

Federico García Lorca

Doña Rosita the Spinster
and the Language of Flowers

(Doña Rosita la soltera
o el lenguaje de las flores)

1935

A Granadine poem of the 19th Century, divided into several
gardens with scenes of song and dance

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Cast List

Doña Rosita
The Nurse/Housekeeper
The Aunt
First Girl/Coquette
Second Girl/Coquette
Third Girl/Coquette
First Spinster
Second Spinster
Third Spinster
The Spinsters' Mother
First Ayola daughter
Second Ayola daughter
The Uncle
The Nephew
The Professor of Economics/Señor X
Don Martín
A Boy
Two Working Men
A Voice

Act I

(A room with an exit to a conservatory)

UNCLE: And my seeds?

NURSE: They were there.

UNCLE: Well, they're not now.

AUNT: Hellebores, fuchsias, and chrysanthemums, violet-coloured Louis Passy roses and silver-white Altairs with streaks of heliotrope.

UNCLE: You should be careful with flowers.

NURSE: If you mean me...

AUNT: Hush. Don't answer back.

UNCLE: I mean all of you. I found dahlia seeds trampled into the soil. *(He goes into the conservatory.)* You don't appreciate my conservatory enough; since the eighteenth century, when the Countess de Vandes grew the first musk rose, no one in Granada has managed it except me, not even the botanist at the University. You must have more respect for my plants.

NURSE: Well, don't I respect them?

AUNT: Ha! You're the worst.

NURSE: Yes, Señora. But I say drench the flowers like that and sprinkle water everywhere and we'll soon have toads in the sofa.

AUNT: Well you like the scent of flowers.

NURSE: No, Señora. To me flowers smell of dead children, or a flock of nuns, or a church altar. Sad things. Give me an orange or a fine quince, and you can forget all the roses in the world. But here...it's roses to the right, basil to the left, anemones, salvias, petunias and those flowers of today, the fashionable ones, chrysanthemums, ruffled like the hair of gipsy girls. How

I'd love to see a pear-tree planted in this garden, or a cherry, or a persimmon!

AUNT: So you could eat them!

NURSE: Since I've a mouth...As they sang in my village;

The mouth is there for eating,
the feet are there for dancing,
and a woman has something...

(She stops goes, over to the Aunt, and whispers to her.)

AUNT: Jesus! *(Crossing herself)*

NURSE: It's village vulgarity. *(Crossing herself)*

ROSITA: *(Entering rapidly. She is in red: her dress is nineteenth century, with mutton sleeves and trimmed with ribbons.)* And my hat? Where's my hat? San Luis' bells have already chimed thirty!

NURSE: I left it on the table.

ROSITA: Well it's not there. *(Looking for it)*

(The Nurse exits.)

AUNT: Have you tried the cupboard?

(The Aunt exits.)

NURSE: *(Entering)* I can't find it.

ROSITA: Can it be possible that no one knows where my hat is?

NURSE: Wear the blue one with daisies.

ROSITA: You're crazy.

NURSE: Not as crazy as you.

AUNT: (*Returning with it*) Here it is, be off with you!

(*Rosita takes it and runs out.*)

NURSE: Everything has to be done on the wing. Today wants now what will happen tomorrow. It takes flight, and slips through our hands. When a little girl has to count the days she begins when she's already old: 'My Rosita is eighty now' ...it's always so. How often has she sat down to watch you do tatting or frivolité, or point de feston, or draw threads to adorn a dressing gown.

AUNT: Never.

NURSE: Always *in and out, and out and in; in and out, and out and in.*

AUNT: Mind what you're saying!

NURSE: Whatever it means, it's nothing new.

AUNT: Of course I've never liked to oppose her. How can one hurt an orphaned creature?

NURSE: *Neither father nor mother, nor dog to defend her, but she has an uncle and aunt who are treasures. (She embraces her.)*

UNCLE: (*Within*) Now this is the end!

AUNT: Holy mother of God!

UNCLE: It's fine that they crush my seeds underfoot, but it's intolerable that they tear the leaves from a rosebush I love so much: more than all the other roses, the musk or the hispid or the pompon or the damascene or the eglantine or the Queen Isabel. (*To the Aunt*) Come, come and see.

AUNT: It's broken?

UNCLE: No, no the worst hasn't happened, but it might have.

AUNT: We'll get to the bottom of this!

UNCLE: I wonder who knocked its pot over?

NURSE: Don't you stare at me.

UNCLE: Was it me, then?

NURSE: Why not a cat, or a dog, or a gust of wind through the window?

AUNT: Go, and sweep the conservatory.

NURSE: In this house it's clear no one's allowed to speak.

UNCLE: (*Entering*) It's a rose no one has seen before; a surprise I've prepared for you. Because it's unbelievable this '*rosa declinata*' with drooping buds, and defenceless because it lacks thorns; What a marvel, eh? Not one thorn! Because there's the myrtifolia that comes from Belgium and the sulphurata that shines in the dark. But this surpasses them all in rarity. The botanists call it '*rosa mutabile*', which means mutable, changeable...There's a description and a picture in this book, look! (*He opens the book.*) Red in the morning, it whitens in the afternoon, and fades at nightfall.

When it opens in the morning,
It glows as red as blood.
The dew won't touch it
Afraid of being burnt.
Open wide at noon
It's hard as the coral.
The sun leans through windows
To gaze at its gleaming.
When the birds begin
To sing in the branches
And the afternoon faints
In violet light, off the sea,
It turns white, as white
As a grain of white salt.
And when night chimes
Its white horn of metal
And the stars all appear
As the breezes die,

In a ray of darkness
It starts to fade.

AUNT: And has it flowered yet?

UNCLE: One flower has opened.

AUNT: And it only lasts a day?

UNCLE: Just one. But I think I'll spend the day beside it to watch how it whitens.

ROSITA: (*Entering*) My parasol.

UNCLE: Your parasol.

AUNT: (*Loudly*) The Parasol!

NURSE: (*Appearing*) Here's the parasol!

(*Rosita takes the parasol and kisses her uncle and aunt.*)

ROSITA: How do I look?

UNCLE: Beautiful.

AUNT: There's not another like you.

ROSITA: (*Opening the parasol*) And now?

NURSE: For the love of God, close that parasol, you mustn't open one indoors. It brings bad luck!

By Saint Bartholomew's wheel
And Saint Joseph's staff
And the sacred laurel bough,
Darkness, get thee
To Jerusalem's four corners.

(The others laugh. The uncle exits.)

ROSITA: *(Closing it)* It's closed.

NURSE: Don't do that again! Holy....saints!

ROSITA: Oops!

AUNT: What were you going to say?

NURSE: But I didn't say it.

ROSITA: *(Leaving, with a smile.)* See you later!

AUNT: Who's going with you?

ROSITA: *(Bowing her head)* I'll be with the girls. *(She exits.)*

NURSE: And the boyfriend.

AUNT: The boyfriend I believe I had to accept.

NURSE: I don't know which I like better, whether it's the boyfriend or her. *(The Aunt sits down to her lace-making.)* A pair of cousins to be put on a shelf of sugar, and if they die, God help them, be embalmed, and set in a niche with crystal and snow. Which do you prefer? *(She begins sweeping up.)*

AUNT: I love them both, as nephew and niece.

NURSE: One for the top sheet and one for the bottom, but...

AUNT: Rosita grew up here with me...

NURSE: Of course. As if I didn't believe in family. With me it's law. Blood runs in our veins, but unseen. She loves a second cousin she sees every day more than a brother far away. For what, we'll see.

AUNT: Woman, get on with the cleaning.

NURSE: I see it now. Here you're not allowed to open your mouth. You nurse a lovely girl like that. You abandon your own children, in a shack, quivering with hunger.

AUNT: It's 'quivering with cold'.

NURSE: Quivering with everything, so they can say to you: 'Be silent!' And since I'm a servant I can do no more than be silent, so that's what I do, and I can't answer and say...

AUNT: And say what..?

NURSE: Oh...leave that bobbin alone with its clicking: you're making my head burst with your clicking.

AUNT: (*Laughing*) Go, and see who's there.

(*There is a silence on stage, in which we hear the sound of the bobbin with which the Aunt is lace-making.*)

VOICE: (*A street-vendor's call*) Camomile....from the mountains!

AUNT: (*Speaking to herself*) One must buy camomile sometimes. On some occasions it's needed....Another day goes by.... (*counting the points in her lace*) thirty-seven, thirty-eight.

VOICE : (*Further off*) Camomile...from the mountains!

AUNT: (*Taking a pin*) And...forty.

NEPHEW: (*Entering*) Aunt.

AUNT: (*Without looking at him*) Hello, have a seat if you want. Rosita has gone out already.

NEPHEW: Who is she with?

AUNT: With the girls. (*A pause. She looks at the Nephew.*) Something's happened.

NEPHEW: Yes.

AUNT: (*Anxiously*) I can almost guess. I hope I'm wrong.

NEPHEW: No. Read this.

AUNT: (*Reading*) Well: it's natural. That's why I opposed your relationship with Rosita. I knew that sooner or later you would have to join your parents. And how close it is! Forty days travel to reach Argentina, to reach Tucumán. If I were a man and younger, I'd slap your face.

