

THE APOTHECARY

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English Setting by Donald Pippin

Over the years, we have presented many an awesome spectacle, a feast for the mind's eye -- palaces of decadent splendor, wave-pounded seacoasts, rugged Alpine mountain ranges, lush tropical islands, Rome, Athens, Jerusalem, and in one case we went all out and gave you the universe -- revolving. So we hope that you will forgive the relative modesty of today's setting -- the interior of an apothecary shop. Any extravaganza is located entirely in the mind of its proprietor, our leading character -- a gullible, cantankerous old fanatic, for whom the polite term is eccentric. His past is not filled in for us, but one can suppose it to have been circumscribed. Not so his imagination, which freely wanders the globe, picking up this and that, the armchair politician masterminding by proxy the affairs of the world,. Without leaving the confines of his shop, he has discovered a marvelous new stimulant to which he has become hopelessly addicted, a drug simultaneously exhilarating and intoxicating, more potent than liquor, known as the daily gazette. This is the magic carpet that carries him across the world, overseas to strange lands, exotic customs and delirious rapture.

In suggesting that Sempronio is a dreamer, that his mind wanders, in the most literal sense, that he pays scant attention to what is going on in his immediate vicinity, one must point out one exception -- his ward, or pupil, Grilletta. To her he pays close attention indeed, watching her every movement like a hawk. And no wonder. In describing our setting as drab, modest, austere, we of course are describing it *before* she enters, at which point any stage lights up and becomes a realm of enchantment. In addition to her charm, her beauty, her intelligence, her youth, she has another significant asset that Sempronio has not failed to take into account -- her money. By what misfortune this miracle creature has wound up imprisoned in this meager household, we are never told. But Sempronio has made every effort to see that she stays there, under lock and key, and under his own thumb, for motives that I need not spell out. His guard, however, has not been infallible. In fact, characteristically, he has overlooked the obvious. Within the house itself, in daily contact with his prize possession, lives a young apprentice named Mengone -- a tenor. One can only suppose that it has never occurred to Sempronio that a young man so obviously inferior to himself could be a potential rival.

And unbeknownst to Sempronio, another threat is looming. From the outer world of the unspecified city steps Volpino, an elegant young dandy, a man about town, another moth drawn to the flame -- a moth, though, with a good deal of spunk and ingenuity. This role is assigned to a lyric soprano.

And so the question of the day is this: which of the three will carry off the girl -- the old man, the lyric soprano, or the tenor? Frankly, tradition would strongly suggest that we place our bets on the latter, especially considering that Grilletta is head over heels in love with him already, as he is with her. But I wouldn't be too sure. This particular tenor is not everyone's idea of a hero, and unfortunately, his passion for Grilletta is almost equally counterbalanced with another passion: his terror of Sempronio. Which will outweigh the other? And how long will high-spirited Grilletta tolerate being balanced on this precarious see-saw?

As the lights go up, Mengone is alone in the shop, lamenting his difficult dilemma, pounding his herbs with a beat that matches the tumultuous beating of his heart. For he is first and foremost -- a tenor.

Scene: Inside the shop of an apothecary, where Mengone, his young apprentice, is wearily pounding herbs while brooding on more vital matters.

MENGONE:

**Morn till midnight,
Day in, day out,
Pounding, pounding, beating, beating,
Forever repeating,
No way out.**

**Deep inside, just the same,
For my heart's caught the flame.
To the core I adore!
At my trade I pound and sweat
While my heart beats louder yet,
Pounding, pounding,
While my heart is pounding louder yet.**

**Outside, inside,
Pounding, pounding, pounding!
I despair
As a tear my hair out.
Lose or win, still I pound
While the echoes sound within.
I do, I do adore!
To the core I do adore!**

**Whoever takes this med'cine
Had better have a rugged constitution.
Our learned apothecary
Knows nothing when it comes to chills or fever,
Nor is medicine his study**

**Unless he finds it printed in the morning paper.
No use fretting or fighting,
For to tell the truth, I cannot read his writing.
I pour first from a vial,
Then blend with another
Until I get a nice combination of colors.**

**Morn till midnight,
Day in, day out,
Pounding, pounding, beating, beating,
Forever repeating,
No way out.**

**Sun up, sun down,
That's the run down.
Oh, it's gray out!**

Sempronio, the apothecary, enters, newspaper in hand.

SEMPRONIO: Let me read you the latest!
A stunning new achievement,
If not the greatest.
“In Popocatapetl,
At last a toupee made of metal!”

MENGONE: Sir, I broke a piece of china . . .

SEMPRONIO: Which reminds me:
A lord of China,
Day by day more weighty,
After a brief confinement
Gave birth to a baby.

MENGONE: No fooling?

SEMPRONIO: You can read it
Here printed in the news.
Listen, listen!
“Near Paris” - - to a tee my very own situation - -
“There lives a wise respected chemist,
Guardian of a young heiress,
An orphan, wealthy, very pretty.
He marries her himself, out of pity.”
Ah! Is it not the story
Of myself and Grillett?

MENGONE: I fail to see the connection.
She's not your bride.

SEMPRONIO: No, not as yet.
But wait till the next edition!

MENGONE: *(aside)* (If you're planning to marry,
Get set for competition!)

SEMPRONIO: *(back to the newspaper)* Ah, what is one to think?
The magistrate's excuse for taking bribes:
With gold I feel in sync.

MENGONE: (Some day your precious journal
Will come out with an earth-shaking scoop:
Your lovely little bird has flown the coop.)

SEMPRONIO: This I don't understand.
From Babylon . . . Listen, Mengone . . .
From Babylon a puzzling paragraph
On the wedding of the Suffah.
But the suffah, I thought, was a place for reclining.

