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On the cover: Nicole Reding as Vittoria
Photo by Craig Schwartz

I Gelosi
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*Also Available By
David Bridel*



Sublimity

Synopsis: SUBLIMITY investigates the life of tormented English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, focusing on the fateful evening in 1797 when he composed his famous pre-romantic masterpiece, Kubla Khan. The tragicomic character of Coleridge - part tender fool, part opium addict - embodies a restless search to understand the nature of creativity and inspiration.

Cast Size: 1 Male

I GELOSI

By David Bridel

SAMPLE ONLY

I GELOSI was first performed with the MFA acting students at UCLA in 2006 with the following cast:

FRANCESCO ANDREINI - Jason Greenfield
GUILIO PASQUATI - Paul Moore
SIMONE DI BOLOGNA - Dorian Logan
ORAZIO PADOVANO - Shawn Colten
ISABELLA ANDREINI - Amy Rush
VITTORIA PISSIMI - Nicole Reding
SYLVIA - Emily Rose
VINCENZO, DUKE OF MANTUA - Kahlil Joseph
CHARLES IX, KING OF FRANCE - Sergio Savinov
CATHERINE DE MEDICI - Jamaica Perry
DEGRISE - Matt Weedman

Thanks to Mel Shapiro.

I GELOSI was professionally staged at the Los Angeles Theatre Ensemble in 2008 with the following cast:

FRANCESCO ANDREINI - Albert Meijer
GUILIO PASQUATI - Isaac Wade
SIMONE DI BOLOGNA - Michael John Pappas
ORAZIO PADOVANO - Jon Redding
ISABELLA ANDREINI - Paige Lindsey White
VITTORIA PISSIMI - Eleanor Van Hest
SYLVIA - Emily Rose/Catherine Talton
VINCENZO, DUKE OF MANTUA - Christopher Tillman
CHARLES IX, KING OF FRANCE - Luke Bailey
CATHERINE DE MEDICI - Danielle Katz

Thanks to Tom Burmester.

CHARACTERS

FRANCESCO ANDREINI (male, 30's)

GUILIO PASQUATI (male, 30's)

SIMONE DI BOLOGNA (male, 30's)

ORAZIO PADOVANO (male, 20's)

ISABELLA ANDREINI (female, 20's)

VITTORIA PISSIMI (female, 30's)

SYLVIA (female, 20's)

VINCENZO, DUKE OF MANTUA (male, 40's)

CHARLES IX, KING OF FRANCE (male, 20's)

CATHERINE DE MEDICI (female, 50's)

Some voices, guards, etc

The action takes place in the latter half of the 16th Century

Place: Italy, France

I GELOSI

PROLOGUE

(The company Gelosi - Francesco, Isabella, Giulio, Simone in a skirt, Orazio, Vittoria, Sylvia - are chatting idly while the audience takes their seats. Throughout the entire play these seven characters will never leave the playing space. When not in a scene, each has their own area at the side or back of the stage where they wait, drink or attend to small matters, and watch the action unfold. Francesco and Isabella come forward to address the audience. The company joins them at the front of the stage.)

FRANCESCO: Signori, my name is Francesco Andreini, and I am dead. This is my wife:

ISABELLA: Isabella Andreini. I am also dead.

FRANCESCO: This is our company of actors. The Gelosi. They're all dead too. Everyone here has been dead for several hundred years. Now let's put that behind us, and we'll show you what we can do.

(Francesco and Isabella clap their hands. The company brings out musical instruments and play. They clap again. Various acrobatics.)

FRANCESCO: Tragedy, pastoral, comedy, the Gelosi does it all. Giulio here can improvise in four languages. Orazio extemporizes verse at the drop of a hat. Vittoria can make an audience fall in love with her in the flash of an eye. And my wife... My wife can appear before you stark raving mad, and you won't know whether she's pretending or not. The Gelosi.

ISABELLA: We were the first.

FRANCESCO: We were the greatest.

ISABELLA: In Paris, they spoke of us for hundreds of years.

FRANCESCO: We came from all over Italy to perform for one purpose alone.

GUILIO: Profit.

VITTORIA: Fame.

ORAZIO: Love.

SIMONE: Food.

SYLVIA: Rebellion.

ISABELLA: Poetry.

FRANCESCO: Revenge. We came for revenge.

(Disagreement among all.)

FRANCESCO: We're going to tell you our story.

ISABELLA: You'll meet Kings and Dukes and hangmen.

FRANCESCO: You'll witness adultery.

ISABELLA: You'll marvel at true love.

FRANCESCO: And when you leave the theater tonight, you will crave one thing, and one thing alone.

GUILIO: Profit.

VITTORIA: Fame.

ORAZIO: Love.

SIMONE: Food.

SYLVIA: Rebellion.

ISABELLA: Poetry.

FRANCESCO: Revenge.

(Disagreement among all.)

FRANCESCO: Places, everyone, we mustn't keep them waiting.

(The company drift off to prepare.)

SIMONE: My bones ache.

FRANCESCO: It is March, 1568. The scene is Milan. It is six months since we were liberated from the Holy Wars and returned home to form the Gelosi. It is not a glamorous life. We do skits and farces outdoors to passers-by. We don't have two coins to rub together. These are desperate times. But I am about to have an idea that will change the theatre forever.

ISABELLA: What did you say?

FRANCESCO: I said I am about to have an idea that will change the theatre forever.

ISABELLA: It was your idea?

FRANCESCO: Of course it was my idea.

VITTORIA: I think it was her idea, sweetie.

ORAZIO: It was her idea.

FRANCESCO: Excuse me – neither of you were there –
Guilio, whose idea was it?

GUILIO: It was our idea, actually.

FRANCESCO: Our idea?

GUILIO: Yours and mine.

FRANCESCO: No it wasn't.

ISABELLA: You're both wrong.

(Disagreement among all.)

FRANCESCO: All right, that's enough. *We* are about to
have an idea that will change the theatre forever. Satis-
fied? *(To audience)* My apologies. *(To Gelosi)* Are
we ready?

