.] Christians of Spain, you are forsaken!

FIFTH TOWN CRIER [emphasizing each word]: Lastly, and this will be the summing-up. [Standing in front of the FIRST ALCALDE, the PLAGUE and the SECRETARY exchange smiles and looks of self-satisfaction.] So as to avoid contagion through the air you breathe and since words are carriers of infection, each of you is ordered to keep permanently in his mouth a pad soaked in vinegar. This will not only protect you from the disease but teach you discretion and the art of silence.

[From now on everyone has a handkerchief in his mouth and the number of voices steadily diminishes, as does the volume of the background music. Beginning with several voices, the CHORUS ends

with that of a single speaker, and finally there is a pantomime, during which the lips of all are puffed out and firmly closed. The Last Gate is slammed to.]

CHORUS: Alas! Alas! The last gate is shut and we are locked up together, we and the Plague. We can hear nothing any more and henceforth the sea is out of reach. Sorrow is our companion, we can only turn in dreary circles within this beleaguered city, cut off from the sounds of leaves and waters, prisoned behind tall, smooth gates. So now, beset with howling crowds, Cadiz will become a huge, red-and-black arena in which ritual murders are to be enacted. Brothers, our plight is surely greater than our sin; we did not deserve this imprisonment. True, our hearts were not innocent, still we greatly loved the world of nature and its summers—surely that might have saved us from this doom. The winds have failed, the sky is empty, for a long while we shall be silent. But for the last time, the last, before fear gags our mouths for many a long day, let us lift our voices in the desert.

[Groans, then silence. All the instruments in the orchestra have ceased playing, except the bells. The buzzing of the comet starts again, very softly. The PLAGUE and the SECRETARY are seen in the Governor's palace. The SECRETARY steps forward, crossing out a name at every step, while the percussion instruments in the orchestra punctuate each gesture that she makes. The death-cart creaks by. NADA grins.

The PLAGUE has taken his stand on the highest point of the palace and makes a sign. All sounds and movement cease.]

THE PLAGUE: I am the ruler here; this is a fact, therefore it is a right. A right that admits of no discussion; a fact you must accept.

In any case, make no mistake; when I say I rule you, I rule in a rather special way—it would be more correct to say I function. You Spaniards

always have a tendency to be romantic, and I'm sure you'd like to see me as a sort of black king or some monstrous, gaudy insect. That would satisfy your dramatic instincts, of which we've heard so much. Well, they won't be satisfied this time. I don't wield a scepter or anything like that; in fact I prefer to look like a quite ordinary person, let's say a sergeant or a corporal. That's one of my ways of vexing you, and being vexed will do you good; you still have much to learn. So now your king has black nails and a drab uniform. He doesn't sit on a throne, but in an office chair. His palace is a barracks and his hunting-lodge a courthouse. You are living in a stage of siege.

That is why when I step in all sentiment goes by the board. So take good notice, sentiment is banned, and so are other imbecilities, such as the fuss you make about your precious happiness, the maudlin look on lovers' faces, your selfish habit of contemplating landscapes, and the crime of irony. Instead of these I give you organization. That will worry you a bit to start with, but very soon you'll realize that good organization is better than cheap emotion. By way of illustration of this excellent precept I shall begin by segregating the men from the women. This order will have the force of law. [The Guards promptly carry out the order.]

Your monkey-tricks have had their day; the time has come for realizing that life is earnest.

I take it you have grasped my meaning. As from today you are going to learn to die in an orderly manner. Until now you died in the Spanish manner, haphazard—when you felt like it, so to say. You died because the weather suddenly turned cold, or a mule stumbled; because the skyline of the Pyrenees was blue and the river Guadalquivir has a fascination for the lonely man in springtime. Or else it was because there are always brawling fools ready to kill for money or for honor—when it's so much more elegant to kill for the delight of being logical.



Yes, you muffed your deaths. A dead man here, a dead man there, one in his bed, another in the bull ring—what could be more slovenly? But, happily for you, I shall impose order on all that. There will be no more dying as the fancy takes you. Lists will be kept up—what admirable things lists are!—and we shall fix the order of your going. Fate has learned wisdom and will keep its records. You will figure in statistics, so at last you'll serve some purpose. For, I was forgetting to tell you, you will die, that goes without saying, but then—if not before—you will be packed off to the incinerator. Nothing could be more hygienic and efficient, and it fits in with our program. Spain first!

So line up for a decent death, that's your first duty. On these terms you will enjoy my favor. But take care that you don't indulge in nonsensical ideas, or righteous indignation, or in any of those little gusts of petulance which lead to big revolts. I have suppressed these mental luxuries and put logic in their stead, for I can't bear untidiness and irrationality. So from this day on you are going to be rational and tidy; the wearing of badges will be compulsory. Besides the mark on your groins you will have the plague star under your armpits, for all to see—meaning that you are marked down for elimination. So the others, people who think these marks are no concern of theirs and line up cheerfully for the bullfight every Sunday, will treat you as suspects and edge away from you. But you need not feel aggrieved; these marks concern them also, they're all down on our lists and nobody is overlooked. In fact all are suspects—that's the long and the short of it.

Don't take all this to mean I haven't any feelings. As a matter of fact I like birds, the first violets of the year, the cool lips of girls. Once in a while it's refreshing, that sort of thing. Also, I'm an idealist. My heart.... No, I fear I am getting sentimental—that's enough for today. Just a word more, by way of summing up. I bring you order, silence, total justice. I don't ask you to thank me for this; it's only natural, what I am

doing here for you. Only, I must insist on your collaboration. My administration has begun.

CURTAIN

SECOND PART

A public square in Cadiz. Stage-left: the cemetery entrance and keeper's office; stage-right: a wharf, near which is the Judge's residence.

When the curtain rises gravediggers in convict uniform are collecting dead bodies. The creaking of the death-cart is heard off stage; presently it comes into view and halts in the center of the stage. The convicts load the bodies onto it; then it creaks off toward the cemetery. As it halts at the entrance a military band starts playing and one wall of the cemetery office slides open, enabling the audience to see the interior: a large, roofed-in vestibule resembling the covered play ground of a school. The SECRETARY is sitting there, presiding, while at a lower level are aligned some tables like those in food offices where ration cards are distributed. At one of the tables the white-mustached FIRST ALCALDE is seated with some other members of the staff. On the other side of the stage Plague Guards are rounding up the crowd and herding them toward the food office, men and women being kept apart.

A light plays on the center and the PLAGUE is seen on the summit of his palace, directing a gang of workers for the most part concealed from view, though we have occasional glimpses of their activities on the outskirts.

THE PLAGUE: Now then! Don't dawdle! It's really scandalous how slowly things move in this town, I never saw such a pack of idlers. Leisure is what you like, that's evident. Well, I don't stand for inactivity—except in barracks and in bread lines. That sort of leisure suits my book; it drains the energy from heart and limbs, and serves no purpose. Get a move on! Finish building my observation tower, and put a hedge of barbed wire around the town. Everyone has the spring flowers he prefers; mine are iron roses. Stoke up the death-ovens, they're our stand-bys. Guards, affix our stars to the houses where I'm going to get busy. And you, my dear, start compiling our lists and drawing up our certificates of existence. [Exit the PLAGUE.]

THE FISHERMAN [acting as spokesman]: A certificate of existence, he said? What's the big idea?

THE SECRETARY: What's the idea, you say? Why, how could you live without a certificate of existence?

THE FISHERMAN: We used to get along quite well without one.

THE SECRETARY: That's because you weren't governed. Now you are. And the whole point of our government is that you always need a permit to do anything whatever. You can dispense with bread and with a wife, but a properly drawn-up certificate, no matter what it says, is something you can't possibly dispense with.

THE FISHERMAN: For three generations we've been fishing folk in my family, we have lived by casting our nets into the sea, and we have always given satisfaction to our customers—and there never was no question of a certificate, that's the gospel truth, young lady.

A VOICE: For years and years, from father to son, we have been butchers, and we never needed a certificate for slaughtering sheep.

THE SECRETARY: You were living in a state of anarchy, that's all. Mind you, we have nothing against slaughterhouses—quite the contrary. Only, we apply to them the latest methods of accounting, we've brought them up to date, in short. There was some mention of casting nets just now; well, you'll discover that we, too, are experts in that line. Now, Mr. First Alcalde, have you the forms ready?

FIRST ALCALDE: Quite ready.

THE SECRETARY: Officers, will you help the gentleman to come forward.

[The FISHERMAN is led up to the table.]

FIRST ALCALDE [reading]: Family name, Christian names, occupation?

THE SECRETARY: Let that be. He can fill in the blanks himself.

FIRST ALCALDE: Your curriculum vita?

THE FISHERMAN: My what? I didn't catch it.

THE SECRETARY: You are to record on the dotted line the chief events of your life. It's our way of becoming acquainted with you.

THE FISHERMAN: My life's my private concern, and nobody else's business.

THE SECRETARY: Your private concern, you say? Those words don't mean anything to us. What interests us is your public life, and that as a matter of fact is the only life you are allowed by us to have. Well, Mr. Alcalde, let's get down to details.

FIRST ALCALDE: Married?

THE FISHERMAN: Yes. I married in '31.

FIRST ALCALDE: Your reasons for the marriage?

THE FISHERMAN: Reasons indeed! God! It's enough to make one's blood boil.

THE SECRETARY: It's in the rules. And it's an excellent way of making public what has got to cease being private.

THE FISHERMAN: Well, if you must know, I got married because that's a thing one usually does when one's a man.

FIRST ALCALDE: Divorced?

THE FISHERMAN: No, a widower.

FIRST ALCALDE: Remarried?

THE FISHERMAN: No.

THE SECRETARY: Why not?

THE FISHERMAN [furiously]: Damn it, I loved my wife!

THE SECRETARY: How quaint! May we know why?

THE FISHERMAN: Can one account for everything one does?

THE SECRETARY: Yes, in a well-organized community.

THE ALCALDE: Your record?

THE FISHERMAN: Meaning what?

THE SECRETARY: Have you been convicted of robbery, perjury, or rape?

THE FISHERMAN: Certainly not.

THE SECRETARY: An upright man—I suspected as much. Mr. First Alcalde, please add a footnote: "To be watched."

FIRST ALCALDE: Civic feelings?

THE FISHERMAN: I've always dealt fairly by my fellow citizens, if that's what you mean. What's more, I never let a poor man leave my fish-stall empty-handed.

THE SECRETARY: That's not a proper answer to the question.

FIRST ALCALDE: Oh, that anyhow I can explain. What we call civic feelings, needless to say, are in my line. We want to know, my good fellow, if you are one of those who respect the existing order for the sole reason that it exists.

THE FISHERMAN: Certainly, if it's just and reasonable.

THE SECRETARY: Doubtful. Write that his civic feelings are doubtful. And now read the last question.

