

Timothy Mather Spelman  
(1891-1970)

# **The Sea-Rovers**

an opera in three acts

*play by*

*Leolyn Louise Everett*

- libretto -

The characters are

<b>Sigismund</b> , a lord of Venice	bass
<b>Piero</b> , a young Venetian gentleman	tenor
<b>Deolus</b> , an astrologer in the service of Sigismund	tenor
<b>Giulio</b> , the captain of the enterprise	baritone
<b>Isabel</b> , the wife of Sigismund	mezzo soprano
<b>Bianca</b> , her companion	lyric soprano

The scene is in **Venice**, on the sea and on the small island of **Ardea**.

The period is the height of the **Renaissance**.

# Act One

*(The sea-wall terrace beside Sigismund's house. All the way along the back runs a white marble balustrade, broken slightly to the centre of stage left by a small square landing from which an unseen flight of steps, running flush with the wall, descends to the bay. Above and thro' this balustrade, one sees the vivid turquoise shine of the water. To the extreme left the undisturbed blueness of sky and sea is cut by the sharp point of one bright orange sail from a boat moored below the wall. To the right downstage, Sigismund's house its rosy stone elaborately decorated in white lace-like trceries and arabesques in the Byzantine style. Facing the stage an arched and carved doorway, whence three brief marble steps lead, between two small couchant stone lions, to the terrace. Above this doorway, a square marble balcony with a tall pointed window opening onto it. It is essential that the proportions of this building are just, the balcony must be at least fifteen feet from the stage level, the door at least eight feet high and the window leading onto the balcony seven. Two oblong stone benches right and left about half way upstage.)*

*Isabel and Bianca walking slowly to and fro, the former tall, dark and beautiful, twenty-five years old and in the flower of the superb maturity that that age gives the Italian woman, the latter slighter and younger, a little blonde woman with the marks of worry about her. Isabel wears a gown of vivid purple velvet square cut at her magnificent throat and revealing like a glove the splendid lines of her figure. Bianca's dress of a mouse-colour between brown and grey expresses to a nicety the tone of her mood. From the unseen beach below the voices of the sailors rise.)*

**Sailors**            While we wait, we wait  
                         at the harbour gate,  
                         our hearts are as low  
                         as the tides that flow  
                         to the dying moon  
                         in the month of June  
                         and we curse our fate  
                         while we wait, we wait!

                         But when we turn free  
                         to the boundless sea  
                         our hearts are as high  
                         as the birds that fly  
                         in the stormy sky,  
                         when we turn once free  
                         to the boundless sea,  
                         to the boundless sea!

**Isabel**            A reckless song that stirs the blood. These are the knaves my husband deals with?

**Bianca**            So I think. A rowd'ish lot of cut throats that I pray we need not sail with. To me anyway this seems a mad adventure.

**Isabel**            Those who win great stakes must play great hazards. This is not as daring as it seems. You know my lord. He is not prone to folly. He has here an excellent position and were loath to tempt a doubtful venture.

**Bianca**            He is sure that he can win the island?

**Isabel**            You have heard of this dare-devil that he buys, a man whose sword's for sale, a pirate whose bare name beggars the ocean of its ships, a man of courage dauntless, recklessness unmatched and brilliance of manoeuvre. Could you ask a better list a favours?

- Bianca** And you think, once won, that he can hold it?
- Isabel** 'Tis the day of private warfare. Once his own, he can commend him to the highest bidder, thus gaining protection for his need.
- Bianca** You should have been a statesman. It is very ill. You are a woman.
- Isabel** Very ill. I have felt my blood dance for battle, had my heart leap at some trick of statecraft as no man could ever make it leap, my soul cry out for reckless life and glory, anything but this, this death-in-living, this accursed routine of lack of passion. Do you think I am afraid to die? I'd take my life in my ten fingers, as a gift and toss it to dark Death with laughter, had I lived! If but one hour I had known my life, as I was meant to have it, would I fear to pay the highest cost-mark of my joy? But thus, thus, thus! Held down, confined, a thing so needless even to myself, so well dispensed with, and with the litany of days chanting the silly vapid circle round in mockery ...
- Bianca** You do not love your lord?
- Isabel** Love! What is love?
- Bianca** An ache --- they say.
- Isabel** (*sentimentally*) I had an ache once --- in my finger!
- Bianca** Fie! You laugh at worthy matters?
- Isabel** Would you that I wept?
- Bianca** Your mood is most capricious and severe and yet your blessings are as various! It had not seemed a woman could ask more than all the admiration and the praise that your strange beauty brings you meetly bound with honor such as is your wifely due as spouse of such a worthy man esteemed by all his proper fellow-citizens. You have whole hosts of lovers asking naught but a small curl or handclasp. Pray what more do you desire?
- Isabel** What do I desire! There is no limit to my wish. I could compass the world with flame and so set forth to fight for space and all the stars. --- I want to leave this all, to throw it by and go out, on the ocean, in the wind, to feel chance, in its living presence, by my side, reckoning or betraying ...
- Bianca** (*interrupting*) Ah, we will set forth too shortly. All I hope is that we are not murdered in our sleep.
- Isabel** (*jesting*) Our throats cut, ear to ear, with Spanish knives, our rings stripped from our nerveless fingers, our long hair short shorn like the pale sisters, sailors ropes made from the ragged tresses ...
- Bianca** (*putting her hands over her ears*) Isabel! In pity, stop! --- Look there, your lord and ... (*she pauses in doubt*)
- Isabel** (*drawing back with a sharp intake of breath*) Oh! Is this my bold swash-buckler?