NEPHEW: It's no sin to love my cousin. Do you imagine that I want to leave? Precisely when I want to stay, this arrives.

AUNT: Stay? Stay? You have to go. There are acres of land, and your father is old. I'm here to insist you make the voyage. But you'll leave me a life of bitterness. I don't want to think about your cousin. You're about to fire an arrow with purple ribbons into her heart. Now she'll find that cloth doesn't only serve to make flowers, but to soak up tears too.

NEPHEW: What do you advise me to do?

AUNT: You must go. Remember your father is my brother. Here you are no more than a stroller among gardens, while there you will be a farmer.

NEPHEW: But I would prefer...

AUNT: To marry? Are you mad? When your future's already laid out? And take Rosita with you, no doubt? Over our dead bodies, your uncle's and mine.

NEPHEW: That's just words. I know only too well I can't. But I want Rosita to wait for me. I'll soon be back.

AUNT: If you don't hit it off with a girl from Tucumán first. The words stuck to the roof of my mouth before I consented to your friendship with her; because my little girl will be left alone behind these four walls, while you'll be free to travel the seas, the rivers, the groves of grapefruit trees: my little one will be here, her every day like another, and you'll be there with horse and a gun shooting pheasants.

NEPHEW: You've no reason to speak to me in this way. I gave my word and I'll keep it. My father is in America keeping his word, and you know...

AUNT: (*Gently*) Hush.

NEPHEW: I have hushed. But don't take my respect as a sign of shame.

AUNT: (*With Andalusian irony*) Pardon me! I forgot: you're a man now.

NURSE: (*Entering weeping*) If he was a man he wouldn't be going.

AUNT: (*Forcefully*) Silence!

(*The Nurse weeps with great sobs.*)

NEPHEW: I'll return again in an instant. You tell her.

AUNT: Don't mind her. The old have to suffer difficult times.

(*The Nephew leaves.*)

NURSE: Ah, what a tragedy for my little girl! A tragedy! A tragedy! Such are the men of today! I'll be gathering gold coins in the street based on his promise. Once again tears fill this house. Ay! Señora! (*Attacking him*) If only a sea-serpent would swallow him!

AUNT: For God's sake!

NURSE:
By the sesame plant
By the three holy questions
And the cinnamon flower,
May your nights be evil
And your sowing be evil.
By the well of Saint Nicholas
May your salt turn to poison.

(*She picks up a jug of water, and makes a cross in the salt*)

AUNT: No curses. Go about your business.

(The Nurse leaves. They hear laughter. The Aunt exits.)

FIRST GIRL/COQUETTE: *(Entering, and closing her parasol)* Ay!

SECOND GIRL: *(Ditto)* Ay! It's chilly!

THIRD GIRL: *(Ditto)* Ay!

ROSITA: *(Ditto)* My three pretty girls
Whom do you sigh for?

FIRST GIRL: For no one.

SECOND GIRL: For the breeze.

THIRD GIRL: For a lover, to court me.

ROSITA: What then will bring
A cry to your lips?

FIRST GIRL: The wall.

SECOND GIRL: A true portrait.

THIRD GIRL: The lace of my bedspread.

ROSITA: I long to sigh too,
My friends! My beauties!

FIRST GIRL: Who'll receive it?

ROSITA: Two eyes
That the shadows whiten,
With lashes like vines,
Where the dawn's sleeping.
And, though dark they're
Afternoons of poppies.

FIRST GIRL: A ribbon for that sigh!

SECOND GIRL: Ay!

THIRD GIRL: Happy girl!

FIRST GIRL: Happy!

ROSITA: If I'm not mistaken, then I've
Heard certain things about you.

FIRST GIRL: Rumours are wild plants.

SECOND GIRL: The murmur of the waves.

ROSITA: I'm going to tell...

FIRST GIRL: Here goes!

THIRD GIRL: Rumours are garlands.

ROSITA: Granada, Calle de Elvira,
That's where the girls live,
Who go to the Alhambra,
Three or four alone.
One dressed in green,
One in mauve, the other
In a Scottish corselet –
With ribbons at their tails.
Those in front are, herons;
The one behind's a pigeon;
Open to the poplars
Mysterious the muslins.
How dark the Alhambra!
Where will the girls go
While suffering the shadow
The fountain and the rose?
What lovers do they hope for?
What myrtles will hide them?
What hands steal the perfume

From their swelling breasts?
No one's with them, no one;
Two herons and a pigeon.
Yet the world has lovers
Hidden in the bushes.
The Cathedral still scatters
Bronze taken by the breeze.
The Genil lulls its oxen:
Its butterflies, the Darro.
The night comes charged
With its hills of shadow;
One shows off her shoes
Beneath silk lace flounces;
The eldest's eyes are open
The youngest's narrowed.
Whose will these three be
High-breasted long-tails?
To whom are they waving?
Now, where are they going?
Granada, Calle de Elvira,
That's where the girls live,
Who go to the Alhambra,
Three or four alone.

FIRST GIRL: May the waves of rumour
Spread through Granada.

SECOND GIRL: Do we have lovers?

ROSITA: Not one.

SECOND GIRL: Is that the truth?

ROSITA: Yes, indeed.

THIRD GIRL: Laces of frost adorn
Our bridal nightgowns.

ROSITA: But...

FIRST GIRL: The night delights us.

ROSITA: But...

SECOND GIRL: In streets full of shadow.

FIRST GIRL: We climb to the Alhambra,
Three or four alone.

THIRD GIRL: Ay!

SECOND GIRL: Hush!

THIRD GIRL: Why?

Ay!

FIRST GIRL: Ay, let no one hear her!

ROSITA: Alhambra, jasmine of sadness
Where the moonlight rests.

NURSE: Child, your Aunt is calling you. (*Very sadly.*)

ROSITA: Have you been crying?

NURSE: (*Controlling herself*) No...it's just something, something I...

ROSITA: I'm not afraid. What's happened? (*She goes in swiftly, gazing at the Nurse. When Rosita has gone, the Nurse breaks into silent weeping.*)

FIRST GIRL: (*In a loud voice*) What's going on?

SECOND GIRL: You tell us.

NURSE: Be quiet.

THIRD GIRL: (*In a whisper*) Is it bad news?

(*The Nurse goes to the door and looks towards the point of Rosita's exit.*)

NURSE: She's telling her now!

(Pause, while they all listen.)

FIRST GIRL: Rosita is crying, let's go inside.

NURSE: Come back, and you'll hear. Go! You can leave through the gate.
(They leave.)

(The stage is left empty. A piano faintly plays a study by Czerny. A Pause. The cousin enters and on arrival halts centre stage as Rosita enters. The two remain gazing at each other. The cousin advances. He takes her by the waist. She leans her head on his shoulder.)

ROSITA:

Why are your treacherous eyes
Intertwined with mine?
Why do your hands weave
Flowers above my head.
To what grief of nightingales
Do you condemn my youth,
For since my life and aim's
Your figure and your presence,
You'll shatter with cruel absence
The strings of my lute!

COUSIN:

Oh, my cousin, my treasure,
Nightingale on the mountain,
Cease your singing of
Imaginary cold;
There's no ice in my going,
For, though I cross the sea,
The waters must lend me
Nard of spume and calm
To contain the fire in me,
For I'm about to burn.

ROSITA:

One night, half-slumbering,

On my balcony of jasmine,
I saw two cherubs plunging
Towards an amorous rose;
Being white in colour
It flushed incarnadine;
But, like a tender flower,
Its petals, all reddened,
Fell from it wounded
By the kiss of love.
So I, the innocent cousin,
In my garden of myrtle,
Gave my longings to the air,
My whiteness to the fountain.
Sweet, thoughtless gazelle
I raised my eyes, I saw you
And in my heart I felt
Sharp needles inside me
That are like open wounds
Crimson as wallflowers.

COUSIN:

I shall return, my cousin,
To take you to my side
In a boat filled with gold
And with sails of happiness;
Light and shadow, day and night,
Thinking only of love for you.

ROSITA:

But the poison love distils
In the isolated spirit,
Will weave with earth and water
A shroud for me when I'm dead.

COUSIN:

When my tardy stallion eats
The stems bowed with dew,
When the mist from the river
Veils the rampart of the wind,
When the violence of summer
Paints me nature's crimson
And the frost leaves in me

Pinpricks of the morning star,
I'll say, for I love you,
That I would die for you.

ROSITA: Anxiously, I see you coming
One afternoon to my Granada
And all the light brine-filled
With nostalgia for the sea;
A yellow conjoined,
A jasmine bleeding,
Since the tangle of stones
Will impede your journey,
And a swirl of nard
Maddening the rooftops.
You'll return?

COUSIN: Yes, I'll return!

ROSITA: What bright dove will declare
You're here, what annunciation?

COUSIN: The bright dove of my faith will.

ROSITA: See how I'll embroider
Sheets for us, for us two.

COUSIN: By the diamonds of God,
The carnation in His side,
I swear I'll come to you.

ROSITA: Farewell, Cousin!

