

LEONCAVALLO

I PAGLIACCI
(The Strolling Players)

English Version by Donald Pippin

CAST:

CANIO (*in the play "Pagliaccio"*) *head of a troupe of strolling players.*

NEDDA (*in the play "Columbine"*) *his beautiful young wife.*

TONIO (*in the play "Taddeo"*) *a clown.*

BEPPE (*in the play "Harlequin"*).

SILVIO, *a villager.*

Other villagers.

Scene: A traveling theatre in the town square of a village in southern Italy. Tonio, dressed as a clown, steps forward from the curtain to deliver the prologue.

TONIO:

A word . . . if I may . . .
Kind ladies and gentlemen,
Be lenient if my style is not fancy --
I speak the Prologue!

Why put you to sleep
With tales of castles and outdated customs,
Of gallant knights and ladies fair,
Of powdered wigs and curtsies.
But now's a new day!

Daily we hear people complain:
"Those tears on the stage are not real, just acting.
Made-up agonies, constant wringing of hands!
None of it genuine."

No, no! This author instead
Dares paint a true portrait of life
As you and I know it.
More than an artist, a man with a heart like yours;
Seeking the truth, it's for *you* he is writing,
And the story could happen to you.
Inspired by fact, not fiction,
Haunted by memories, ashes that smolder,
He sobbed as he wrote, with tears freely flowing --
Tears so tender, recalling pain still much alive.

Like you . . . he's borne the blows
Too often aimed at ill-fated lovers,
Making love a travesty,
Prodded along by envy and callous mockery.



Search beneath the surface to the soul.
We players, like you, are frail,
Imperfect and mortal,
Made of flash and bone, just as you are,
And breathing the same fresh air as others do.

Here I've planted the seed;
Listen and watch it burst into blossom.
Enough! Bring on the players! (*Exit, and the curtain rises*)

*(Enter villagers in their holiday best, with much shouting, laughing and whistling.
A bright, sunny afternoon in August.)*

THE CROWD, VARIOUSLY:

Hey! They're here! Full force! All back again.
Pagliaccio, too! Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!
The old and young alike
Reward his clowning
With hearty laughter and loud applause.

He proudly marches, stern as the devil.
The crowd enlarges, shouting approval.

Grave as a judge when his court is in session;
Beating his drum as he leads the procession.
Hey! Hey! Look at Harlequin, goading the donkey!
The children yelling and cheering . . .
Men toss their hats in jubilation.
Fired up, some toss their caps.

CANIO (*offstage to boys*)

Shoo! Run along with you!

BEPPE

Shoo! Shoo, you rascals!

THE CROWD

The kids are running to and fro,
All primed and eager for the show.
The children yelling and cheering.

Make way there! All back again.
A roving wagon with painted curtains.
With novelties, surprises, they arrive in glory.
The players arrive in glory. Here they are!
All just to tell a story.
Bravo, Pagliaccio! Cheers for Pagliaccio!
Long live the prince of clowns in blaze of color.
Without his laughter life each day is duller.
His tumbles drive away the frowns.
Evviva! Evviva!
Long live the prince of clowns, long may he conquer.
Without his laughter, days keep growing longer.
Though one and all admire the jester greatly.
Today, take note, his march is stern and stately.
Bravo, bravo! Cheers for the jester!
A clown with saucy banter!
A clown for goose and gander!
Evviva Pagliaccio, the colorful clown!

CANIO

Praises too kind . . .

CROWD

When will the show begin?

CANIO

Can't you be quiet?

(He beats the drum loudly to subdue the crowd)

CROWD

Uh! We hear you!

No more of that! Oh, please, no more!

CANIO *(doffing his hat with a comic salute)*

May I stick in a word?

CROWD

Ha ha ha ha! For you let us settle down.

Allow you to have the floor.

CANIO

A play we will offer tonight at eleven,
The work of your fervent, obedient servant.

(with a comic, ceremonious bow)

Come, weep for the husband, his wife left unguarded,
But gets the last laugh when the tart is outsmarted.
Then jeer at the villain, a spreader of evil,
Who raises the devil
And thickens the plot.
Your blood will run cold and hot
Tonight at eleven, right here at eleven.