FIRST ALCALDE [deciphering the words with difficulty]: Reasons for existing?

THE FISHERMAN: Well, let my mother be bitten at the place where it hurts most, if I can understand a word of this rigmarole!

THE SECRETARY: It's quite simple, surely. You must state your reasons for being alive.

THE FISHERMAN: My reasons for being alive! But what the devil do you expect me to say?

THE SECRETARY: Aha! Make a note, Mr. First Alcalde, that the undersigned admits that his existence is unjustifiable. That will simplify matters when the time comes for us to deal with him. Also, that will bring it home to you, the undersigned, that the certificate of existence granted you is temporary and of short duration.

THE FISHERMAN: Temporary or not, let me have it. They're waiting for me at home and I want to get away.

THE SECRETARY: By all means. Only you must begin by submitting to us a certificate of health. You can procure this, after complying with some formalities, on the first floor, Department of Current Affairs, Bureau of

Pending Cases, Auxiliary Division. [The FISHERMAN goes away. Meanwhile the death-cart has reached the cemetery gate and is being unloaded. Suddenly NADA jumps down from the cart, staggering and bawling.]

NADA: But, damn it all, I tell you I'm not dead! [They try to replace him on the cart, but he breaks loose and runs into the food office.] Did you ever hear the like! Telling me I'm dead when I'm alive and kicking! Oh, pardon ...!

THE SECRETARY: Don't mention it. Come.

NADA: They loaded me onto the cart. But I wasn't dead—only dead drunk. It's my way of suppressing.

THE SECRETARY: Suppressing what?

NADA: Why, everything, my dear young lady. The more one suppresses, the better things are. Ah, if only one could suppress everything and everyone, wouldn't it be fine! Lovers, for instance—there's nothing I loathe more. When I see a loving couple in front of me I spit at them. On their backs, of course; some of them might turn nasty. And children, filthy little brats! And flowers that goggle at you like half-wits, and rivers that have only one idea. So let's annihilate everything, I say. That's my philosophy. God denies the world, and I deny God. Long live nothing, for it's the only thing that exists.

THE SECRETARY: And how do you propose to suppress all that?

NADA: By drinking, drinking till I'm blind to the whole damned world.

THE SECRETARY: A clumsy way of going about it. We have a better one. What's your name?

NADA: Nothing.

THE SECRETARY: What?

NADA: Nothing.

THE SECRETARY: I asked you to tell me your name.

NADA: That is my name.

THE SECRETARY: Fine! With a name like that, we should get on well together. Come this way. We'll find you a job in our administration. [The FISHERMAN comes back.] Mr. Alcalde, would you please instruct our friend Nothing in his duties? Meanwhile you, the Guards, get busy selling our badges. [She goes toward DIEGO.] Good day. Would you like to buy a badge?

DIEGO: What badge?

THE SECRETARY: Why, the plague badge, of course. [Pauses.] You are free to refuse it, of course. It's not compulsory.

DIEGO: In that case, I refuse.

THE SECRETARY: Very good. [Turning to VICTORIA] And you?

VICTORIA: I don't know you.

THE SECRETARY: Quite so. But I feel I should inform you that those who refuse to wear that badge are obliged to wear another.

VICTORIA: And what is that?

THE SECRETARY: Why, the badge of those who refuse to wear the badge, obviously. That way we see at once with whom we have to deal.

THE FISHERMAN: I beg your pardon, miss....

THE SECRETARY [to DIEGO and VICTORIA] : Good-by then, for the present. [To the FISHERMAN] Well, what is it now?



THE FISHERMAN [with rising exasperation]: I've been up to the office on the first floor and they told me to come back here. It seems I have to get a certificate of existence before I can get a certificate of health.

THE SECRETARY: That goes without saying.

THE FISHERMAN: "Goes without saying!" What do you mean by that?

THE SECRETARY: Why, it proves that this city is beginning to reap the benefits of a strong administration. We start with the premises that you are guilty. But that's not enough; you must learn to feel, yourselves, that you are guilty. And you won't feel guilty until you feel tired. So we weary you out; that's all. Once you are really tired, tired to death in fact, everything will run quite smoothly.

THE FISHERMAN: Anyhow, is there some way of getting this damned certificate of existence?

THE SECRETARY: Well, it really looks as if you couldn't. You see, you need to get a certificate of health first, before you are given a certificate of existence. It's a sort of deadlock, isn't it?

THE FISHERMAN: Then—what?

THE SECRETARY: Then you have to fall back on our good will. But like most sorts of good will ours is of limited duration. Thus we may grant you this certificate as a special favor. Only I warn you it will be valid for one week only. After that, we'll see....

THE FISHERMAN: See what?

THE SECRETARY: See if there are reasons for renewing it for you.

THE FISHERMAN: And supposing it's not renewed?

THE SECRETARY: Since there is then no proof of your existence we may have to take steps for your elimination. Alcalde, would you draw up the certificate? Thirteen copies, please.

FIRST ALCALDE: Thirteen?

THE SECRETARY: Yes. One for the applicant and twelve for our files.

[Light on the center of the stage.]

THE PLAGUE: Now we can get started on the great useless public works. And you, my dear, get busy with the record of deportations and concentrations. We must speed up the transformation of innocent into guilty parties; that's the only way of making sure of our labor supply. Just now it looks as if our man power might run short. How far have you got with the census?

THE SECRETARY: It's under way, all is for the best, and I think these good people are getting to understand me.

THE PLAGUE: Really, my dear, you shock me. Fancy wanting to be understood. That's a sentimental fancy; in our profession we have no right to indulge in sentiment. Of course these good people, as you call them, haven't understood a thing—but that has no importance. What we want of them isn't comprehension but execution of their duties. Not a bad expression. Singularly apt under the circumstances, you'll agree?

THE SECRETARY: An excellent slogan, yes.

THE PLAGUE: It covers everything. Execution—that puts it in a nutshell. And the man who is to die is expected to collaborate in his own execution—which is the aim and the bedrock, too, of all good government. [Noises in the background.] What's that?

[The CHORUS OF WOMEN is showing signs of excitement.]

THE SECRETARY: It's the women making a demonstration.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: This lady has something to say.

THE PLAGUE: Let her step forward.

A WOMAN [coming forward]: Where's my husband?

THE PLAGUE: There now! Your heart's in the right place, my good woman, I can see. And what has happened to this husband of yours?

THE WOMAN: He didn't come home last night.

THE PLAGUE: What's remarkable about that? He found another bed to sleep in, most likely. Try to take it in your stride.

THE WOMAN: But my husband isn't that sort of man; he respects himself.

THE PLAGUE: Ah, I see: a model husband. [To the SECRETARY] You'd better look into this, my dear.

THE SECRETARY: Surname and Christian name?

THE WOMAN: Galvez, Antonio.

[The SECRETARY inspects her writing-pad and whispers in the PLAGUE'S ear.]

THE SECRETARY: Well, you may congratulate yourself. He's alive and well looked after.

THE WOMAN: Where is he?

THE SECRETARY: In a palatial residence, where the company's select.

THE PLAGUE: Yes, I deported him along with some others who were giving trouble but whose lives I wished to spare.

THE WOMAN [shrinking away]: What have you done to them?

THE PLAGUE [his voice shrill with fury]: What have I done to them? I have concentrated them. They had been living at a loose end, frittering their time away, dispersing their energies. Now they've been pulled together, they are concentrated.

THE WOMAN [running to the CHORUS, whose ranks open to make way for her]: Pity! Pity on me!

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Pity on us all!

THE PLAGUE: Silence! Don't idle about! Do something! Get busy! [Pensively murmurs to himself] Execution, occupation, concentration. Ah, how useful those long words are! We couldn't do without them.

[Light is flashed on the food office, showing NADA seated beside the ALCALDE, with batches of petitioners lined up before them.]

A MAN: The cost of living has gone up and our wages aren't enough to live on.

NADA: We are aware of that, and we have a new wage scale all ready. It has just been drawn up.

THE MAN: Good! What sort of raise can we expect?

NADA: I'll read it out to you. It's quite easy to follow if you listen carefully. [Reads] "Wage Scale Number 108. This reassessment of the wage-earner's emoluments and all remunerations thereto assimilated involves the suppression of the basic living wage and entire decontrol of the sliding scales hitherto in force, which now are free to reach the level of a maximum wage whose monetary value is to be determined

subsequently. Nevertheless, the sliding scale, after deduction of the increases nominally accorded under Wage Scale Number 107 shall continue being assessed, irrespective of the terms and conditions of the above-mentioned reassessment, in terms of the basic living wage suppressed by the first clause of this regulation.”

THE MAN: That sounds fine! But what raise exactly can we count on?

NADA: The raise will come later; meanwhile you have our new wage scale to go on with. We are increasing your pay by a wage scale; that’s what it amounts to.

THE MAN: But what the hell can we do with your new wage scale?

NADA [shrilly]: Eat it! Put it in your pipes and smoke it! Next. [Another man steps forward.] Ah, you want to open a shop, do you? Now that’s a really bright idea. Well, the first thing is to fill up this form. Dip your fingers in the ink. Then press them here. Right.

THE MAN: Where can I wipe my hand?

NADA: Where can you wipe your hand? Let’s see. [Flips the pages of a file in front of him.] Nowhere. It’s not provided for in the regulations.

THE MAN: But I can’t stay like this!

NADA: Why not? Anyhow what does a little ink on your fingers matter, seeing that you’re not permitted to touch your wife. What’s more, it’s good for your morals.

THE MAN: Good? In what way?

NADA: It humiliates you; that’s why. But let’s get back to this shop you want to open. Would you rather have the benefits of Article 208 of Chapter 62 of the sixteenth supplement to the fifth issue of the Trading

Regulations, or would you rather come under Clause 27 of Article 207, Circular Number 15, concerning special cases?

THE MAN: But I don't know the first thing about either of them!

NADA: Naturally, my man, you wouldn't know it. Nor do I, for that matter. Still, as things have to be settled one way or another, we shall let you have the benefits of both articles at once.

THE MAN: That's really kind of you, Nada. I'm much obliged.

NADA: Don't mention it! As a matter of fact I rather think that one of these bylaws gives you the right to open your shop, while the other forbids your selling anything in it.

THE MAN: But—what's the idea, then?

NADA: Discipline, my friend; discipline. [A woman runs up in a state of great agitation.] Well, what is it, my good woman?

THE WOMAN: They've requisitioned my house.

NADA: Good.

THE WOMAN: And a government office has been installed in it.

NADA: Naturally.

THE WOMAN: But I haven't anywhere to live, though they promised to find me a new house.

NADA: Well, doesn't that show how considerate they are?

THE WOMAN: Yes—but I've been told to submit an application through the usual channels. And, meanwhile, my children haven't a roof over their heads.

NADA: All the more reason to put in your application right away. Fill in this form.