*(Sigismund and Giulio having entered from the steps along the sea-wall, turn down-stage. Sigismund crosses to Isabel leaving Giulio a little way behind him.*

*Sigismund is about sixty, a thin upright old man with grey beard, arrogant but timid. He is richly but darkly dressed. Giulio is just over thirty, bronzed, brawny, his rather shabby elegance of dress carried, like everything else about him, with a swagger.)*

**Sigismund** Madame, I scarce thought to find you here.

**Isabel** *(held as if against her will and speaking with false ease)* I took the air, the house is most oppressive.

**Sigismund** You had best retire and make you ready. We will sail some time tomorrow.

**Isabel** Excellent, my lord! Then I will travel with you?

**Sigismund** Tho' your wish is not completely fitting, I have thought in this regard, that tho' it is misplaced bespeaks your eager wish to keep my side, for motives' sake I might be lenient and have arranged it *(he pauses expecting her withdrawal)*

**Isabel** *(without moving)* That was good of you.

**Sigismund** *(bowing)* A pleasant wifely gratitude. Farewell.

**Isabel** *(taking the initiative as a last resort)* May I not meet our ally in this quest?

*(Sigismund turning with very bad grace to Giulio who all this time has been examining the details of his own dress and the far horizon with an equal indifference toward all the persons present)*

**Sigismund** Giulio, this is my wife.

**Giulio** *(bowing over her hand after one vivid glance that sweeps her from head to foot)* Your wife.

*(Bianca nervously engaging Sigismund in conversation they slowly withdraw upstage left)*

**Isabel** *(to Giulio, speaking as with an involuntary eagerness)* Your name is known already to me since I have some taste for the high seas.

**Giulio** *(in astonishment)* You have!

**Isabel** I should have been a man.

**Giulio** *(bowing)* Ah never!

**Isabel** *(drawing back)* You are bold.

**Giulio** *(easily)* Your pardon but the winds and waves have taught me little else.

**Isabel** *(hastily)* I like it. I am not afraid of words.

**Giulio** Nor yet the sea?

**Isabel** *(laughing)* Nor yet the sea nor all the world. You see I have scant wisdom.

**Giulio** That is wisdom to the depth of all the world's philosophy, I think. Why should we be such misers of our lives that make a show of bounty?

**Isabel** Ah, that is my very thought! You live it but, you see, I by the curse on women needs must stand aside and merely think it. You must love your life for fear of losing while I hate mine for the length of living.

**Giulio** Yes, I love my life. Yours also, it will change, the world be yours as it is mine now.

- Isabel** (*impelled by some powers beyond her control*) You are full contented, to the very soul. You love?
- Giulio** The wind, the sky, the ocean, the mad light that leads one on to battle and the wars of heaven and earth that are so great the ship is but a bubble in the current; love the struggle of it, victory, the spray salt on my lips and in my eyes, the cool green marvel of the water when it lies more still than sleep, the shock of it that comes in leaping to its depths, the air, the sun warm on my shoulders --- and my ship, my love that I have chosen for my bride, the wife that's my companion, that's a warrior or a mere sailor with me, love her dressed in all her flags and flaunting them when forth she sallies down the harbour mirrored by the little lazy waves and love her more when she is tattered, when her sails are rent, her dear sides battered and she flings herself forth from a combat, victor! These my loves!
- Isabel** (*passionately*) That never will be rivalled?
- Giulio** (*easily*) Never. I am no way sentimental.
- Isabel** (*hastily*) No. Nor I. It is a wretched folly.
- Sigismund** (*crossing to her and speaking with manifest displeasure*) I would wish myself to have some converse with our guest.
- Isabel** (*tart beneath her seeming meekness*) If, in my passion for this quest, my lord, I loitered here unduly, keen to learn of notable adventure, 'tis not strange.
- Sigismund** (*coldly*) You have o'erpassed the time for women's talk.
- Isabel** And did but speak the folly of my sex the captain will bear witness.
- Sigismund** (*to Giulio*) If you come with me it will be better. (*He turns upstage left*)
- Giulio** (*bowing over Isabel's hand*) I will see your ladyship tomorrow.
- Isabel** (*jestingly*) On your ship, your thrice beloved vessel. Do you think in such a blissful state, you will find time to note my humble presence?
- Giulio** (*giving her the slow and full benefit of a glance in which annoyance mingles with and is overcome by some more ardent but less explicable motive*) As I think I would find time in Heaven or in Hell.
- Isabel** (*covering her pleasure with a jesting pretence of horror*) Calm such unchurchly words and pray the saints we may never see the latter!
- Sigismund** (*with utmost impatience*) If you please, this way.
- Isabel** Farewell.
- Giulio** Farewell.
- (*Sigismund and Giulio exit, as they entered by the flight of steps along the sea-wall. Bianca, who has remained upstage left, crossing down-stage right to Isabel*)
- Bianca** (*truly shocked*) Oh, Isabel, you do amaze me!
- Isabel** Do not be a fool!

**Bianca** Kind Virgin!

**Isabel** What about it? Is he not a very devil? Did you hear him say that he loved nothing but his ship? S'faith I'll teach him better!

**Bianca** Isabel, I bid do not affright me with such stormy words. You do affright me. For five minutes talk thus to leap up flame-lit and flame-inspired, as if your old wild theories were the truth.

**Isabel** My old wild theories. That is it. --- I have some dreadful madness in my veins. He woke the god and devil in me and they seem to leap together. --- I will teach him! Oh you great in coldness, is it strange? --- Did you not see that dark'ning glance that suddenly flashes to lightning --- just a certain way as natural as breathing and as marked as wholly of himself? --- To tenderness he would be like a child in tenderness but as a warrior, steel bound and forged both soul and body! --- There's a man who might have all a woman's heart for song --- if she were twice a triple fool --- most women are! --- He has the way to take it, just that smooth cool insolence and underneath what fire, I'd give my very soul to know --- I mean she would, the foolish woman. I am not a foolish woman tho' thus stirred by some great fascination. You have noticed it? You must have --- having eyes to see! --- And here we have that foolish Piero!

*(As Piero enters halfway upstage left she sinks down on the bench right.*

*Piero is a thin dark young dandy of her own age with a somewhat foppish attire and somewhat foppish manner abruptly at variance with a kind of haggard and sinister passion which occasionally reveals itself.)*

**Piero** *(kissing Isabel's hand)* Fortune smiles that I should see you.

**Isabel** *(curtly)* Not on me.

**Piero** You are unkind.

**Isabel** You should not trouble me.

**Piero** Can you not see my love that drives me? Have you not some pity for my love?

**Isabel** Your love? You do not know the meaning of the word!

**Piero** And you, can you not tell me what you think it is?

**Isabel** *(with sudden passion)* A fire that drinks the blood, death yet not death yet more intense than life --- Oh, naught, naught, naught.