MENGONE: Though bizarre, not a shocker.
I call it normal.
Why not? Things are mated every day,
So by all means, celebrate and make it formal.
There is many an old roué
Now married to his rocker.

SEMPRONIO: And here we've matters dangerous and murky . . .

VOLPINO, a young man about town (a soprano) enters.

VOLPINO: Mister Apothecary!

SEMPRONIO: *(still reading)* Plague has broken out in Turkey!

VOLPINO: I beg your pardon?

SEMPRONIO: Latest news!

VOLPINO: Tell me . . .

SEMPRONIO: You've an appointment?
VOLPINO: I come with a prescription;
The need is urgent.
SEMPRONIO: That is not my department.
MENGONE: Here, sir, I am your man.
What can I do for you?
VOLPINO: Take a look.
(All I want is Grillet!)
SEMPRONIO: Tell me, my good man,
Do you enjoy *The Morning Star Gazette*?
VOLPINO: (*without enthusiasm*) Oh, indeed.
SEMPRONIO: Then you'll *love* to hear me read!

ARIA

**Turn to any page you choose;
Find the most amazing news.**

**The arena of Verona
And the tower of Cremona
Chose a German to determine
Which could claim the greater fame.**

**One could boast of elevation;
'Tother's pride was in dilation.
Testimony thus compared,
Tempers flared,
War was declared.**

**So the Roman Coliseum
Told the Vatican Museum,
You and I must referee 'em
Like a game. (*He leaves.*)**

VOLPINO: (*to Mengone*) Friend, I want action!

Go and mix for me this fabulous concoction.

MENGONE: Right away, good as done, sir.

VOLPINO: First, kindly reassure me --
Grilletta's feeling fit, I'm assuming?

MENGONE: As a fiddle.
(I give up on this scribble!
No use fuming.
I might as well admit
That again I must rely on native wit.)

VOLPINO: You might persuade her
To grant me a private visit.

MENGONE: You ask *me* to solicit?
Listen, Buster!
If you need that kind of service,
A chemist's shop
Is not a likely spot.

VOLPINO: There, there! Just a suggestion . . .
I'll settle for the prescription.
(*giving him a second slip*) I've got another.
Excuse the bother.

MENGONE: Tell me . . . just who will take
This miracle medicine in question?

VOLPINO: A banker who suffers agonies of indigestion.

MENGONE: Splendid! And who is to swallow
My second priceless potion.

VOLPINO: A writer who cannot . . . unburden.

MENGONE: I've got the solution.
Here's to relief and liberation!

ARIA

**Are you afflicted with disease?
My bottles hold all remedies.**

**Each dread derangement they undo
And change 'em to something new.**

**Attention! And look at me
If you would learn my recipe.**

**Cum aqua quantum sufficit,
Quicksilver stir with spider spit,
Add juice of jute, put that in
A bottle beetles shat in
Translated into Latin.**

**You victims of the belly ache
Need only nighthawk nipples take
With tip of tongued snake.**

**For agonies intestinal,
A drop will subdue them all,
And like a perfect cadence fall,
A cure for one and all,
Including you, and you and you.**

**Now for a quick review:
Are you afflicted with disease?
My bottles hold all remedies.
Each dread derangement they undo
And change 'em from one to two.**

**Cum aqua quantum sufficit,
To quinine add a tortoise tit.
There'll be no further question
Of acid indigestion.**

**Cum aqua quantum sufficit,
Or possibly the opposite,
We find a simple cure in
A drop of dragon urine.**

**'Tis said some sooner would endure
Sixteen diseases than the cure.
They little know the lift
When merely whiffed.**

**For those with woes interior,
A single dram or drop I pour**

And watch their spirits soar.

**Cum aqua quantum sufficit,
Mix in with sweat of Jesuit,
Add juice of jute, put that in
A bottle beetles shat in
Translated into Latin.**

**And if you're pleased with none of these,
Come back and claim your old disease,
Or trade it for a new.
For pains and pangs abdominal
It's time for a quick review:**

**A swallow of this scintillating brew,
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh!
Then get set prestissimo,
Oh, oh, oh, oh!**

**And hurry, hurry, hurry,
Oh, you've got
To hurry like a shot.
Go, go, go, go. *(He runs off.)***

VOLPINO:

What a shrewd bit of fiction!
I made up that intestinal affliction
As an entree to Grilletta --
An orphan, so enchanting
To see her is to worship.

With vows and verse I shall assault her.
From there 'tis but a tiny step to the altar.

GRILLETTA comes in.

VOLPINO:

Grilletta!

GRILLETTA:

Are you a madman?

VOLPINO:

Who, I?

GRILLETTA:

You know my tutor.
Twenty four hour inspection.

No visits with gentlemen without exception.

VOLPINO: Then it's time he discover,
The tyrant,
That Grilletta is ready for a lover.

GRILLETTA: Spare you pain; I shall remain
Obedient to my tutor.

VOLPINO: I'm sure that with Mengone
You're not so prim and proper.

GRILLETTA: Are you so certain?

VOLPINO: It's the truth, don't deny it,
And your blushes now show it.

GRILLETTA: But if you know it,
Why do you still persist?
Does nothing faze you?

VOLPINO: I'd counsel and advise you,
Help clear away the mist.
He's a fool;
You should leave him for a better.

GRILLETTA: Indeed, I am your debtor.
In fact a better fool I know already.
Of course, I have not implied
That you are specified.

VOLPINO: You taunt me! You despise me!
(How to hurt her?)
Yes, I'll murder Mengone!