THE WOMAN [taking the form]: But will it go through quickly?

NADA: Yes, provided you claim priority and support your claim with the necessary documents.

THE WOMAN: What exactly is needed?

NADA: A duly authenticated certificate declaring that it's a matter of urgency for you to be given accommodation.

THE WOMAN: My children haven't anywhere to sleep. Surely that's urgent enough for anyone?

NADA: You will not be given accommodation because your children are homeless. You will be given it if you supply a certificate. Which is not the same thing.

THE WOMAN: I never heard such talk! The devil may know what it can mean—I don't!

NADA: Precisely! That, my good woman, is part of our program. We want to fix things up in such a way that nobody understands a word of what his neighbor says. And, let me tell you, we are steadily nearing that perfect moment when nothing anybody says will rouse the least echo in another's mind; when the two languages that are fighting it out here will exterminate each other so thoroughly that we shall be well on the way to that ideal consummation—the triumph of death and silence.

THE WOMAN: Justice means that children have enough to eat and are sheltered from the cold. That my little ones can live. When I brought them into the world the good earth was their birthright. And the sea gave the water for their baptism. That's all the wealth they need. I ask nothing more for them than their daily bread and poor people's right to sleep nights. Little enough indeed—but you deny it to them. And if you

deny the poor their daily bread, no luxury, no fine speeches, no wonderful promises you make can ever earn you our forgiveness.

NADA [speaking at the same time as the woman]: Choose to live on your knees rather than to die standing; thus and thus only will the world acquire that neat, nicely ordered layout whose template is the gibbet, and be shared between well-drilled ants and the placid dead: a puritan paradise without food, fields, or flowers, in which angel police float around on pinions of red tape among beatific citizens nourished on rules and regulations and groveling before this decorated God, whose delight it is to destroy and doggedly to dissipate the dear delusions of a too delicious age.

NADA [speaking alone]: Down with everything! Nobody knows what anybody means—the golden age has come.

[Light on the center of the stage, showing up huts, barbed-wire fences, observation towers, and other forbidding structures. DIEGO enters; he is still wearing the mask and he has the bearing of a hunted man. He gazes at the scene before him, the townsfolk, and the PLAGUE.]

DIEGO [to the CHORUS]: Where is Spain? Where's Cadiz? This scene does not belong to any known country. We are on another planet, a planet where man is out of place. Why are you silent?

CHORUS: We are afraid. Ah, if only the wind would rise ...!

DIEGO: I, too, am afraid. But it does good to cry one's fear aloud. Cry, and the wind will answer.

CHORUS: Once we were a people and now we are a herd. Once we were invited, now we are summoned. Once we could buy and sell our milk and bread; now we are rationed. We queue up and wait our turns. We toe the line, for no one can do anything for his neighbor, we can



only wait in the line, at the place assigned us. What is the use of crying out? No longer have our women those flowerlike faces that set our hearts aflame with desire, and Spain is Spain no longer. Line up! Line up! Keep your places! No joy is left in life. We are stifling, stifling to death, in this prison house that was once a city. Ah, if only the wind would rise ...!

THE PLAGUE: They have learned wisdom. Come, Diego, now that you have understood.

[Sounds of “eliminations” in the upper air.]

DIEGO: We are innocent. [The PLAGUE guffaws.] Innocence, you murderer—do you know what’s meant by innocence?

THE PLAGUE: Innocence? That’s a new one on me!

DIEGO: Then let’s have it out, you and I. The stronger of us two will kill the other.

THE PLAGUE: I am the stronger, you poor innocent. Look! [Beckons to his Guards. They step toward DIEGO, who takes to flight.] Run after him! Don’t let him escape. A man who runs away is ours. Put the marks on him!

[The hunt is on. The Guards pursue DIEGO through windows, doors, etc., in and out. Whistles, sirens.]

CHORUS: He is running away. He is afraid, and admits it. He has lost all self-control, he’s crazy. But we know better, we have come to our senses. We are ruled and the state looks after us. And yet—in the dusty silence of their offices sometimes we hear a long, restrained cry, the cry of hearts that are separated, and it tells of sunlit seas at noon, the fragrance of reeds at nightfall, the sweet embraces of our women. Our faces are sealed up, our steps counted, our hours fixed—and yet our hearts reject this silence of the grave. They reject the never-ending

forms to be filled out; the miles and miles of walls; barred windows; and daybreaks bristling with guns. They reject these things as does he who is fleeing from this setting of shadows and numbers, seeking a house for refuge. But the only refuge is the sea, and the walls cut us off from it. Let the sea wind but rise, and at last we shall breathe freely. [DIEGO has fled into a house. The Guards halt at the door and post sentries outside.]

THE PLAGUE [shrilly]: Brand them! Brand them all! Even what they do not say makes itself heard. They can no longer raise their voices in protest, but their silence grates on our ears. Smash their mouths, gag them, din our slogans into them, until they, too, are saying the same thing over and over again—until they become good citizens of the kind we need. [A cataract of slogans, raucous as if they issued from loudspeakers, pours down from the flies, growing louder and louder with each reiteration until it drowns the muttering of the CHORUS. Abruptly silence falls.] One plague, one people! Concentrate, execute orders, keep busy! One good plague is worth two freedoms. Deport and torture, there'll always be something left!

[Lights go on in the Judge's house.]

VICTORIA: No, father. You can't hand over our old servant just because they say she's infected. Have you forgotten how good she was to me when I was a child and how loyally she's served you all her life?

JUDGE CASADO: I have made my decision and it's not for you or anyone else to question it.

VICTORIA: You cannot have the last word always; grief, too, should have a hearing.

JUDGE CASADO: My duty is to watch over this house and to see that the disease is not allowed to enter it. [DIEGO enters abruptly.] Who gave you leave to enter?

DIEGO: It's fear that has driven me to ask shelter here. I am running away from the Plague.

JUDGE CASADO: Running away? No, you have it with you. [He points to the mark on DIEGO'S armpit. A short silence. Then police whistles are heard in the distance.] Leave this house.

DIEGO: Let me stay, I beg you. If you turn me out they'll get me, and I shall be shut up with all those other wretched people in the death-house.

JUDGE CASADO: I cannot permit you to remain here. As judge, I am a servant of the law and must obey it.

DIEGO: The old law, yes. But these new laws are no concern of yours.

JUDGE CASADO: I do not serve the law because of what it says but because it is the law.

DIEGO: And suppose the law's identical with crime?

JUDGE CASADO: If crime becomes the law, it ceases being crime.

DIEGO: And then it's virtue you must punish!

JUDGE CASADO: As you say, virtue must be punished if it is so presumptuous as to break the law.

VICTORIA: Casado, it's not the law that's making you behave like this; it's fear.

JUDGE CASADO: Isn't that man, too, afraid?

VICTORIA: But he has not yet played the traitor.

JUDGE CASADO: He will. Fear always leads to betrayal, and everyone feels fear because nobody is pure.

VICTORIA: Father, I belong to this man; you have given your consent to it. You cannot rob me of him today after having given him to me yesterday.

JUDGE CASADO: I never consented to your marriage. I consented to your leaving us.

VICTORIA: Yes, I always knew you didn't love me.

JUDGE CASADO [looking intently at her]: All women disgust me. [Loud knocks at the door.] What is it?

A GUARD [outside]: This house is put in quarantine, as harboring a suspect, and all its occupants are under close surveillance.

DIEGO [laughing loudly]: And the law's infallible, as you pointed out just now. Only, as this one is a trifle new, you weren't quite at home in it. Well, now you know, and so here we are, all in the same boat—judge, accused, and witnesses. Brothers all! [The JUDGE'S WIFE enters, with her little son and younger daughter.]

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: They've boarded up the door.

VICTORIA: Yes, we're in quarantine.

JUDGE CASADO: That's his fault. Anyhow I shall report him to the authorities. Then they will open the house.

VICTORIA: Father, you can't do that. Your honor forbids you.

JUDGE CASADO: Honor is practiced between men, and there are no men left in this city.

[Whistles outside, and sounds of running feet nearing the house. DIEGO listens, gazes frantically around him, then suddenly picks up the little boy.]

DIEGO: Look, servant of the law! If you stir a finger or utter a sound I shall press your son's lips to the plague mark.

VICTORIA: Diego, that's cowardly.

DIEGO: Nothing is cowardly in this city of cowards.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE [rushing toward her husband]: Promise, Casado! Promise this madman that you'll do what he wants.

THE JUDGE'S DAUGHTER: No, father, don't do anything of the sort. It's no concern of ours.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: Don't listen to her. You know quite well she hates her brother.

JUDGE CASADO: She is right; it's no concern of ours.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: And you, too, hate my son.

JUDGE CASADO: Your son, as you rightly say.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: Oh, how vile of you to rake up something that was forgiven years ago!

JUDGE CASADO: I did not forgive. I complied with the law and in the eyes of the law that boy is my son.

VICTORIA: Is this true, mother?

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: So you, too, despise me?

VICTORIA: No, only it's as if the bottom had dropped out of the world I knew, and everything were falling in ruins. My mind is reeling.

[The JUDGE takes a step toward the door.]

DIEGO: The mind may reel, but the law keeps us on our feet—isn't that so, Judge? As we all are brothers [holding the little boy in front of him], I'm going to give you a nice brotherly kiss, my little man!

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: Oh, please, Diego, don't act hastily! Don't behave like one whose heart has turned to stone! Only wait, and it will soften. Wait, I beg you! [Runs to the door and bars the way to the JUDGE.] You'll do as Diego wishes, won't you?

THE JUDGE'S DAUGHTER: Why should my father truckle to Diego? What interest has he in this bastard, this interloper in our family?

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: Keep silent! It is your envy speaking, from the black pit of your heart. [To the JUDGE] But you at least—you whose life is drawing to a close—surely you have learned that nothing on this sad earth is enviable but tranquillity and sleep. And you will sleep badly in your solitary bed if you let this monstrous thing be done.

JUDGE CASADO: I have the law on my side. And the law will ensure my rest.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: I spit on your law! I have on my side the right of lovers not to be parted, the right of the criminal to be forgiven, the right of every penitent to recover his good name. Yes, I spit on your law and all its works! Had you the law on your side when you made those cowardly excuses to the captain who challenged you to a duel, after you'd made a false declaration so as to escape your military service? Was the law on your side when you asked that girl who was suing a dishonest employer to sleep with you?

JUDGE CASADO: Keep silent, woman!

VICTORIA: Yes, mother, please, please stop.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: No, Victoria, I must have my say. I have kept silence all these years—for the sake of my honor and for the love of God. But honor has left the world. And a single hair of that child's head is dearer to me than heaven itself. I shall not hold my peace. And I will say to this man, my husband, that he has never had justice on his side; for justice—do you hear, Casado?—is on the side of the sufferers, the afflicted, those who live by hope alone. It is not and can never be with those who count their pennies and cling to their miserable hoard.