CROWD

Our blood will run cold and hot
If you keep your promise.
Tonight at eleven!

CANIO

(to Tonio, who runs to help Nedda down from the wagon)
Hands off!

SOPRANO

Gallant deeds go unrewarded.

BOYS

Try tomorrow!

TONIO *(aside, as he exits in a huff)*
(I will get even, you drunkard!)

VILLAGERS *(to Canio)*

Say, if you have nothing on,
Join us for a round or two at the tavern.
So, why not?

CANIO

With pleasure.

PEPPE *(reappearing)*

Fellows, wait for me. I'm coming, too.

CANIO

Hey, Tonio! Will you join us?

TONIO *(from within)*

The donkey needs a brushing. Maybe later on.

VILLAGERS

**Watch him, Pagliaccio!
He stays behind, but hoping
To make a play for Nedda.**

CANIO

**Oh, does he?
Take my word that such a game
Is played at ones own peril.
That goes for Tonio,
And others who may be so inclined.
On the stage all is illusion, but life is another matter.
Not the same . . . so don't be fooled.
If on the stage the husband surprises the guilty couple,
His wife embracing Harlequin,
He gives a gentle scolding, then surrenders,
Or is rewarded with a beating on the backside,
And the public applauds, doubled up with hearty laughter.
But with Nedda, if this should really happen . . .
I assure you, it would have no happy ending.
This I swear upon my honor!
Take my word that such a game
Is played at ones own peril.**

NEDDA

(What does he know?)

VILLAGERS

Be honest! What has made you uneasy?

CANIO

**Me? . . . just talking. My lovely wife
I adore and trust as always.**

VARIOUSLY:

**The pipers playing ... the bells resounding ...
And off to church the young folk are headed.
Couples pour in from the valleys surrounding,
Maybe two sweethearts about to be wedded.
The church bells are sending a summons from heaven.**

CANIO

**My friends . . . you must not forget:
Tonight at eleven!**

CHORUS

Come all! Come all!
Ding, dong, say the vesper bells to young people all
As couples answer to the call,
And the setting sun becomes golden fire;
As vigilant mothers cry,
“You children, stay near!”
Warm and sparkling light of love fills the air,
And old folk wonder and sigh,
“Where went yesteryear?”

NEDDA (*alone*)

The accusing way he glowered!
I could not face him,
Oh, what would happen if
He discovered my guilty secret?
He can turn into a monster,
And this can be an excuse.
How foolish! How futile!
To fear the worst is wild imagination!

How warm and sweet is the August sunshine,
Stirring fires deep inside me
That fill my heart with yearning
And awaken desire, till now long buried.

Swallows start on their journey
With lively chatter,
Exploring, seeking what? Who knows?
Maybe my mother, in tune with the secrets of nature,
Understood their language.
Though a child, I heard
And I still am haunted.



Ever on course, and swift as an arrow in flight,
At times, braving the cold and the sun that scorches,
But always onward through the boundless sky.

They glide, lighter than air, toward vast horizons,
Basking in splendor on mountain tops bathed in blue.
What drives them forward?
What force of nature has guided
And sent them searching for a place to nest?

Spurred by the wind,
Or lashed by howling tempest,
Spreading their wings, they dare to expand.
No rain, no lightning can deter or hinder
Their valiant journey over sea and land.

Onward they go, a quest without an ending,
To reach a goal they are never to attain.
These gypsies of the sky
Obey a stern power past understanding
That cries, "Go on! Go on! Go on!"

NEDDA

Back again? I thought you had gone with the others.

TONIO

Your song pulled like a magnet –
So here I am, enslaved but enraptured..

NEDDA

Ha ha ha! What a dose of poetry!

TONIO

Nedda, stop laughing!

NEDDA

Off! Back to your tavern!

TONIO

I well know I'm awkward,
Uncouth and ungainly,
I well understand your contempt and disdain.
Yet I, too, can dream,
With a soul that desires
And a heart that feels pain.