GRILLETTA: Heaven help us!
With a stick of macaroni?

VOLPINO: Never before have I been mocked and put to shame.

GRILLETTA: Ah, but in the future you cannot make that claim.

VOLPINO: Not a shred of gratitude.

GRILLETTA: You're right, that is my attitude.

VOLPINO: To me you should feel obligated.

GRILLETTA: I fear I'm far too addle-pated.

VOLPINO: Be less severe!
A pining suitor begs it.

GRILLETTA: This way . . .

VOLPINO: Oh, tell me more!

GRILLETTA: You'll find the exit.

ARIA

**Darling Volpine, so amorous,
Pleading so urgently,
So fine, so bold and glamorous
To all excepting me.**

**Although you stoop to love me,
Your sphere is far above me,
Far higher than I aspire.
No! The great Volpino rules,
The peerless, perfect prince of fools.
The great Volpino rules,
As peerless prince of fools.**

**Like you, I could be amorous,
Yet who would not agree?
A mate for me so matchless
Would rate but ridicule.
Volpino,
So peerless, but no me, no!
For me the perfect fool. *(She leaves.)***

VOLPINO: Not again! Women, women!
I'm snubbed and slighted.
No more! I have decided.

Ah, the dear little coquette!
My revenge I must go get!

Spurning me for Mengone,
She calls me macaroni.
Perhaps she meant to dare me . . .
When I find that Mengone,
He'd best beware me!

ARIA

**With raging fire and thunder,
My sword I'll seize and tear asunder,
Crush my detested rival,
Pursue him till he's dead.
But . . . what if it's me instead?**

**Inspired to boldness by beauty,
To death I'll do my duty.
D - d - death? Oh, damn!
Oh, you're to blame, Grilletta,
As clear as A B C.
Oh, you're the one, Grilletta,
That's made a man of me.**

**With raging fire and thunder,
My foe I'll seize and tear asunder.
Then let him plead survival,
Plead for his own survival.
Upon his loathsome face
My boot will tread.**

**My own face it could be instead,
My face instead . . .**

**Inspired to boldness by beauty,
To death I'll do my duty.
D - d - death? Oh, damn!
Oh, you're to blame, Grilletta.
I'm shaking in my shoes.
Oh, you're the one, Grilletta,
That's made of me a goose.**

Oh! Oh! You're the one.

**Oh, you're to blame, Grilletta,
For putting down a friend.
To none but you, Grilletta,
I owe my tragic end.**

He leaves. Mengone returns.

MENGONE: I've deciphered the directions
And mixed the two concoctions,
Now find the patient gone, no explanation.
For him, an inspiration.
I have a funny notion
He'd best pass up this potion,
Or I swear he
Will down his next one in the cemetery.

Grilletta enters.

GRILLETTA: Dear Mengone!

MENGONE: Grilletta!

GRILLETTA: Do you love me?

MENGONE: Careful! What if the master? . . .

GRILLETTA: But he's away now.
Tell me your passion burns.

MENGONE: If he returns . . .
Total disaster!

GRILLETTA: Ugh! How faint-hearted!

MENGONE: Well, since we've already started,
The sooner done the better.

GRILLETTA: Your hand, now draw me closer.

MENGONE: Now watch it! Let's not go overboard.

GRILLETTA: Nonsense! Have you forgotten that we're engaged?

MENGONE: My darling . . . (*He sees Sempronio.*)
Oh, there he is!

SEMPRONIO: (*entering*) What goes on here?

MENGONE: (*to Gril.*) I warned you . . .

GRILLETTA: Oh, the poor man! He's got a fever!
Hear how his pulse is pounding!

SEMPRONIO: Why bother me?

MENGONE: (*offering his wrist*) Just listen.

SEMPRONIO: A battle is impending
'Twixt the Persians and the Prussians.

MENGONE: You don't think it contagious?

SEMPRONIO: Nothing serious.

MENGONE: Though you might not suppose it,
I'm almost delirious.

GRILLETTA: And so sudden!
(Let us hope he won't diagnose it!)

SEMPRONIO: Get to work! You'll feel lifted.
Here are herbs to be sifted.
For you, charming Grilletta,
Idleness would be unsporting.
Get out the books and bills
And do some sorting.

My own task is to probe
The problems of the globe:
Military, strategic and political.
Tactics are necessary;
The times are critical!

ACT ONE FINALE

MENGONE: **Count the dust specks dancing color-bright;
Add the stars out on a summer night.
That's the number, Grilletta, my delight,
Of the fears that tear my heart.**

GRILLETTA: **Count the grass blades, tender, green and small;
Add the leaves in swirling bacchanal.
That's the number, Mengon, my adorable,
Of the hopes that stir my heart.**

SEMPRONIO: **Cut the Andes from the Pyrenees;
Drive the Mongols from the Moguls.
Offer Poland to the Portuguese;
Chart a course to the Hesperides;
Let the Persian Pasha wait
To abdicate.**

GRIL. & MENG. **In a dream together drifting,
Clouds appear forever shifting.**

GRILLETTA: **As I'm sorting . . .**

MENGONE: **As I'm sifting . . .**

GRILLETTA: **Sorting, sorting . . .**

MENGONE: **Sifting, sifting . . .**

BOTH: **Evermore I adore.**

SEMPRONIO: **I was born a man of mission,
International politician.
To fill a crucial gap
I'll go consult a map.**

*(to Grilletta)
(to Mengone)*

**Keep sorting.
Keep sifting.
Take care and do not slack,
For I shall hurry back. *(He goes out.)***

GRILLETTA: **Sempronio's left us together,
Alone together!**

MENGONE: **Grilletta, love, come hither!**

BOTH: **Alone so briefly, I'm
Impatient for the time
Our love will be no crime.**

GRILLETTA: Give me your hand, my dearest.
MENGONE: Both hands oh give me, dearest.
BOTH: Hush, hush! Mum, mum!
Quiet, Sempronio's come. (*They go back to work.*)

Sempronio returns.