**Piero** You have learned quickly.

**Isabel** *(pointing scornfully to a book which she has tossed aside)* Nothing! You can read my phrases in the poem there. It is a bit to your own liking, an intrigue in walled gardens, heavy with perfume.

**Piero** *(sentimentally)* An idyll.

**Isabel** Long but futile.

**Piero** Will you not grant me a moment's hearing?

**Isabel** Scarcely that. I prize my moments dearly.

**Piero**           *(taunted to anger)* Isabel, tempt not too long the jealousy that lies so quiet now ...

**Isabel**           *(interrupting)* Have I no honor? Pray what of my husband?

**Piero**           To his worthiness, his age and his position, reverence, this is his due and ours, no more. The rest --- I do repeat as I have said and said over and over to those pretty ears as obdurate as marble --- I repeat when passion speaks, it is a jest to give a man thus custom-chosen, pro and con, so much for dowry and for youth --- aged three at your betrothal, were you not? --- and he a score and ten and widowed --- excellent! To give a patriarchal spouse like this more than a lip-fidelity.

**Isabel**           *(mocking him)* And yet think of the sanctity the married state conveys, the dangers that a rash man runs who sticks the pins of intrigue in the side that our first mother sprang to being from.

**Piero**           *(growing more eloquent)* A formal marriage. The true marriage is a bond of love ...

**Isabel**           *(interrupting in a flash)* I'll never marry you!

**Piero**           Have you no pity? Love me!

**Isabel**           Does one say „Here, pretty Love, thou puppy dog“ and Love come to the whistle?

**Piero**           Never? Else had I loved a less lovely lady, far more kind.

**Isabel**           Take her your graces, in sweet mercy's name.

**Piero**           Pause for one moment to be pitiful!

**Isabel**           Why pitiful? Is life? Is death? Is love? Love that you mouth like some old ritual become so tawdry and mechanical invoked for both the toothache and the hope of a salvation in a better world, it is but babble! Why be pitiful? Is weariness not punishment enough for both of us and all of us? --- Farewell.

*(She and Bianca enter the house.)*

**Piero**           Thus for my love! And yet be warned: I will be venged for your disdainment. I will stay where you least want me when your blood leaps up to that which you deny. You dream to pass thro' life without some passion rising up to seize you by the throat and strangle you. 'Tis but a dream. Your youth is warm and red as mine that has made laughter for your play of cruelty and polish for your wit. Let it be so. Tomorrow, we set sail. And as I am lieutenant close behind your aged husband in this enterprise, if we can win this island that is torn and wearied out by constant civil wars, I stand forth, bettered in so many ways, my soul will scarcely know me. --- Misery of heart you gave me, anguish, bitterness, and hopeless longing; I will bring them back for your own use. --- The pirate and my lord in weighty conversation.

*(As Sigismund and Giulio, enter as before, Piero draws back a little.)*

**Giulio**           *(continuing)* Better come along the western side. There is a bay of easy shelter and long beach where we may land if you will have it. I suggest we head straight for the city and there take what little crafts we may. They have but two poor vessels fit for warfare.

*(They are now downstage center.)*

**Sigismund** I am not a fighting man, you know. *(He sees Piero and bows)* Good day.

**Giulio** I am a fighting man, thanks to be God who gave my soul this body.

**Sigismund** *(uncertainly)* Very well. You had best manage it. --- If you will call your men I'll give them drink.

**Giulio** Most willing! But they are a barely handsome lot.

*(Giulio goes upstage and calls over the balustrade.)*

**Piero** *(scornfully, to Sigismund)* A swaggerer.

**Sigismund** *(with some warmth, feeling that the wisdom of his choice of a leader is questioned)* A swaggerer whose name is feared by all the courts of Europe. *(relaxing)* In my younger days he would have been my hero.

**Piero** *(pointedly)* It is well that you grow older.

**Sigismund** *(angrily)* Do you dare ...

**Piero** *(hastily and meekly)* Ah no! 'Tis but a jest.

*(Giulio returns downstage. The sailors begin to enter from the beach. Sigismund goes to the door of the house and gives an order to the servant who appears there.)*

**Piero** *(to Giulio and to everybody, with suddenly effusive gaiety)* And now a song to make our throats more eager for the drink.

*(Sigismund joins them.)*

**Giulio** No need for that, I fancy, yet begin --- a ship ...

**Sigismund** Winds of the oceans, blow, blow!

**Chorus** Winds of the ocean blow!

**Sigismund** Tides of the ocean, flow, flow!

**Chorus** Tides of the ocean flow!

**Sigismund** The breeze is high,  
the white sails fly,  
on to my love of the sea!

**All** Tho' bye and bye  
we have to lie  
our white dead bones  
as still as stones  
under the waves we sailed so free  
it's --- on to my love of the sea!

**Piero** Sails of the vessel, fly, fly!

**Chorus** Sails of the vessel fly!

**Piero** Fronting the stormy sky, sky!

**Chorus** Fronting the stormy sky!

**Piero** I know no fear  
The seas' my dear  
On to my love of the sea!

**All** Tho' bye and bye  
we have to lie  
our white dead bones  
as still as stones  
under the waves we sailed so free  
it's --- on to my love of the sea!

*(Isabel and Bianca come out on the balcony unseen by the men.)*

**Giulio** Of the tavern, weep, weep!

**Chorus** Of the tavern weep!

**Giulio** Of the tavern, sleep, sleep!

**Chorus** Of the tavern sleep!

**Giulio** You're not my love  
There's one above  
On to my love of the sea!

**All** Tho' bye and bye  
we have to lie  
our white dead bones  
as still as stones  
under the waves we sailed so free  
it's --- on to my love of the sea!

**Isabel** Oh, I could almost hate him! --- Let us wait. His lovely lovely lady of the sea.

**All men** Tho' bye and bye  
we have to lie  
our white dead bones  
as still as stones  
under the waves we sailed so free  
it's --- on to my love of the sea!