The more you despise me
The more I adore you
And secretly suffer the pangs of despair.
Subdued by your magic, I sigh but surrender,
Held captive by a love I've dared not declare.
Oh, grant me the liberty . . . of saying . . .

NEDDA

You love me? Ha ha ha!
On stage you will find time enough

To pour out your passion . . .

TONIO

Nedda!

NEDDA

**So spill it tonight when you're playing the fool.
The crowd will adore it. So save it.**

TONIO

**Stop joking, Nedda! While I sigh and suffer
To you I am nothing ...**

TONIO

**Don't laugh at me. Stop joking . .
Who knows how it happened?
Love hit me so hard. Nedda! Nedda!**

NEDDA

I warn you, just leave me alone.

TONIO

**No! Instead, sit down and talk to me.
I'm not asking, I'm telling you;
Like it or not, you'll hear me.
I love you! You are the one I want.
And come what may, I will have you/.**

NEDDA

**Ah! Frankly, Mister Tonio,
You are asking for a good thrashing.
Or is a box on the ears
Needed to bring you down to earth?**

TONIO

**So flippant and sarcastic!
By the rod of Jehovah, watch it!
That laugh will cost you dearly.**

NEDDA

You threaten? Go before I call my husband.

TONIO

No, not until I kiss you.

NEDDA

Never!

TONIO

I dare you try to stop me!

(As he tries to force himself upon her, she picks up a whip and strikes him)

NEDDA

The audacity!

TONIO

**By the Holy Virgin of the Assumption,
I swear you will live to be sorry. *(he leaves, still threatening)***

NEDDA

(staring after him as he departs)

Sacrilege! Go!

You now show your true colors: Tonio, the viper!

Your character is printed on your face . . .

Vindictive . . . venomous . . .

SILVIO *(entering)*

Nedda!

NEDDA

Silvio! So unexpected . . . and so risky.

SILVIO

Nonsense! Though madly in love, I'm not so reckless.

Canio and Beppe I saw sharing a bottle.

They'll surely stay in the tavern till the last drop.

We're in luck, as already they are blotto.

NEDDA

A moment sooner,

And Tonio would have surely seen you.

SILVIO

Ah, Tonio the camel!

NEDDA

That camel could mean danger.

He loves me . . . He was here and said so . . .

A raging beast . . . out of control . . .

He tried to kiss me, but I told him where to go.

SILVIO

Dear God!

NEDDA

A whip came in handy,
I let him have it, and then sent him running.

SILVIO

How long must you endure
A life of anger and fear?
Nedda! Nedda! You can decide my fate.
Nedda! Now is our moment.
The show will close tonight;
Everyone else leaves tomorrow.
Stay here! Stay here!
How can you leave when we have just found each other?
How can I live without you?
Death to all I have dreamed of.
Nedda! Nedda! I plead, I implore!
If you can no longer abide your husband,
And find just as abhorrent
This roving, rootless life you are leading.
If you love me as I love you,
If your words are sincere,
Late tonight you'll prove it
And run off with me.

NEDDA

You go too far.
Would you lead me into the dark?
Silvio, I have outgrown these illusions of rapture.
Let me speak straight from the heart:
I gave to you my love, and with it all my trust,
A gift to guard and hold.
You go too far. You go too far.

SILVIO

Be brave! Be brave!
Listen to me: be brave.

NEDDA

I beg of you, tempt me no more,
Oh please, no more . . .

SILVIO

You claim to love me, yet you leave me.

NEDDA

{Who knows? Who knows?
Maybe my leaving is for the best.
Our love was not meant to be;
Unyielding fate says no.
And yet I'm far too weak
To say farewell forever.
My survival I owe to the love you inspired.

SILVIO

Ah, Nedda, my own!

NEDDA

Oh, say no more! Would you leave my life in ruin? *Etc. Etc.*}

SILVIO (*turning away*)

You say you love me, yet you leave me.

NEDDA

Because I love you.

TONIO (*sneaking in unobserved*)

(I've caught them red handed.)

SILVIO

Tomorrow you are leaving?