(Mutterings of consent.)

FRANCESCO: It is 1568. Begin!

(Francesco and Isabella clap their hands.)

PART 1 - ITALY

1. THE GRAND IDEA

(Guilio and Simone are rehearsing a scene.)

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *'Flaminia? Won't you stand a little closer, my precious Flaminia?'*

FLAMINIA (SIMONE): *'Oh Pantalone. I don't know if I should.'*

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *'Give me a kiss, my sweet little Flaminia.'*

FRANCESCO: *(interrupting)* Just a moment. Simone, what's the matter?

SIMONE: Nothing.

FRANCESCO: You're supposed to kiss him, not sniff him. Try again.

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *'Flaminia? Won't you stand a little closer, my precious Flaminia?'*

FLAMINIA (SIMONE): *'Oh Pantalone. I don't know if I should.'*

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *'Give me a kiss, my sweet little Flaminia.'*

FRANCESCO: You did it again.

SIMONE: I can't help it. He smells of garlic.

GUILIO: I don't.

SIMONE: Yes you do. It makes me hungry. I can't concentrate.

FRANCESCO: You have to stop thinking about your stomach.

SIMONE: When's lunch?

GUILIO: We ate lunch.

SIMONE: What did we have?

GUILIO: We shared an apple.

SIMONE: When's dinner?

FRANCESCO: Simone. If this scene isn't funny, there won't be any dinner. And there won't be any breakfast tomorrow. How many coins do we have left, Giulio?

GUILIO: Three.

FRANCESCO: Three coins left. We're about to go broke.

SIMONE: We're always about to go broke. I'm sick of this life. I want to go back to Bologna. My mother makes a rabbit pie to die for. I used to eat it on the steps. A pretty girl wanders past. Hello! Can I sing you a song?

FRANCESCO: Rehearsal.

SIMONE: All right, all right.

(They are about to begin.)

SIMONE: You know she's watching us again. Over there.

FRANCESCO: Never mind her.

SIMONE: Every day, rain or shine. I think she's got a crush on you.

FRANCESCO: Lots of girls have crushes on me, it's not important.

SIMONE: She'll get into trouble if she isn't careful... *(Calling out)* Shoo! Go on, this is no place for you. You're too young and too pretty to mix with the likes of us. *(Turns back)* I think she's listening.

GUILIO: Simone, will you shut up? We have to rehearse. We have to be funnier. We have to draw bigger crowds. I refuse to scrounge around like this for the rest of my life.

SIMONE: You see? You're sick of it too. This is worse than the army. Six years in a Turkish prison was better than six months as a player. Somebody threw a stone at me yesterday and yelled 'Show us your tits!'

FRANCESCO: Rehearsal.

SIMONE: All right, all right.

(They are about to begin.)

SIMONE: Why is it always me that has to dress up as the woman? Every play that we do I have to be the

woman. I'm your lover. I'm his lover. I marry you. I marry him. This old skirt is getting raggedy. I want to play in a mask.

FRANCESCO: There aren't any stories with three men and no women.

SIMONE: But I look so ridiculous.

FRANCESCO: You're supposed to look ridiculous. Ridiculous is funny. Ridiculous is big crowds. Ridiculous is money in hat. It is necessary that you look ridiculous.

SIMONE: And you told me playing would give me back my self-respect.

FRANCESCO: It will. Be patient. First we have to make our mark, and Rome wasn't built in a day. So put that skirt back on and show us your tits.

SIMONE: Hey. If we only had an apple for lunch, how come you stink of garlic?

GUILIO: I don't stink of garlic.

SIMONE: Have you been eating pie?

GUILIO: What pie?

SIMONE: Any kind of pie. Pie with garlic in it.

GUILIO: I don't know what you're talking about.

FRANCESCO: So he had some pie, what's the difference?

SIMONE: He did have some pie?

GUILIO: I did not have any pie.

(Simone is taking off his skirt.)

SIMONE: Right. That is it. I'm not going on.

FRANCESCO: What?

SIMONE: I'm not going on. I'm hungry, you bastard.
We're supposed to share everything.

GUILIO: I'm telling you I did not have any pie.

(Francesco draws his sword.)

FRANCESCO: Get back in that skirt and rehearse.

SIMONE: Oh, so that's how you treat me, is it?

FRANCESCO: Get back in that skirt, fool, or I will run
you through with pleasure.

GUILIO: Hey, Cesco, calm down.

SIMONE: Go on then, kill me. I hope I go to hell, it
can't be any worse than this.

FRANCESCO: You are an ungrateful little shit – I
ought to carve my name on your balls.

GUILIO: Hey, hey, hey. Cut it out.

SIMONE: For six months we've been wasting our time.
We're penniless, we're starving, and our play is a
joke. I quit.

(He throws down the skirt. Isabella enters.)

ISABELLA: Signori. This is the boldest moment of my life. I have watched your performances ever since you arrived in Milan, I have watched them faithfully, if you will forgive me, and I do believe that you are, all three of you, most excellent players with the finest timing and the most diverting senses of humor... And yet – far be it from me, a mere face in the crowd - and yet I cannot help but wonder whether a little, and I mean a fraction, more of the Lyrical would serve your purposes well; for an audience, though easily reduced to fits at the sight and sound of frolicking, also has, though it may not know it itself, a higher purpose, a desire to be enlightened, transported, I believe, by a discipline that could be dearly executed by the right player on the right stage - I speak of poetry. I contend, signori, there is a seed within the human heart that only poetry can nurture, and its growth and flowering is the wish, however distant and unknown, of every humble crowd that gathers about the trestle.

SIMONE: Oh she's beautiful.

ISABELLA: To that end, signori, though I hardly dare to confess it, I have here composed a speech for your play, and humbly I offer it to you as a token of my admiration. It is for the buffoon who portrays the woman.

(She hands a parchment to Simone.)

SIMONE: I can't read.

ISABELLA: Perhaps the signore will read it for you.

(Simone hands the parchment to Francesco.)