SEMPRONIO: On this map I'll trace the menace
That alarms the state of Venice.
Rumor claims they shot a man
From the Empire Ottoman.

MENGONE: While I'm working
There is lurking
Fatal danger from above.

GRILLETTA: In these pages
Bills and wages
Speak to me in words of love.

SEMPRONIO: The Byzantines will stump us;
This calls for quill and compass
And recent almanac.

(*to Grilletta*)
(*to Mengone*)

Keep sorting.
Keep sifting.

Take care and do not slack,
I'll be right back. (*He goes out again.*)

MENGONE: Oh sublime Grilletta, dearest!
We have time, the coast is clearest.

GRILLETTA: Oh, my darling! Here is my hand.

BOTH: Dearest darling, darling dearest!

Sempronio returns.

SEMPRONIO: Bravo, bravo, O lust and lechery!
Bravo, bravo, O trust and treachery!
Like a mouse, tip-toe I scurry back,

And I've caught you in the act!

MENGONE: I was sifting . . .

GRILLETTA: I was sorting . . .

MENGONE: Sifting, sifting . . .

GRILLETTA: Sorting, sorting . . .

SEMPRONIO: *(to Mengone)* Leave the house and my domain!

MENGONE: But, O master! . . .

GRILLETTA: But, O tutor! . . .

SEMPRONIO: Never show your face again.

MENG. & GRIL. Fatal blunder! Fire and thunder!

SEMPRONIO: Leave my house! Leave my house!

ALL THREE: Past concealing
Is my feeling
There is lots of trouble ahead.

I am shaking,
I am quaking
At a future fraught with dread.
I am shaking,
I am quaking
And I fear what lies ahead.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

The cataclysmic explosion that ended Act One has left behind a wake of devastation. Mengone, ousted from the house, is more terrified of Sempronio than ever. Sempronio, appalled at the discovery of lust and lechery under his own rooftop, recognizes the need to keep even closer watch on Grilletta, who is equally determined to

resolve the situation come what may, even at the risk of total disaster. Into this shattered domicile once again steps Volpino . . .

The scene is unchanged. The following day.

SEMPRONIO: Abominable behavior that I shudder to mention!
But still no reason I should change my intention
To wed my ward, and besides there's the money . . .
The nerve! Brazenly cavorting with Mengone!
A wise man heeds a warning.

Volpino enters.

VOLPINO: Sir, good morning!

SEMPRONIO: (That fancy fop!)
If you have come for some medicine,
Please step into the shop.

VOLPINO: I come on matters confidential.

SEMPRONIO: Trust me to keep a secret.
You can count on discretion.

VOLPINO: To put it bluntly . . .

SEMPRONIO: Well, say it!

VOLPINO: I've a bold confession.

SEMPRONIO: Spit it out.

VOLPINO: Coming straight to the point . . .
Blind Cupid's arrow . . .

SEMPRONIO: Do go on.

VOLPINO: In short, I am so in love . . .

SEMPRONIO: In love with *me*?
Have you no scruple?

VOLPINO: Sir! I refer to the hand of your pupil.

SEMPRONIO: My answer also will be short:

Firstly, no! Then no, no! Then no, no, no!

VOLPINO: Why so stern and unyielding?

SEMPRONIO: My answer was precise:
No, no, no, no, no!
That reason should suffice. *(He starts to leave.)*

VOLPINO: Stay but a moment.

SEMPRONIO: I'm in a hurry.

VOLPINO: But from France I've a story!
Oh, the tales that they publish!

SEMPRONIO: *(immediately hooked)* That you must share!
The pleasure's then . . . doublish.

VOLPINO: ARIA

**A tattered old tutor attempted, I'm told,
To hoard a young girl like a nugget of gold.
'Tis said that a suitor then taunted the tutor
To let her go free,
To let her go free.**

**"Oh, mis'erable miser, now prove that you prize her
And give her to me,
And give her to me.**

**"Oh, mis'erable miser, I would you were wiser
And astuter," said the suitor to the tutor.**

**"Oh, let her go free
And give her to me."**

**The antic pedantic's undaunted by age.
(His ward was a hummingbird locked in a cage.)
The frantic romantic compelled the pedantic
To let her go free,
To let her go free.**

**"Take warning, O warder, my word is an order,
So give me the key,
So give me the key."**

**His phrases emphatic unnerved the fanatic:
“You’re the warder, but an order is an order!
Oh let her go free
To fly home with me.”** *(He leaves.)*

SEMPRONIO: *(alone)*

What an unattractive story!
That gallant of the gazette
Supposes that with a vignette
He can win Grillette.

Oh, these juveniles I would shower with derision,
Drooping with love and doting on it.
They would woo with a sonnet
And pass for Parisian.
Lovely Grillette’s now my pupil --
All the more qualified to be my bride.