[DIEGO has put the child down.]

THE JUDGE'S DAUGHTER: The right you champion is the right to adultery.

THE JUDGE'S WIFE [her voice rising to a scream]: I have no wish to hide my sin. No, no, I'll cry it on the housetops. But, abject as I am, this much I know: that, if the flesh has its lapses, the heart has its crimes. And what is done in the heat of passion should meet with pity.

THE JUDGE'S DAUGHTER: Pity for the bitches!

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: Why not? Bitches, too, have a belly for their pleasure and their parturition.

JUDGE CASADO: Woman, your arguments are worthless. I shall denounce the young man who has brought all this trouble upon us. And I shall do it with the greater satisfaction since I shall be not only carrying out the law, but also giving vent to my hatred.

VICTORIA: Ah, so at last the truth is out, more shame to you! Always you have judged in terms of hatred, though you masked it with the name of law. Thus even the best laws took on a bad taste in your

mouth—the sour mouth of those who have never loved anything in their lives. Oh, I'm suffocating with disgust. Come, Diego, take me in your arms and let's rot together. But let that man live; life is punishment enough for him.

DIEGO: Let me be! Oh, I'm sick with shame when I see what we have come to!

VICTORIA: I feel as you do. I could die of shame. [DIEGO makes a dash to the window and jumps out. The JUDGE runs also. VICTORIA slips out by a concealed door.]

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: The time has come when the buboes have got to burst, and we are not the only ones. The whole city is in the grip of the same fever.

JUDGE CASADO: You bitch!

THE JUDGE'S WIFE: You—judge!

[The light leaves the Judge's house, then settles on the food office, where NADA and the ALCALDE are preparing to leave.]

NADA: Orders have been given to the district wardens to see to it that all the citizens under their charge vote for the new government.

FIRST ALCALDE: That won't be too easy. Quite likely some will vote against it.

NADA: No, not if we use the right method.

FIRST ALCALDE: The right method?

NADA: The right method is to declare that the voting's free. Which means that votes cast in favor of the government are freely given. As for the others, account must be taken of the pressure brought to bear on voters to prevent their voting of their own free will. Thus votes of



this kind will be counted in accordance with the preferential method; that is to say, votes on the same ticket for candidates belonging to different parties will be assimilated to the quota of the uncast votes in the ratio of one third of the votes eliminated. Is that quite clear?

FIRST ALCALDE: Quite clear? Well.... Still I think I have an inkling of what you mean.

NADA: In that case I congratulate you, Alcalde. Anyhow, whether you understand or not, don't forget that the practical effect of this admirable use of applied mathematics is to cancel out all votes unfavorable to the government.

FIRST ALCALDE: But didn't you say the voting was free?

NADA: And so it is. Only we base our system on the principle that a vote against us isn't a free vote. It's a mere romantic gesture, conditioned by prejudice and passion.

FIRST ALCALDE: Well, well! I'd never have thought of that!

NADA: That's because you've never really grasped what freedom means.

[Light on the center. DIEGO and VICTORIA enter, running, and halt in the front of the stage.]

DIEGO: Victoria, I'd like to run away from all this. I've lost my bearings and I no longer know where my duty lies.

VICTORIA: Do not leave me. A man's duty is to stand by those he loves. We will see this through together.

DIEGO: But I'm too proud to love you if I can no longer respect myself.

VICTORIA: What's there to prevent your respecting yourself?

DIEGO: You, Victoria—when I see how brave you are.

VICTORIA: For heaven's sake, for our love's sake, Diego, don't talk like that or I'll let you see the ugly truth—the coward that I really am! For you're mistaken. I'm not so brave as you think. All my courage wilts when I think of the time when I could feel I was yours, body and soul. How far away it seems, that time—when I felt love welling up in my heart, like a tempestuous flood, whenever anybody spoke your name! And when I had a thrill of happy triumph, like a sailor who has made his landfall, whenever I saw you coming toward me! Yes, I'm losing grip, I feel like sinking to the ground, all my courage is dying of a cowardly regret. If somehow I still keep on my feet, it's the momentum of my love carrying me blindly on. But if you were to go out of my life, I'd stop dead, I'd fall and never rise again.

DIEGO: Ah, if only I could tie myself to you and we two, bound limb to limb, could drown together in a sleep that has no end!

VICTORIA: Come!

[Slowly they move toward each other, each gazing into the other's eyes. But before they can embrace, the SECRETARY suddenly comes forward and thrusts herself between them.]

THE SECRETARY: What are you up to, you two?

VICTORIA [shrilly]: Can't you see? We're making love!

[A terrific crash in the air overhead.]

THE SECRETARY: Ssh! Some words must not be spoken. You should have known that that one was forbidden. Look! [Strikes DIEGO on the armpit, branding him for the second time.] So far you were only under suspicion. Now you are infected. [Gazes at him.] A pity! Such a good-

looking lad. [To VICTORIA] Sorry, but frankly I prefer men to women, I get on with them so much better. Good evening.

[DIEGO stares with horror at the new mark under his arm; then, after gazing wildly round him, rushes toward VICTORIA and clasps her in his arms.]

DIEGO: Oh, how I hate your beauty—now that I know it will survive me! No, I cannot bear to think that others will enjoy it after I am dead. [Crushing her to his breast] Good! Anyhow this way I shall not be alone. What do I care for your love if it doesn't rot along with me?

VICTORIA [struggling]: Stop! You're hurting me.

DIEGO: Ah! So you're afraid? [Shakes her, laughing wildly.] Those black horses of love, where are they now? So long as the weather's fair a woman's love continues, but let the storm break, and the black horses gallop away in panic.... At least you can die with me!

VICTORIA: With you, yes; but never against you! I loathe the look of fear and hatred you have now. Let me go. Leave me free to discover in you the love that once was yours—and then, and then my heart will speak again.

DIEGO [half releasing her]: I can't bear the thought of dying. And now all that is dearest to me in the world is forsaking me, refusing to follow me to the grave.

VICTORIA [flinging herself against him]: But, Diego, I will follow you—to hell, if need be. Ah, my old Diego has come back. I feel my limbs quivering against yours. Kiss me, kiss me and crush back the cry that rises from the depths of my body, forcing its way up through my lips!... Ah!

[He presses his lips to her mouth's kiss, then breaks free and leaves her trembling with emotion in the center of the stage.]

DIEGO: Wait!... No, you are unscathed. There is no sign on you. This foolish act will have no consequences.

VICTORIA: Take me in your arms again. It's with cold that I am trembling now. A moment ago your breast was burning my hands and the blood ran like wildfire through my veins. But now ...

DIEGO: No. Let me go my own way. I cannot stand aloof with all this suffering around me.

VICTORIA: Come back, Diego. All I want is to be consumed by the same fever, to die of the same wound, and to join my last cry with yours.

DIEGO: No. From now on I am with the others, all those wretched people who are marked as I am marked. Their agonies appall me; they fill me with the disgust that used to make me shrink from every contact. But now their calamity is mine, and they need me.

VICTORIA: If you must die, I'll envy even the earth that wraps your body.

DIEGO: You are on the other side of the barricade, the side of the living.

VICTORIA: I can still be with you, Diego, if only you keep your love for me.

DIEGO: Love? They have ruled love out. But, ah, how I hate the thought of losing you!

VICTORIA: No, Diego; do not talk of losing me. Oh, I've seen quite well what they are after; they do all they can to make love impossible. But I'll defeat them, for I am stronger than they.

DIEGO: Perhaps, but I am not. I know my weakness and I have no wish to share my defeat with you.

VICTORIA: There's no flaw in my armor; my love is all my life. I fear nothing now; even were the skies to fall, I should go down to death crying out my happiness, if only I still had your hand in mine.

[Cries in the distance.]

DIEGO: Others are crying, too.

VICTORIA: I'm deaf to their cries, my ears are sealed against them!

DIEGO: Look!

[The death-cart rumbles past.]

VICTORIA: My eyes see nothing. Love has dazzled them.

DIEGO: Don't you feel the very sky weighing down on us with its load of sorrows?

VICTORIA: When it's the utmost I can do to bear the weight of my love, how can you ask me to take on my shoulders the burden of the sorrows of the world as well? No, that's a man's idea of duty—one of those futile, preposterous crusades you men engage in as a pretext for evading the one struggle that is truly arduous, the one victory of which you could be rightly proud.

DIEGO: What else should I struggle against in this world of ours if not the injustice that is done us?

VICTORIA: The anguish that you have within yourself. Master that, and all the rest will follow.

DIEGO: I am alone. And that anguish is too great for me to master.

VICTORIA: You are not alone. I stand beside you and I am armed for the fight.

DIEGO: How beautiful you are, Victoria, and how I'd love you—if only I were not afraid!

VICTORIA: How little you would fear, if only you'd consent to love me!

DIEGO: I do love you.... But I don't know which of us is in the right.

VICTORIA: The one who has no fear. And my heart is fearless. It burns with a single, steady flame, a pillar of fire, like those beacon fires with which our mountaineers hail each other on midsummer's night. And it, too, conveys a message, it is calling you. This is our midsummer's night.

DIEGO: In a charnel house!

VICTORIA: Charnel house or mountaintop—how can that affect my love? And my love, anyhow, is benign, it does no harm to anyone. But who is benefited by your crazy self-devotion? Not I, in any case; each word you utter is a dagger in my heart.

DIEGO: Don't cry, foolish one!... But, oh, the cruelty of my predicament! Why should I be singled out for this ordeal? I could have drunk those tears and, with my lips seared by their bitterness, have strewn as many kisses on your face as an olive tree has leaves!

VICTORIA: At last! At last you have come back to me and that's our language you are speaking once again. [Stretches out her arms toward him.] Let me make sure that it is you, really you, come back.

[But DIEGO steps quickly back, showing the plague marks on him. She moves her hands forward, then hesitates.]

DIEGO: So you, too, are afraid?

[She places the palms of her hands firmly on the plague marks. Startled, he recoils from her, but she stretches out her arms again.]

VICTORIA: Come! Let me take you in my arms. You have nothing to fear now. [The groans and imprecations in the background grow louder.

DIEGO gazes blankly around him like a madman, then abruptly hurries away.] Diego! No, he has forsaken me. I am alone, alone!

CHORUS OF WOMEN: We are the guardians of the race. This ordeal is more than we can cope with, we can but wait for it to end. So let us hold our peace until winter comes, bringing the hour of liberation when these groans and curses cease and our men come back to us, clamoring for what they treasure in their memories and cannot do without: the freedom of the great sea spaces, empty skies of summer, love's undying fragrance. But meanwhile we are like, autumn leaves drenched by the September gales, which hover for a while in air and then are dragged down by the weight of water on them. We, too, are drooping earthward with bent backs, and until the day when these battle cries have spent their force, we listen only to the slow tides of happiness murmuring deep down within us. When the bare boughs of the almond trees grow bright with frost flowers we shall straighten up a little, fanned by a rising wind of hope, and soon in that second springtime we shall hold our heads high once more. Then those we love will turn again to us and as they draw near, step by step, we shall be like those heavy boats that the tide lifts inch by inch from the mud flats—steeped in brine and reeking with the harsh tang of the sea—until at last you see them dancing on the waves. Ah, if only the wind would rise, if only the wind would rise ...!

