

Pagliacci

by Ruggero Leoncavallo

Cast

CANIO, head of the troupe (Pagliaccio) (tenor)

NEDDA, Canio's wife (Colombina) (soprano)

TONIO, the hunchback (Taddeo) (baritone)

BEPPE, actor (Arlecchino) (tenor)

SILVIO, Nedda's lover (baritone)

Chorus of villagers

PROLOGUE

(Tonio appears through the curtain, dressed as Taddeo in the style of the commedia dell'arte.)

TONIO

Please? Will you allow me?

Ladies! Gentlemen!

Excuse me if I appear thus alone.

I am the Prologue.

Since our author is reviving on our stage
the masks of ancient comedy,
he wishes to restore for you, in part,
the old stage customs,

and once more he sends me to you.

But not, as in the past, to reassure you,
saying, "The tears we shed are false,
so do not be alarmed by our agonies
or violence!"

No! No!

Our author has endeavored, rather,
to paint for you a slice of life,
his only maxim being that the artist
is a man, and he must write for men.
Truth is his inspiration.

Deep-embedded memories stirred one day
within his heart, and with real tears
he wrote, and marked the time with sighs!

Now, then, you will see men love
as in real life they love, and you will see
true hatred and its bitter fruit.

And you will hear
shouts both of rage and grief,
and cynical laughter.

Mark well, therefore, our souls,

rather than the poor players' garb
we wear, for we are men
of flesh and bone, like you, breathing
the same air of this orphan world.

This, then, is our design.

Now give heed to its unfolding.

(shouting towards the stage)

On with the show! Begin!

ACT ONE

Scene One

A country cross-roads at the entrance to a village. The blare of trumpet out of tune and the beating of a big drum announce the coming of the players, amid shouts, laughter and the whistling of urchins. A throng of villagers, men and women in holiday dress, come running to the scene. Tonio, annoyed by the swelling crowd, stretches out in front of the theatre. It is three o'clock under a burning August sun.

MEN and WOMEN

(arriving in groups)

They're here! They're back!

And there's Pagliaccio!

All follow him, young and old,
and all applaud his quips and clowning.

And he bows gravely as he passes,
then beats the big drum again.

Hey! Hey! Whip your donkey, good Harlequin!

They're here, they're here!

Now the urchins shout
and throw their caps in the air!

CANIO
(from within)
Go to the devil!

BEPPE
(from within)
Take that, you rascal!

CHORUS
They throw their caps up into the air!
Up they go, with shouts and whistles...
Here come the cart! Make way...
They're coming!
Good God, what pandemonium!
They're here...make way!
(Enter Beppe, dressed as Harlequin. He leads a donkey which is drawing a brightly painted, multi-colored cart. Nedda is reclining in the front of the cart while Canio, in the costume of Pagliaccio, is standing in the back. Canio is beating the big drum.)

ALL
Hurrah! Hurrah for the
Prince of Clowns!
All cares take flight
before his merriment.
Hurrah! They're here!
etc.

CANIO
Thank you...

CHORUS
Bravo!

CANIO
I should like...

CHORUS
And the show?

CANIO
My friends!

ALL
Oh! You deafen us! Stop!

CANIO
Am I allowed to speak?

ALL
Oh! With him we have no choice
but to yield and listen.

CANIO
Your able and respectful
servant is preparing
a great show for you
at eleven this evening.
You will see the madness
of the good Pagliaccio,
and how with a well-laid trap
he gains his vengeance.
You'll see the vile body
of Tonio tremble,
and what a heap of intrigue
that rogue contrives.
Come and honor us,
ladies and gentlemen.
At eleven tonight!

ALL
We'll be there — and save
your good spirits for us!
At eleven tonight!
(Tonio steps forward to help Nedda down from the cart, but Canio, who has already leapt down, gives him a cuff, saying:)

CANIO
Off with you!

WOMEN
(laughing)
Take that, you fine gallant!

BOYS
(whistling)
With our compliments!

TONIO
(to himself)
You'll pay for this! Bandit!

VILLAGER
(to Canio)
Say, won't you come and drink

a glass with us at the cross-roads?
Come, won't you?

CANIO
With pleasure.

BEPPE
Wait for me,
I'll be with you!

CANIO
And you, Tonio, are you coming?

TONIO
I'll groom the donkey. You go ahead.

VILLAGER
(laughing)
Watch out, Pagliaccio, he wants to be alone
to woo your Nedda.