FRANCESCO: *(reads)*

‘Though woman is mere flesh and blood,
Her heart is a star; it follows a course
In the skies. You cannot capture this heart
Unless you, too, leave the earth behind,
As if in a dream. This is the impossible truth,
Delivered in the language of truth; a poem.’

(to Isabella)

What is your name?

ISABELLA: Isabella Canali, signore.

GUILIO: Guilio Pasquati, at your service. This is
Simone di Bologna.

FRANCESCO: Where did you learn to compose like
this?

ISABELLA: The poetry composes itself, signore. I am
merely the messenger.

FRANCESCO: Do you live here in Milan?

ISABELLA: Yes, but my father does not know I am
talking with you. He disapproves of players.

SIMONE: Signorina, your speech is a marvel. But I
could never learn it, I have no more brain than a sau-
sage. Besides, I’m going back to Bologna. The Gelosi
has lost its only woman.

(Francesco and Guilio are studying Simone’s skirt.)

FRANCESCO: The right player...

GUILIO: On the right stage.

(Francesco takes Giulio aside. Simone follows.)

FRANCESCO: Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

GUILIO: People will come from all over Milan.

SIMONE: What's going on? Who's thinking what?

FRANCESCO: They'll come from all over the country.

GUILIO: We'll be playing to thousands within a week.

FRANCESCO: It's audacious.

GUILIO: It's unprecedented.

SIMONE: Hey. You're not thinking – Cesco, no. Have you gone out of your mind? A woman on the stage? It's madness. We'll be kicked out of Milan.

FRANCESCO: Then we'll go somewhere else.

SIMONE: What if the church hears about this?

FRANCESCO: I don't give a damn about the church.

(They return to Isabella.)

FRANCESCO: Signorina, we have discussed your offer carefully, and we are delighted to insert your verses into our play, on one condition. You will deliver the speech yourself. You, signorina, will play the woman in our play.

ISABELLA: Oh – signore –

SIMONE: Hey. Who am I going to play? If she plays the woman, who am I going to play?

GUILIO: I thought you quit.

SIMONE: Yes, but that was – not any more – you didn't believe me, did you?

FRANCESCO: You can play in a mask.

SIMONE: Now you're talking.

SAMPLE ONLY

2. THE OPPORTUNITY

(In the market square. The following ‘scene’ from the Gelosi’s play is performed with the actors facing up-stage, silhouetted, perhaps, against a stage curtain. Downstage of the curtain are Francesco and Simone – until he enters the play.)

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *‘Isabella? Won’t you stand a little closer, my precious Isabella?’*

ISABELLA: *‘Oh Pantalone. I don’t know if I should...’*

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *‘Give me a kiss, my sweet little Isabella.’*

ISABELLA: *‘Only if you answer me this riddle.’*

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *‘Arlecchino!’*

ARLECCHINO (SIMONE) *(in mask, entering):*
‘Signore?’

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *‘Help me answer this riddle, or I’ll knock you into next week.’*

ARLECCHINO (SIMONE): *‘Yes, signore!’*

ISABELLA: *‘I am strong, but you think I am weak. I am bold but you think I am shy. I am old but you think I am young. Now guess who I am in one try.’*

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *‘One try – ah, we’d better think carefully, Arlecchino, we only have one try. Don’t be rash, don’t be rash, let us ponder this riddle...’*

ARLECCHINO (SIMONE): 'A chicken!'

PANTALONE (GUILIO): 'A chicken? What kind of idiot would think of a chicken?'

ARLECCHINO (SIMONE): 'Chickens are strong...' (He wrestles with a powerful imaginary chicken.) 'Chickens are shy...' (He calls an elusive imaginary chicken.) 'Chickens are old – oh, no they're not. They're chickens.'

PANTALONE (GUILIO): 'You've ruined my chance of a kiss, you numbskull, you half-wit, you Turk-brain...'

(Pantalone chases Arlecchino 'off'. They arrive downstage of the curtain and congratulate one another on a successful performance as Isabella finishes the play.)

ISABELLA:

*'Though woman is mere flesh and blood,
Her heart is a star; it follows a course
In the skies. You cannot capture this heart
Unless you, too, leave the earth behind,
As if in a dream. This is the impossible truth,
Delivered in the language of truth; our play.'*

(Keen applause. Backstage:)

GUILIO: (counting money from hat) Two hundred and twelve... two thirteen...

SIMONE: Today, lamb stew with Tuscan potatoes.

GUILIO: Two fourteen... two fifteen...

SIMONE: And a bottle of French wine. Our luck has officially changed.

GUILIO: Luck had nothing to do with it - it was a business decision and a very astute one.

SIMONE: The signorina has a magic touch. Such grace, such beauty was never seen before on a stage. And she writes like a true poet. Even Francesco is impressed, aren't you, Cesco?

FRANCESCO: Hmm?

SIMONE: On Tuesday I saw him kissing her behind the vegetable stand.

FRANCESCO: As a matter of fact, she was kissing me.

SIMONE: Oh, well that's different.

GUILIO: Two hundred and twenty four coins. That's our best yet. Makes our total for the fortnight seven hundred and thirty eight. At this rate with, say, eleven performances a week, our annual income will be three thousand coins.

SIMONE: I'm going to buy a villa. My mother will come and live with me. Casa Simone.

FRANCESCO: Before anyone draws a wage we have to attend to company expenses.

GUILIO: New props.

FRANCESCO: Paint the wagon.

GUILIO: A horse of our own, for travel.

SIMONE: Travel? Where are we going?

FRANCESCO: We're going to take this show to the provinces.

GUILIO: More towns, more money.

SIMONE: But if we leave Milan, what will happen to the signorina? She can't start traveling with a bunch of players. She'll be disgraced.

FRANCESCO: The thought had occurred to me.

SIMONE: And without her we'll be back where we started.

GUILIO: Which is not an option.

FRANCESCO: Thus it is, dear Simone, that you will be amazed at the solution we have come up with. Yesterday evening, after the performance, I married Isabella.