Then let me catch her making eyes at a lover!
Nothing crude, like a scandal,
But that’s a scene that I know how to handle

ARIA

**’Tis no libel to label a pupil
The plague of all people.
And at best I would say without scruple
They resist you whichever way you pull.
I’d be stuck were it not for the stick,
My trustworthy stick.**

**As for silly young girls I abhor ’em
When they vow without a trace of decorum:
“Oh, my dearest, my darling, my only!”
They are too empty headed to see
That the vow should be spoken to me.
Oh, the sound would improve, I allow,
If ’twere I that were given the vow.
With a slight move
The sound would improve.**

Under stress, I confess

**That a pupil can make me see duple.
I am told that the problem is global
Of the nubile ignoring the noble.
I'd be stuck were it not for the stick,
My trustworthy stick.**

**Oh, the truth is that youth is a bother:
"Oh, my dearest, my darling, my only!"
Have you heard any words so absurd?**

**Though 'tis common, I grant, to adore 'em,
As for silly young girls I abhor 'em
When they vow without a trace of decorum:
"Oh, my dearest, my darling, my sweetest, my only!"
Stuff and nonsense!
They are too empty headed to see
That the vow should be spoken to me.**

**Oh, the truth is that youth is a bother:
"Oh, my dearest, my darling, my only!"
Have you heard any words so absurd?
Oh, the sound would improve, I allow,
If 'twere I that were given the vow.
A shift so slight
Would set it right.**

He leaves. Grilletta enters.

GRILLETTA: The shock has left me weak!
My heart's in a flutter, but I must speak.
And as soon as we're alone,
Just I and my dear Mengon,
We must strengthen our resolution
And put an end to this cruel persecution.
And then, our true love requited,
After shame and grief are forgotten,
Our joys will be ever sweeter, united.

Mengone creeps in, in obvious terror of running into Sempronio.

MENGONE: There she is! Oh, be careful . . .
Is the master in his study?

GRILLETTA: Ah! Why so timid?

He has found us out already.

MENGONE: No use parading.
We must stay on guard, Grilletta.
The worst may yet be waiting.
This very minute he may be plotting his vendetta!

GRILLETTA: Then it's time for a choice:
We either openly declare our intentions,
Or decide here and now, *Finito!*

MENGONE: *Finito?* No, not that!
Tell the master? Not that either.
Both answers make me squirm.

GRILLETTA: Our purpose must be firm,
Either yes or no.

MENGONE: Oh, it's yes! Nothing firmer.
But yet . . .

GRILLETTA: You must decide.

MENGONE: If you're to be my bride . . .
What will the master say?

GRILLETTA: Oh, go your way, you're a donkey. Go!
You've not the courage of a cricket.
I'll do better to marry my Volpino.

MENGONE: Brava! So it's *your* Volpino?
So that's the ticket!
Fine! Tell him to his face.
Congratulations! Fickle! Shallow!
So I'm a donkey? You would ride me!

GRILLETTA: But if you . . .

MENGONE: But if that is the case,
Better far that Volpino take my place.

GRILLETTA: I only . . .

MENGONE: Only meant I'm nothing but a cricket,
And not your equal.

But allow me to wish you a brighter sequel.

GRILLETTA:

All I meant . . .

MENGONE:

You are wise. I rejoice.
You have made a better choice.
Though object of derision,
I approve your new decision.
I don't deserve to touch your little finger.

GRILLETTA:

I was foolish . . .

MENGONE:

Do not linger.
We have learned the truth in time.

GRILLETTA:

Yes, but . . .

MENGONE:

Go, while your youth is in its prime.
Hurry up! For Volpino's surely waiting.

GRILLETTA:

(This is most exasperating!)

MENGONE:

There's Nina, almost a bambina . . .
Not from the city . . . very pretty.
Perhaps she's just infatuated,
But the church, she says, is near her.
(This recipe calls for a pinch of jealousy.)

GRILLETTA:

The picture's getting clearer.
Dear Mengone, I'm happy you have found
Such an apt substitute in matrimony.

MENGONE:

(What does she mean by that?)

GRILLETTA:

My compliments, I'm indeed very pleased.
(The dirty rat!)

MENGONE:

(Well, well, I'd best not torment her further.)
Ho, ho, Grilletta darling!

GRILLETTA:

Go, go, you mongrel! I detest you.
Viper! You creepy, crawly . . .

MENGONE:

You are angry.

GRILLETTA: How observant!

MENGONE: But now that . . .

GRILLETTA: Now that you've explained so clearly,
I thank you sincerely.
You're but a nincompoop
And can go to the devil.
To think I'd ever *stoop*
To your level!

ARIA

**However you add it,
The sum is, I've had it.
The end is overdue.
The two of us are through.**

**Wiser to wake up,
This is the break-up,
Time now to take up
And go your way.
And hurry or
You'll hear some more.**

**However you add it,
The sum is, I've had it.
But if you care to stay,
I've lots more to say.**

**Since I am certain,
Down with the curtain,
Call it finale,
The end of you,
And long overdue.**

**However you add it,
The sum is, I've had it.
Farewell, it was jolly,
But now's the finale.**

**So we should sever
Once and forever.
No, I shall never**

Go back to you.

**Nor will you find
That I change my mind.
I'm not inclined
To look behind.**

**No, I shall never go back to you.
We two are through! (*She storms out.*)**

MENGONE: Whew! Did I say something wrong?
So I have lost my Grilletta!
No! There has to be a way to appease her,
To placate and to please her.

The question's how.
I never started the row.
Oh, women, women!
So captious and capricious!
All the more precious.
The harder we resist,
The more they enmesh us. (*He leaves abjectly.*)

Grilletta returns, followed soon afterwards by Sempronio.

GRILLETTA: Yes, yes! Mengon will be sorry,
For I intend to marry
The first man to ask me.
A well deserved repayment.

SEMPRONIO: Grilletta, have you a moment?

GRILLETTA: What do you wish?

SEMPRONIO: It's time I talked to you
About some simple facts of life,
For you will someday be a wife.
You surely cannot doubt it.