CANIO
(smiling, but with a frown)
Ah, so! You think so?
(half serious, half ironic)
My friends, believe me, it's better
not to play such games with me;
I say to Tonio, and in part to all of you
I say, the stage is one thing
and life itself another;
and if up there Pagliaccio
surprises his wife with a lover
in her chamber,
why, he delivers a comic lecture
and thereupon calms down
and submits to a thrashing —
and the public applauds to see such sport!
But if I surprised Nedda in real life -
as sure as I am speaking to you -
the story would have a different ending.
It's better not to play
such games, believe me.

NEDDA
(to herself)
He bewilders me!

VILLAGERS
You take us
seriously, then?

CANIO
I! Hardly! Forgive me,
I adore my wife!
(the sound of bag-pipes off-stage)

BOYS
The pipers! The pipers!

MEN
They are on their way to church.
(The church-bells sound vespers.)

OLD PEOPLE
They are accompanying the happy train
of couples as they go to vespers.

WOMEN
Come, everyone. The bell
calls us to the Lord.

CANIO
But be sure to remember,
at eleven tonight.

CHORUS
Let's go, let's go!
Ring, bells! It is vespers calling,
girls and lads, let us join
in pairs and hasten now
to church. Ring, bells!
Yonder the sun kisses
the western heights, ring, bells!
Look out, companions,
our mothers watch us.
Ring, bells!
The world is gleaming
with light and love.
But our elders keep watch
over bold lovers!
Ring, bells!
etc.

*(During the chorus, Canio has gone behind the
theatre to take off his Pagliaccio costume. He
returns, nods a smiling farewell to Nedda and
leaves with Beppe and five or six villagers.
Nedda remains alone.)*

Scene Two

NEDDA

What a fire in his glance!
 I lowered my eyes for fear
 that he read my secret thoughts.
 Oh, if he ever caught me,
 brute that he is! But enough of that.
 These are mere fearful dreams and folly.
 Oh, beautiful midsummer sun!
 And I, bursting with life, languid with desire,
 and yet not knowing what it is I long for!
(She looks up at the sky.)
 Oh, what a flight of birds, what clamor!
 What do they seek? Where do they go?
 Who knows?...
 My mother, who foretold the future,
 understood their song and even so
 she sang to me as a child.
 Hui! How wildly they shout up there,
 launched on their flight like arrows!
 They defy storm-clouds and burning sun,
 as they fly on and on through the heaven.
 Light-thirsty ones, avid for air and splendor,
 let them pursue their journey; they, too,
 follow a dream and a chimera,
 journeying on and on through clouds of gold.
 Let winds buffet and storms toss them,
 they challenge all with open wings;
 neither rain nor lightning daunts them,
 neither sea nor chasms, as they fly on and on.
 They journey towards a strange land yonder,
 a land they've dreamt of,
 which they seek in vain...
 Vagabonds of the sky, who obey only
 the secret force that drives them on and on.
*(Tonio enters during the song and listens
 enchanted. Nedda sees him as she finishes.)*
 You here! I thought you'd gone!

TONIO

Only your singing is to blame.
 I listened enraptured.

NEDDA

Ah, such a fine speech!

TONIO

Don't laugh at me, Nedda...

NEDDA

Off with you...off to the tavern.

TONIO

I know well that I am the twisted half-wit,
 that I inspire only scorn and loathing.
 But even so, I too dream dreams;
 I too know in my heart the pulsing of desire.
 When you pass coldly by me, in disdain,
 you do not know what anguish grips me...
 For I have felt the sorcery, alas, and
 I am vanquished in your spell.
 Oh, let me speak and tell you...

NEDDA

That you love me?
 You will have time to tell me that tonight,
 if you so wish,
 while you perform your tricks
 there on the stage.

TONIO

Don't laugh at me, Nedda.

NEDDA

But now please spare yourself the trouble.

TONIO

No, here and now I want to tell you,
 and you shall hear me say,
 that I adore you and desire you
 and that you will be mine!

NEDDA

Eh! Tell me, Master Tonio!
 Have you an itching back,
 or must I pull your ears to cool
 your ardor?

TONIO

You mock me? Wretched woman!
 By God's Cross, watch out or you'll
 pay dearly for it!

NEDDA

You're threatening me?
 Shall I call Canio?

TONIO

Not until I kiss you.

NEDDA
Look out!

TONIO
(advancing with open arms to seize her)
Oh, you will soon be mine!