COUSIN: So, farewell!

(They embrace facing each other. A distant piano is heard. The Cousin leaves. Rosita is weeping. The Uncle appears, who crosses the stage towards the conservatory. Seeing her Uncle, Rosita takes up the book of roses which is in reach of her hand.)

UNCLE: What were you doing?

ROSITA: Nothing.

UNCLE: You were reading?

ROSITA: Yes.

(The Uncle exits. Rosita reads.)

When it opens in the morning,
It glows as red as blood.
The dew won't touch it
Afraid of being burnt.
Open wide at noon
It's hard as the coral.
The sun leans through windows
To gaze at its gleaming.
When the birds begin
To sing in the branches
And the afternoon faints
In violet light, off the sea,
It turns white, as white
As a grain of white salt.
And when night chimes
Its white horn of metal
And the stars all appear
As the breezes die,
In the ray of darkness
It starts to fade.

Curtain

Act II

(Fifteen years later. The sitting room in Dona Rosita's house. In the background, the garden.)

SEÑOR X: Well, I will always be one with the century.

UNCLE: The century that has just begun will be a materialist century.

SEÑOR X: But much more advanced than the last one. My friend, Señor Longoria of Madrid, has just bought a car in which one can travel at the amazing speed of thirty kilometres an hour; and the Shah of Persia, who is indeed a very pleasant person, has also bought a twenty-four horse power Panhard Levassor.

UNCLE: And I say: where are they going so fast? See what happened in the Paris-Madrid race which had to be abandoned, because before reaching Bordeaux all the drivers had been killed.

SEÑOR X: Count Louis Zborowski, who died by accident, and Marcel Renault, or Renol, either form can be used or spoken, who also died by accident, were martyrs for science, who will be worshipped at the altars on the day when the Positivist religion arises. I knew Renault quite well. Poor Marcel!

UNCLE: You won't convince me. *(He sits down.)*

SEÑOR X: *(With his foot resting on a chair and playing with his walking stick.)* Clearly; though a Professor of Political Economics shouldn't be discussing such questions with a grower of roses. Yet nowadays, believe me, there's no lack of quietist or *obscurantist* ideas. Nowadays the path is open to a Jean Baptiste Say, or See, either form can be used or spoken, or a Count Leo Tolstoy, Lev in Russian, as daring in form as he is profound in content. I am a citizen of Athens; I am not an adherent of passive Nature, of *Natura Naturata*.

UNCLE: Everyone lives as best he knows or can, in this everyday world.

SEÑOR X: That's understood, Earth is a mediocre planet, but we must nurture civilisation. If Santos Dumont, instead of studying comparative

Meteorology, had dedicated himself to cultivating roses, the dirigible balloon would still be in Brahma's breast.

UNCLE: (*Disgustedly*) Botany is also a science.

SEÑOR X: (*Disparagingly*) Yes, when it is applied: by studying the juices of fragrant *Anthemis*, or the giant *Pulsatilla*, or the narcotic effects of *Datura Stramonium*.

UNCLE: (*Innocently*) Are you interested in those plants?

SEÑOR X: I have an insufficient volume of experience regarding them. Their horticulture interests me, which is quite different. *Voila!* (*Pause.*) And.... Rosita?

UNCLE: Rosita? (*Pause. In a loud voice.*) Rosita!...

A VOICE: (*From within*) She's not here.

UNCLE: She's not here.

SEÑOR X: I regret it.

UNCLE: I too. Since it's her Saint's Day, she has to go and say her forty Cremos.

SEÑOR X: For the occasion I have brought you this *pendentive*. It's an Eiffel Tower in mother-of-pearl with above it two doves holding in their claws the Wheel of Industry.

UNCLE: It's much appreciated.

SEÑOR X: I was all for buying a little cavern in silver through whose entrance the Virgin of Lourdes, or Lordes, can be seen, or a buckle for a belt adorned with a snake and four dragonflies, but I preferred the first as being more to my taste.

UNCLE: Thank you.

SEÑOR X: I'm enchanted by its favourable reception.

UNCLE: Thank you

SEÑOR X: My best wishes to your wife.

UNCLE: Thank you.

SEÑOR X: And my regards to her charming little niece, to whom I wish all happiness in celebrating her name-day.

UNCLE: A thousand thanks.

SEÑOR X: Regard me as your faithful servant.

UNCLE: A thousand thanks.

SEÑOR X: I shall repeat it...

UNCLE: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

SEÑOR X: Forever. (*He exits.*)

UNCLE: (*Loudly*) Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NURSE: (*Enters, laughing*) I don't know how you have the patience. Between that gentleman, and the other, Don Confucio Montes de Oca, baptised in Masonic Lodge 43, they'll set the house on fire someday.

UNCLE: I've told you I don't like you eavesdropping on my conversations.

NURSE: That's called being ungrateful. I was behind the door, certainly, but I wasn't there to listen, but to pick up a broom since the gentleman was leaving.

AUNT: (*Entering*) Has he gone yet?

UNCLE: He has.

NURSE: Is he still a possibility for Rosalita?

AUNT: Why speak of possibilities? You know nothing of Rosita!

NURSE: But I know about possibilities.

AUNT: My niece is engaged.

NURSE: Mustn't speak, mustn't speak, mustn't speak, mustn't speak!

AUNT: Then be quiet.

NURSE: Does it seem right to you for a man to go off and leave a woman stranded for fifteen years, one who is the cream on the milk? She ought to be married. It grieves my heart caring for her table linen in Marseilles lace, and her sets of bedding decorated with gimp, and table runners and bedcovers of gauze with flowers in relief. They ought to be used and worn, but she pays no attention to how time passes. She'll have silver hair and she'll still be sewing satin ribbon on the border of her nightdress.

AUNT: Why involve yourself in something that has nothing to do with you?

NURSE: (*With amazement*) But I don't *involve* myself, I'm already involved.

AUNT: I'm sure she's happy.

NURSE: It's a pretence. Yesterday I had to spend all day with her hanging around the entrance to the Circus because she insisted that one of the acrobats looked like her cousin.

AUNT: And did he really look like him?

NURSE: He was as handsome as a novice about to sing his first mass, but of course she would prefer the nephew to have that figure, that white neck and that moustache. He looked nothing like him. In your family the men are not handsome.

AUNT: Well, thank you!

NURSE: They are all short with sloping shoulders.

AUNT: Off with you!

NURSE: It's the truth. All it was, Rosita liked the acrobat as I liked him or you would. But she ascribes everything to the other. Sometimes I'd like to give her a thump on the head. Because she'll get cow's eyes gazing at the sky so much.

AUNT: Fine; and the point of this. It's acceptable to speak plainly, but not to be coarse.

NURSE: I don't speak out to anyone unless I love them.

AUNT: It sometimes seems otherwise to me.

NURSE: I'd give her the bread from my mouth and blood from my veins, if she asked it of me.

AUNT: (*Angrily*) A tongue full of idle promises! Mere words!

NURSE: (*Angrily*) And deeds! I have proved it, and deeds! I love her more than you.

AUNT: That's a lie.

NURSE: (*Angrily*) No it's the truth!

AUNT: Don't raise your voice to me!

NURSE: (*Loudly*) Because it sounds out like a bell.

AUNT: Be quiet, you ignoramus!

NURSE: Forty years I've been with you.

AUNT: (*Almost weeping*) Well you're dismissed!

NURSE: (*Shouting*) Thank God, I'll be out of your sight!

AUNT: (*Weeping*) Off to the street with you!

NURSE: (*Breaking into tears*) To the street! (*She heads towards the door weeping and in departing knocks something over. Both of them are weeping.*)

(*Pause.*)

AUNT: (*Wiping away her tears, speaking softly*) What have you knocked over?

NURSE: A barometer, in the Louis XV style.

AUNT: Really?

NURSE: (*Weeping*) Yes, Señora.

AUNT: Can I see?

NURSE: It's for Rosita's name day. (*She approaches.*)

AUNT: (*Looking at it.*) It's a beauty.

NURSE: (*In a tearful voice*) Set in velvet, it's a fountain with real snails; over the fountain a bower of wire with green roses; the water in the bowl is a cluster of blue sequins, and the jet is the thermometer itself. The pools around it are painted in oils and a nightingale is drinking from them, embroidered in gold thread. I wanted one where you pulled a cord and it sang, but it wasn't possible.

AUNT: It's not possible.

NURSE: But it doesn't need to sing. We've real ones in the garden.

AUNT: That's true. (*Pause.*) Why have you done this?

NURSE: (*Weeping*) I would give Rosita everything I have.

AUNT: It's because you love her like no one else!

NURSE: Second only to you.

AUNT: No. You nursed her at your breast.

NURSE: You have given your life to her.

AUNT: But I did it out of duty, you out of generosity.

NURSE: (*More strongly*) Don't say that!

AUNT: You have shown that you love her more than anyone else.

NURSE: I have done what anyone would in my position. I'm a servant. You pay me and I serve.

AUNT: You've always been considered one of the family.

NURSE: A humble servant who gives what she has, that's all.

AUNT: Are you telling me that is all you are?

NURSE: Am I anything more?