*(As the servants come out of the house with flagons and goblets of wine, the curtain falls.)*

## Act Two

*(The deck of a ship. It is as if the bulk of the ship extended into the body of the audience but at angle so that the back of the figure-head of the vessel is not upstage center but upstage well to the left. This arrangement reveals a portion of the side of the ship on this left side both the inside and outside of this portion and on the right side the inside only. Thus the ground plan of the stage resembles a rounded V with the point upstage left. All around the sea should be visible. The acting stage is on three levels, A, the level of the footlights, B, the level of the major part of the ship as seen by the audience and C a small section of the actual prow. The level B, is reached by two full flights of steps, each comprehending a rise of not less than eight feet but the lift from level B to level C is of not more than four feet for which an ascent of seven small steps is sufficient. Owing to the position of the vessel, section A is a long narrow triangle, one side of which is formed by the footlights and one by the wall above which section B lies and with the apex downstage left. Of the two flights of steps which lead from A to B, being on the extreme opposite sides of the ship namely against the bulwarks, one is downstage left and one slightly upstage right. Between these stairs, there are just right and left of center, two doors with unseen steps which descend to the cabins, between these doors a narrow bench against the wall. In the middle of section B well upstage rises a great mast from which depend many ropes. If the height of the stage permits, it would be desirable to have a look-out on this mast as well as a huge square of brownish-yellow sail visible above the look-out but as it would have to be at least twenty four feet above the level of B, it would be better, in event of too little space to eliminate it rather than to have it made ridiculous because of a feeling of proximity and top-heaviness. The sail should be shown, at any rate, and if the look-out exists, there should be a man in it thro'out the act. This section, B, has coils of rope disposed at regular intervals along the bulwarks. The steps that rise from this level to level C are in the due center and directly behind the mast.*

*As the curtain rises, Isabel and Bianca are seated on the bench downstage A and above them, B, a group of sailors are singing. During the song, Isabel once or twice rises impatiently and then returns to her place. She wears a gown of aquamarine blue and small gold net head-dress, Bianca is dressed as before.)*

**A Sailor** I loved a black-eyed wench in Spain  
and left her with a tear --- oh!  
Yet to a German I was fain  
before another year --- oh!

**All Sailors** And all the year  
the ship's my dear,  
my dear, my dear, my dear --- oh!

**The Sailor** I loved a jade on Afric's strand  
of color very queer --- oh!  
And a gay lass of northern land  
who never knew a fear --- oh!

**All Sailors** And all the year  
the ship's my dear,  
my dear, my dear, my dear --- oh!

**The Sailor** I've travelled much about the world  
and loved maids far and near --- oh!  
Yet she who round my heart is curled  
is ever she who's here --- oh!

**All Sailors** And all the year  
the ship's my dear,  
my dear, my dear, my dear --- oh!

*(The group breaks up, some of the men coming down the steps and exiting right but most of them busying themselves with tasks on the upper levels.)*

**Isabel** So do they always sing: light love, light love, the give and take, the passing and return to the great sea that loves them not. --- Have you marked Giulio? He was silent yesterday when all the rest were merry.

**Bianca** Isabel, are you then mad? Have you no eyes that thus you leap unto destruction?

**Isabel** Yes, to doom, thrice joyous in its anguish! I would sell my deathless soul to have him. I am mad --- that was the word --- or am I sane at last? It does not matter! I have grown the height to touch this minute: that is everything. --- And yet --- to eat your heart, to eat your heart, it chokes you yet the hunger drives! --- Have you not marked it with him? Ah sweet Christ! I thought he turned away today to hide his eyes. You must have seen, Bianca!

**Bianca** I have seen too much at best.

**Isabel** Too much! The meagreness, the little prayerful hopeful nothingness, starvation rations! --- Do you life your brows at it? My lord? Position? Can't you see that I would take all service that the world calls honour in one twisted coil of gold that had been crowns for unborn dynasties and fling it in the ocean with my soul if he might love me, love me! --- Hear the wind wail in the rigging: 'tis my soul that sweeps untamed and tameless. Mark the sea that sweeps beneath us. Can you bind it? Can you hold its wild infinity of waves that leap one on another? They are my desires upon the ocean of my heart. --- No more!

*(She breaks off as Sigismund, Deolus and Giulio enter right.)*

**Bianca** Your lord is with him.

*(Giulio crosses as for a courtesy performed with some unwillingness, to Isabel and Bianca. Sigismund and Deolus remaining apart, the latter continuing the remarks that he has been making. He is a meagre fox-like man of indeterminate middle-age and affects in his dress a modified and tactful use of the signs and symbols of his trade.)*

**Sigismund** *(interrupting, as if repeating)* Tho' he said the stars were bright at present, a pale cloud enfolds some phases of the future ...

**Deolus** *(soothingly)* Let my lord leave it to me. I hear that in this place we go there are some men who every night hold certain converse with the orbs on high. *(His voice dropping lower, they continue to converse unheard.)*

**Isabel** *(gaily to Giulio)* This land to eastward! Are we drawing near the country of desire?

**Giulio** *(who throughout this scene shows obviously the struggle within himself in marked contrast to her changes from daring ease to impassioned eagerness)* 'Ere the night we will see battle. You are not afraid?

**Isabel** Afraid!

**Sigismund** *(overhearing this exclamation says over his shoulder to Giulio)* She scorns it. She is more a man than woman, I am fearful. *(He resumes his conversation with Deolus.)*

**Isabel** *(to Giulio)* Once you said it pleased you I was not a man.

**Giulio** *(shortly)* That day we were more far from battle!

**Isabel** Do you doubt that I have courage?

**Giulio** Never. Yet 'tis hard that you must know the danger and the rage of a sea-battle.

**Isabel** (*gravely*) I have known no change in my first impulse save its growth. My choice of all the world were here.

**Giulio** (*ungraciously*) Your recklessness thus meets your recklessness.

**Isabel** (*smiling*) And thus ...?

**Giulio** And thus we needs must make a semblance of content with the performance.

**Isabel** (*very gaily*) Oh ungallant one! There was a chance for gracious charming speech.

**Giulio** (*his pain and a bitter unexpected contempt for himself vibrating thro' the words*) It were unnatural to me. I am a fellow of the sea, a follower and cruiser of the ocean, who has taught but little gentleness.