SIMONE: What?

FRANCESCO: A fleeting glance, a stolen kiss, a trip to the priest –

GUILIO: One witness.

FRANCESCO: And presto. She can leave home with head held high. She's collecting her things as we speak.

SIMONE: But you've only known her two weeks.

FRANCESCO: You said it yourself. We can't leave her behind.

SIMONE: Yesterday evening?

GUILIO: You were eating a pie.

SIMONE: But Francesco – the girl is mad about you.

FRANCESCO: Yes; that helped.

SIMONE: But do you love her?

GUILIO: Ha! Listen to him.

SIMONE: Love is important.

GUILIO: Strategy is the only important thing in life.

(Isabella enters, with traveling bags.)

ISABELLA: Francesco.

FRANCESCO: Darling.

ISABELLA: When I told my father that I had married one of the players from the piazza he threatened to beat me. When I told him that I had been appearing on the stage for two weeks already he called me a harlot and tried to lock me in my bedroom. But I escaped through the window and climbed down the pear tree. I have my quill and my parchment – I'm free. This is the happiest day of my life.

GUILIO: An official welcome to the Gelosi – signora.

ISABELLA: Thank you, Guilio.

SIMONE: Allow me to wish you every good fortune, signora. You'll need it.

(Orazio approaches.)

ORAZIO: Excuse me, signori. You are the company Gelosi, the talk of all Milan?

FRANCESCO: We are.

ORAZIO: Orazio Padovano, at your service. I wish to speak with the signorina, if I may.

FRANCESCO: The signora. Signora Isabella Andreini, my wife.

ORAZIO: Signora. I wish to compliment you on the exquisiteness of your verse. I have seen many performances in my time; I am an aficionado of the stage; I contend that no other player has ever matched your delicacy. Then, of course, no other player shares your advantages...

ISABELLA: Thank you, signore.

ORAZIO: Heartbreak brought me to this city; but my heart has been replenished by your performance. I can live again.

ISABELLA: Thank you again, signore.

ORAZIO: And now, without further ado, I would like to request that I join your company. It is not an easy path to tread, I know. Many years of hard graft lie ahead, and the small fragments of inspiration are outweighed by the chronic burden of poverty. Nevertheless, I want to be a player. I have had some experience performing. My uncle has a soft spot for the spoken word, and I have read much of Horace aloud at certain parties, with fellow students, in the lilac gardens, and I have been told perchance that I have a melliflu-

ous delivery. I have prepared a short piece; a snippet, if you will. I'll stand over here, shall I? Oh! I'm nervous. I'm just an amateur. Here, then, is my piece:

'My heart is like the anvil that resists the hammer-stroke
Of your obstinacy. My breast is marble to withstand your fire;
My bosom is ice, ice so hard your flames cannot melt it,
And you are a fury for my torment in the realms of love.
Argh! I suffer. Argh! I weep. Argh!
Love is a star; a star is born; you have from me my poor heart torn.'

(The Gelosi applaud Orazio, uncertainly.)

ORAZIO: Thank you. I think I might have missed the true passion of the last two lines -

FRANCESCO: Signore, we are honored that you consider us worthy of your talents. However, we are a small company, as you see, and we're very sorry...

ORAZIO: *(he has become emotional)* Oh dear - I promised myself I wouldn't cry. Speaking as one whose very soul has been shredded, torn asunder by the hardships of love - I've never felt so liberated - reciting before the famous Gelosi... My uncle won't believe it when I tell him. He's got a soft spot for the stage, you know.

FRANCESCO: Yes. Anyway, we're very sorry...

ORAZIO: It was uncle who advised me to travel, when he saw how my heart had been crushed. I believe that I owe him my life. He's the Duke of Mantua.

(Pause.)

FRANCESCO: Your uncle is the Duke of Mantua?

ORAZIO: A man of culture. A man of sophistication. A man who loves nothing more than a great feast, with wine, and meats, and warm cheese, and a play to follow. You were saying?

FRANCESCO: What?

ORAZIO: You were saying you're very sorry...

FRANCESCO: We're very sorry...

GUILIO: We're very sorry that we didn't meet you earlier.

FRANCESCO: Very sorry.

GUILIO: Because you will make a wonderful addition to our ranks.

FRANCESCO: Welcome to the Gelosi.

ORAZIO: Oh sir - I am overcome...

FRANCESCO: And the timing could not be better. We leave for Mantua tomorrow!

GUILIO: Tomorrow.

ORAZIO: For Mantua? Tomorrow?

FRANCESCO: I assume your uncle can be persuaded to receive us?

ORAZIO: Oh - I am sure he can, but...

FRANCESCO: Excellent. Then send word of our impending arrival.

ISABELLA: What is it, Orazio?

ORAZIO: Oh dear. My poor heart... You see, I left Mantua because of - because of a woman...

FRANCESCO: Signore. Fear no women. You are Gelosi now.

ORAZIO: Gelosi... Yes... So I am...

GUILIO: Have confidence, signore.

ORAZIO: Yes - yes, I will have confidence. I am Gelosi. I am Gelosi.

SIMONE: Are we sure this is a good idea?

3. THE PATRON

(In Mantua, in front of the Duke. As before, the play is performed at the rear, in silhouette.)

ISABELLA: *'Now guess who I am in one try.'*

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *'One try – ah, we'd better think carefully, Arlecchino, we only have one try. Don't be rash, don't be rash, let us ponder this riddle...'*

ARLECCHINO (SIMONE): *'A chicken!'*

PANTALONE (GUILIO): *'A chicken? What kind of idiot would think of a chicken?'*

ARLECCHINO (SIMONE): *'Chickens are strong...'* *(He wrestles with a powerful imaginary chicken.)* *'Chickens are shy...'* *(He calls an elusive imaginary chicken)* *'Chickens are old – oh, no they're not. They're chickens.'*

LEANDRO (ORAZIO): *(entering)* *'I know the answer!'*

ISABELLA: *'Leandro!'*

LEANDRO (ORAZIO): *'I have heard of this riddle. I shall solve it, and claim your kiss as reward. The answer is –'*

(He goes up on his line.)