AUNT: (*Annoyed*) You shouldn't say such things to me. I won't listen.

NURSE: (*Annoyed*) Nor I. (*They exit rapidly, one by each door*)

(*As she leaves the Aunt encounters the Uncle.*)

UNCLE: From being pressed together so long, bits of lace become thorns.

AUNT: She is forever parading hers.

UNCLE: Don't tell me again, I know it all off by heart...still, we can't do without her. Yesterday I heard you explaining all the details of our bank account with her. You don't know how to maintain your position. It doesn't seem to me to be the most suitable of conversations to have with a servant.

AUNT: She is not a servant.

UNCLE: (*Gently*) Enough, enough: I don't wish to start an argument.

AUNT: But can't you discuss it with me?

UNCLE: I can, but I prefer to stay silent.

AUNT: Though you insist on words of reproach.

UNCLE: Why should I say anything about it after all this time? To avoid argument I make my bed, wash my shirts with a bar of soap, and shake out the rugs in my room.

AUNT: It's not right to give yourself the airs of a superior man who is badly served, when everything in this house is subject to your comfort and wishes.

UNCLE: (*Gently*) On the contrary, my dear.

AUNT: (*Seriously*) Not at all. Instead of making lace, I prune your plants. What do you do for me?

UNCLE: Pardon me. The time comes when people who have lived together for many years display irritation and anxiety over the tiniest things, to add intensity and passion to something long dead. We've been having these conversations for twenty years.

AUNT: No, for twenty years we've been breaking windows...

UNCLE: And we haven't minded the draught.

(Rosita appears. She is dressed in pink. The fashion has altered from the mutton sleeves of 1900. Her skirt is bell-shaped. She crosses the stage, quickly, with scissors in hand. At centre-stage she halts.)

ROSITA: Has the postman been?

UNCLE: Has he?

AUNT: I don't know. (*Aloud*) Has the postman been? (*Pause*) No, not yet.

ROSITA: He always goes by at this time.

UNCLE: He ought to be here shortly.

AUNT: He's often delayed.

ROSITA: The other day I found him playing games with the children and he'd left a pile of letters on the ground.

AUNT: He'll be here soon.

ROSITA: Call me. (*She exits rapidly.*)

UNCLE: Where are you going with those scissors?

ROSITA: To cut some roses.

UNCLE: (*Astounded*) What? And who has given you permission?

AUNT: I have. It's her name day.

ROSITA: I want to put some in the jardinière and in the vase in the hall.

UNCLE: Every time I cut a rose it's as if I were cutting off a finger. I feel it the same way. (*Gazing at his wife.*) I won't argue. I know they don't last. (*The Nurse enters.*) Thus they speak of the waltz of the roses, which is one of the more beautiful compositions of these times, but I can't conceal the disgust it arouses in me to see them in their vases. (*He exits the stage.*)

ROSITA: (*To the Nurse*) Has the post come?

NURSE: Well, the only thing roses are good for is to adorn rooms.

ROSITA: (*Annoyed*) I asked if the mail has come.

NURSE: (*Annoyed*) Would I keep the letters to myself if they had come?

AUNT: Go, and cut the flowers.

ROSITA: There's a bitter taste to everything in this house.

NURSE: We come across pesticides in every corner.

AUNT: Are you content?

ROSITA: I don't know.

AUNT: Why is that?

ROSITA: When I don't see people I'm content, but when I have to...

AUNT: Of course! I don't like the life you lead. Your fiancé doesn't demand you be unsociable. He always says in his letters you should go about.

ROSITA: It's just that on the streets I notice how time has passed and I don't want to abandon my dreams. They have built another house in the little square. I don't want to notice how time is passing.

AUNT: Of course! I've often advised you to write to your fiancé and wed someone else here. You will be happier. I know there are men young and old who are fond of you.

ROSITA: But Aunt! My feelings are so profound, so deep-rooted. If I don't see people I can believe another week has gone by. I can hope, just as I did at first. What is a year or two, or five? *(A bell rings.)* The post.

AUNT: What might it bring you?

NURSE: *(Entering)* Here are those wretched spinsters.

AUNT: Mary and Jesus!

ROSITA: What's the matter?

NURSE: That mother and her three daughters. All show on the outside and straw for brains. They need a good kick in the...! *(She exits.)*

(The three spinster daughters and their mother enter. The three Spinsters are wearing huge hats with stragglng feathers, and exaggerated costumes, gloves to the elbow with bracelets round them, and fans hanging from long chains. The Mother is dressed in brownish black with a hat with old purple ribbons.)

MOTHER: Congratulations. (*She kisses them.*)

ROSITA: Thank you. (*She kisses the daughters, and addresses them by their names.*) Love! Charity! Mercy!

FIRST SPINSTER: Congratulations.

SECOND SPINSTER: Congratulations.

THIRD SPINSTER: Congratulations.

AUNT: (*To the Mother*) How are your feet?

MOTHER: Worse all the time. If it were not for these girls, I'd be housebound. (*They sit down.*)

AUNT: Have you tried rubbing them with lavender?

FIRST SPINSTER: Every night.

SECOND SPINSTER: And a decoction of mallows.

AUNT: No rheumatism can resist it.

(*Pause*)

MOTHER: And your husband?

AUNT: He's well, thank you.

(*Pause*)

MOTHER: And his roses?

AUNT: And his roses.

THIRD SPINSTER: How pretty the flowers are!

SECOND SPINSTER: We have a Saint Francis rose in a pot.

ROSITA: Do Saint Francis roses have any scent?

FIRST SPINSTER: Very little.

MOTHER: What I like most is mock orange.

THIRD SPINSTER: Violets are very beautiful.

(Pause)

MOTHER: Daughters, have you brought the card?

THIRD SPINSTER: Yes. It's a girl dressed in pink, and is at the same time a hygrometer. You can see the friar's hood that shows the humidity. Depending on how humid it is the girl's skirts, which are of very thin paper, open or close.

ROSITA: *(Reading.)* One morning in the fields
 The nightingales were singing
 And the song they sang was:
 'Rosita is the sweetest.'

You shouldn't have gone to so much trouble.

AUNT: It's in very good taste.

MOTHER: I don't lack taste, I lack money.

FIRST SPINSTER: Mama...!

SECOND SPINSTER: Mama...!

THIRD SPINSTER: Mama...!

MOTHER: Daughters, here I can speak confidentially. There is no one else listening. Indeed, you know that since my poor husband died it has truly required a miracle to live on the pension he left us. I still seem to hear the father of these children when, generous gentleman that he was, he said to me: 'Henrietta, spend, spend, I earn three hundred and fifty pesetas'; but those times are gone! In spite of everything we have not lost our status.

What anguish I have experienced, Señora, so that these children could continue to buy hats! What tears, what trouble for a ribbon or a set of loops! Those feathers and net cost me many sleepless nights.

THIRD SPINSTER: Mama...!

MOTHER: It's true, daughter. We cannot overspend by even the smallest amount. Many times I ask them: 'What do you prefer, children of my soul: eggs for breakfast or to rent chairs in the promenade?' And they reply with one voice: 'The chairs.'

THIRD SPINSTER: Mama, don't speak about that any more. All Granada knows.

MOTHER: Of course, who can say otherwise? And we get by with potatoes or a bunch of grapes, yet still with a Mongolian cloak or a striped parasol or a poplin blouse, and all the accessories. Because there is no alternative. But it costs me my life! And my eyes fill with tears when I see them taking turns with what they have.

SECOND SPINSTER: Do you still go to the Poplar Grove, Rosita?

ROSITA: No.

THIRD SPINSTER: There we always meet the Ponce de Léons, the Herrastis and the Baroness de Santa Matilde de la Bendición Papal. The best of Granada.

MOTHER: Of course! They were all at the College of Puerto de Cielo together.

(Pause)

AUNT: *(Rising)* Will you take something? *(They all rise)*

MOTHER: I don't have your gift for desserts like Piñonate or Pastel de Gloria.

FIRST SPINSTER: *(To Rosita)* Is there any news?

ROSITA: The last post promised some. We're waiting to read it.

THIRD SPINSTER: Have you finished your set of Valenciennes lace?

ROSITA: Oh yes! I've done another in nainsook with butterflies by a pool.

SECOND SPINSTER: The day you marry you will have the best trousseau in the world.

ROSITA: Oh, I think it's all too little. They say men tire of you if they always see you in the same dress.

NURSE: (*Entering*) The daughters of Ayola the photographer are here.

AUNT: You mean the Ayola young ladies.

NURSE: Here are the noble daughters of the great Ayola, photographer to His Majesty and gold-medal winner at the Madrid Exhibition. (*She exits*)

AUNT: We have to put up with her; but at times she gets on my nerves. (*The Spinsters are looking at some cloth with Rosita.*) Servants are impossible.

MOTHER: Be brave with her. I have a woman who sweeps the floor in the evenings; I give her what I have always given her: one peseta a month and the leftovers and that is quite enough these days; then the other day she let us down saying that she wanted five, and I can't afford it!

AUNT: I don't know where it will all end.