[Darkness. Then light plays on the wharf. DIEGO enters and hails a boat that he has seen approaching. The male chorus is massed in the background.]

DIEGO: Ahoy there! Ahoy!

A VOICE: Ahoy!

[During the scene that follows the boat is invisible, only the boatman's head appears above the level of the wharf.]

DIEGO: What are you up to?

THE BOATMAN: Carrying provisions.

DIEGO: For the city?

THE BOATMAN: No, that's the food controller's job. He issues the ration cards to the people, and that's all they get. I supply my customers with bread and milk. You see, there's some ships at anchor out there, with whole families aboard, people who've gone there to escape contagion. I bring their letters ashore and take back their food.

DIEGO: But that's forbidden by the authorities.

THE BOATMAN: So I've heard tell. But I was at sea when the new laws were passed, and I've never learned to read. So I can't be expected to know their precious regulations, can I?

DIEGO: Take me with you.

THE BOATMAN: Where?

DIEGO: To one of those ships you spoke of.

THE BOATMAN: Nothing doing. It's forbidden.



DIEGO: But just now you said you didn't know anything about the regulations.

THE BOATMAN: I didn't mean forbidden by the authorities here; it's the people on the ships who don't allow it. You can't be trusted.

DIEGO: Can't be trusted? What do you mean?

THE BOATMAN: Why, you might bring 'em with you.

DIEGO: Bring what?

THE BOATMAN: Ssh! [Looks round to make sure no one is listening.]  
Why, germs, of course. You might bring the germs on board.

DIEGO: Look here! I'll pay you well.

THE BOATMAN: Don't tempt me, sir. I don't like saying No to a gentleman.

DIEGO: As I said, I won't haggle over the terms.

THE BOATMAN: And you'll take it on your conscience if it leads to trouble?

DIEGO: Yes.

THE BOATMAN: Then step on board, sir. The sea is like a lake tonight.

[DIEGO is about to step down from the wharf when suddenly the SECRETARY appears behind him.]

THE SECRETARY: No. You're not to go.

DIEGO: What the devil ...?

THE SECRETARY: It's a contingency that's not provided for. Also, I know you better, you won't desert your post.

DIEGO: Nothing will prevent me from going.

THE SECRETARY: That's where you're mistaken. If I wish you to stay you will stay. And in fact I do wish you to stay; I've some business to transact with you.... You know who I am, don't you? [She moves back some steps, as if to draw him away from the edge of the wharf. DIEGO follows her.]

DIEGO: To die is nothing. But to die degraded ...

THE SECRETARY: I understand. Mind you, I'm a mere executive. But by the same token I have been given a sort of jurisdiction over you. The right of veto, if I may put it so.

[Consults her notebook.]

DIEGO: The men of my blood belong to the earth, and to the earth alone.

THE SECRETARY: That's what I meant. You belong to me after a fashion. After a fashion only, mind you, perhaps not in the way I'd like you to be mine ... when I look at you. (Naïvely) You know, I'm rather taken by you, really. Unfortunately I have my orders.

[Toys with her notebook.]

DIEGO: I prefer your hatred to your smiles. And I despise you!

THE SECRETARY: Have it your own way! In any case this talk we're having isn't quite in order. But I find that tiredness often makes me sentimental, and with all this never-ending bookkeeping, I sometimes find myself losing grip a bit—especially on nights like tonight. [She is twiddling the notebook between her fingers. DIEGO tries to snatch it from her.] No, darling, don't be naughty. What would you see in it, anyhow, if you got it? Just lines and lines of entries. It's a sort of memorandum book, you see, a cross between a diary and a directory. [Laughs] My little memory-jogger!

[She stretches a hand toward DIEGO as if to fondle him, but he moves hastily back to where the BOATMAN was.]

DIEGO: Ah! He's gone!

THE SECRETARY: So he has. Another simpleton who thinks he's out of it, but whose name is in my book, like everybody else's.

DIEGO: You're double-tongued, and that, as you should know, is enough to put any man against you. So, let's be done with it.

THE SECRETARY: I don't know what you mean by "double-tongued." Really it's all quite simple and aboveboard. Every town has its list. This is the Cadiz list. Our organization's excellent, I can assure you; nobody's left out.

DIEGO: Nobody's left out, yet all escape.

THE SECRETARY [indignantly]: How can you talk such nonsense! [Ponders for a moment.] Still, I admit, there are exceptions. Now and then we overlook someone. But he always ends up by giving himself away, sooner or later. When a man reaches the age of a hundred he can't help bragging about it—fool that he is! Then it gets into the newspapers. It's only a question of time. When I read the morning papers I note their names—collate them, as we call it. Oh, never fear, we always get them in the end.

DIEGO: But for a hundred years, anyhow, they've snapped their fingers at you—just like all the people in this city.

THE SECRETARY: What's a hundred years? To you no doubt that sounds like a lot of time, because you see these things from too near. But I can take a longer and a broader view. In a list of three hundred and seventy-two thousand names, what does one man matter, I ask you—even if he is a centenarian? In any case, we make up for it by pulling in

a certain number of teen-agers; that levels up our average. It only means eliminating a bit quicker. Like this.... [She crosses out an entry in her notebook. There is a cry out at sea and the sound of a body falling into the water.] Oh! That was the boatman you were talking to. I did it without thinking. It was just a fluke.

[DIEGO, who has risen to his feet, is gazing at her with horror and repugnance.]

DIEGO: You disgust me so much that I feel like vomiting.

THE SECRETARY: Oh, I know I have a beastly job. It's terribly exhausting, and then one has to be so meticulous. At the start I fumbled a bit, but now I've a steady hand. [Approaches DIEGO.]

DIEGO: Keep away from me!

THE SECRETARY: Really I shouldn't tell you; it's a secret. But soon there won't be any more mistakes We've invented a new system that will run like clockwork, once it gets going. Just wait and see. [While speaking, she has been coming closer and closer, phrase by phrase, to DIEGO. Suddenly, trembling with rage, he grips her by the collar.]

DIEGO: Stop this play acting, damn you! What are you waiting for? Get on with your job and don't try to play cat-and-mouse with me—I'm bigger than you, if you only knew it. So kill me; that's the only way of making good that wonderful system of yours, which leaves nothing to chance. But of course only masses count with you; it's only when you're dealing with a hundred thousand men or more that you condescend to feel some interest. Then you can compile statistics—and statistics are conveniently dumb. It's easier working on whole generations, at an office table, in silence and with a restful smell of ink. But a single man, that's another story; he can upset your applecart. He cries aloud his joys and griefs. And as long as I live I shall go on shattering your

beautiful new order with the cries that rise to my lips. Yes, I resist you, I resist you with all the energy that's in me.

THE SECRETARY: My darling!

DIEGO: Keep silent! I am of a race that used to honor death as much as life. But then your masters came along, and now both living and dying are dishonorable.

THE SECRETARY: Well, it's true ...

DIEGO: It's true that you are lying and that you will go on lying until the end of time. Yes, I've seen through your famous system. You have imposed on men the pangs of hunger and bereavement to keep their minds off any stirrings of revolt. You wear them down, you waste their time and strength so that they've neither the leisure nor the energy to vent their anger. So they just mark time—which is what you want, isn't it? Great as are their numbers, they are quite as much alone as I am. Each of us is alone because of the cowardice of the others. Yet though, like them, I am humiliated, trodden down, I'd have you know that you are nothing, and that this vast authority of yours, darkening the sky, is no more than a passing shadow cast upon the earth, a shadow that will vanish in a twinkling before a great storm wind of revolt. You thought that everything could be expressed in terms of figures, formulas. But when you were compiling your precious registers, you quite forgot the wild roses in the hedges, the signs in the sky, the smiles of summer, the great voice of the sea, the moments when man rises in his wrath and scatters all before him. [She laughs.] Don't laugh! Don't laugh, you fool! You're doomed, I tell you, you and your associates. Even when you are flushed with victory, defeat is knocking at the door. For there is in man—look at me, and learn—an innate power that you will never vanquish, a gay madness born of mingled fear and courage, unreasoning yet victorious through all time. One day this power will surge up and you will learn that all your glory is but dust before the

wind. [She laughs again.] No, don't laugh. There's nothing to laugh about.

[She goes on laughing. He slaps her face and at the same moment the men in the chorus tear off their gags and utter a great cry of joy. In his excitement DIEGO has crushed out his plague mark; he touches the place where it was, then gazes at it in amazement.]

THE SECRETARY: Splendid! Simply splendid!

DIEGO: What do you mean?

THE SECRETARY: You're simply splendid when you are angry. I like you even better.

DIEGO: But—what's happened?

THE SECRETARY: You can see for yourself. The mark is disappearing. Carry on; you're going about it the right way.

DIEGO: Does that mean I am cured?

THE SECRETARY: Now I'm going to tell you a little secret. Their system is excellent, as you have observed; still there's a defect in their machine.

DIEGO: I don't follow.

THE SECRETARY: It has a weak point, darling. As far back as I can remember the machine has always shown a tendency to break down when a man conquers his fear and stands up to them. I won't say it stops completely. But it creaks, and sometimes it actually begins to fold up.

[A short silence.]

DIEGO: Why do you tell me that?

THE SECRETARY: Oh, you know, even when one has to do what I do, one can't help having a soft spot. And you've discovered mine.

DIEGO: Would you have spared me if I hadn't struck you?

THE SECRETARY: No. I came here to finish you off according to the rules.

DIEGO: So I'm the stronger?

THE SECRETARY: Tell me, are you still afraid?

DIEGO: No.

THE SECRETARY: Then I can't do anything to harm you. That, too, is down in the regulations. But I don't mind telling you it's the first time I'm glad about that loophole in our code.

[She moves slowly away. DIEGO runs his hand over his chest, glances at his hand again, then quickly swings round and gazes in the direction whence groans are coming. The scene that follows is in pantomime. He goes toward a man who is still gagged and lying on the ground, and undoes the gag. It is the FISHERMAN. The two men eye each other in silence for some moments.]

THE FISHERMAN [with an effort]: Good evening, brother. It's quite a while since I spoke last. [DIEGO smiles toward him. The man glances up at the sky.] What's happening?

[The sky has brightened. A light breeze has sprung up, a door is flapping, and some clothes are fluttering on a line. The populace gathers round the two men; they, too, have removed their gags and are gazing up at the sky.]

DIEGO: Yes. The wind is rising....