LEANDRO (ORAZIO): *'The answer is –'*

(Nothing. Francesco, from backstage, prompts him desperately, to no avail.)

ISABELLA: (*covering*) 'I'm also mindful of my duty /
But you love me for my beauty.'

(*Still nothing.*)

ISABELLA: '*Though I'm modest don't dismiss me / I'm
not modest when you kiss me./ Can you guess yet? I'll
reprieve you / And my verse will not deceive you /
Follow, and you will not tell a / Lie when you say...'*

LEANDRO (ORAZIO): '*Isabella! You!*'

(*Isabella and Leandro kiss.*)

PANTALONE (GUILIO): '*You ruined my chance of a
kiss, you numbskull, you half-wit, you Turk-brain...'*

(*Pantalone chases Arlecchino off.*)

ISABELLA:

*'Though woman is mere flesh and blood,
Her heart is a star; it follows a course
In the skies. You cannot capture this heart
Unless you, too, leave the earth behind,
As if in a dream. This is the impossible truth,
Delivered in the language of truth; our play.'*

(*Keen applause. Backstage:*)

ORAZIO: I thought perhaps I was a little nervous...

FRANCESCO: Maybe a little.

ORAZIO: But your wife kept the inspiration alive.

FRANCESCO: We are all indebted to my wife. Gelosi,
bravo. Even you, you old goat.

GUILIO: Thanks.

FRANCESCO: He just needs a bit more rehearsal.

SIMONE: I've never performed inside in my life. We don't even have to hold out our hats. Who was that big fellow in the front row? Couldn't stop chuckling.

ORAZIO: That was my uncle.

(Enter the Duke of Mantua.)

DUKE: May I offer my sincerest congratulations to the company Gelosi.

ORAZIO: Hello uncle.

DUKE: Orazio. An unforgettable debut. Your wages, signori.

(The Duke gives a bag of money to Francesco.)

FRANCESCO: We are your grateful servants, signore.

(Francesco tosses the money to Giulio.)

DUKE: I must kiss the hand of this magnificent creature. Some of us were a little skeptical when we heard that a woman was to play. You have proved a great many nobles wrong, signora. Yours was an illustrious display of the heart.

ISABELLA: My heart is full of love, signore.

DUKE: So I see, so I see. Your success has made some of our women quite jealous too.

ISABELLA: That was not my intention, signore.

DUKE: Of course not. Signora, signori. Make yourselves at home, please, for the rest of the evening, there is plenty of food and wine.

(He exits. He returns.)

DUKE: Oh! One other thing: I have a business proposition for you.

FRANCESCO: What's that?

DUKE: I have heard that the Duke of Venice is adopting a theater company as his own. I have decided I would like to do the same. If you agreed, you would play in Mantua at my command. Six weeks in the Spring, six weeks in the Autumn. At other times you would be my ambassadors abroad. I've had a contract drawn up. See what you think.

(He exits, leaving the contract with Francesco.)

FRANCESCO: *(reading)* 'On the day of Mercury, 25th of the month, at the Palazzo of Vincenzo, 12th Duke of Mantua. Clause 1. We the undersigned companions, collectively known as the Gelosi, agree to form a company of players under the patronage of the aforesaid Duke of Mantua, for such time as both parties find it mutually convenient. Clause 2. The Duke hereby agrees to pay the Gelosi the sum of one thousand coins a month' – one thousand coins! – 'until such time as this contract is declared null and void... Clause 3. The company may decide internal conflicts by means of the majority... Clause 4,5, 6...'

(He turns the pages.)

FRANCESCO: '15, 30' – it's very thorough. It's going to take all night to read.

GUILIO: Patronage. Patronage, Cesco!

ORAZIO: I knew uncle would come up trumps.

FRANCESCO: We sign.

SIMONE: I can't write.

FRANCESCO: Put a cross.

(They sign. The Duke enters.)

DUKE: And what have we decided?

FRANCESCO: We have decided to accept your most generous offer, signore.

DUKE: Excellent. I will look after the Gelosi, and you will perform for the glory of Mantua. It will be mutually beneficent. Next week, as it happens, Mantua plays host to His Serene Majesty Charles, King of France, and his mother Catherine, of Medici. The King is a discerning theater-goer; I shall offer them a command performance.

FRANCESCO: We are going to play to the King of France?

DUKE: Precisely. Now rest well and eat well. I want you in top form for the King.

(He exits. He returns.)

DUKE: Oh! One other thing. As permitted by the terms of the contract, I have decided to add one to your number. A new player awaits.

FRANCESCO: What?

DUKE: Clause 33. Decisions regarding the hire and release of company members rest with the patron. You won't be disappointed. You can come in now, peachblossom...

(Vittoria enters.)

DUKE: Signora, Signori. Allow me to introduce Signorina Vittoria Piissimi of Padua.

VITTORIA: Good evening.

SIMONE: Oh she's naughty.

VITTORIA: Thank you, Vincenzo. I can manage from here.

DUKE: I'll leave you to it, then. Signora, signori. Peachblossom.

(He exits. Vittoria goes straight to Isabella.)

VITTORIA: Signora. Please accept my compliments on a magnificent performance. I was deeply moved.

ISABELLA: Thank you, signorina. I am honored to have impressed one as beautiful as you.

(Vittoria goes to Francesco.)

VITTORIA: Signore. You have made a modest woman blush, and blush again.

FRANCESCO: Delighted, signorina.

(Vittoria goes to Giulio and Simone.)

VITTORIA: You, signori, are the essence of comedy.

GUILIO: We aim to please.

(Vittoria goes to Orazio.)

VITTORIA: Signore Orazio.

(Orazio starts crying.)

FRANCESCO: What's the matter with him?

(Orazio is pointing at Vittoria.)

ISABELLA: Oh no...