**Isabel** (*softly*) You feel it so? I would have claimed her the antithesis because she is a splendid, terrible, wise teacher, comprehending, silent, cold but to the glance. I called the waves desires, desires of the hot heart that ever rise to being from the depths.

**Giulio** (*drawing a great breath*) A fantasy! (*He turns to Sigismund, interrupting, careless of doing so, his talk with Deolus*) We make swift speed. If but the wind holds fair within an hour, the towers of the town will break the sky.

**Sigismund** I do mislike your plan of battle. Let us enter quietly ...

**Giulio** (*interrupting fiercely*) And fail! 'Twill be but failure! I have fought for many men beside myself. You are, confessed, no fighter. We have come so far with understanding of this thing. If now your blood grows thin we lose it all, which means perhaps, quick death for all of us; for me, more loss, my reputation but, at worst, the thing itself, to fail, --- so cowardly, so cheap, so weak a failure!

**Isabel** (*decidedly*) Good my lord, lift up your head. You would attempt and now you needs must do.

**Sigismund** (*unwillingly and with irritation*) Enough. I like it not and yet, so pinched, admit necessity. (*to Isabel*) Hushing your scepticism for the sake of wifely duty --- least that you can do --- if you must be a sceptic, join me now within my cabin, where we are to see how magic charts that Deolus has made.

(*He summons Deolus and the three descend by the door right. Giulio bowing and going forward onto level B, Bianca is thus left alone. She stands clasping and unclasping her hands.*)

**Bianca** This is beyond the worst that I had feared of all the many fears I had, when we sailed on this mad adventure, left the calm of proper ordered life to seek the wild existence of the boundless seas. Alas, to meet a bloody or a watery death is fit for rowd'ish men but ill accords to ladies' gentle training. (*She sits down on the bench and meditates.*) Deolus, prowls round to find the secrets of the stars, by spying, not by searching, Isabel said yesterday. He is the very tool of my lord Sigismund who all the time deceives himself with fear that someone else deceives him. Yet she will not hear me say, for her contempt is high and dangerous, next to the hate of love that Piero has the flame of this man's anger for her burns because she knows his practises and shakes the power that he wields above her lord.

(*Enter Deolus as he exited. Looking around and seeing Bianca alone he approchaes eagerly.*)

**Deolus** I have not seen you for a moment's talk since we left Venice. Lady Isabel is so absorbed in all these new affairs, with you or her one must ask audience, 'ere one can have an instant. Is't not so?

**Bianca** 'Tis scarcely as extreme as that!

**Deolus** You find this pirate captain splendid company. Is it not so?

**Bianca** So much depends on all that touches this event, that we, of course, are most desirous of knowing what is definitely planned.

**Deolus** It is my thought that my lord Piero grows more dark in doubt as you --- as Lady Isabel at least grows bright in pleasure of adventuring. Think you he fears the outcome?

**Bianca** You can tell better than I. I had not noticed it. --- Pray pardon me. The lady Isabel will wish me shortly.

**Deolus** Tell her ladyship I wait upon her slightest wish.

**Bianca** Farewell.

*(She exits by the door right. Enter Piero from the door left. He is distraught and in a bad temper. As he would pass downstage right, Deolus, bowing, intercepts him.)*

**Deolus** My lord is occupied.

**Piero** *(curtly)* As you observe.

**Deolus** *(smoothly)* Pardon the interruption, if I take the scanty leisure that your labours leave. Seeing you bowed with unaccustomed care, I, in some sort physician to the mind, proffer my services.

**Piero** You over-step. I do not need a doctor, if I see the larger issues that you miss, no need that your small wisdom should obtrude itself.

**Deolus** My lord is scornful. Yet that we should stand in friendship for this hazardous emprise were excellent for both.

**Piero** That tongue of yours is so accustomed to long verbiage of meaningless intent, you have no choice but to insinuate so hazily your hints are valueless.

**Deolus** Then you refuse?

**Piero** *(loftily)* I neither take nor leave.

**Deolus** *(with growing anger)* Yet it were well, if you could eat that choking pride of yours that we were allies and not enemies.

**Piero** I can protect myself. Go wield your power upon the dotard.

**Deolus** 'Tis an ugly name.

**Piero** Quote it and I'll deny it in your teeth. You are not yet a king.

**Deolus** *(calmly, his self-control completely regained)* Your final word?

**Piero** My final word.

**Deolus** Peace to you and farewell! I leave the larger issues in your hand and the more sinister. Myself I go out to the prow where, in the solitude of sea and sky, even in the day I am close to the changeless wisdom of the stars.

*(He mounts the stairs left, crosses level B, mounts the steps thence to level C and, in the prow where he places himself gazing out, is invisible to those below.)*

**Piero** The devil take him for a meddling fool! He thinks that he can cross me for his whim or use me for his ends, can make me stoop to help or harm on possibility of gain or loss. To buy his services in all their secrecy upon the chance that our arch-enemy, my fatal love, should let herself be played on by a man that she, so lavish and intense in hates, in scorn, deigns not to hate, to price and buy his petty craft and tortuous intrigue that in my triumph he may get his wage! A pandar! Faugh! I will not loose to him one hound of all the pack of my desires that he may poison it for his design.

*(Enter Isabel and Bianca from the door right. Bianca obviously has been remonstrating but ceases speaking as soon as she sees Piero)*

**Isabel** *(to Piero)* My lord desires your presence.

**Piero** Would that you desired one word of warning or despair!

**Isabel** What, changed from love so quickly?

**Piero** Love's poor voice was not so loud that it could reach your ears yet if its silence should afflict your heart, your cold and cruel heart, from its sad tomb love might arise.

**Isabel** *(more gently)* Pray for its blest repose. And so begone. My lord is loath to wait.

*(Exit Piero by the door right.)*

**Bianca** *(desperately)* But hear me! Hear me! Are you turned to stone or turned to fire that words articulate no longer reach you?