GRILLETTA: I've thought about it.

SEMPRONIO: And have you made any plans?

GRILLETTA: They seldom vary.

SEMPRONIO: Could you be more specific?

GRILLETTA: I want to marry.

SEMPRONIO: Our thoughts coincide:
I shall make you a bride!

GRILLETTA: The groom, though, who is it?

SEMPRONIO: Grilletta, darling, your asking me “Who is it?”
Shows modesty exquisite.
You don’t want just a fool or simple sot.

GRILLETTA: I certainly do not.

SEMPRONIO: You’d want a man who’s mature,
Ripe and mellowed,
Of some position.
I see a man of the world,
With a touch of erudition.

GRILLETTA: A leaf that’s yellowed
Would suit my disposition.
But this man, who could it be?

SEMPRONIO: Dear girl, who else but me?

GRILLETTA: You?

SEMPRONIO: I think you’ll agree
That my merits are not slight.

GRILLETTA: (Oh, unfaithful Mengon, this serves you right.)

SEMPRONIO: Your answer?

GRILLETTA: To your wishes I’m all obedience.

SEMPRONIO: What a wise girl,
A blend of the finest ingredients.
Lives there a man who would not be in my place?

GRILLETTA: (What I’d give now to see Mengone’s face!)

SEMPRONIO: The not'ry should be here any minute.

GRILLETTA: He's very speedy.

SEMPRONIO: He's been sent for already.
When two hearts are uniting,
It must be put very clearly into writing.

GRILLETTA: When you sent,
Were you so sure your offer would be accepted?

SEMPRONIO: I've long suspected
You felt the same desire that I did.
And clearly,
In this belief I was not misguided.

GRILLETTA: (Desire becomes chagrin.)

SEMPRONIO: (In fact I did not expect to win --
So quickly.)

GRILLETTA: (Well, well . . . the path I've picked
Appears to be prickly.)

Volpino enters, disguised as a notary.

VOLPINO: (Venus, assist me now in this bold deception
And I'll be your votary.)

SEMPRONIO: Are you here at my command?

VOLPINO: I come as notary.

SEMPRONIO: An honor to shake your hand.
I'd have with your consent
A legal document of matrimony
Between myself and my ward Grilletta.

VOLPINO: (It was not an idle threat.)
Just as you will.

SEMPRONIO: Grilletta, this is the notary.
Quick, go and fetch some paper,
The ink and quill.

GRILLETTA: (With fear I fumble.)

VOLPINO: You dictate
What you wish me to write.

SEMPRONIO: Take care, oh worthy notary,
And do not bumble.

Mengone enters, also disguised as a notary.

MENGONE: (So I have been preceded.
Nonetheless, I come equipped.)

SEMPRONIO: Who are you?

MENGONE: I am the notary.

SEMPRONIO: Never mind, you'll not be needed.
You are just a little tardy.

VOLPINO: (How did he get in the script?
I meant to work unaided.)

MENGONE: I must be reimbursed!
And I shall stay till you agree to pay me.

SEMPRONIO: (*to Volpino*) What's your answer?

VOLPINO: It's obvious I'm here first.

MENGONE: That claim is immaterial - -
Article seven hundred ninety six point two,
Paragraph B - -
In all matters magisterial.

SEMPRONIO: Well, then, here's what we'll do:
So that you both get money for your trouble,
We'll have the papers double,
One for her and one for me.
Is there objection?

MENGONE: That appears satisfactory.

VOLPINO: Sir, on reflection . . .

SEMPRONIO: I would advise you at once to make your mind up.

GRILLETTA: (This legal game will wind up
With a checkmate.)

SEMPRONIO: Now that both of you are signed up,
Write this down as I dictate.

ACT TWO FINALE

**SEMPRONIO: This legal paper confirms an agreement:
Today the hand of Grilletta is offered**

VOLPINO: Grilletta . . .

MENGONE: . . . is offered

SEMPRONIO: In matrimony

VOLPINO: In mat- . . .

MENGONE: . . . -ter of money.

SEMPRONIO: Unto Signore

VOLPINO & MENGONE: Signore . . .

SEMPRONIO: Sempronio.

VOLPINO: Volpino.

MENGONE: Mengone.

SEMPRONIO: Sempronio! Watch how you spell it.

VOLPINO & MENGONE: Baloney-o.

SEMPRONIO: And she promises in marriage

VOLPINO & MENGONE: . . . no marriage . . .

SEMPRONIO: To assign him beneficiary

VOLPINO: . . . fishr'y . . .

MENGONE: . . . fishy . . .

SEMPRONIO: Of her goods and marriage dower.

VOLPINO & MENGONE: . . . our.

SEMPRONIO: Mine, not our! We both agree
That the dowry goes to me.

VOLPINO & MENGONE: . . . to me.

SEMPRONIO: We have worked it out together.

VOLPINO & MENGONE: . . . out to get her.

SEMPRONIO: Are you halfwits? Are you madmen?
(They are shysters, I can see.)

VOLPINO & MENGONE: (Who am I to disagree?)

SEMPRONIO: Finish, hurry!

MENGONE: We're not ready.
We must first hear from the lady.
'Twould appear she speaks but rarely.

VOLPINO: My fine colleague puts it fairly.

BOTH: Without that we cannot proceed.
On that point we're at least agreed.

SEMPRONIO: (*to Grilletta*) Don't keep them waiting.

GRILLETTA: I consent. (But the words are hard to find.
I've not quite made up my mind.)
I hereby promise to marry my tutor.

SEMPRONIO: Till death unparted.