VITTORIA: I am told that I have no lack of talent, and I am prepared to work hard. On stage, I believe I will complement your company beautifully. Above all else, I can look after myself and I won't meddle in any of your affairs. And now, signori, signora, I believe we have the honor of playing to royalty next week: shall we rehearse?

4. THE ACTRESS

(In the foreground, Guilio is counting money. Simone is asleep. Isabella is writing. In the background, sounds of a rehearsal.)

ISABELLA: I'll wear a hole in this parchment if I'm not careful. I can't seem to write them down fast enough.

(No reply.)

ISABELLA: Verses. For the King. I'm writing a new epilogue.

GUILIO: Hmm?

ISABELLA: For the King of France.

GUILIO: Yes.

ISABELLA: One day I hope that my plays will be published by the Academy of Letters. It's my secret vanity. My father told me hell would freeze over before a woman was published.

(Pause.)

ISABELLA: Guilio?

GUILIO: Yes?

ISABELLA: Tell me, have you and my husband always been so single-minded?

GUILIO: Single minded?

ISABELLA: In your ambitions.

GUILIO: We just want to make a good life for ourselves.

ISABELLA: You fought in the Holy Wars together, didn't you?

GUILIO: Pope Gregory's army.

ISABELLA: And you were captured by the Turks?

GUILIO: Six years.

ISABELLA: Francesco doesn't tell me anything about it.

GUILIO: Perhaps he doesn't remember.

ISABELLA: Oh, I have a feeling he remembers.

GUILIO: They kept us in a prison in the middle of the desert. They starved us within an inch of our lives. They strapped us to the walls for weeks at a time while the rats ate the slop in our bowls. They boiled lamb outside our window till we began screaming at the smell. One night Francesco dreamed he was eating a fresh peach. When he woke up he had gnawed his fist to the bone. Perhaps he doesn't want to remember.

ISABELLA: No.

GUILIO: It's all behind us now, anyway. We have a new life.

ISABELLA: I wake up at night and he's sitting on the edge of the bed, talking to himself. I think he's plotting something.

GUILIO: Plotting something? There's nothing to plot.

(Francesco arrives.)

FRANCESCO: Giulio, your turn to rehearse.

GUILIO: We're up five hundred and seventy seven coins. After expenses.

FRANCESCO: Perfect.

GUILIO: Is she good?

FRANCESCO: She will serve our purposes perfectly.

GUILIO: One woman was a sensation; two will be a scandal.

(Giulio goes to rehearse with Vittoria.)

ISABELLA: What are our purposes, by the way?

FRANCESCO: To please the King, of course.

ISABELLA: Of course. I've been writing a new epilogue.

FRANCESCO: Hmm? Good.

ISABELLA: One day I hope my plays will be published. It's my -

FRANCESCO: Yes.

ISABELLA: Francesco..?

FRANCESCO: What is it?

ISABELLA: There's nobody here.

FRANCESCO: Simone's here.

ISABELLA: He's asleep.

FRANCESCO: I should wake him up. He needs to rehearse with her too -

ISABELLA: Now would be a good time to kiss me.

FRANCESCO: Come here.

(They kiss.)

ISABELLA: Are you happy with me, Cesco?

FRANCESCO: Yes. This is my disposition. You'll get used to it

ISABELLA: We still don't know each other very well, do we?

FRANCESCO: I know that you're pretty.

ISABELLA: Don't you want to learn about me, Francesco?

FRANCESCO: Of course I do.

ISABELLA: Then ask me a question.

FRANCESCO: What's your favorite color?

ISABELLA: That's not a question.

FRANCESCO: Yes it is a question.

ISABELLA: Ask me what the stage is for.

FRANCESCO: What..?

ISABELLA: We're going to live our lives on it, we should at least have an opinion. I believe that the stage is for the expression of all that is beautiful in life. I'm not saying there's no room for suffering on stage - in fact, it's not much of a show if somebody doesn't suffer, and preferably at length. Suffering is beautiful, in any case, and so is anguish. But as for loathing, and bitterness... I don't think they belong on the stage at all. What do you think?

FRANCESCO: All I ever do is play the fool. I want people to laugh, there's no bitterness in that.

ISABELLA: I'm speaking of your plans, Francesco.

FRANCESCO: What plans?

ISABELLA: You talk in your sleep.

FRANCESCO: What do I say?

ISABELLA: Ambush.

FRANCESCO: I must be thinking about the wars.

(Simone wakes with a start.)

SIMONE: Ah!

FRANCESCO: What is it?

SIMONE: I was about to be hanged.

(Sylvia, the Duke's maid, enters.)

SYLVIA: Everyone got everything they need?

(They look at her.)

SYLVIA: I'm the new maid. The other one got dropsy.
Everyone got everything they need?

(Pause.)

SYLVIA: All right, don't all shout at once.

(She goes.)

SIMONE: Oh she's magnificent.

(Guilio enters.)

GUILIO: Simone. Your turn to rehearse.

SIMONE: I could take her to the moon. Come, pretty
one, the moon is made of cheese...

GUILIO: Simone. Did you hear what I said?

(Orazio enters.)

ORAZIO: Signori, Signora, I'm afraid I must hurriedly announce my resignation from the company Gelosi. I have a cousin in Pisa who is very sick. He has been bitten by a venomous Norwegian spider.

FRANCESCO: Signore.

ORAZIO: It was a great pleasure to know you all –

FRANCESCO: Signore Orazio.

ORAZIO: And I hope that in the future our paths may cross -

FRANCESCO: Signore! The Gelosi plays to the King of France in two days.

ORAZIO: I know.

GUILIO: You're not getting as far as the street, let alone Pisa.

ORAZIO: But my cousin – the spider -

FRANCESCO: This has nothing to do with your cousin. You're scared of that woman.

ORAZIO: She has crushed my heart. She is a monster. She devours a man, until there is nothing left, not even a shell, a husk. I must leave the Gelosi.

GUILIO: You've signed a contract. You stay.

ORAZIO: I'm sorry signori. I go.