NEDDA
(seizes Beppe's whip and lashes Tonio across the face.)
Wretch!

TONIO
(falling back with a scream)
By the Holy Virgin of the Assumption, Nedda,
I swear, you'll pay for this!
(He goes out, growling threats.)

NEDDA
Snake that you are, go!
Now that you have shown
what you are! Tonio the half-wit!
Your soul is like your body,
filthy and deformed!
(Enter Silvio, who calls softly.)

SILVIO
Nedda!

NEDDA
Silvio! How rash at this hour!

SILVIO
Bah! I knew I was risking nothing.
I saw both Canio and Beppe far off
at the tavern, and I came here cautiously
through woods I know.

NEDDA
A moment earlier and you'd have met Tonio!

SILVIO
Oh, Tonio the half-wit!

NEDDA
The half-wit is to be feared!
He loves me — so he told me now — and in his
bestial passion dared assault me,
yelling for kisses.

SILVIO
By God!

NEDDA
But with the whip
I curbed the fury of the filthy dog!

SILVIO
Ah, you will live forever with this worry...
Oh, Nedda, Nedda,
resolve my fate,
stay with me, Nedda, stay!
You know the holiday is ending
and everyone will leave tomorrow.
Nedda, Nedda!
What will become of me and of my life
when you have gone away?

NEDDA
Silvio!

SILVIO
Nedda, Nedda, answer me.
If it is true that you have never loved Canio,
if, as you say, you loathe
this wandering life and trade,
and if your great love for me is not a myth,
come, let us flee tonight! Come, flee with me!

NEDDA
Oh, do not tempt me!
Would you ruin my life?
Quiet, Silvio, quiet. This is madness!
I put my trust in you, who have my heart...
Do not abuse my ardent passion!
Do not tempt me! Take pity on me!
Do not tempt me! And then who knows?
It's best to part.
Fate is against us, our words are in vain!
Yet from my heart I cannot tear you.
I shall live only on the love
which you awakened in my heart!

SILVIO
Oh! Nedda, let us flee!

NEDDA
Do not tempt me!
Would you ruin my life? *etc.*

SILVIO

Nedda, stay!
 What will happen to me when you've gone?
 Stay! Nedda! Let's fly! Ah, come!
 Ah! Come with me! Ah, come!
 No! You love me no longer!

TONIO

(observing them from one side)
 Wench, I've caught you now!

NEDDA

Yes, I love you, I love you!

SILVIO

And you will leave tomorrow?
 Why, if you must leave me without pity,
 why then, sorceress, have you ensnared me?
 Why then, that kiss of yours
 in the abandon of your close embrace?
 If you forget those fleeting hours,
 I cannot do so: I desire still
 that warm abandon and that flaming kiss
 that kindled such a fire in my blood!

NEDDA

I have forgotten nothing: I have been stirred
 and shaken by your burning love.
 All I wish is to share a life of love with you,
 bound to you ever in a sweet enchantment.
 To you I give myself and you I take;
 you alone rule me: I am wholly yours.

NEDDA and SILVIO

Let us forget everything.

NEDDA

Look into my eyes! Look at me!
 Kiss me, kiss me! Let us forget everything!

SILVIO

You will come?

NEDDA

Yes. Kiss me.

NEDDA and SILVIO

Yes, I look at you, I kiss you,
 I love you, I love you!

*(Canio and Tonio come furtively in as Nedda
 and Silvio are approaching the wall.)*

TONIO

Walk softly and you'll surprise them.

SILVIO

I'll be down there at midnight.
 Come cautiously and you will find me.
(Silvio vaults over the wall.)

NEDDA

Until tonight, and I'll be yours forever.

CANIO

Oh!

NEDDA

Run!
(Canio also scales the wall in pursuit of Silvio.)
 Heaven help him!

CANIO

(off-stage)
 You're hiding, coward!

TONIO

(laughing cynically)
 Ha!...Ha!...

NEDDA

Bravo! Bravo, Master Tonio!

TONIO

I do what I can.

NEDDA

That's as I thought!

TONIO

But I have not lost hope of doing better.

NEDDA

You fill me with disgust and loathing!

TONIO

Oh, you don't know
 how glad that makes me!
(Canio returns, wiping his brow.)

CANIO
(raging)
 Scorn and derision!
 Empty-handed! He knows that path well.
 But no matter!
 For you yourself will tell me
 now the scoundrel's name.

NEDDA
 Who?