CURTAIN

### THIRD PART

The townsfolk of Cadiz are moving about in the public square, engaged in various tasks that DIEGO, standing at a slightly higher level, supervises. A brilliant lighting brings out the artificiality of the stage properties set up by the PLAGUE, and thus renders them less impressive.

DIEGO: Rub out the stars. [The stars are obliterated.] Open the windows. [Windows are opened.] Group the sick together. [The crowd obeys.] Make more space for them. Good. Now stop being frightened; that's the one condition of deliverance. Let all of you who can, rise to their feet. Why are you cowering like that? Hold up your heads; the hour of pride has struck. Throw away your gags and proclaim with me that you have stopped being afraid. [Raising his arm.] O spirit of revolt, glory of the people, and vital protest against death, give these gagged men and women the power of your voice!

CHORUS: Brother, we hear you, and wretched as is the plight of men like us who live on bread and olives, by whom a mule is reckoned as a fortune, and who touch wine but twice a year, on wedding days and birthdays, we, abject as we are, can feel hope stirring in our hearts. But the old fear has not left them. Olives and bread give life a savor, and little though we have, we are afraid of losing it and our lives.

DIEGO: You will lose your bread and olives and your lives as well if you let things continue as they are. Even if all you want is to keep your daily bread, you must begin by fighting down your fear. Spirit of Spain, awake!



CHORUS: We are poor and ignorant. But we have been told that the plague follows the course of the seasons. It has its spring when it strikes root and buds, a summer when it bears its fruit. Perhaps when winter comes it dies. But tell us, brother, is winter here, has winter really set in? Is this breeze that has sprung up really blowing from the sea? Always we have paid for everything with a currency of toil and tears; must we now pay in the currency of blood?

CHORUS OF WOMEN: There they are again, the men, prating of the concerns of men! But we are here to remind you of moments that fall into your hands like sun-ripe fruit, of days fragrant with flowers and the black wool of ewes—the scents and sights of Spain. We are weak and you, with your big bones, can always master us. But, none the less, do not forget, in the dust and heat of your shadow-fights, our flowers of flesh.

DIEGO: It is the plague that is wearing us to the bone, parting lovers, withering the flowers of our days. And our first duty is to fight the plague.

CHORUS: Has winter really come? The oaks in our forests are still clad with tiny, gleaming acorns and wasps are buzzing round their trunks. No, winter has not yet begun.

DIEGO: The winter of your wrath—let that be your beginning.

CHORUS: Yes, but is hope waiting for us at the end of the road? Or must we die of despair upon the way?

DIEGO: Cease talking of despair! Despair is a gag. And today the thunder of hope and a lightning flash of happiness are shattering the silence of this beleaguered city. Stand up, I tell you, and act like men!

Tear up your certificates, smash the windows of their offices, leave the ranks of fear, and shout your freedom to the four winds of heaven!

CHORUS: We are the dispossessed and hope is our only riches—how could we live without it? Yes, brother, we will fling away these gags. [A great shout of deliverance.] Ah, now the first rain is falling on the parched earth, sealing the cracks that the summer heat has made. Autumn is here with her mantle of green, and a cool wind is blowing from the sea. Hope buoys us up like a great wave. [DIEGO moves away. The PLAGUE, enters, on the same level as DIEGO, but from the opposite side, followed by NADA and the SECRETARY.]

THE SECRETARY: What's all this commotion about? Will you be good enough to replace your gags—at once!

[Some of the crowd, in the center, put back their gags. But some men have followed DIEGO and are carrying out his instructions in an orderly manner.]

THE PLAGUE: They're getting out of hand.

THE SECRETARY: As usual!

THE PLAGUE: Well, we must take severer measures.

THE SECRETARY: Yes, I suppose we must. [She opens her notebook and starts turning over the pages with a certain listlessness.]

NADA: Why, of course we must! We are on the right track, that's sure. To abide by the regulations or not to abide by them—there you have all philosophy and ethics in a nutshell. But in my opinion, if Your Honor will permit me to express it, we don't go far enough.

THE PLAGUE: You talk too much.

NADA: That's because I'm bubbling over with enthusiasm, and while I've been with you I have learned quite a lot. Suppression—that's always been my gospel. But until now I had no good arguments to back it up. Now I have the regulations on my side.

THE PLAGUE: But the regulations do not suppress everything. Watch your step, my man, you're not in line.

NADA: Mind you, there were rules and regulations before you came on the scene. But no one had had the idea of an all-embracing regulation, a sum total of all accounts, with the human race put on the index, all life replaced by a table of contents, the universe put out of action, heaven and earth at last devalued and debunked....

THE PLAGUE: Go back to your work, you drunken sot. And you, my dear, get busy.

THE SECRETARY: How shall we start?

THE PLAGUE: Oh, at random. That way it's more impressive.

[The SECRETARY strikes out two names. Two thuds in quick succession; two men fall. The crowd surges back; the workers stop work and gaze at the dead men with dismay. Plague Guards rush up, replace the stars on the doors, close windows, pile the corpses up on the side.]

DIEGO [at the back of the stage; quietly]: Long live death! You no longer frighten us.

[The crowd surges forward. The men start work again. The Guards retreat. Same action as before, but in reverse. The wind whistles each time the crowd moves forward, and dies away when the Guards return.]

THE PLAGUE: Eliminate that man.

THE SECRETARY: Impossible.

THE PLAGUE: Why?

THE SECRETARY: He has ceased being afraid.

THE PLAGUE: You don't say so! Does he know?

THE SECRETARY: He has suspicions.

[She strikes out some names. Dull thuds. The crowd surges back. Same action as before.]

NADA: Splendid! They're dying like flies. Ah, if only we could blow up the whole world!

DIEGO [calmly]: Go to the help of those who fall [Some movements of the crowd, in reverse.]

THE PLAGUE: That fellow is really going too far.

THE SECRETARY: As you say, he's going far.

THE PLAGUE: Why do you sound so sad about it? You haven't by any chance let him know how things stand, have you?

THE SECRETARY: No. He must have found that out for himself. A sort of clairvoyance.

THE PLAGUE: He may have clairvoyance, but I have the means of action. We shall have to try new tactics. I leave their choice to you.

[Goes out.]

CHORUS [flinging off the gags]: Ah! [A huge sigh of relief.] This is the beginning of the end, the strangle hold is loosening, the sky is clearing, the air growing breathable. Listen! You can hear it again, the murmur of the streams that the black sun of the plague had dried up. Summer is passing, and soon we shall no longer have the grapes of the vine arbor,

nor melons, green beans, and fresh salad. The water of hope is softening the hard earth and promising us the solaces of winter—roast chestnuts, corn with the grains still green, tender walnuts, milk simmering on the hearth.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Ignorant as we are, this much we know—that too high a price should not be paid for these good things. Everywhere in the world, and whoever be the master, there will always be fresh fruit for the plucking, the poor man's cup of wine, a fire of vine twigs at which we can warm our hands, waiting for better times....

[The JUDGE'S DAUGHTER jumps out of a window in the Judge's house, runs across to the group of women and hides among them.]

THE SECRETARY [coming down toward the crowd]: Really you'd think we were in the midst of a revolution. But that is not the case, as you are well aware. Anyhow, it's not the masses who launch revolutions nowadays, and it's no use trying to put the clock back. Modern revolutions don't need insurgents. The police attend to everything, even to the overthrow of the government in power. And, when you think of it, isn't that a great improvement? That way the common people can take it easy, while some kind souls do all the thinking for them and decide what modicum of welfare they can do with.

THE FISHERMAN: I've half a mind to knock that damned eel on the head and rip her guts out.

THE SECRETARY: So, my good friends, wouldn't you do best to let it go at that? Once a government has settled in, it always costs more than it's worth to change it. Even if the present system strikes you as intolerable, there's always the hope of getting some concessions.

A WOMAN: What concessions?

THE SECRETARY: How can I tell? But surely you women realize that every upheaval costs a lot of suffering, and a good appeasement often pays better than a ruinous victory?

[The women approach. Some men, too, leave Diego's group.]

DIEGO: Don't listen. All she said has been thought up in advance.

THE SECRETARY: What do you mean by "thought up"? I'm talking common sense, that's all.

A MAN: Just what concessions did you have in mind?

THE SECRETARY: Well it's difficult to answer that right off. Still, to give an example, I don't see why we shouldn't join with you in appointing a committee to decide, by a majority of votes, what eliminations should be ordered. Then this notebook in which the eliminations are made would be kept in the possession of the committee. Mind you, I'm only saying this by way of illustration of an arrangement we might come to. [She is dangling the notebook at arm's length. A man snatches it from her hand. She addresses him with feigned indignation] Will you give me back that notebook at once! You know quite well how valuable it is and that it's enough to strike out the name of one of your fellow citizens for him to die on the spot.

[Men and women crowd excitedly round the man who has the notebook. Cries of jubilation: "We've got it!" "That's cooked their goose!" "We're saved!"

The JUDGE'S DAUGHTER runs up, snatches away the notebook, and after retreating to a corner and skimming through the pages, strikes out an entry. A shrill cry in the Judge's house and the sound of a body falling heavily on the floor. Men and women rush at the girl.]

A VOICE: You poisonous vixen! It's you who should be eliminated!

[Someone takes the notebook from her; all gather round him and hunt until they find the name of the JUDGE'S DAUGHTER. A hand strikes it out. The girl drops without a cry.]

NADA [at the top of his voice]: Forward, let's all join in a general suppression. It's not enough suppressing others, let's suppress ourselves. Here we are gathered together, oppressors and oppressed, a happy band of victims waiting in the arena. Go to it, bull; now for the universal cleanup.

A BURLY MAN [who now is holding the notebook]: That's so. There's plenty of cleaning up to do in this here city. We'll never have another chance like this of rubbing out some of those sons of bitches who's been living on the fat of the land while we were starving.

[The PLAGUE, who has just come on the scene again, lets out an enormous guffaw, while the SECRETARY demurely steps back to her place beside him. Nobody moves while the Plague Guards roam the stage, replacing the scenery and symbols of the PLAGUE.]

THE PLAGUE [to DIEGO]: You see! They're doing the work themselves. Do you really think they're worth all the trouble you are taking?

[But meanwhile DIEGO and the FISHERMAN have leaped onto the raised platform where the man who holds the notebook is standing, and knocked him down. DIEGO takes the notebook and tears it up.]

THE SECRETARY: That's no good. I have a duplicate. [DIEGO hustles the men toward the other side of the stage.]

DIEGO: Get back to your work. You've been tricked.

THE PLAGUE: When they're frightened, their fear is for themselves. But their hatred is for others.

DIEGO [coming back and facing him]: Neither fear, nor hatred—therein lies our victory.

[The Guards retreat before Diego's men.]