**Isabel** Oh, I am in haste.

**Bianca** But hear me! Hear me! Deolus has power that grows with every day he serves your lord.

**Isabel** Tell me where Giulio is.

**Bianca** There.

**Isabel** Near it grows. Would it be better if the plan should fail and we all die together?

**Bianca** Isabel, they stand as rivals not for your delight, for your destruction! Will you understand?

**Isabel** Sigismund's slave and Piero. Let it go. They are but scheming sycophants. --- Am I at the one splendid moment of my life, when the one rapture I have ever known or ever will know, lies before me, when the culmination of these wretched years is a desire greater than the world --- Am I not mad with suffering enough? I only am a woman! --- If he falls --- I am afraid --- you understand --- afraid! I want to drag a single joy from life before I die! --- Go, only go! I have one little minute!

*(With a gesture of despair Bianca exits by the door right. As Isabel mounts the steps right, to where Giulio is standing beside the right bulwarks on level B, the last of the sailors descends by the stairs left and exits. Thus Giulio and Isabel are alone on the stage except for Deolus, unseen by them, in the prow.)*

**Isabel** As the hour is gone, pray show me where the towers stand.

**Giulio** *(turning with a start and then pointing)* To left.

**Isabel** Those little boats are fishers? They will fly back to the harbour as we come.

**Giulio** You see a black spot there? The fortress. Just below we take our stand. The walls are old.

**Isabel** We will use engines on them?

**Giulio** *(nodding)* They will crumble lest I have forgot. I sailed here once.

**Isabel** You have sailed many places and, your songs all say loved once in every place.

**Giulio** I have no time for love.

**Isabel** No time?

**Giulio** I am a warrior. My life is touch and go with death, as now I wait approach and bend my thoughts upon the lead of my attack.

**Isabel** Yet love is sweet.

**Giulio** *(passionately)* War is a lovely lady, a great queen of midnight eyes, with midnight hair entwined with all the gold of glory, with red robes of deadly dripping crimson and great arms wide open to the world. See, she stands high upon the fortress and I turn into her loved embrace.

*(They are very near the harbour. There is the sound of hurrying and growing tumult of voices both on the ship and on the shore. It is at this point that Deolus, finding his position too exposed, creeps down-stage left and exits still unseen by Giulio and Isabel. As Giulio turns, Isabel catches his arm.)*

**Isabel** And she is all? You have a thought of no one else?

**Giulio** *(in a whisper)* Ah God! *(He swings round, confronting her. For a long moment, they stand looking into each other's eyes. Then he catches her in his arms crushing her mouth to his in a long kiss.)*

**Isabel** 'Tis true that I am yours, all yours, before you go. You love me?

**Giulio** Love you! Past what love can be, I love you. I am mad with love of you. To battle! --- I'll return --- into your arms!

**Isabel** I wait for you.

*(She crosses downstage by the stairs right. The sailors rush up onto level B. A signal flag is raised.)*

**Isabel** I wait for you. *(She sinks down on the bench between the doors.)* I wait ...

*(The scene ends in uproar.)*

# Act three

## Scene One

*(The hall in the palace of Ardea. About eight feet from the foot-lights and parallel to them three shallow steps run all the way across the stage. These give on the great hall itself which is separated from the lower space in front by six great columns. This hall hung with tapestries and lighted by great gold candelabras, is, at the time that the curtain rises, crowded with those members of the populace, who desire to be the courtiers of the new ruler. The scene is gay, animated, insincere but wholly unconscious of any unpleasant elements, Sigismund is enjoying himself to the full. With the gold brocade of his dress he has put on the pomposity of manner which he considered fitting for one of his position. He and Isabel stand between the second and third pillars left, she is in a gown of black embroidered in gold and with her arms full of red roses. They are greeting the townspeople, as the curtain rises. The confused murmur of conversation gives place to a hush preceeding Sigismund's speech.)*

**Sigismund** My loyal subjects --- I will use the name that you yourselves have given to yourselves, so much has come and gone in so few days that we stand breathless, you and I alike before a future opening so fair as we recall with reminiscent fear the storm that hemmed us in. When I appeared on the horizon of your smiling seas however much I wished your benefits my guise was warlike. Let me once again repeat, that tho' I came to soothe and heal the civil strifes that racked you, neither I nor the poor least of all my followers, however much we hoped for such a deed, imagined you would fling your swords away and offer homage to a mightiness whose pride is your defense: foresightedness like this, is truest wisdom. By its use you have been spared much trouble, even we, your lords are spared the natural distress of noble motives badly understood. So be it. I depart for your own sake, part to return, in such security of power and protection that the world will speak in envy and in praise the name of Ardea, our lovely Ardea.

*(Deolus enters downstage left. Sigismund, seeing him, turns away leaving Isabel doing the honours and comes down the steps. He and Deolus cross right and, by the second column from that side, converse together.)*

**Deolus** My lord, a message for your private ears. All preparations are complete; the fleet stands ready for the sailing and the tide approaches turning point yet, 'ere you go, list to a prophecy a witch who died in the young hours of morning left you, „Watch your love and home tonight if you would have a love and home tomorrow.“

**Sigismund** Who was she?

**Deolus** A girl who saw the future in a glass. One crazed with madness who had yet a power beyond the common mind of man. The words were her last message. Scarcely done, she died whereat the sickly moon that sought the west waxed brighter and so vanished and the dogs set up a fearful howling everywhere.

**Sigismund** And so she died? I do not like your tale.

**Deolus** Believe me, in the telling it has lost half of its horror. Had you seen the thing, the fall to death while yet the words shook forth upon her lips, you would have liked it less.

**Sigismund** What do you think? What is your sorcery? What say the stars?

**Deolus** Dare I lift up my voice even to whisper that the Duchess is not cold as she appears? The cloudy skies long time have been obscured by weeping mists and your bright planet has two little orbs like enemies beside it that make pale its ancient splendour ...

**Sigismund** *(interrupting)* God! Why must you wait 'till this last minute for such evil words?

**Deolus** This is the crucial moment, this the night that shall reveal all you desire.

**Sigismund** But why ...

**Deolus** (*interrupting meekly but insistently*) Make the appearance of departure. If tomorrow proves today is naught you can make double speed away from here, heart-whole that you have tested her fidelity not wrought-upon and tried as you have been. What boots delay for such security?