CANIO
(furious)
 You, by the Almighty!
(drawing a stiletto from his belt)
 And if I have not cut your throat
 already at this moment, it's because
 I want his name before this blade
 is fouled with your stinking blood. Speak!

NEDDA
 It is no use insulting me. My lips are sealed.

CANIO
 His name, his name! Don't waste time, woman!

NEDDA
 I'll never tell you.

CANIO
(rushing at her in a fury with stiletto raised)
 By the Madonna!
(Beppe enters and wrests the knife from Canio.)

BEPPE
 Master! What are you doing?
 By God's love, the villagers are leaving church
 and coming to the show.
 Come, calm down!

CANIO
(struggling)
 Let go, Beppe! His name! His name!

BEPPE
 Tonio, come here and hold him.
 Hurry, the public is arriving.
(Tonio takes Canio by the hand and Beppe turns to Nedda.)
 You'll do your explaining later. You there,

get going. Go and get dressed.
 You know, Canio is hot-tempered
 but good-hearted.
(He pushes Nedda through the curtain and follows her.)

CANIO
 Shameful! Shameful!

TONIO
 Be calm now, Master, it is better to dissemble.
 The lover will be back. Trust me,
 I'll keep an eye on her. Now for the show!
 Who knows, perhaps he'll come to see the play
 and so betray himself. To succeed
 you must dissemble.

BEPPE
(re-entering)
 Come one, Master, hurry, you must dress.
 And you, Tonio, beat the drum.
(Tonio and Beppe leave. Canio, overwhelmed, remains behind.)

CANIO
 Perform the play! While I am racked with grief,
 not knowing what I say or what I do!
 And yet...I must...ah, force myself to do it!
 Bah! You are not a man!
 You are Pagliaccio!
 Put on the costume, the powder and the paint:
 the people pay and want to laugh.
 And if Harlequin steals your Columbine,
 laugh, Pagliaccio, and all will applaud you!
 Change all your tears and anguish into
 clowning:
 and into a grimace your sobbing and your pain...
 Laugh, Pagliaccio, at your shattered love!
 Laugh at the sorrow that has rent your heart!
(Grief-stricken, he goes out through the curtain.)

Intermezzo

ACT TWO

Same scene as before

(All members of the troupe are on stage. The spectators arrive in groups.)

WOMEN

Come on, friend,
quick, keep moving,
the show is starting
at any minute.
Let's try to sit
right at the front.

TONIO

We're about to start!
Your seats, everyone!

THE MEN

See how the ladies run,
the little rascals!
Fair friends, please be seated.
Good heavens, what a crush
to get in first.

TONIO

Take your places!

CHORUS

Let's find a place!
Right at the front!
Let's try to sit right at the front,
for the show is about to begin.

TONIO

Come on!
Take your seats, please!

THE WOMEN

Don't push and crowd,
take your places!
Come, Beppe, help us,
there's a place right here!

PART OF THE CHORUS

On with the show!
Come on, let's get started!
Why the waiting?
We're all here!

BEPPE

The devil, what a racket!
You've got to pay first!
Nedda, take the money.

ANOTHER PART OF THE CHORUS

Look, they're fighting,
calling for help!
Quiet there, sit down
and stop shouting.

SILVIO

Nedda!

NEDDA

Careful!
He didn't see you!

SILVIO

I'll be waiting for you!
Don't forget!

CHORUS

This way! This way!
Start the show!
Why the delay?
Get on with the play!
Let's make a row!

Eleven o'clock has struck!

Everyone longs to see the show! Ah!
The curtain's rising!
Quiet! Hola!

THE PLAY

Nedda (*Columbine*) — Beppe (*Harlequin*)
Canio (*Pagliaccio*) — Tonio (*Taddeo*)

(The curtain of the inner stage rises, disclosing a little room with a table and two chairs. Nedda, in costume of Columbine, is pacing anxiously up and down.)

NEDDA

(Columbine)
My husband Pagliaccio
will not be home till late.

And whatever has become
of that blockhead Taddeo?

THE VOICE OF BEPPE

(Harlequin)

Oh! Columbine, your faithful
and adoring Harlequin is near!
Calling your name and sighing,
the poor fellow awaits you!
Show your fair face
that I may kiss this instant
your little mouth.
Love is cruelly tormenting me!
Oh, Columbine,
open your window for me;
your poor, patient Harlequin is waiting,
sighing and calling your name!
Harlequin is near to you!