FRANCESCO: (*drawing sword*) You stay, or I will carve my name on your balls.

GUILIO: Cesco, careful.

ORAZIO: You can't make me.

ISABELLA: Francesco, put that thing away.

FRANCESCO: You stay!

ORAZIO: This isn't fair!

(Fracas. The Duke enters.)

DUKE: Gelosi! What is the meaning of this?

FRANCESCO: A minor disturbance.

DUKE: You are not paid to squabble. You are paid to rehearse. You have a very important performance ahead of you.

GUILIO: It won't happen again, Signore Duke.

DUKE: There are other companies, you know. I hear the Fortunati are looking for a patron. And a new leading lady. I am sure Signorina Piissimi would be to their taste.

FRANCESCO: Nothing to worry about, Signore Duke. We are delighted to have the Signorina with us. She is proving to be an admirable player.

DUKE: She is a peachblossom.

(Vittoria enters.)

VITTORIA: Signora, I've been thinking that perhaps I should deliver the new epilogue to the King. A fresh face. What do you think, Vincenzo?

DUKE: An excellent idea.

SAMPLE ONLY

5. THE KING AND HIS MOTHER

(Vittoria is delivering the epilogue to the King of France. The rest of the company wait backstage.)

VITTORIA:

*'You cannot capture our hearts
Unless you, too, leave the earth behind,
As if in a dream, a slow dream; it is the one
Condition of love. This is the impossible truth,
Delivered in the language of truth; our play.'*

(Applause. Vittoria comes backstage.)

VITTORIA: Some swear that we players must be true to our hearts. I say nothing of the kind. The stage is one big lie; it is what it is precisely because it has nothing of the truth upon it. It is all a marvelous deception, a hoax, a ruse to stimulate the fancies of the audience. They're not interested in sincerity - what could be more tedious than that? Give me the freedom to perjure reality, and I will give you a scintillating performance. I think the King liked me, don't you?

(Enter the Duke of Mantua.)

DUKE: Announcing His Serene Majesty, Charles, King of France.

(Enter King Charles IX of France, and his mother, Catherine de Medici. Ceremony.)

KING: Wonderful.

CATHERINE: His Serene Majesty was pleased with the performance.

DUKE: Your Most Serene Highness, the Gelosi is the first and certainly the best of the troupes of the *com-media dell'arte*. I am very proud to maintain the company in my employ.

(The King approaches Isabella.)

KING: Wonderful.

CATHERINE: His Serene Majesty was particularly taken with the skill and the finesse of Isabella. He was moved to tears by her simplicity. Formidable.

ISABELLA: Thank you, Your Serene Majesty.

CATHERINE: It is due to the impression that this young woman has made on His Serene Majesty that he is given to ask the Gelosi to visit his Court in Paris.

DUKE: On behalf of the Gelosi, I accept your most generous invitation, Your Serene Majesty.

CATHERINE: I will arrange safe passage. Come, Charles. They have agreed.

KING: Wonderful.

(Catherine and Charles exit. A stunned silence, then laughter, etc. Sylvia enters.)

SYLVIA: Everyone got what they need?

(Pause.)

SYLVIA: I'm the new maid. The other one got dropsy.

(Pause.)

SYLVIA: All right, don't all shout at once.

(She is about to leave.)

SYLVIA: If I may say so. Women on stage. Very good idea. Shake things up a bit.

VITTORIA: Girl. Wait a minute. What's her name?

SIMONE: Sylvia.

VITTORIA: Sylvia, come here.

(Sylvia crosses to Vittoria.)

SYLVIA: Yes, signorina?

VITTORIA: Are you a criminal, or a whore?

SYLVIA: Neither. My mother's a widow; my father was killed in the wars. I've scrubbed the Duke's floors since I was nine. I earn two coins a month and I get half a day off a year. That's it. Oh, I don't care for people and I can ride a horse tolerably well.

VITTORIA: I see. Well, you asked if there was anything I need, and there is. You.

SYLVIA: Me?

VITTORIA: I need a Lady-in-Waiting. I can't possibly go to the Court without one. You seem to be the only candidate for the position, so I will take you. I can take her, can't I, Vincenzo?

DUKE: Yes. Of course. Glad to be rid of her.

VITTORIA: Good. You're coming to Paris. Pack up your things.

SYLVIA: Yes, signorina.

(Sylvia exits.)

DUKE: I will make the arrangements. No expense will be spared. I need not stress how important it is that you make a good impression at the Court. Peachblossom, I will compose a letter of greeting to the French Court on your behalf. If you will come with me, I will give it to you.

VITTORIA: You can give it to my Lady-in-Waiting.

DUKE: I would rather give it to you.

VITTORIA: Just give it to my Lady-in-Waiting.

DUKE: What I have to give is for you and you alone, signorina.

VITTORIA: My Lady-in-Waiting will take care of it.

SIMONE: I think he wants to give it to you, signorina.

VITTORIA: I know perfectly well what he wants. But it is not what I want any more. A woman is not a courier. I do not march letters back and forth at the whim of anyone, signore.

DUKE: But the letter... is on your behalf...

VITTORIA: I need no letter, signore Duke. I can introduce myself at the French court perfectly well. And that is precisely what I intend to do. Independent of your ministrations.

DUKE: But...

VITTORIA: Is there anything else we can help you with, signore Duke?

DUKE: No.

VITTORIA: Very well. Then if you will excuse us.

DUKE: Of course.

(The Duke exits.)

ORAZIO: Vittoria.

VITTORIA: I expect that brought back all sorts of horrid memories, did it Orazio? Are you going to tell me I'm cruel? I shouldn't have broken your poor uncle's heart? Have you plucked up the courage to punch me on the nose, or curse me in public?

ORAZIO: I am still in love with you.

(Vittoria laughs.)

VITTORIA: You are priceless.

(She laughs on. Orazio exits.)

VITTORIA: *(to Isabella)* Incidentally, signora. In Paris the men have excellent taste. I think they may love me a little better there.

(She departs.)

GUILIO: We're going to the most powerful Court in Europe.