THE PLAGUE: Silence! I am he who turns the wine bitter, and dries up the fruit. I nip the young vine when it is putting forth its grapes and rot it when it needs the fires of summer. I loathe your simple joys. I loathe this country in which men claim to be free without being rich. I have prisons and executioners on my side, power and blood are my ministers. This city will be wiped out, and upon its ruins history will expire at last in the august silence of all perfect social orders. Silence then, or I destroy everything.

[A mimic hand-to-hand conflict ensues between Diego's partisans and others, in the midst of an appalling din—thuds of eliminations, buzzings in the air, creakings of garottes, an avalanche of slogans. Then, while the struggle gradually turns in favor of Diego's men, the tumult dies down and the voices of the CHORUS, indistinct as yet, drown the noises of the PLAGUE.]

THE PLAGUE [with a furious gesture]: We still have the hostages.

[He makes a sign and the Plague Guards leave the stage, while the others form up once more in groups.]

NADA [standing on the summit of the palace]: Something always remains. Nothing goes on and everything goes on. And my offices, too, go on functioning. Even if the city falls in ruins and men forsake the earth, these offices will continue opening at the usual hour, to see to it that government goes on, even if nothing is left to govern. I stand for eternity, my paradise will have its records, office files, and rubber stamps for ever.



[Exit.]

THE CHORUS: They are in flight. Summer is ending with our victory. So, after all, man has won the day. And for us victory takes the form of our women's bodies quickened by the showers of love; of happy flesh, warm and glistening like the clusters of September grapes round which the wood wasps buzz. Harvests of the vine are heaped on the belly's wine press and wine spurts red over the tips of drunken breasts. Soon, O my love, you will see desire bursting like an overripe fruit and the glory of bodies issuing at last in shining freedom. In every corner of the sky mysterious hands are proffering flowers, from quenchless fountains the golden wine is flowing. Now is the festival of victory; let us make haste to join our women!

[All fall silent as a stretcher, on which VICTORIA lies, is carried forward. DIEGO rushes toward it.]

DIEGO: Ah, this makes one want to kill—to kill or to die!

[He stands beside the body, which seems lifeless.] O Victoria, most glorious of women, fierce and unconquerable as love, turn your face toward me if only for a moment. Come back, Victoria! Do not let yourself be lured away to that dim place beyond the world where you will be lost to me forever. Do not leave me, the earth is cold. Struggle to keep your foothold on this narrow ledge of life where we are still together, and do not let yourself slip down into the abyss. For, if you die, it will be dark at noon on all the days that yet are given me to live.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Now we are at grips with truth; till now it was but half in earnest. What we have before us is a human body, racked by agony. Thus, after the tumult and the shouting, the fine speeches, the cries of "long live death!" death comes in person and clutches the throat of the beloved. And then, at the very moment when it is too late for loving, love returns.

[VICTORIA utters a low groan.]

DIEGO: It's not too late. Look, she is trying to rise! Yes, Victoria, once again I shall see you standing before me, straight as a torch, with the black flames of your hair rippling in the wind, and that glory of love upon your face, whose radiance was ever with me in my darkest hour. For I had you with me in the thickest of the fight, and my heart saw me through.

VICTORIA: You will forget me, that's certain. Your heart will not see you through the years of absence. Did it not fail you in the hour of misfortune only a while ago? Ah, how cruel it is to die knowing one will be forgotten! [Turns away.]

DIEGO: I shall not forget you; my remembrance will outlast my life.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: O suffering body, once so desirable; O queenly beauty, once so radiant! A man cries for the impossible, a woman endures all that is possible. Bow your proud head, Diego, and accuse yourself—for the hour of repentance has struck. Deserter! That body was your homeland; without it you are nothing any more; do not count on your remembrance to save you.

[The PLAGUE, who has come up quietly, is facing DIEGO across VICTORIA'S body.]

THE PLAGUE: Well, do you throw in your hand? [DIEGO gazes with despair at VICTORIA'S body.] Your strength has turned to weakness, your eyes are wavering. But I have the steady gaze of power.

DIEGO [after a short silence]: Let her live, and kill me instead.

THE PLAGUE: What's that you say?

DIEGO: I propose an exchange.

THE PLAGUE: What exchange?

DIEGO: My life for hers.

THE PLAGUE: That's the sort of romantic notion one has when one is tired. Don't forget that dying is a far from pleasant process and she is through with the worst of it. So let's leave well alone.

DIEGO: It's the sort of notion one has when one's the stronger.

THE PLAGUE: Look at me! I am strength incarnate.

DIEGO: Take off your uniform.

THE PLAGUE: Are you crazy?

DIEGO: Strip, I tell you! When strong men take off their uniforms they are not pretty sights!

THE PLAGUE: Quite likely. Their strength lies in having invented uniforms.

DIEGO: Mine lies in rejecting them. Well, I stand by my offer.

THE PLAGUE: Don't be over-hasty in deciding. Life has its good points.

DIEGO: My life is nothing. What count for me are my reasons for living. I'm not a dog.

THE PLAGUE: The first cigarette of the day—will you tell me that is nothing? And the smell of dust at noon on the rambla, rain falling through the dusk, a woman unknown as yet, the second glass of wine—do these mean nothing to you?

DIEGO: They mean something, yes. But this girl will live better than I.

PLAGUE: No—provided you give up troubling yourself about others.

DIEGO: On the road I've chosen there is no turning back, even if one wants it. I shall not spare you!

THE PLAGUE [changing his tone]: Now, listen well. If you offer me your life in exchange for that girl's, I am bound to accept your offer, and she will live. But there's another arrangement we can make, if you agree to it. I'll give you that girl's life and let you both escape, provided you let me make my own terms with this city.

DIEGO: No. I know my power.

THE PLAGUE: In that case I will be frank with you. For me there can be no question of half measures; I must be master of all or I am master of nothing. So, if you escape me, this city escapes me. That's the law. An ancient law, whose origin I do not know.

DIEGO: But I do. It comes from the abyss of time, it is greater than you, loftier than your gibbets; it is the law of nature. We have won the day.

THE PLAGUE: Not yet. I have this girl's body as my hostage. And this hostage is the last trump in my hand. If any woman has life written on her face it's she; she deserves to live, and you wish to have her live. As for me, I am bound to give her back to you—but only in exchange for your life, or for the freedom of this city. Make your choice.

[DIEGO gazes at VICTORIA. In the background a murmuring of voices muted by the gags. He turns toward the CHORUS.]

DIEGO: It is hard to die.

THE PLAGUE: Yes, it's hard.

DIEGO: But it's hard for them as well.

THE PLAGUE: You fool! Don't you realize that ten years of this girl's love are worth far more than a century of freedom for those men?

DIEGO: This girl's love is my private property and I can deal with it as I choose. But those men's freedom belongs to them; I have no rights over it.

THE PLAGUE: No one can be happy without causing harm to others. That is the world's justice.

DIEGO: A justice that revolts me and to which I refuse to subscribe.

THE PLAGUE: Who asked you to subscribe to it? The scheme of things will not be changed just because you'd like it to be otherwise. But if you really want to change it, abandon idle dreams and face up to reality.

DIEGO: No. I know those stale old arguments. To do away with murder we must kill, and to prevent injustice we must do violence. That's been dinned into our ears till we took it for granted. For centuries fine gentlemen of your kind have been infecting the world's wounds on the pretense of healing them, and none the less continuing to boast of their treatment—because no one had the courage to laugh them out of court.

THE PLAGUE: No one laughs, because it's I who get things done; I am efficient.

DIEGO: Efficient, I don't deny. And practical. Like the headsman's ax.

THE PLAGUE: But isn't it enough to watch the way that men behave? You very soon realize that any kind of justice is good enough for them.

DIEGO: Since the gates of this city were closed I've had ample time for watching.

THE PLAGUE: In that case you certainly have learned that they will always fail you; you will always be alone. And the lonely man is doomed.

DIEGO: No, that's false. If I were alone, everything would be easy. But, whether they want it or not, they are with me.

THE PLAGUE: And what a fine herd they make! For one thing, they stink!

DIEGO: I know they are not pure. Nor am I, for that matter. After all I was born among them, and I live for my city and my age.

THE PLAGUE: An age of slaves.

DIEGO: No, the age of free men.

THE PLAGUE: Free men? You amaze me. I can't see any here. Where are they?

DIEGO: In your prisons and your charnel houses. The slaves are on the thrones.

THE PLAGUE: Only dress up your free men in my policemen's uniforms, and see what they become!

DIEGO: I don't deny that they can be cowardly and cruel at times. That is why they have no better right than you to hold the reins of power. No man is good enough to be entrusted with absolute power—that I grant you. But, by the same token, that is why these men are entitled to compassion, whereas you are not.

THE PLAGUE: The coward's way of living is to live as they do—mean, antlike lives, never rising above mediocrity.

DIEGO: On that level I can feel at one with them. And if I am not faithful to the humble truth I share with them, how could I keep faith with the greater, lonelier ideal that is mine?

THE PLAGUE: The only fidelity I know of is—scorn. [Points to the CHORUS cowering in the background.] Look! Isn't that enough?

DIEGO: I reserve my scorn for the oppressors. Whatever you do, these men will be greater than you. When one of them kills, he does it in a gust of passion. But you slaughter people logically, legally, cold-bloodedly. Why scoff at their bowed heads when for so many generations the comets of fear have been roaming the skies above them? Why laugh at their timid airs when for centuries death has been playing havoc with them, tearing their love like wastepaper? The worst of their crimes has always had an excuse. But I find no excuse for the wrong that has been done them since the dawn of time, and which you have legalized in your foul code. [The PLAGUE approaches him.] No, I will not lower my eyes.

THE PLAGUE: Yes, that's obvious; you will not lower them. So I may as well tell you that you have come through the last ordeal with success. If you had made over this city to me, you would have lost this girl, and you, too, would have been lost. As it is, this city has a good chance of being free. So, as you see, a madman like yourself suffices.... Naturally the madman dies. But, in the end, sooner or later, the rest are saved. [Gloomily] And they don't deserve to be saved.

DIEGO: The madman dies....

THE PLAGUE: Ah, on second thought, you're not so sure. But of course that's quite in order—a last-minute hesitation. Pride will triumph in the end.

DIEGO: I stood for honor. And today I shall regain my honor only among the dead.

THE PLAGUE: As I was saying, it's pride that kills them. But all this is very tiring for an old man like myself. [Harshly] Get ready!

DIEGO: I am ready.

THE PLAGUE: There are the marks. They hurt. [DIEGO gazes horror-struck at the marks, which have reappeared on him.] Good. Suffer a little before dying. That, anyhow, I can insist on. When hatred flames up in me, the suffering of others is a healing dew. Groan a little; that does me good. And let me watch your suffering before I leave this city. [To the SECRETARY] Now then, my dear, get to work.

THE SECRETARY: Yes, I suppose I must.