**Sigismund** Security! No creature is secure, yourself has said it half a hundred times.

**Deolus** And yet precaution is the wise man's sword. It is my counsel --- if you heed the stars and my devotion to yourself and house --- that you go thro' the semblance of farewell mounting the vessel that you may again descend to some sequestered spot where you and I may wait the middle night, when all these festive folk have reeled them home and in the general silence we can seek your palace room un-noticed.

**Sigismund** 'Tis too swift, too sudden in decision to be well. I should have known before.

**Deolus** 'Tis not too late if we ...

**Sigismund** (*interrupting*) So be it. Doubt is mine that she ... (*he breaks off*) Yes I will meet you, go. See that the fleet leaves promptly and careful plans whereby there is no hint of doubt that, at the dawn, it meets up, to protect us on our way. This is a great commission, guard it well.

**Deolus** My interest is now so wholly yours that e'en the stars are servants to your fame.

*(Deolus exiting left as he entered, Sigismund returns to his place beside Isabel)*

**Sigismund** This is the moment of farewell. Goodbye, my loving wife, my kindly friends. Let not remembrance fail me since I bear the thought of all of you so closely.

**Isabel** (*making a deep curtsy*) Sir, goodbye.

**Sigismund** You always were as cold as this. Have you no stir of passion in you?

**Isabel** Of what use were stir of passion to my high estate? I wish your mission well. I wish you well in all this growth of noble offices that fills your heart with pleasure and with pride. Is it sufficient?

**Sigismund** Yes, it will suffice.

*(As he turns to leave, he looks around for Deolus)*

**Sigismund** (*muttering to himself*) Now I will call him. I will go. No need to change. He's over-anxious for my sake.

*(He fails to find him and exits, the courtiers crowding around him and following him out. Isabel stands watching them for a moment and then comes downstage moving restlessly to and fro. The crowd is still exiting half-way upstage left when Piero enters upstage right. He comes down quickly and quietly but instead of descending the steps, conceals himself behind the third column from the right.*

*There is a little pause.*

*Giulio enters upstage right as Piero did. He gives a hasty glance round but fails to see Piero and comes eagerly downstage to where Isabel is awaiting him. She flings her roses down and the steps and he takes her in his arms.)*

**Isabel** Ah but I thought that you would never come!

**Giulio** Piero has dogged me all day long, half-seen, being inexpert in this latest role.

**Isabel** What does he want?

**Giulio** A lever. --- Isabel, how long will you compel me to stand by topping a boodless war by a romance ill-suited to the player?

**Isabel** Is it so? I shall not tax your patience, mighty one! --- But what of Piero?

**Giulio** Oh, I shook him off now, by the palace. --- Sigismund has gone?

**Isabel** Did you not hear the shouting as he passed?

**Giulio** I do not like this business. I would take and fling you on my vessel, steal yourself as you have ta'en my soul. The world is wide of undiscovered countries, of great seas unknown. --- I hold you thus! --- I'll take you yet.

**Isabel** Why not? Am I not ready? Wherefore play at intrigue? I will leave him when you wish. You know, dear heart, that I would leave the world and follow you, contented to the soul. Yet if you left me --- do you understand what it would mean? The stars would fall, the sky become a thing of horror, the great sea naught but a means of death, the world a farce, a cruel jest of God's --- I love you --- oh

**Giulio** I love you also, love you past the dream of life and fear of death. Tonight?

**Isabel** At last! The secret staircase to my room. You know the entrance near the sea, half overgrown with sand-weeds great as trees, half fallen in yet passable and, dearest ...

**Giulio** Thus tonight I come to you. Tomorrow?

**Isabel** I will go wherever you desire, anywhere --- And yet, just once come to me. Let the gift, of making yours what is already yours, be wholly mine.

**Giulio** 'Till midnight.

**Isabel** Oh you take time's swiftness with you leaving only slow and weary hours that weep for your return.

*(They kiss and part, Giulio exiting upstage right as he entered, Isabel downstage left. When they have gone, Piero steps out from behind the column and comes downstage center. As he stands smiling slightly and yet gnawing his lower lip as one whose pleasure is marred by pain, the curtain falls.)*

# Act Three

## Scene Two

*(Isabel's room, midnight. A great open casement window to the right thro' which one sees the moonlit ocean. A door from the outer hall downstage left, a door to other rooms halfway upstage left, upstage due center, the secret door in the panelling thro' which Giulio is to enter. To the left a divan, to the right, not too near the window, a large carved table with a candelabra on it and arm-chairs at either end.*

*As the curtain rises, Isabel turns, replacing the silver mirror that she has lifted from the table. She wears a gorgeous gown of glittering white and has diamonds at her throat and in her dark hair.*

*Bianca, who turns from looking out of the window back into the room and crosses to Isabel as she speaks, is in black.)*

**Isabel** Am I not lovely? Oh I never wished beauty as I do now! The ancient queens, who by a glance of eyes more wonderful than all the glories of the sky and sea, held adoration, I'd out-rival, show beyond, above! --- Am I not beautiful?

**Bianca** You are unwise beyond all things in this, seeking destruction in the way you go.

**Isabel** Unwise! Would you talk wisdom to me now? I have no instant for it, know no thing in earth or heaven save that I am I, that he is he and that he comes to me! That he is coming! Coming! --- Hear the song up from the water. --- They are revellers that play at love.

**Chorus** Like to the sea, the mystery of my heart  
Lay misty in my life's enfolding night;  
Like to the moon, thy love has shone thereon  
And waked the darkness into silver light.

**Single voice** Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!  
This night at least is ours. The wind blows free.  
Take we our boat and set us forth to sea.  
Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!

**Isabel** This is the tune to all my love, the sea, the mystery and the splendour of the sea, the wonder and the glory of the sea.

**Bianca** Not yet the terror of it, not the wide sweep of its desolation.

**Isabel** *(lightly)* Augurer. Of evil, silence, silence! 'Tis my love my second love because his second love, if first, how I should hate it! *(gravely)* I've no fear. I love it, love it. At the very end I do not even dread its sleep --- but hark!