(*The Ayola daughters enter, greeting Rosita cheerfully. They are dressed in the rich and exaggerated fashion of the epoch.*)

ROSITA: Do you know them?

FIRST AYOLA: Only by sight.

ROSITA: The Señoritas Ayola, the Señora and Señoritas Escarpini.

SECOND AYOLA: We have seen you before sitting on chairs in the Promenade. (*Feigning a smile*)

ROSITA: Take a seat. (*The Spinsters sit.*)

AUNT: (*To the Ayolas*) Would you like a sweetmeat?

SECOND AYOLA: No; we've eaten not long ago. Indeed I had four eggs with chopped tomato, and I could hardly rise from my chair.

FIRST AYOLA: (*Laughing*) How witty!

(*Pause. The Ayolas burst into uncontrollable laughter which communicates itself to Rosita, who makes efforts to contain it. The Spinsters and their Mother remain serious. Pause.*)

AUNT: What creatures!

MOTHER: Youth!

AUNT: It's a light-hearted time.

ROSITA: (*Walking round the stage, arranging things.*) Please, hush. (*They fall silent.*)

AUNT: (*To the Third Spinster*) And how is your piano going?

THIRD SPINSTER: I don't play much now. I have too much work to do.

ROSITA: I haven't heard you for ages.

MOTHER: If it were not for me their fingers would have lost their flexibility. But I always insist.

SECOND SPINSTER: Since poor Papa died I don't feel like it. He enjoyed it so!

SECOND AYOLA: I agree it often brought tears.

FIRST SPINSTER: When she played Popper's tarantella.

SECOND SPINSTER: And '*The Maiden's Prayer*'.

MOTHER: He was a man of great feeling!

(The Ayola who has been stifling her laughter, laughs aloud. Rosita turning away from the Spinsters, also laughs, but controls it.)

AUNT: These girls!

FIRST AYOLA: We laughed because, before we arrived here...

SECOND AYOLA: She stumbled and was about to ring the bell...

FIRST AYOLA: And I... *(They laugh)*

(The Spinsters give a small feigned smile, a shade sad and bored.)

MOTHER: We must go now!

AUNT: Not at all.

ROSITA: *(To them all)* Then let us celebrate the fact that you didn't fall! Nurse, bring the sweets, those 'Bones of Saint Catherine'.

THIRD SPINSTER: How rich they are!

MOTHER: Last year we treated ourselves to a pound of them.

(The Nurse enters with the sweets.)

NURSE: Titbits for the gentry. *(To Rosita)* The postman is coming past the poplars.

ROSITA: Wait at the door for him!

FIRST AYOLA: I don't want one. I'd prefer anisette with selzer water.

SECOND AYOLA: And I grape juice.

ROSITA: Are you still drinking that!

FIRST AYOLA: When I was six years old I came here and Rosita's fiancé introduced me to it. Don't you remember, Rosita?

ROSITA: (*Seriously*) No!

SECOND AYOLA: For my part, Rosita and her fiancé taught me my ABC...How long ago it all was!

AUNT: Fifteen years!

FIRST AYOLA: I almost seem to forget your fiancé's face.

SECOND AYOLA: Didn't he have a scar on his lip?

ROSITA: A scar? Aunt, did he have a scar?

AUNT: Don't you remember, child? It was the one thing that made him a little ugly.

ROSITA: But it was not a scar; it was a burn, a little redness. Scars are deeper than that.

FIRST AYOLA: I wish Rosita would get married!

ROSITA: For goodness sake!

SECOND AYOLA: It's not foolish. I do too!

ROSITA: And why?

FIRST AYOLA: To go to a wedding. I'll marry as soon as I can.

AUNT: Child!

FIRST AYOLA: Whoever it is, I don't want to stay single.

SECOND AYOLA: I feel the same.

AUNT: (*To the Mother*) What do you think of that?

FIRST AYOLA: Oh! I'm Rosita's friend because she has a fiancé! Women without fiancés are of no account, poor things, and all of them... (*She*

glances towards the Spinsters) Well, not all, no; some of them....Anyway, they are all crosspatches!

AUNT: Ah, now that's nice.

MOTHER: Stop it.

FIRST SPINSTER: There are many who don't marry because they don't wish to.

SECOND AYOLA: That's not me I think.

FIRST SPINSTER: (*Emphatically*) That's for sure.

SECOND AYOLA: Those who don't want to marry usually stop using powder and padding out their bosoms, and spending days and nights hanging over the balcony rail spying on people.

SECOND SPINSTER: They might just be taking the air!

ROSITA: (*With a forced laugh*) What a foolish conversation!

AUNT: Well, why not play for us a little?

MOTHER: Come on, daughter!

THIRD SPINSTER: (*Rising*) What should I play?

SECOND AYOLA: Play: '*Viva Frascuelo!*'

SECOND SPINSTER: That barcarolle '*The frigate Numancia*'.

ROSITA: Why not: '*What the Flowers Say*'

MOTHER: Ah, yes! '*What the Flowers Say*'! (To the Aunt) Have you heard that? Playing and singing together. It's beautiful!

THIRD SPINSTER: I can also recite: '*The dark swallows return to make their nests in the eaves.*'

FIRST AYOLA: That's too sad.

FIRST SPINSTER: Sad things can still be fine.

AUNT: Come along, come along!

THIRD SPINSTER: (*At the piano*) Mother, take me to the country
in the light of morning
to see the flowers open
on their swaying stems.
A thousand flowers are speaking
to a thousand lovers,
and the stream is murmuring
now the nightingale has ceased.

ROSITA: The rose it had opened
with the light of morning;
so red with its hot blushes
the dew had burnt away;
so hot there on its stem that
the breeze itself was burning;
so high there! How it glowed!
The rose that had opened!

THIRD SPINSTER: 'My eyes are yours alone'
the heliotrope was saying.
'I'll not love you while I live'
said the flower of the basil.
'I am shy' said the violet.
'I am cold,' said the white rose.
Said the jasmine: 'I am faithful';
the carnation: 'I am passion!'

SECOND SPINSTER: The hyacinth is bitterness;
grief, the passion-flower;

FIRST SPINSTER: Wall-rocket is disdain
and hope the lily-bower.

AUNT: Says the spikenard: 'I am your friend';

'I trust in you', the passion-flower.
The honeysuckle rocks you,
The immortelle will kill you.

MOTHER:

Immortelle of funerals,
flower of crossed hands;
how fine when the breeze
weeps on your garland!

ROSITA:

The rose it had opened
but afternoon followed
and a sad breath of snow
weighing down the branches;
when the shadows lengthened
and the nightingale chanted,
as if sentenced to death
it turned faint with whiteness;
and when the night's vast
horn of metal sounded
and the winds entangled
slumbered on the mountain,
it faded, still sighing
for the crystal of morning.

THIRD SPINSTER:

Beneath your long hair
the cut flowers moan.
Some carry little daggers;
others fire or water.

FIRST SPINSTER:

The flowers they speak
the language of lovers.

ROSITA:

Sweet acacia is jealous;
disdainful, the dahlia;
the spikenard sighs love;
laughter, the Gala rose.
The yellow one is hatred;
The red one is anger;
the white means marriage,
and a purple one a shroud.

THIRD SPINSTER: Mother, take me to the country
in the light of morning
to see the flowers open
on their swaying stems.

(The piano plays a last run and then finishes.)

AUNT: Oh, that's beautiful!

MOTHER: There's also the language of fans, the language of gloves, the language of stamps and the language of hours. It gives me goose pimples when they say:

Twelve o'clock strikes
With fatal precision
The hour of your death
Acknowledge it, sinner.

FIRST AYOLA: *(Her mouth full of sweets)* How unpleasant!

MOTHER: And when they say :

At one we're born
Tra-la, tra-la,
And being born,
Tra-la lira,
Is like opening your eyes
Tra-la, la
In an orchard,
Orchard, orchard.

SECOND AYOLA: *(To her sister)* I think she's a little tipsy. *(To her mother)* Do you want another glass?

MOTHER: With great pleasure and a strong will, as they said in my day.

(Rosita is in a state of expectation waiting for the arrival of the postman.)

NURSE: The post! (*A general commotion*)

AUNT: It has arrived at last!

THIRD SPINSTER: You have to consider the days it takes to get here.

MOTHER: That's hardly material!

SECOND AYOLA: Open the letter!

FIRST AYOLA: It's more discreet to read it alone, since it might say something risqué.

MOTHER: Good heavens!

(*Rosa goes out with the letter.*)

FIRST AYOLA: Well a letter from your fiancé isn't a sermon.

THIRD SPINSTER: It's a sermon on love.

SECOND AYOLA: Oh, how elegant! (*The Ayolas laugh*)

FIRST AYOLA: We know she's never received one.

MOTHER: (*Forcefully*) Fortunately for her!

FIRST AYOLA: Well, that's her view.

AUNT: (*To the Nurse, who is going to join Rosita*) Where are you going?

NURSE: Can't I move a step?

AUNT: Leave her alone!

ROSITA: (*Entering*) Aunt! Aunt!

AUNT: What is it, child?

ROSITA: (*Agitated*) Oh, Aunt!

FIRST AYOLA: What is it?