How can it be? You know I a- dore you,
Though you depart with barely a tear.
Don't you recall those hours of rapture,
Vows of devotion I thought sincere?
Have you forgotten hours so fleeting,
Hours when dreaming and passion blend,
Facing a world that opened before us
With boundless horizons – must it all end?

NEDDA (*overcome with emotion*)

Not for one moment have I forgotten,
From the first greeting, I knew we belong together,
Happy just to be near you to be near you,
Two hearts united,
Free to live out that love calmly and die serene . . .
I'm yours, my darling!

Your love has made me stronger.
Bravely together, we'll leave the past behind us.

BOTH

Onward as one, standing alone . . .

BOTH

With faith and courage it shall be so;
Your eyes are telling me all that I need know.

SILVIO

You're mine?

NEDDA

Yes . . . totally.

BOTH

Ah, but kiss me and say again, "I love you."
(Tonio returns, with Canio)

TONIO *(quietly, to Canio)*

Proceed with caution, then take them by surprise.

SILVIO

At midnight promptly I'll wait down below.
You give the signal, and off we go together.

NEDDA

After midnight, I'll be yours forevermore!

CANIO *(springing toward them with a fierce cry)*

Ah!

NEDDA

Flee! O Lord, help him escape. *(Silvio runs off)*

CANIO

Coward! I'll find you!
(he chases out after him as Toni starts laughing).

NEDDA

(as Tonio gives a cynical laugh)
Bravo! Nice going, Tonio!

TONIO

I aim to please.

NEDDA (*bitterly*)
On that I would have counted.

TONIO
Stick around; maybe next time I'll do better.

NEDDA
You're disgusting and loathsome.

TONIO
Ah, how you flatter! I begin to blush . . .

CANIO
(*returning after an unsuccessful search*)
So the clown is a cuckold . . . Lost him!
That snake in the grass slithers off in the dark.
But no matter.
I've means to make you tell me your lover's name.

NEDDA
Me?

CANIO
Speak, or have your throat cut.
You are spared for the moment.
There is one thing I must know
Before I stain my dagger
With the vile, tainted blood of a proven trollop.
I want an answer:
Who is the viper? Name him.

NEDDA
Your words are wasted. My lips are sealed forever.

CANIO
Your lover! Who is he? Woman, don't keep me waiting.

NEDDA
No, no! I've no more to say.

CANIO
By all that's holy!

BEPPE (*restraining him*)
Not now, but later! For the love of Jesus!

The service is over; everybody's heading for the show.
Calm down. Your dispute can wait

CANIO (*struggling*)
Stop interfering. His name! His name!

BEPPE
Tonio, help me restrain him.

CANIO
His name!

TONIO
Come on, sir. People are swarming in.
Time to get ready.
(*to Nedda*) And you had better hurry up!
Get dressed to go on.
Don't worry . . . Canio is all bark, no bite. (*Nedda leaves*)

CANIO
How could she! How could she!

TONIO
I'm telling you to calm down.
Be smart and play for time.
That rascal will return; trust me and take my word.
Wait and be patient.
We must behave as usual.
Who knows? Maybe tonight he'll come to watch the show.
I'll keep an eye out. Cheer up!
Cunning and caginess outfox the fox.

BEPPE (*to Canio*)
Go change . . . come . . .
Your audience is waiting.
(*to Tonio*) Go down, beat the drum harder, louder.

CANIO (*alone*)
Play the role,
In a daze, going half crazy . . .
Not knowing what I'm doing
Or what I'm saying.
But pull together . . . brace yourself.
Bah! Am I not a man?
No, just the jester . . .

So don the costume,
 And apply paint and powder . . .
 They pay their money; you have to amuse the crowd.
 While Columbine and Harlequin betray you,
 Laugh, clown, be merry,
 And grin as they applaud.
 Draw foolish laughter from pain and despair.
 Go on, the show must continue -- play the part!

Laugh, en- ter- tain them, though de- spised & be- trayed.
 Swallow the foul venom that poisons my heart.