**Chorus** The gardens of the world lie all asleep,  
Close flooded with the perfume of their flowers.  
The ocean only waits for thee and me,  
Come forth and spend the midnight's silver hours.

**Single voice** Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!  
This night at least is ours. The wind blows free.

**Chorus** Take we our boat and set us forth to sea  
Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!

**Isabel** Oh thus! --- But still he comes not! --- Do you hear no sound? --- 'Tis after midnight! --- What is that?

*(The secret door to the passage is flung open and Giulio, terribly wounded, stumbles into the room.)*

**Giulio** Have you betrayed me?

**Isabel** Oh my God! You are hurt, wounded --- thus --- oh, gently!

*(She helps him as he staggers toward the divan speaking to Bianca as she does so.)*

**Isabel** Cloths, some cloths, some water ...

*(Bianca exits into the bedroom.)*

**Isabel** Dearest --- dearest ...

**Giulio** I am done. I never should have come here, should have led the life that I was meant for and so died in battle, in the sunshine, like a man --- not murdered in the dark.

**Isabel** Who did this thing?

**Giulio** Piero. He's finished, --- dead outside ...

*(Bianca comes back with the cloths and the water. Isabel kneels beside Giulio and tries to cleanse and to stanch the wound.)*

**Giulio** *(with sudden suspicion)* He was there in the passage as he knew the way of custom.

**Isabel** *(brokenly)* Do not say it --- do not say ... *(She breaks off, her love and her fear obliterating all else.)* Oh curse me if you will, but lift your head as you did lift it! Tell me you will go, you hate me, loathe me, only you will live, live for the ocean that you loved, 'ere me, live for the joy of living, for the joy of air and battle, for the sun, the blood of strength that fills your veins. You are too great to have this petty wound, this dagger-thrust a thing so vital! It has almost ceased to bleed. 'Twill heal and you will live. Lift up your head!

**Giulio** Do you then love me?

**Isabel** *(her voice almost inaudible)* Do I love my thought of God, my hope of peace, my soul? Love you?

**Giulio** So then it is not failure. I would change no heart-beat of it. *(He starts up in sudden delirium)* Oh, they storm! Do you hear cannon? Up, my men! To south, a growing wind that speaks of storm and there the ship we wish! --- To battle! --- Do you fear this little tempest? Why, it is the soul of the great sea, my sweetheart, her own way of wooing! There! The lightning! Draw your sail! Hold to your rudder! Now it comes in truth --- the tempest --- waves as white as women's tears --- the anger of the sea! *(He sinks down)*

**Isabel** My love! My love!

**Giulio** *(reviving)* Is this the end? I should not finish thus! Your arms! --- This is my Heaven 'ere my death.

**Isabel** Oh rouse yourself! You are my life, my life make the great effort for me. --- Giulio!

**Giulio** Live for you! Yes, for you! To let this thing, this wound cut off my glory? As you say, I am too great. Tomorrow --- we will go --- tomorrow ... *(He has struggled to his feet again and now he falls forward, dead before he strikes the floor.)*

**Chorus** Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!  
This night at least is ours. The wind blows free  
Take we our boat and set us forth to sea.  
Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!

**Isabel** *(with perfect calm)* Close the window. You may go.

**Bianca** *(after shutting the window stands shaking with fear)* Isabel!

*(There is a sudden clangor in the hallway.)*

**Isabel** *(with sudden anger)* More disturbance! Who is here?

*(The door downstage left is wrenched open and Sigismund enters followed by Deolus.)*

**Isabel** My husband. You have come too late. He is just dead.

**Sigismund** *(in astonishment at this baffling and inexplicable creature, woman)* You killed him?

**Isabel** *(quietly)* I might take my life, might kill my soul, not him.

**Sigismund** What does this mean?

**Bianca** A tragedy, my lord ...

**Isabel** *(interrupting)* No more. I loved this man. He was a hero glorious beyond the earth that lost him. Had he lived we would have gone, tomorrow, forth to sea, together and so left you. Now we can but seek another ocean.

**Bianca** Piero lies dead in the passage, killed by him.

**Isabel** *(slowly)* I wish I might have killed him.

**Bianca** Isabel!

**Isabel** *(choking just a little)* My loss was so much greater.

**Sigismund** *(to Deolus, pointing to the body of Giulio)* Take him.

**Isabel** *(stopping him with a gesture)* No. Let be. More business shortly.

**Sigismund** *(suddenly suspicious of her intention)* Do you mean ...

**Isabel** *(easily)* The one dead in the passage.

**Sigismund** *(relieved)* Certainly.

**Isabel** *(crossing to the window, opening it and standing beside it, thereby putting the table between her and the others)* Look out. What glory of white moonlight. He will have a pleasant passage.

**Bianca** Isabel!

**Isabel**            *(dreamily)* The sea is like a mirror.

**Sigismund**      I don't understand.

**Isabel**            You never will. --- Will you and Deolus seek Piero out and bring him here? Perchance he may be breathing yet.

*(As Sigismund and Deolus exit into the passage way, she lifts Giulio's dagger from the table, motioning Bianca away with a fierce gesture.)*

**Isabel**            Stand back! Do you think I would play with death that have such call of speed upon me? *(She stabs herself)*

**Bianca**            *(screaming)* Oh, my lord! My Lord! Lord Sigismund! Come quickly! Help me --- help...

*(As she runs to the open door that leads to the passage, Sigismund and Deolus enter hastily therefrom. Isabel, meanwhile has painfully crossed the room and now stands just above where Giulio lies, supporting herself by the table.*

*Below a single voice sings to the soft murmur of the accompaniment of the chorus, the music growing fainter and fainter as the singers move away, so that the last line is scarcely more than a breath)*

**Single voice**    Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!  
This night at least is ours. The wind blows free.  
Take we our boat and set us forth to sea.  
Oh love of all my life, come forth to me!

**Isabel**            *(faintly)* Listen! You hear his greeting. In the dark beside the shore, he's waiting. We will turn to the wide ocean as we wished. No fear --- we are together and the moon ... *(She breaks off, opening her arms, her face illuminated)* My love!

*(As she falls forward to the floor beside Giulio, the curtain descends)*

## **End of the Play**