THIRD SPINSTER: Tell us!

SECOND AYOLA: What is it?

NURSE: Tell!

AUNT: Out with it!

MOTHER: Get her a glass of water!

SECOND AYOLA: Come on!

FIRST AYOLA: Quick. (*Uproar reigns*)

ROSITA: (*Her voice choking*) To marry.... (*Quite terrified*) To marry me, because no more is possible right now, but...

SECOND AYOLA: (*Hugging her*) Hurray! What happiness!

FIRST AYOLA: Hug me!

AUNT: Stop speaking.

ROSITA: (*More calmly*) But since it's impossible for him to come now the marriage will be by proxy and he will come later.

FIRST SPINSTER: Congratulations!

MOTHER: (*Almost in tears*) God grant you the happiness you deserve! (*She hugs her.*)

NURSE: Fine; and this *proxy*, what is it?

ROSITA: Simple. A person represents the bridegroom at the wedding.

NURSE: And what else?

ROSITA: Then one is married!

NURSE: And the wedding night?

ROSITA: Good God!

FIRST AYOLA: Well said? And the wedding night?

AUNT: Girls!

NURSE: Let him come himself and marry her! *Proxy!* I've never heard of such a thing. The bed and its hangings shivering with cold and the bride's nightdress in the darkest trunk: Señora, don't let any *proxy* enter this house. (*They all laugh.*) Señora, I don't like this *proxy!*

ROSITA: But he will come soon. It is one more test of what I wish for!

NURSE: It is! Let him come then, and take your arm, and stir the sugar in your coffee, and test it first to see if it's too hot! (*Laughter*)

(*The Uncle appears with a rose.*)

UNCLE: I heard it all, and almost without realising it I cut that unique mutable rose I have in my conservatory. It is still red,

When it opens in the morning,
It glows as red as blood.

ROSITA: The sun leans through windows
To gaze at its gleaming.

UNCLE: If I had waited another two hours before cutting it my gift to you would have turned white.

ROSITA: White as a dove,
As laughter of the sea;
White as the cold white
Of a heap of salt.

UNCLE: But now it still holds the warmth of youth.

AUNT: Drink a glass with me, my dear. This is a day on which you should.

(Commotion. The third Spinster sits down to the piano and plays a polka. Rosita is gazing at the rose. The first and second Spinsters dance with the Ayolas and sing)

Because I saw you girl
down by the ocean
your sweet languor
filled me with sighs,
and the subtle sweetness
of that fatal illusion
in the light of the moon
saw you drown by and by.

(The Aunt and Uncle dance. Rosita goes towards the second Spinster and one of the Ayolas. She dances with the Spinster. The other Ayola claps her hands towards the old people, and the Nurse in the doorway has the same idea.)

Curtain

Act III

(Ten years later. A ground floor room: its windows with green shutters looking onto the garden. The stage is silent. It is afternoon. A clock strikes six. The Nurse crosses the stage with a suitcase and a bundle. The Aunt appears and sits on a low chair centre stage. Silence. The clock again strikes six. Pause.)

NURSE: *(Entering)* The clock's struck six for the second time.

AUNT: And Rosita?

NURSE: Upstairs in the tower room. And you, where have you been?

AUNT: Removing the last pots from the conservatory.

NURSE: I haven't seen her all morning.

AUNT: Since my husband died the house feels so empty it seems twice the size, and we have to go searching for one another. When I cough in my room some nights, I hear an echo as if I was in church.

NURSE: It's true the house has proved too large.

AUNT: *(Almost in tears)* And then...if he were alive, with that clear mind of his, with his ability...

NURSE: *(Singing)* Tra-la-tra-la-tra-la.... No Señora, I won't let you cry. He's been dead six years and I don't want to see you as you were that day. How we cried! Be strong, Señora! Let the sun shine in the corners! Let us hope for many years of cutting roses!

AUNT: *(Rising)* I am an old woman. We are living amongst ruins.

NURSE: There's nothing wrong with us. I'm old too!

AUNT: If I only had your age!

NURSE: We're a little worn, but since I've worked hard, I'm well-oiled, while you, in using the armchair, your legs have withered.

AUNT: You think I haven't worked?

NURSE: With your fingertips, with thread, with stalks, jam; but I worked with my shoulders, knees, fingernails.

AUNT: So to run a household is not working?

NURSE: It's harder work scrubbing floors.

AUNT: I won't argue with that.

NURSE: Why not? It passes the time. Go on. Answer me back. But we've ended up like mutes. Before, there was always shouting. 'What about this, what about the other, what about the custard, why aren't there more sheets?' ...

AUNT: I'm resigned....one day it's soup, the next only crumbs: with my glass of water and my rosary in my pocket, I'll await death with dignity...But when I think of Rosita!

NURSE: That's what hurts!

AUNT: (*Excitedly*) When I think of the wrong he did her, and the terrible deceit he practised and the falsehood in that man's heart, who is no longer my family and not worthy enough to be part of my family, I'd like to be twenty years old and board that steamboat, and go to Tucumán, and take a whip...

NURSE: (*Interrupting*)and take a sword, and cut off his head, and crush it between two stones, and cut off that hand that wrote those false promises and those lying words of affection.

AUNT: Yes, and let him pay with blood for the blood he has cost, even if he is of my blood, and then....

NURSE: ...scatter his ashes over the sea.

AUNT: Resurrect him, and bring him here to Rosita, to obtain satisfaction for my family's honour.

NURSE: So now you agree with me.

AUNT: I do.

NURSE: There he met that rich woman he was seeking and married her, but he should have told Rosita at the time. Because who will love the girl now? Now she has faded! Señora, couldn't we send a poisoned letter that would kill him when he opened it?

AUNT: The things you say! Eight years of marriage, and only last month the wretch writes to tell me the truth. I knew it from his letters; the proxy never arrived, an ambiguous tone...he didn't dare, but in the end he did. Of course it was after his father died! And that creature....

NURSE: Hush...!

AUNT: And take those two jars.

(Rosita appears. She is dressed in bright pink in the fashion of 1910. Her hair is done in curls. She has aged greatly.)

NURSE: Child!

ROSITA: What are you doing?

NURSE: Grumbling a little. And you, where are you off to?

ROSITA: I'm going to the conservatory. Have you removed the pots already?

NURSE: There are a few left.

(Rosita goes out. The two women wipe away tears.)

NURSE: And now what? You sit here, and I sit here? And keep silent? And not seek justice? And not have the courage to make a fuss...?

AUNT: Be quiet, don't pursue it!

NURSE: I have no power to endure these things without my heart pounding in my chest as if I were a dog being chased. When I buried my husband I felt it deeply, but deep down I felt a great happiness...happiness no...a thrill to realise that it was not I who was being buried. When I buried my little girl...you understand? When I buried my little girl it was if my guts were being trampled on, but the dead are dead. They are dead, we mourn, we close the door, and we go on living! But all this to do with Rosita is worse. It is to seek a corpse and not find it; it's to weep without knowing what you are weeping for; it's to sigh for someone you know, who shouldn't deserve sighs. It's an open wound that bleeds an endless trickle of blood, and there is no one, no one on earth, who can bring the swabs, or bandages for it, or a precious lump of snow.

AUNT: What do you want me to do?

NURSE: Let the river carry us away.

AUNT: In old age everyone turns their back on us.

NURSE: While I have arms nothing is lacking.

AUNT: (*Pause. In a lower voice, as if ashamed.*) I cannot pay your wages! You will have to leave us.

NURSE: What! What breeze is that blowing through the window! What...! Or perhaps I'm going deaf? Well...do you want me to sing? Like the little girls going home from school! (*Children's voices are heard*) Do you hear, Señora? My Senora: more my Señora than ever. (*She embraces her.*)

AUNT: I hear.

NURSE: I'm going to cook something. A dish of mackerel fragrant with fennel.

AUNT: Listen!

NURSE: And for dessert a meringue, a *Monte Nevado*! I'll make a *Monte Nevado* with coloured dragees...

AUNT: But, woman!

NURSE: (*Loudly*) Is Don Martín there! Don Martín, come here a moment! Here! Entertain the Señora a while.

(*She exits quickly. Don Martín enters. He is an old man with red hair. He uses a crutch which supports a withered leg. A noble individual, of great dignity, with a certain air of sadness.*)

AUNT: Bless my sight!

MARTÍN: When is the final departure?

AUNT: Today.

MARTÍN: Where will you go?

AUNT: Our new house is not like this. But it has good views and a little patio with two fig trees where you can grow flowers.

MARTÍN: That's not so bad. (*They sit down.*)

AUNT: And how are you?

MARTÍN: The same as ever. I came here to give my tutorial. It was truly hellish. It was a beautiful lecture: 'The Concept and Definition of Harmony' but of no interest to the youngsters at all. And what youngsters! I, whom they consider a waste of time, they show a little respect to; sometimes a pin or something in the backside or a puppet on one's shoulder, but they do terrible things to my colleagues. They're the children of the rich and, since they pay, they can't be punished. Or so the Headmaster always tells us. Yesterday it involved poor Señor Canito, the new Geography professor, who wears a corset, because his body is a little distorted; when he was alone in the courtyard, the older boys and the boarders stripped him to the waist, tied him to one of the pillars along the walk, and drenched him with a jar of water over the balcony.