VOLPINO & MENGONE: . . . down-hearted.

SEMPRONIO: How's that?

GRILLETTA: I promise to him . . .

SEMPRONIO: All that is due him.

VOLPINO & MENGONE: . . . to undo him.
All's *comme il faut*.
You simply sign below.

GRILLETTA & SEMPRONIO: I'm ready now to sign the vow.

SEMPRONIO: (*to Volpino*) No, first let's read it back.

VOLPINO: Sir, is it trust you lack?

SEMPRONIO: (*to Mengone*) You got the wording right?

MENGONE: To ask is impolite. You seem to quite forget
The legal etiquette.

GRILLETTA & SEMPRONIO: Before I'm signing it
I'll read each line of it.
Before I sign I'll read each line.

(*alternately*) "This legal paper . . .
. . . confirms an agreement.
Today the hand of . . .
. . . Grilletta . . .
. . . is offered . . .

VOLPINO: (Here comes the punch!)

MENGONE: (Caught in the crunch!)

GRILLETTA: . . . in matrimony . . .

SEMPRONIO: . . . unto Signore . . .

GRILLETTA: . . . Volpino . . .

SEMPRONIO: . . . Mengone . . .

GRILLETTA: How's that?

SEMPRONIO: What's up?

VOL. & MENG.: He is a counterfeit notary, too,
Both of us making our legal debut.

GRIL. & SEMP.: What a misprint! Explain, I entreat you!

VOL. & MENG.: Ah, worthy not'ry, a pleasure to meet you.

VOLPINO: That is Mengone.

MENGONE: That is Volpino.

GRIL. & SEMP.: Villains and traitors!
Impersonators!

VOL. & MENG.: Hail to the twosome!
Win some and lose some.

GRIL. & SEMP.: Villains and traitors!
False advocates!

VOL. & MENG.: Take an attorney,
Three cheers for love!

GRIL. & SEMP.: Take a long journey,
Off with a shove!

End of Act Two

ACT THREE

Up till now, I would hope, the unfolding of events has not been too intricate to follow. But at this point the plot thickens, as we plunge into deeper, murkier waters. Volpino's first scheme to get Grilletta by posing as a notary has failed, but he is quick to come up with another. By now he has taken Sempronio's measure and has sized up his particular susceptibility. He proceeds to play upon it by dangling before the old man's eyes the prospect of fulfilling his wildest dream: overseas travel, a political assignment in Turkey, the chance to become adviser to the king, maybe even Apothecary of State! All this with but one small stipulation: Grilletta must be allowed, indeed compelled, to wed the Turkish messenger. Bear in mind some words of wisdom from the lips of Volpino himself: "How simple to deceive one who wishes to believe!"

Apothecary!"

VOLPINO:

Stupendous!

SEMPRONIO:

To what end is the proclamation leading?

VOLPINO:

**Go on, keep reading,
With no obligations.**

SEMPRONIO:

**"A resourceful enterpriser
We require as king's adviser,
Well-versed in medications,
A proven expert in foreign relations."**

**My reply must not be vague!
I've a pill for pox and plague,
And *so-o-o-o-o* much learning!**

VOLPINO:

To you they must be turning!

SEMPRONIO:

**It continues: "Two messengers have been told,
'Do not stint with your gold.'
(They bear a fortune.)
"Before the nation's turned into a vast cemetery,
Bring back at once a good apothecary."
How it moves one to pity!**

VOLPINO:

**They are due in this very city.
They have embarked upon this exploration
international
Bearing seven silver salvers,
Gold caskets decked with jewels,
And forty sacks with cash in all,
Their object - - an interview
With you!
Chance of a lifetime!**

SEMPRONIO:

**Let 'em come!
Stout and steady, I am ready.
Farewell to home and to fireside.
My higher side calls to work
In the land of the Turk.
I'm off to work
Among the Turk!**

VOLPINO:

**(The plot must not unravel
Before he wakes the wiser.)**

SEMPRONIO:

**Ah, to travel!
To be the Shah's adviser!
I'll send the news to the journals.
I'm on the make
In the kingdom of the Sheik!**

ARIA

**The doctor politician
Is bound for overseas,
Where rank and recognition
Reward my remedies.**

**Oh, celebrate and sing!
I'm chemist of the king!**

**My sedatives are famous,
My pills rejuvenate.
With pomp they come to name us
Apothec'ry of State!**

**Oh, celebrate and sing!
I'm chemist of the king!**

**Start with a syrup
Making 'em cheer up,
Then with a potion
Win a promotion.
Tra la la la - -
Drink to the Shah!**

**Engaged to give advice,
To me it's paradise.**

**The doctor politician
Prepares to navigate,
The ultimate physician,
Apothec'ry of State!**

(He leaves in great excitement)

VOLPINO:

I've got him! How simple to deceive

One who wishes to believe.
A change of costume turns me Turk.
Count of nine, Grilletta's mine.
In fine, my rival goes berserk.

*He leaves, full of high hopes, as Mengone enters, in the depths of despair,
followed by Grilletta.*

MENGONE: Pacing, staring, just going, not caring,
What a torment full of trial and tears.
I never could forget her
If I lived a million years.

GRILLETTA: *(aside)* (He's like a wounded lamb.
Am I sorry? I am.)

MENGONE: (Oh, it's Grilletta!)

GRILLETTA: (I shall take him off the rack,
But all in good order.)

MENGONE: (Could I have her back,
How my love would reward her.)

GRILLETTA: (He pretends not to observe.)

MENGONE: (I meant to give her this pretty ribbon,
But now I've lost my nerve.)

