

A DRAMA

(Pages taken from a book of memories.)

The greatest monster is jealousy.
Calderón

Scene I

The sea. Venice in the background. Jacob and Rafael in a gondola.

Jacob. Are you hurt?

Rafael. No... It's nothing... just a scratch. When I fell, he hit me one more time, but not very hard. And how is he doing?

Jacob. His godparents are taking him away in a gondola; I don't know where, perhaps to his house.

Rafael. Did he say anything when they put him in the gondola?

Jacob. No.

Rafael. Maybe he was dead.

Jacob. Or perhaps he fainted.

Rafael. If he is dead, his father will undoubtedly want some terrible revenge.

Jacob. In any case, you'd better leave Venice before it gets light, and then get out of Italy as soon as you have the chance.

Rafael. Before it gets light!... But that will be in less than an hour.

Jacob. Yes, and that's why I think what you did was crazy.

Rafael. Crazy! I tried to kill a man because of her, one whom I hated because of her; because of her, I have put the lives of our Brothers in danger, all those who are associated with our cause...; because of her I left my mother sad and alone, so that she was exposed to the anger of my enemies...; I may lose my home and my country forever...; and you want me to leave without telling her goodbye?

Jacob. Since there is nothing more worthless than advice that will never be followed, I will say nothing more to oppose what you say; but that doesn't change the fact that I still think it was crazy, or a reckless act, which amounts to the same thing.

Rafael. Drop the oars...; here we are. (*Rafael gets out of the gondola.*) Will you wait for me here?

Jacob. Yes, I'll wait. But listen to me for a moment... When you see it's getting light, just remember that, if the sun shines on us here, it will not only cost you your head, but mine as well... (*Rafael walks away.*) That's the only way he can leave that woman, who is driving him mad, if he wants to leave safely. (*Sitting down again in the gondola, while he mutters to himself...*) Ah, love! If only there were no jealousy, this would be a paradise without a serpent.

Scene II

The same people: Rafael gets into the gondola. It is just starting to get light.

Jacob. Okay that's good, it hasn't gotten light yet, and you are already back. You kept your word.

Rafael. Yes, I was thinking of you.

Jacob. I know that.

Rafael. And now what do we do?

Jacob. Keep our mouths shut, grab the oars again, and get out of here as quick as we can. But, wait!... It looks like you might have a fever...; what about that wound?... You told me it was nothing, that you hardly felt it...

Rafael. Now it's bothering me a little.

Jacob. Why didn't you tell me! Put down that oar, and lay down and rest.

Rafael. No, I'm all right.

Jacob. You say you're all right!... Oh, now I understand; you want to take a last look at the place where she lives...

Rafael. I love her so much!

Jacob. What about her? How does she feel?

Rafael. She... has promised she would wait for me... until I was able to come back.

Jacob. And if you couldn't come back for several years?

Rafael. She would wait until she dies..., that's what she promised.

Jacob. Do you think she meant it?

Rafael. Can you lie, while you're crying?

Jacob. People can lie whenever they want.

Rafael. Can you swear to do something based on the memory of your father, and then not do it?

Jacob. You can even swear in the name of God.

Rafael. Bah! You don't believe in anything.

Jacob. On the contrary; I believe in everything.

Scene III

The basement of a tavern. Jacob and some other young men, who are all wearing masks, are drinking around a table, on which you can see an unsheathed dagger. In a corner, there is another masked man, who is drinking by himself.

Jacob. Are all the Brothers here? (*Directing a nervous glance at the masked men?*)

1st Mask. Yes, every one. The tavern owner won't let anyone enter the cave, unless they repeat the right words, and those words are known only by the Brothers.

2nd Mask. And what is the purpose of this meeting?

Jacob. To decide which one of us is going to kill one of our enemies.

3rd Mask. And what is the reason he should be killed?

Jacob. He should die... because he broke a solemn promise he made, before fighting with one of our Brothers...; because he has made our Brother's mother suffer, who may have already died in prison...; because he is going to marry an Italian, and he is German.

3rd Mask. And what about her?

Jacob. She'll live... because the only one of us who has the right to kill her is not here. (*The masked man, who is sitting by himself, gets up and grabs the dagger that is lying on the table, before removing his mask.*)

Rafael. She will die.

The others. Rafael!...

Rafael. Tonight there is a dance in the Doria Palace: anyone who disguises himself like one of them, can enter the hall like everyone else... Which one of you will do that?

Jacob. I will.

Rafael. But aren't you one they will suspect?

Jacob. No more than anyone else...; but how are we going to do it, at a dance where everyone is disguised?

Rafael. I found out that she is going to be there, and how she will be dressed.

Jacob. Have you really thought about all this?

Rafael. While you had doubts about the truth of certain vows that were made, I made another... I made it only in my mind... so we will have to see if I am actually able to fulfill it... Let's go to the Doria Palace.

Jacob. To the Palace.

Scene IV

A street in Venice. Bautista is dozing, resting in his gondola that is rocking while tied to a dock. Julia is covered with a dark cloak.

Julia. Bautista.

Bautista. Lady...

Julia. Do you know where Rafael is?