AUNT: The poor creature!

MARTÍN: Every day I tremble as I enter the college, waiting for what they might do to me, though, as I say, they respect my misfortune somewhat.

There was a huge scandal a while ago when Señor Cosuegra, who is an admirable teacher of Latin, found cat excrement on his class list.

AUNT: They are like enemies!

MARTÍN: They are the one that pay, and so they behave accordingly. And believe me the parents laugh at their pranks, because as we are only like tutors, and are not about to examine their children, they consider us as men devoid of feelings, as people situated in the lowest class of society, who nevertheless still wear a decent collar and tie.

AUNT: Oh Don Martin! What a world it is!

MARTÍN: What a world! I always dreamed of being a poet. They said I had natural talent, and I wrote a play which was never staged.

AUNT: ‘*The Daughter of Jephthah*’?

MARTÍN: That was it.

AUNT: Rosita and I have read it. You gave us a copy. We have read it four or five times!

MARTÍN: (*Anxiously*) And what did you think...?

AUNT: I liked it a lot. I’ve always said so. Especially when she is going to die, and thinks about her mother and the flames.

MARTÍN: It is strong, right? A true drama. A drama in shape and concept. I was never able to have it performed. (*He starts to recite.*)

‘Oh sublime mother! Turn your gaze
on one who sunk in vile torpor lies;
Welcome all the glittering rewards
and the fearful tremor of my struggle!’

Is that bad? Are not the stresses and the caesura fine in that line: ‘and the fearful tremor of my struggle?’

AUNT: Beautiful! Beautiful!

MARTÍN: And when Glucinius goes to meet Isaiah, and lifts the hanging of the tent....

NURSE: *(Interrupting)* Through here.

(Two workers entered dressed in corduroy.)

FIRST WORKER: Good afternoon.

AUNT AND MARTIN: *(Together)* Good afternoon.

NURSE: This is the one! *(She points to a large sofa at the back of the room.)*

(The men carry it out slowly as if carrying a coffin. The Nurse follows them. Silence. We hear two chimes of a church bell as the men leave with the sofa.)

MARTÍN: Is that the Novena for Saint Gertrude the Great?

AUNT: Yes at the Church of San Antón.

MARTÍN: It is very hard to become a poet! *(The men exit.)* After that I wanted to be a pharmacist. That's a tranquil life.

AUNT: My brother, who is in glory, was a pharmacist.

MARTÍN: But it was not possible. I had to help my mother and became a professor. That's why I envied your husband so much. He was what I wished to be.

AUNT: And it caused his ruin!

MARTÍN: Yes, but it's worse to be me.

AUNT: But you are still a writer.

MARTÍN: I don't know why I write, because I've no illusions about it, yet it's the only thing I enjoy. Did you read my story yesterday in the second edition of the magazine, in '*Mentalidad Granadina*'?

AUNT: '*Matilda's Birthday*'. Yes, we read it; it was beautiful.

MARTÍN: Is it so? There I wanted to renew myself by creating something with a present-day atmosphere; I even have an aeroplane in it! I must be truly modern. Of course what matter most to me are my sonnets.

AUNT: To the Nine Muses of Parnassus!

MARTÍN: To the Ten, the Ten. Don't you remember that I called Rosita the Tenth Muse?

NURSE: (*Entering*) Senora, help me fold this blanket. (*They fold it between them.*) Don Martín, with the red hair! Why have you not married, man of God? You would be less lonely in life!

MARTÍN: I've never wanted to!

NURSE: It's because now it doesn't please you to. Speaking in that precious way of yours!

AUNT: Let's hope you fall in love.

MARTÍN: Little chance of that!

NURSE: When he lectures in the room downstairs in the college, I go to the boiler-room to listen: 'What is an idea?' 'The intellectual representation of a thing or an object.' Is that right?

MARTÍN: Listen to her! Marvellous!

NURSE: Yesterday he shouted: "No, it's a hyperbaton, an inversion of words' and later.... 'the epinicion, a song of victory'...I wanted to understand it all, but since I couldn't I wanted to laugh, and the boiler-man who is forever reading a book called *The Ruins of Palmyra*, echoed my grimaces as though we were pair of rabid cats. But though I laugh, like an ignoramus, I know Don Martín has great merit.

MARTÍN: No one today grants merit to Rhetoric or Poetry or the university culture.

(The Nurse exits rapidly with the folded blanket.)

AUNT: What can we do? There's little time left to us here.

MARTÍN: We must employ it in kindness and sacrifice.

(Voices are heard.)

AUNT: What is that?

NURSE: *(Appearing)* Don Martín, you must go to the college because the students have split a water pipe with a nail, and all the classrooms are flooded.

MARTÍN: I must go. I dreamed of being a Parnassian and I must act as a plumber and mason. As long as they don't push me, and I don't slip... *(The Nurse helps Don Martín to his feet.)*

(Voices are heard.)

NURSE: Off you go, now! Oh for a little peace and quiet! Let's hope the water rises quickly and there's not a student left alive!

MARTÍN: *(Leaving)* Blessed be the Lord!

AUNT: Poor man, what a fate is yours!

NURSE: Look in that mirror. This very person irons his collars and darns his socks, and when he was sick, and I took him some custard, he had only a bed with sheets as black as charcoal, and four walls and a little washbasin...ay!

AUNT: As do others, plenty of them!

NURSE: That's why I always say: 'Cursed, cursed be the rich! Nothing shall survive of them, not even their fingernails!

AUNT: Forget about them!

NURSE: But I'm certain they go headlong to Hell. Where do you think Don Rafael Salé is now, that exploiter of the poor, whom they buried yesterday,

God forgive him, with all those nuns and priests and all that chanting? In Hell! And he cries: 'Take my twenty million pesetas, but don't squeeze me with the pincers! I'll give you two hundred thousand if you'll take those coals from my feet!' but the demons burn here, and burn there, struggle how you may, strike you in the face, till your blood is turned to charcoal.

AUNT: Every Christian knows that the rich can't enter the kingdom of Heaven, but be careful talking that way doesn't send you headlong to Hell as well.

NURSE: To Hell, me? With the first kick I give Old Nick's cauldron, I'll supply the whole world with hot water. No Senora, no. I will go to Heaven for sure. (*Gently*) Like you. Each of us sitting in our very own rocking-chair upholstered with heavenly silk, holding a red satin fan. Between us, on a swing twined with jasmine and rosemary, Rosita will be swinging away, and behind her your husband, covered with roses, just as he went in his coffin from this house; with the same smile, with the same pale brow as if made of glass, and you there rocking away, and I, and Rosita swinging, and behind her your husband throwing roses, as if we were all three on a float, one made of mother-of-pearl and covered with candles and flounces, in the Holy Week procession.

AUNT: And may the handkerchiefs for our tears be left behind down here.

NURSE: Let them. A heavenly spree for us!

AUNT: Because now there's not a single one left in our hearts!

FIRST WORKMAN: You must tell us what you want us to do.

NURSE: Come. (*They exit. From the doorway.*) Courage!

AUNT: God bless you! (*She sits down slowly.*)

(*Rosita appears with a packet of letters in her hands. Silence.*)

AUNT: Have they taken the chest of drawers already?

ROSITA: Just now. Your cousin Hope sent a lad to fetch a screwdriver.

AUNT: They'll be setting up the beds for tonight. We must leave soon and make sure everything is as we want it. My cousin will have arranged the furniture any old how.

ROSITA: But I'd prefer to leave here when the streets are dark. If only I could quench the street-lights. Whatever happens, the neighbours will spy on us. All day long, with our moving house, the doorway has been full of little children, as though someone had died here.

AUNT: If I had known I would never have allowed your uncle to mortgage the house, furniture and all. What we are taking is barely enough, a chair to sit on and a bed to sleep in.

ROSITA: To die in.

AUNT: A fine trick he played on us! Tomorrow the new owners arrive! I wish your uncle could see us. The old fool! Cowardly in business! Mad for his roses! A man with no concept of money! Ruining me, day by day. 'Here is Fulano'; and: 'Let him come in'; and he would enter with empty pockets and leave with them full of silver, and it was always: 'Don't let my wife find out.' Extravagant and weak! And there was no disaster but he must remedy it...no child but he must help, because..., because...he had a bigger heart than anyone...the purest of Christian souls...; no, no, hush old woman! Be silent, chatterbox, and respect God's will! Ruined! Well then, silence! But I look at you...

NURSE: Don't think of me, aunt. I know the mortgage paid for my furniture and my trousseau, and that is what grieves me.

AUNT: It was well done. You deserved it all. And everything we bought is worthy of you, and will be beautiful the day you come to use it.

ROSITA: The day I come to use it?

AUNT: Of course! The day you are married.

ROSITA: Don't let's talk about it.

AUNT: That's what wrong with the decent women in this world. We don't talk! We don't talk and we should talk. (*Loudly*) Nurse! Has the post arrived?

ROSITA: What do you suggest?