GRILLETTA: (What's that in his fingers, silk or satin?)

MENGONE: (Why keep it, when the gift is unwanted?)

He throws the ribbon to the ground.

GRILLETTA: (Discarding it so carelessly
Could indicate insanity.)

MENGONE: Yes, I'm a madman!
Call me crazy, call me loony.

GRILLETTA: Poor little ribbon, abandoned there.
Not even worth his trouble.

MENGONE: Worth even more, it cost a pretty penny.

GRILLETTA: You'd toss it out like rubble?

MENGONE: Now nothing matters.
I meant it for a present.
Never mind if it's torn to tatters.

GRILLETTA: There in the dust . . . a pity.
It must have been so pretty.

MENGONE: The dust would vanish
With a tiny puff of air.

GRILLETTA: It breaks my heart that no one seems to care.

MENGONE: So sad to see it . . .

GRILLETTA: Little cast-off . . .

MENGONE: But leave it.

GRILLETTA: Leave it?

MENGONE: Unwanted . . .

GRILLETTA: Take it.

MENGONE: It is no longer mine.

GRILLETTA: Let me restore it to you.

MENGONE: I'll not go near it.

GRILLETTA: What am I to do?

MENGONE: You might put it on and wear it.

DUETTINO

**MENGONE: My love, I plead, implore,
Be as you were before.
May grace and goodness move you
To let me serve and love you.
Take as token of your pardon**

A gift straight from the heart.

GRILLETTA: **No need to plead, implore;
I love you all the more.
My heart could never harden,
Denying you my pardon.
Your faith and candor prove you,
So let me serve and love you - -
A gift straight from the heart.**

MENGONE: **Quarrels ended!**

GRILLETTA: **Hearts are mended!**

BOTH: **Love so tender
Wins surrender.
Ever, ever hail
The gift of love. *(They leave.)***

Sempronio enters with Volpino, disguised as a Turk.

SEMPRONIO: I've enough to fill a galley.
Now it's time to sail.
We must not dilly dally.

Potent stuff! Smelling salts, emetics, oil and unguent.
Do not forget to pack the box in
Containing sedatives and anti-toxin.

VOLPINO: Hari kari, on contrary,
Me stay here stationary.
First, pupil unto me you marry.

SEMPRONIO: Oh, hurry! I've a mission!

VOLPINO: Marry - - that agreed condition.

SEMPRONIO: Nothing must deter me.

VOLPINO: Me go and she outcarry
So that in presence you -- her -- me . . .

SEMPRONIO: I marry!

VOLPINO: Brava, brava, Semproniu!

SEMPRONIO: (You would-be baritone, you!
But now, to the Middle East!
I shall get rich, to say the very least!)

VOLPINO ARIA

**Salamelica, Semprugna cara,
Cobstantinupola, nupola, nupola,
Sempre cantara, sempre ballara,
Dadl dadl dadl dadl dara.
Da didl didl da didl didl
Da didl didl dum. (He leaves)**

SEMPRONIO: What learned oratory!
It will take very long
To master such a tongue - -
A new recruit on the Turkish route to glory!

Grilletta enters, followed by Mengone, disguised also as a Turk.

GRILLETTA: Tutor! Oh, Signore!
Since in marriage you compel me to claim one,
Here's the Turk I will take.

SEMPRONIO: (Is it the same one?
I swear to God, these Turks all look alike.)

MENGONE: Want pomp, want ceremony.
Now I marry pupil.
Want you, oh noble tutor,
Make happy couple.

SEMPRONIO: Then Constantinoople!
Let my signature bear testimony:
You will be joined in matrimony!

MENGONE: Yours till death do us part!

SEMPRONIO: Now we can start!

MENGONE: (You've been taken, old Semprony, by a phony!)

Volpino returns.

VOLPINO: Grilletta, me not find her.
Oh, there she be!

SEMPRONIO: There she be, there she be,
Just married by me!

VOLPINO: To who?

SEMPRONIO: To the Turk right behind her.

VOLPINO: *(to Mengone)* And you are who?

MENGONE: You? Who are you?

VOLPINO: (Final vendetta! Mengone got Grilletta!)
Full of rage, flame and passion,
I'm just a mutton-head.
Both my plot and costume
Now come unbutton-ed.

In disgust, he tears off his disguise and throws it to the ground.

FINALE

MENGONE: Sir old Sempronio,
The matrimonio we celebrate.
Constantinupola will have to wait.
You frown, although it's
To you we owe it.

GRILLETTA: Oh joy beyond all measure!
You joined in matrimony
Me and my dear Mengone.
So share our love and pleasure,
And let the scene conclude
In bliss and gratitude.

Oh joy beyond all measure!
A cup that overflows.
So share our love and pleasure,
And let the chapter close.

VOLPINO: In vain, my arietta!
For I aspire

But to acquire Grilletta.

**How patently absurd
That my rival is preferred!
I can but philosophize:
She picked him for his size.**

SEMPRONIO:

**How could I spot the clues?
Oh, the honest man must lose
When a fabricator woos.
What a lowdown dirty ruse!
You've won the show - - Bravissimo!
But I shall go back to the news!**

GRIL. & MENG.:

**The lover finds the ladder
To paradise forever;
No need has he of charts.
Misfortune cannot sever
Two tender loving hearts.**

VOLP. & SEMP.:

**A sentiment so gruesome
But taunts the other twosome
That play the losing parts.**

TUTTI:

**Blind Cupid's a teacher
More skilled than a preacher,
And only the lover
Contrives to discover
The way through the wood.**

**Unsworn to conceal it,
We'd gladly reveal it.
Oh, would that we could!**

THE END