SIMONE: I'm going to eat till I pop.

GUILIO: We will play to kings and queens, princes and cardinals, nobles and duchesses. Cesco, can you believe it? After all these years.

FRANCESCO: We are nearly there. We are nearly in the belly of the beast.

ISABELLA: What do you mean by that?

FRANCESCO: Nothing, my love. Nothing at all.

SAMPLE ONLY

PART 2: FRANCE

1. KIDNAP

(Night. The company is traveling by carriage to Paris. They are all squeezed in. Sound of the horses. Simone is asleep. Isabella is writing.)

GUILIO: Then we were attacked by a garrison of Turks. We were surrounded. We fought like maniacs. We killed fifty warriors. But there were too many of them. They captured twelve of us. They took us deep into the desert. There stood the prison. A monument to cruelty. We were incarcerated for six years. We endured the unendurable. One day, long after we thought we had passed the point of no return, the Turks released us into the desert with the words: 'It is finished.' There were three of us left. We had to walk back to Italy. By the time we reached Milan we were ghosts, not men. It was then that we found out the war had been over for three years.

VITTORIA: *(applauding)* I love war stories.

FRANCESCO: It's not a story, signorina.

VITTORIA: Embellish a little here, exaggerate a little there, and you've got your audience eating out of the palm of your hand. We should put it in the show.

FRANCESCO: Not everything in life is designed for amusement, signorina.

VITTORIA: I don't see any evidence to the contrary.

(The horses come to a halt.)

ORAZIO: We can't be in Paris already.

FRANCESCO: What's happening?

GUILIO: *(looking out)* I can't see. It's too dark.

(Sudden noise of swordplay.)

GUILIO: Oh shit.

ORAZIO: What is it? What's going on?

GUILIO: Two men wearing masks. I think they've killed our coachman.

(Vittoria screams.)

SIMONE: *(waking)* Roast pork!

ORAZIO: I pray.

FRANCESCO: Are you sure?

ISABELLA: Francesco, what's happening?

(Suddenly the horses start galloping. The carriage is taken at full speed, turning off in a new direction. Various expletives.)

GUILIO: All right! Everyone stay calm. We've been kidnapped.

(Vittoria screams.)

ORAZIO: I don't want to die, dear God, don't let me die!

FRANCESCO: Where are they taking us?

GUILIO: I can't see. It's too dark.

ORAZIO: In the name of God - who is doing this to us?

SYLVIA: The Huguenots, of course.

SIMONE: The who?

SYLVIA: The Huguenots. The Protestants.

ORAZIO: Mother of God!

VITTORIA: How do you know?

SYLVIA: They are the King's enemies. We are valuable to them. They'll hold us to ransom, kill us off one by one until the King meets their demands.

ORAZIO: I faint at the sight of blood.

(The coach comes to an abrupt halt.)

ORAZIO: Why have we stopped?

HUGUENOT: *(offstage)* Put down your weapons and come out.

VITTORIA: *(whispering)* Signori. You have slain many Turks in your day. Now it is your turn to slay the Huguenots.

SIMONE: I try not to do anything that will get me killed.

GUILIO: A sensible policy.

FRANCESCO: I agree.

HUGUENOT: *(offstage)* Come out by the count of ten.
Or we kill you all. One. Two. Three.

(Etc. As he counts, chaos ensues. They all argue, nobody willing to be the one that steps outside, despite pushing and shoving.)

HUGUENOT: Nine...

(Pause. They wait.)

SIMONE: Sylvia!

FRANCESCO: *(covering Simone's mouth)* Shut up.

(A struggle. Simone desperate to speak, breaks free.)

SIMONE: She's not here.

(They discover that Sylvia has slipped out.)

FRANCESCO: What?

VITTORIA: My Lady-in-Waiting?

SIMONE: She's out there, with the Hooly-hoes.

ISABELLA: Huguenots.

SIMONE: She's going to be ravaged by the Hooly-hoes.

ISABELLA: Huguenots.

ORAZIO: Mother of God... Somebody stop this.

SIMONE: I'll rip them into little pieces. Come here, you Hooly-hoes, you demons and pigs. Let me plunge my hands into your chests and rip your hearts from their cavities, let me place the bloody still-beating organs into a pot, and boil them up with some carrots and a knuckle of ham, and then let me consume the entire dish in one gulp and wash it down with a sweet Belgian beer brewed by Dominicans.

VITTORIA: What's come over you all of a sudden?

SIMONE: I think I'm in love.

FRANCESCO: Will you shut up!

ISABELLA: Listen!

(They listen. From a distance, the sound of singing: a woman's voice.)

ISABELLA: She's singing.

SIMONE: Sylvia?

ISABELLA: She's singing.

(They gather around the carriage door, peeking out. Sylvia is singing a song.)

FRANCESCO: What song is that?

ISABELLA: I don't know.

(It ends. Applause, approval from the Huguenots outside.)

FRANCESCO: They're hypnotized.

SIMONE: Can you blame them? Encore!

(They shut him up.)

VITTORIA: Now she's dancing too.

(Sylvia is singing and dancing.)

ORAZIO: She possesses an uncommon degree of independence.

SIMONE: Please help me to marry her, Cesco, help me to marry her.

FRANCESCO: She's saving our lives.

GUILIO: Now what is she doing?

VITTORIA: She's getting very close to them.

SIMONE: She's a nightingale. A beautiful, innocent –

(A sudden gasp from all. Orazio faints.)

SIMONE: Shit.

GUILIO: She didn't.

FRANCESCO: She did.

(Sylvia arrives, wielding a knife spattered in blood.)

SYLVIA: It was them or us.

VITTORIA: I want a different Lady-in-Waiting.

SYLVIA: You're stuck with me. I'll take the place of the coachman. Hang on tight, I'd better give them the rein. This is Huguenot country.

(She exits. She comes back.)

SYLVIA: I only ask one thing for my troubles. I want to be in your play.

(She exits again. The coach lurches off.)

SAMPLE ONLY