ACT TWO

THE CROWD

Come on, sit down, the show is starting any minute.
 Hustle! Hustle! Friends, neighbors, come along,
 Good neighbors, hurry, hurry, the show is starting.
 Come on, the show's about to start.
 You neighbors come along.

TONIO

Soon as you're seated we'll get started..

THE CROWD

Come on, sit own so they can start.
 Sit down, the show's about to start.

TONIO

Soon as you're seated we'll get started.

THE CROWD

The rowdy rascals scamper up to be the first in line.
 The way they push and shove!
 So beat them to it, all you lovely ladies.
 Remember, ladies first. You first, lovely ladies.
 We want the places front near the center.
 We want to sit in front and near the center.
 You told us that the show would soon get started.

TONIO

We're sorry, there's been a slight delay.

THE CROWD

Then hurry up!
I wonder if the show is ever starting.
What's holding up the show?
Why keep us waiting? See, here we are.

TONIO

Be patient, please, we'll soon get started.

BEPPE

Sit down, there's room enough for all.

SILVIO

(aside to Nedda as he pays for his seat)

Nedda!

NEDDA

We're lucky. He did not see you.

SILVIO

Close by, I'll wait for you after the show.

THE CROWD

We'll pay! Enough delay!
Why keep us waiting? When are you starting?
We want an explanation.

BEPPE

A riot! Damn it all!
You haven't paid yet. Nedda will help you.

THE CROWD

All right, we pay, okay, okay.
No more delay. It's now well past eleven.
You wait until we're dead and gone to heaven.
My teeth, my toes, my bones and back are aching.
You make us wait till dawn is slowly breaking.
No more of this! We'll boo and hiss
Till the show gets started.
(A loud bell sounds from inside the theatre)
Ah! The curtain rises.
Eureka! Be quiet, well mannered, attentive.
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

THE PLAY

Scene: a small room with two side doors and a window in back, with a table and two straw chairs.

COLUMBINE

My peevish old husband out on an errand
Will not return tonight.
That horrible Taddeo I'm expecting,
But he's also no where in sight.

HARLEQUIN (*serenading from outside*)



Fair Co- lom-bine, your faith-ful Har- le- quin im- plores, come, let me in!
Outside, how long am I to pine
For just a hopeful sign?
Starved for a tender kiss from lips that I adore,
Long waited for,
Why leave a lover
To sigh and suffer?
Outside in pain
To plead and sigh in vain? Ah!
Am I to starve in vain?
Fair Columbine, have pity on your Harlequin –
Too long denied.
Faithful yet lonely,
Always yours only,
A man with eyes aglow,
I'm waiting below:
Let me in!

COLUMBINE

The time ha come, I give the signal.
As people say, the cat's away
And Harlequin now enters.

TADDEO (*peeping in*)

(My goddess!! Ah, what a beauty!
If I could get her
To give me at least a tiny ray of hope,
What timing could be better?
Home with no husband,
No neighbors staring – Why not be daring?
So far, no sign of favor . . . It's now or never!)

COLUMBINE

Oh, it's you! Beat it!

TADDEO

Here I stay . . . so?

COLUMBINE

You're aware that Pagliaccio? . . .

TADDEO

Is not at home.

COLUMBINE

**I hesitate to ask it,
Is chicken in the basket?**

TADDEO

**Bought for my heavenly idol!
I find you here in the twilight,
Depressed and lonely.
The very moment I wanted to kneel before you
And unburden my heart.
So . . . may I go on? From the day . . .**

COLUMBINE (*interrupting*)

I assume the chicken was a bargain.

TADDEO

**Just fifty lira.
From the day I first saw you, I've adored you!**

COLUMBINE

Not again! Not again!

TADDEO

**Pure as the falling snow, or so I've heard . . .
Angelic . . . milder than milk and honey . . .
So chaste . . . or so they tell me . . .
Sternly unbending! Or just pretending?
Brooding, I beat my breast and vow to forget you . . .
But ... how can I?**

HARLEQUIN (*bursting in*)

Here is your answer!