Bautista. Rafael is in Paris.

Julia. No he's not; I wrote to him there, and he didn't answer.

Bautista. Well then...

Julia. You know where he is.

Bautista. And why would I know that?

Julia. Because you're a member of the Venetian Brotherhood.

Bautista. I?

Julia. Do you think I'm going to reveal that?... The Brothers know each other by means of some mysterious signs; you can see that this letter gets to Rafael better than anyone else... Keep in mind that it is very important to him... a great deal depends on it... perhaps even his life. I am not going to offer you anything, because then I know you wouldn't do it. (Julia *disappears*.)

Bautista. (*He hesitates for a moment, while he looks at the letter he is holding in his hands.*) There is no doubt: that woman knows me. Rafael, Rafael! I have to admit that what she is saying is true, but... bah!..., the Brothers will have to decide.

Scene V

A room in the Doria Palace. Julia and her mother are seated with some other women on one side. Rafael, Jacob, and some others, are wearing disguises. Some couples are ready to begin dancing. The orchestra is playing the prelude to a waltz.

Rafael. (*Moving over to Julia.*) Masked lady... may I have this dance?

Julia. (*Surprised.*) That voice... it sounds like..., but no, that's not possible.

Rafael. Lady. The prelude is over and the waltz is beginning. How am I to interpret this silence?

Julia. (*My God! Can it be him?*) Here, take this... (*She leaves the bouquet and her fan in her mother's lap.*) Just one round then, only one. (*They start dancing and mix with the crowd. The mother turns to the other women who are sitting by her side.*)

The Mother. Oh, these women!... just now anyone would have thought she was going to perish with emotion: all this crying and moaning before she accepts the husband she's been allocated... Now she's dancing...! Oh, who's going to pay attention to the tears of little girls?... (*Rafael and Julia pass by again.*)

Rafael. Is it true that you are going to be married?

Julia. Yes, it's true. (*They move away until they are lost in the crowd again.*)

The Mother. What? She said just one round... When it comes to dancing, they're all the same. I guess, when I was their age, I was also less sensible. But not that much... Heavens, if I had paid as little attention to the advice of my mother as she pays to hers today!... (*Rafael and Julia pass by again.*)

Rafael. You say it's impossible?

Julia. Yes, impossible! (*They move away once more.*)

The Mother. Another round? Good heavens! She has to overdo everything... Thank goodness, her fiancé hasn't arrived yet...; if he had, we would certainly have a scene... When they go by here again, I will have to warn her. So much dancing will wear her out. Is that why she is doing it?... To tire herself out? (*Rafael and Julia appear again, and this time they stop for a moment.*)

Rafael. And don't you have a single word to excuse yourself?

Julia. *(After hesitating for a moment, she says softly.)* No, none...

Rafael. May God have more mercy on you, than he has had on me. *(He lets a white handkerchief fall.)*

Jacob. *(To the other young men.)* He dropped his handkerchief... Surround them... *(The group of masked men form a circle around the two lovers, and, making loud noises and dancing, they move away out of sight.)*

The Mother. What an uproar, all that shouting! They're going to upset her. After this round she is definitely going to stop dancing... *(Standing up.)* Where are they going? I don't see her..., although I don't know how I could ever be able to see her, with that crazy group of people around her. Wait, someone shouted!... and that music won't stop. Each time it keeps getting faster... She's going to get dizzy... Ah!, now I see her. Didn't I say so? She has collapsed... She can't stand up... *(The group of men comes back, still making a raucous uproar of shouts and laughter that almost drowns out the music. Rafael, who is still masked, is carrying Julia, who seems to have fainted.)* Here, here! Put her on this ottoman. *(Rafael places her so she is sitting; he hesitates a moment until Jacob pulls him away.)* My God, she's as pale as a corpse!... Julia, Julia!... *(She touches her face with her hands.)* What is this? She's bleeding! They have killed her!...

The Final Scene

The basement of a tavern. Rafael, immobile, is seated next to a table in the background. Jacob, Bautista, and some other men, are standing in the foreground.

Bautista. I have a letter for Brother Rafael. To whom should I give it?

Jacob. Give it to him.

Bautista. He's here in Venice?

Jacob. Just look over there... Rafael! Rafael!

Rafael. *(As though emerging from a profound lethargy.)* Who's calling me?

Bautista. I have a letter for you. A woman who was disguised gave it to me, and she said it would be very important for you to read it. Here, take it.

Rafael. That is her handwriting. She's not dead!... When did she give you this letter?

Bautista. Last night.

Rafael. At what time?

Bautista. Around eleven o'clock.

Rafael. (*He tears open the envelope and begins to read.*) “Rafael: your mother, who everyone thought was dead, is still alive, but she has been taken prisoner. The price of her life and her freedom is not my love, because that will be yours forever, but my hand. When you receive this letter, I will already belong to another man. However, I will leave him once I have fulfilled my promise. I have not told you this before, because I didn’t want either of us to wait any longer to sacrifice our love, for someone who has suffered because us. Goodbye. I swore I would wait for you... Since it can no longer be on this earth, I will wait for you in heaven. Goodbye, goodbye—Julia.”