THE PLAGUE: Tired already, is that it? [The SECRETARY nods, and as she does so her whole aspect changes and she becomes an old woman, with a death's-head face.] I always knew your hatred did not strike deep enough. Whereas mine is insatiable; I must ever have new victims. Well, get things over quickly, and we'll begin again elsewhere.

THE SECRETARY: You are right; I haven't hatred to uphold me, because my duties do not call for it. But in a way it is your fault, too. When one has to drudge away at keeping up statistics, one loses the power of feeling emotion.

THE PLAGUE: Mere words! If you want something to uphold you, as you call it, you can find it [Points to DIEGO, who sinks onto his knees] in the pleasure of destruction. That, anyhow, falls within your duties.

THE SECRETARY: So be it, let's destroy. But I must say it goes against the grain.



THE PLAGUE: What authority have you to question my orders?

THE SECRETARY: The authority of memory. For I have not forgotten what I was before you came. Then I was free, an ally of the accidental. No one hated me, I was the visitant who checks the march of time, shapes destinies, and stabilizes loves. I stood for the permanent. But you have made me the handmaid of logic, rules, and regulations. And I have lost the knack I had of sometimes being helpful.

THE PLAGUE: Who wants your help?

THE SECRETARY: Those who are not big enough to face a sea of troubles. Nearly everyone, that is to say. Quite often I could work in a sort of harmony with them; I existed, in my fashion. Today I do violence to them, and one and all they curse me with their last breath. Perhaps that's why I like this man whom you are telling me to kill. He chose me freely, and, in his way, he pitied me. Yes, I like people who meet me halfway.

THE PLAGUE: You'd do better not to irritate me.... We have no need for pity.

THE SECRETARY: Who could need pity more than those who themselves have none? When I say I like this man, what I mean is really that I envy him. For, with conquerors like us, love takes the ugly form of envy. You know this well and you know, too, that for this reason we deserve a little pity.

THE PLAGUE: That's enough! I order you to keep silent!

THE SECRETARY: You know it well and you know, too, that when one kills enough one comes to envy the innocence of those one kills. Oh, if only for a moment, let me call a halt to this ruthless logic, and let me

fancy that at last I am leaning on a human body. I am so sick of shadows! And I envy all these wretched people—yes, even that girl [Points to VICTORIA] who when she returns to life will start howling like a wounded animal. But at least she will have her grief to lean on.

[DIEGO is collapsing. The PLAGUE helps him to his feet.]

THE PLAGUE: Stand up, man! The end cannot come until my charming companion takes the necessary steps. And, as you see, she is indulging in sentiment just now. But don't be afraid, she will do her duty; it's in the rules and she knows what is expected of her. The machine is creaking a bit, that's all. But, before it folds completely, you shall have your wish, young fool; I give you back this city. [Shouts of joy from the CHORUS. The PLAGUE turns toward them.] Yes, I am going, but do not overdo your glee. I am pleased with myself, here, too, we have made a success of it. I like my name to live upon men's lips, and I know you will not forget me. Look at me! Look for a last time at the only power in the world, acclaim your one true monarch, and learn to fear. [Laughs.] In the old days you professed to fear God and his caprices. But your God was an anarchist who played fast and loose with logic. He thought He could be both autocratic and kindhearted at the same time—but that was obviously wishful thinking, if I may put it so. I, anyhow, know better. I stand for power and power alone. Yes, I have chosen domination which, as you have learned, can be more formidable than Hell itself.

For thousands and thousands of years I have strewn your fields and cities with dead bodies. My victims have fertilized the sands of Libya and black Ethiopia, the soil of Persia still is fat with the sweat of my corpses. I filled Athens with the fires of purification, kindled on her beaches thousands of funeral pyres, and spread the seas of Greece so thick with ashes that their blue turned gray. The gods, yes, even the poor gods were revolted by my doings. Then, when the temples gave

place to cathedrals, my black horsemen filled them with howling mobs. For years untold, on all five continents, I have been killing without respite and without compunction.

As systems go, mine was not a bad one. There was a sound idea behind it. Nevertheless, that idea was somewhat narrow. If you want to know the way I feel about it, I'll say a dead man is refreshing enough, but he's not remunerative. Not nearly so rewarding as a slave. So the great thing is to secure a majority of slaves by means of a minority of well-selected deaths. And, thanks to our improved technique, we now can bring this off. That's why, after having killed or humiliated the requisite number of persons, we shall have whole nations on their knees. No form of beauty or grandeur will stand up to us, and we shall triumph over everything....

THE SECRETARY: We shall triumph over everything—except pride.

THE PLAGUE: Who can tell? Men are not so unintelligent as you may think, and very likely pride itself will peter out. [Sounds of trumpet calls and people moving in the distance.] Listen! My star's in the ascendant once again. Those are your former masters returning, and you will find them blind as ever to the wounds of others, sodden with inertia and forgetfulness of the lessons of the past. And when you see stupidity getting the upper hand again without a struggle, you will lose heart. Cruelty provokes, but stupidity disheartens. All honor, then, to the stupid, who prepare my ways! They are my hope and strength. Perhaps there will come a day when self-sacrifice will seem quite futile, and the never-ending clamor of your rebels will at last fall silent. Then I shall reign supreme, in the dead silence of men's servitude. [Laughs.] It's just a question of sticking to it, isn't it? But, never fear, I have the low brow of the stubborn man. [Begins to move away.]

THE SECRETARY: I am older than you, and I know that their love, too, can be stubborn.

THE PLAGUE: Love? What's that? [Exit.]

THE SECRETARY: Rise, woman. I'm tired, and I want to get it over.

[VICTORIA rises. But at the same moment DIEGO falls. The SECRETARY retreats a little, into a patch of shadow. VICTORIA runs toward DIEGO.]

VICTORIA: Oh, Diego, what have you done to our happiness?

DIEGO: Good-by, Victoria. I am glad it's so.

VICTORIA: Don't talk like that, my love! That's one of those horrible things men say. [Weeping.] No one has the right to be glad to die.

DIEGO: But I am glad, Victoria. I did what I was called upon to do.

VICTORIA: No, you should have chosen me, though all the powers of heaven forbade you. You should have preferred me to the whole earth.

DIEGO: I have squared up accounts with death—there lies my strength. But it is an all-devouring strength; happiness has no place in it.

VICTORIA: What did your strength matter to me? It was you—the man you were—that I loved.

DIEGO: I have burned myself out in the struggle. I am no longer a man and it is right that I should die.

VICTORIA [flinging herself on him]: Then take me with you.

DIEGO: No this world needs you. It needs our women to teach it how to live. We men have never been capable of anything but dying.

VICTORIA: Ah. it was too simple, wasn't it, to love each other in silence and to endure together whatever had to be endured? I preferred your fear, Diego.

DIEGO: [gazing at VICTORIA]: I loved you with my whole soul.

VICTORIA [passionately]: But that wasn't enough! No, even that was not enough! You loved me with your soul, perhaps, but I wanted more than that, far more.

[The SECRETARY stretches her hand toward DIEGO. The death agony begins, while the women hasten toward VICTORIA and gather round her.]

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Our curse on him! Our curse on all who forsake our bodies! And pity on us, most of all, who are forsaken and must endure year after year this world which men in their pride are ever aspiring to transform! Surely, since everything may not be saved, we should learn at least to safeguard the home where love is. Then, come war, come pestilence, we could bravely see them through with you beside us. Thus, instead of this solitary death, haunted by foolish dreams and nourished with words, your last end would be shared by us, we would die united in an all-consuming flame of love. But no! Men go whoring after ideas, a man runs away from his mother, forsakes his love, and starts rushing upon adventure, wounded without a scar, slain without a dagger, a hunter of shadows or a lonely singer who invokes some impossible reunion under a silent sky, and makes his way from solitude to solitude, toward the final isolation, a death in the desert.

[DIEGO dies. The women keen while a rising wind sweeps the city.]

THE SECRETARY: Do not weep. The bosom of the earth is soft for those who have loved her greatly. [She goes away. Carrying DIEGO, VICTORIA and the women move to the side of the stage. Meanwhile the sounds in the background are becoming more distinct. There is a burst of music and NADA is heard shouting on the battlements.]

NADA: Here they are, the old gang! They all are coming back: the men of the past, the fossils, the dead-enders, the triflers, smooth-tongued, comfortable—the army of tradition, robust and flourishing, spick and span as ever. So now we can start all over again, and what a relief for everyone! From zero naturally. Here they come, the tailors of nonentity, you'll have your new suits built to order. But there's no need to worry, their method is the best. Instead of shutting the mouths of those who air their grievances, they shut their own ears. We were dumb, we are going to be deaf. [Trumpet calls.] Look! The writers of history are coming back and we shall soon be reading all about our heroes of the plague.

They will be kept nice and cool under the flagstones. But there's nothing to complain of; the company above the flagstones is really too, too mixed! [In the background official ceremonies are taking place, in pantomime.] Look! Do you see what they're up to? Conferring decorations on each other! The banquet halls of hatred are always open, and the soil is never so exhausted that the dead wood of the gallows fails to rise from it. The blood of those you call the just ones still glistens on the walls—and what are those fine fellows up to? Giving each other medals! Rejoice, my friends, you're going to have your prize-day speeches. But before the platform is brought forward, I'd like to give you mine—a few well-chosen words. That young man, whom somehow I couldn't help liking, died cheated. [The FISHERMAN makes a rush at NADA. The Guards arrest him.] As you see, fishermen and governments may come and go, the police are always with us. So, after all, justice does exist.

CHORUS: No, there is no justice—but there are limits. And those who stand for no rules at all, no less than those who want to impose a rule for everything, overstep the limit. Open the gates and let the salt wind scour the city.

[The gates are opened, the wind is growing stronger and stronger.]

NADA: Justice exists—the justice done to my disgust. Yes, you are going to start again; but henceforth it's no concern of mine. And don't count on me to supply you with the plaintive, perfect scapegoat; plaintiveness is not my line. So now, old world, it's time for me to leave you, your executioners are tired, their hatred's gone too cold. I know too many things; even scorn has had its day. So good-bye, my worthy fellow citizens, one day you'll find out for yourselves that man is nothing and God's face is hideous!

[NADA rushes through the wind, which has now reached storm pitch, to the jetty, and flings himself into the sea. The FISHERMAN, who has run after him, stands gazing down.]

THE FISHERMAN: The sea has closed upon him. The great sea-horses are ravaging him, choking his breath out with their white manes. That lying mouth is filling up with salt; at last it will keep silent. See how the swirling waves are glowing, like anemones! Their anger is our anger, they are avenging us, calling on all the men of the sea to meet together, all the outcasts to make common cause. O mighty mother, whose bosom is the homeland of all rebels, behold thy people who will never yield! Soon a great tidal wave, nourished in the bitter dark of underseas, will sweep away our loathsome cities.

CURTAIN

The End