TADDEO

**Damn it! My rival! It seems I'm one too many.
Bless you, my children!
Now I'll go and stand on guard. (exit)**

COLUMBINE

Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN

**O my darling! The god of love
Has answered all my prayers.**

COLUMBINE

**Then now for supper!
My love, I'm serving you tonight
A feast of rustic flavor.**

HARLEQUIN

**And I have brought for your delight
A wine to sip and savor.**

BOTH

**Ah! True love inhales the aroma
Of food and wine well blended.**

HARLEQUIN

A splendid combination!

COLUMBINE

A call for celebration!

HARLEQUIN

**I've a potion, effective but safe,
Meant for your husband.
While he's soundly snoring
Together we'll escape!**

COLUMBINE

Ah! Perfect!

**TADDEO (bursting in with mock alarm)
Disaster! Your husband is back!
A roaring tiger, a live volcano . . . ,
Run for cover!
He knows, and heaven help you! (he runs off)**

COLUMBINE (*to Harlequin*)
Hurry!

HARLEQUIN
Into his cup go ahead and pour that potion.
(He also hurries off)

COLUMBINE
Wait till midnight! Then forever I shall be yours.

CANIO
(Can I be dreaming?
The same wording exactly . . .
Press onward . . .)
Cavorting with a man!

NEDDA
You're crazy! Too much vino?

CANIO
A boozer ... though not blinded.

NEDDA
Back home so early . . .

CANIO (*pointedly*)
But timely . . . expecting to find you faithful as ever.
And maybe a little lonely . . .
But this table for two?

NEDDA
Taddeo paid a visit,
But fled in terror of your temper.
Come out! Tell him.

TADDEO (*from within*)
Yes, it was me! I came for tea.
Your wife is pure as a saint.
She'd never stoop to lie, much less betray you.

SPECTATORS
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

CANIO
Cut the laughter! (*to Nedda*) Stop bluffing.

**I want to know, as any honest husband.
Tell me his name.**

NEDDA (*laughing*)

But who?

CANIO

**I demand to know your lover's name.
Speak out, or else I'll have to force it from you.
One or the other.**

NEDDA

(*joking, trying to resume the play*)

Pagliaccio! Remember?

CANIO

**No! Pagliaccio is dead!
I'm now another man
Who feels too deeply
The horror of betrayal
And the stain on his honor.
Only blood will wash away the stigma,
A wound that festers
And cries, "Vendetta!"
Not Pagliaccio! Instead, a simple, trusting fool
Who befriended a helpless, homeless orphan
Nearly dead from starvation.
To her I gave my home,
I gave my hand,
With a love meant forever.**

SOPRANO I

My goodness! I'm about to cry.

SOPRANO II

So real, I start to wonder.

BASS

Quiet back there!

TENOR

So powerful!

SILVIO

(How can I hear and bear it?)

NEDDA

**No! I'll not be bullied.
I may be undeserving – have it your way –
But I am not a coward.**

BASS & TENOR

Are they pretending!

SOPRANO

Not so amusing.

TENOR

Quiet back there!

SILVIO

**It's more than I can bear.
What a strange turn it's taken.**

BASS

Odd how the play turns darker.

BEPPE (to Tonio)

We'd better beat it. Tonio, I'm scared.

TONIO

You be quiet.

NEDDA

**Despise me and hate me,
But my love's unshaken.
I will not talk. No!
Not even if you kill me. No!**

CANIO

His name! Who is he?

SILVIO *drawing his dagger*

Mother of Lucifer! He's in earnest!

OTHERS

He's mad!

(Nedda tries to escape, but Canio seizes her and strikes her repeatedly with his knife. General confusion)

CANIO

Take that, and that! As you're gasping your final breath,

Say his name!

OTHERS

Stop him! Go help her!

NEDDA (*with a last effort as she dies*)
Oh, help me! Silvio!

SILVIO (*rushing forward*)
Nedda!

(Turning at the sound of Silvio's voice, Canio runs toward him and stabs him in the heart. He falls.)

CANIO (*speaking*)
Ah! So it's you? Welcome!

OTHERS

Jesu Maria! Arrest him!

CANIO

(as if stupefied, he lets his knife fall.
The comedy is ended.

THE END