AUNT: Watch how I behave, and you will learn.

ROSITA: (*Embracing her.*) Hush.

AUNT: Sometimes I have to speak out. Get away from these four walls, my child. Don't give in to misfortune.

ROSITA: (*Kneeling before her.*) For many years I grew accustomed to living beyond myself, thinking of things that were far away, and now those things no longer exist I go on giving more and more to that cold emptiness, seeking an escape I have never found. I knew everything. I knew he had married; he had charged a kind soul with telling me, and I went on receiving his letters, embracing an illusion, so full of sighs that I even deceived myself. If no one had said anything; if you had not known; if no one had known but me, his letters and his lies would have sustained my illusion, just as in the first year of his absence. But everyone knew, and I was met with pointing fingers that mocked my chastity as a fiancée, and made my spinster's fan appear grotesque. Every year that passed was like a secret pledge that withered my flesh. One day a friend marries then another and another, and tomorrow has a grown-up child, and comes to show me its school report, and they make new homes and new songs, and I am the same, with the same emotions, the same; I am the same as before, cutting the same carnations, gazing at the same clouds; and one day I'm out walking and I realise I no longer know anyone; the boys and girls leave me behind because I bore them, and one says: 'Oh, that's the old maid'; and another, a handsome boy, with curly hair, comments: 'No one will have her now.' And I hear him and I can't say a word, only walk on swiftly, with a mouth full of poison, and an enormous desire to run away, to throw off my shoes, and rest and not move again, ever, from my corner.

AUNT: Child! Rosita!

ROSITA: Now I am old. Yesterday I heard Nurse say that I might still marry. There is no way. Don't think it. I have lost hope now of having him whom I

loved with all my heart, whom I loved....whom I love. Everything is finished...and yet, with all illusions gone, I still wake with the most dreadful of feelings, the feeling of nursing a hope that is dead. I want to run, I want not to see; I want to be left calm, empty... (Doesn't a wretched woman have the right to breathe freely?) Yet hope pursues me, circles me, bites me, like a dying wolf snapping its teeth for the last time.

AUNT: Why didn't I see this? Why didn't you marry someone else?

ROSITA: I was promised, and besides, what man ever came to this house truly overflowing with desire to win my affection? None.

AUNT: You never took any notice of them. You were blinded by a deceitful lover.

ROSITA: I have always been a serious person.

AUNT: You clung to an idea without seeing the reality, taking no heed for your future.

ROSITA: I am what I am. And I can't change. The one thing left to me is my dignity. What I have within I keep for myself alone.

AUNT: That is not what I wish.

NURSE: (*Entering swiftly*) Nor I! Talk to us, unburden yourself; then we can be filled with tears the three of us, and share our feelings.

ROSITA: And what should I talk of? There are things that can't be said because there are no words in which to say them; and if there were, no one would understand their meaning. You would understand if I asked for bread or water or even a kiss, but no one can understand or remove this dark hand, that freezes or burns my heart, I don't know which, whenever I'm alone.

AUNT: That is talking at least.

AUNT: For everything there is consolation.

ROSITA: It's a never-ending tale. I know my eyes will stay young always, while my back will curve more each day. After all what has happened to me

happens to thousands of women. (*Pause.*) But why am I speaking of it? (*To the Nurse*) Go and arrange our things, because in a short while we'll be leaving this house and garden, and you, aunt, must not think of me. (*Pause. To the Nurse*) Go on! I don't like being looked at that way. That gaze like a faithful dog's annoys me. (*The Nurse goes out.*) Those looks of pity disturb me and anger me.

AUNT: Child, what do you want me to do?

ROSITA: Treat me as a lost thing. (*Pause. She walks about.*) Already I know you will be thinking of your sister the spinster....a spinster like me. She was sour and odious to children and every woman who put on a new dress....but I will not be like that. (*Pause.*) I ask forgiveness.

AUNT: What nonsense.

(*A boy about eighteen years old appears at the back of the room.*)

ROSITA: Let's go.

BOY: Are you ready?

ROSITA: In a few moments. When it grows dark.

AUNT: Who is this?

ROSITA: It's Maria's son.

AUNT: Which Maria?

ROSITA: The elder of my three former girlfriends.

AUNT: Ah!

'Who go to the Alhambra
three or four alone.'

Forgive my poor memory, child.

BOY: I have only met you a few times.

AUNT: Of course! But I liked your mother very much. How witty she was! She died at the same time as my husband.

ROSITA: Earlier.

BOY: Eight years ago.

ROSITA: And he has the same face as hers.

BOY: (*Cheerfully*) Not so pretty. It's taken a bit of a hammering.

AUNT: And the same wit, the same personality!

BOY: Of course, I resemble her. At the Carnival I wore my mother's dress...one from the old days...in green...

ROSITA: (*Sadly*) With black bows, and puffed out with green Nile silk.

BOY: Yes.

ROSITA: And a broad velvet ribbon at the waist.

BOY: That's it.

ROSITA: That hangs down on either side of the skirt.

BOY: Exactly! What a ridiculous style. (*He laughs*)

ROSITA: (*Sadly*) It was a lovely fashion!

BOY: You don't say! Well I nearly died laughing dressed in that old thing, filling all the hallway of the house with the smell of camphor, and suddenly my aunt started crying bitterly because she said it was like seeing the very image of my mother. I was upset, of course, and I left the dress and the mask on my bed.

ROSITA: There is nothing more living than a memory. They can make life impossible. That is why I have a profound understanding of those old drunken women who wander through the streets trying to erase the world, who sit and sing on the benches in the avenue.

AUNT: And your aunt is married?

BOY: He writes from Barcelona. Less each time.

ROSITA: Are there any children?

BOY: Four.

(Pause.)

NURSE: *(Entering)* Give me your keys to the cupboard. *(The Aunt gives her them, for the Boy.)* This lad here was with his girlfriend yesterday. I saw them in the Plaza Nueva. She wanted to hide in a side street but he wouldn't let her. *(She laughs.)*

AUNT: Ha, look at him blush!

BOY: *(Embarrassed)* We were just fooling about.

NURSE: Don't blush then! *(Exiting)*

ROSITA: Hush, let's be going.

BOY: What a beautiful garden you have!

ROSITA: We had!

AUNT: Go, and cut some flowers.

BOY: Take care, Doña Rosita.

ROSITA: Go with God, my lad!

(He leaves. Dusk is falling.)

Doña Rosita! *Doña...*Rosita!

When it opens in the morning,
It glows as red as blood.

In the afternoon it's white,
White as the white salt spray.
And when the night falls
It begins to fade.

(Pause.)

NURSE: *(Entering with a shawl)* Away with us!

ROSITA: Yes, I'm going to put a coat on.

NURSE: Since I've taken the hangars, it's hooked over the window catch.

(The Third Spinster enters, dressed in black, with a mourning veil over her head and face, which she has worn for twelve years. She speaks quietly.)

THIRD SPINSTER: Nurse!

NURSE: We only have a few minutes left.

THIRD SPINSTER: I'm here to give a piano lesson nearby, and I came to see if you needed anything.

NURSE: God bless you!

THIRD SPINSTER: What a terrible thing!

NURSE: Yes, yes, but don't trouble about me, don't lift your veil for me, because I'm the one who should give encouragement in the midst of all this mourning with no death that you are witnessing.

THIRD SPINSTER: I would like to speak to them.

NURSE: It's better that you don't see them. Go out the other way!

THIRD SPINSTER: Perhaps, it is better. But if you need anything, if there's anything I can do, I am here.

NURSE: Now bad weather's coming! *(They hear the sound of the wind.)*

THIRD SPINSTER: The wind is rising!

NURSE: Yes. Perhaps it will rain.

(The Third Spinster exits.)

AUNT: *(Entering.)* With this wind blowing there won't be a single rose left. The cypresses on the circle are almost brushing the walls outside my room. It seems as if something wants to make the garden ugly so that we won't feel the pain of leaving it.

NURSE: It has never been so beautiful, so beautiful. Put on your coat. And this shawl...There, you are wrapped up well. *(She puts it round her.)* Now, when we arrive, I have a meal ready. A flan; like a golden carnation. *(The Nurse speaks in a voice clouded by deep emotion.) (A loud bang is heard.)*

AUNT: It's the door of the conservatory. Why didn't you close it?

NURSE: It won't close because of the damp.

AUNT: It will make that banging noise all night.

NURSE: Well we won't hear it...!

(The stage is in gentle evening shadow.)

AUNT: I will. I will hear it.

(Rosita appears. She is pale, dressed in white, with a coat covering her to the edge of her dress.)

NURSE: *(Courageously)* Let's go!

ROSITA: *(In a faint voice)* It's begun to rain. So there'll be no one on their balcony to watch us leave.

AUNT: It's for the best.

ROSITA: *(Swaying a little, she leans on a chair and falls into it, supported by the Nurse and the Aunt, who prevent her fainting completely.)*

ROSITA:

‘And when the night falls
It begins to fade.’

(They leave, and the stage remains empty after their exit. The door is heard banging. Suddenly the door to a balcony opens at the rear of the stage, and white curtains are seen blowing in the wind.)

Curtain