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Harlequin is waiting, and the hour is near
for the agreed signal!
*(Nedda sits at the table, her back towards the
door. Enter Tonio, dressed as the servant
Taddeo. Unseen by Nedda, he pauses a moment
to admire her.)*

TONIO

(Taddeo)

She herself! Ye gods, how divine!
(The public laughs.)
If I should reveal my love to this shrew,
this love mightier than mountains!
And why not dare?
Her husband is away!
And we are alone and unsuspected!
Up, then! Let us try!
*(A deep and exaggerated sigh. The public
laughs.)*

NEDDA

(Columbine, turning)

Is it you, you idiot?

TONIO

(Taddeo)

My very self.

NEDDA

(Columbine)

And Pagliaccio has gone?

TONIO

(Taddeo)

Gone!

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Why are you standing there transfixed?
Did you buy the chicken?

TONIO

(Taddeo)

Divine lady, here it is!
(falling to his knees and offering the basket)
And here, indeed, we both lie at your feet,
for the hour has come, O Columbine,
to disclose my whole heart to you.
Say, will you listen? From the day...

NEDDA

(Columbine grabbing the basket)

How much did you pay the inn-keeper?

TONIO

(Taddeo)

One and a half. From that day my heart...

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Stop bothering me, Taddeo!
*(Harlequin leaps in through the window. He
places a bottle on the table, and then goes
towards Taddeo, who pretends not to see him.)*

TONIO

(Taddeo)

I know that you are chaste
and pure as whitest snow!
And harsh as you are towards me,
I cannot forget you!

BEPPE

*(Harlequin takes Taddeo by the ear and gives
him a kick)*

Go outside and cool off!

(Spectators laugh.)

TONIO

(Taddeo beating a comic retreat)

Heavens! They are in love!

I yield to your orders,

and bless you!

Now, I'll keep watch for you!

(Exit Taddeo. The public applauds.)

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Harlequin!

BEPPE

(Harlequin)

Columbine! Love at long last

surrenders to our prayers!

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Let's have a little supper.

(They sit facing each other at the table.)

See, my love, what a splendid repast

I've made for you!

BEPPE

(Harlequin)

See, my love, what a heavenly

nectar I've brought you!

TOGETHER

True love adores

the joys of food and wine!

BEPPE

(Harlequin)

My greedy Columbine!

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Beloved drunkard!

BEPPE

(Harlequin, taking out a phial)

Take this drug and give it to Pagliaccio

before he goes to sleep,

and then we'll run off together.

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Yes, let me have it.

(Re-enter Taddeo, in an exaggerated fit of trembling.)

TONIO

(Taddeo)

Look out!

Pagliaccio's here!

Raging like a madman, seeking arms.

He knows all.

I'll barricade myself!

(He rushes out slamming the door.)

NEDDA

(Columbine to Harlequin)

Flee!

BEPPE

(Harlequin)

(climbing through the window)

Pour the filter into his cup.

(Enter Canio, dressed as Pagliaccio.)

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Till tonight, and I shall be yours forever!

CANIO

(Pagliaccio)

(In God's name! The very words! Courage!)

A man was here with you.

NEDDA

(Columbine)

What nonsense!

Are you drunk?

CANIO

(Pagliaccio)

Drunk, yes, for an hour!

NEDDA

(Columbine)

You are home early.

CANIO

(Pagliaccio significantly)

But in time! Does that

distress you, sweet wife?

(resuming the play)

Ah, I thought you were alone...
But I see two places.

NEDDA

(Columbine)

Taddeo was with me,
and scampered off for fear.

(towards the door)

You, there, speak up!

TONIO

(Taddeo)

Believe her! She is pure!
Her pious lips abhor all falsehood!

(Spectators laugh loudly.)

CANIO

(furiously to the public)

The devil take you!

(then to Nedda)

This is enough!

I have the right to act
like every other man!

His name!

NEDDA

(cold and smiling)

Whose?

CANIO

I want your lover's name.

Name me the villain to whom you gave
yourself, base harlot!

NEDDA

(still acting her part)

Pagliaccio! Pagliaccio!

CANIO

No, I am not Pagliaccio!

Although my face

is white, that is for shame

and for the lust for vengeance!

The man reclaims his right,

the heart that bleeds wants blood

to wash away the shame, damned woman!

No, I am not Pagliaccio!

I am he, I am that fool who found you,

a starving orphan of the street,

and took you in, and offered you a name,
and the fever and the folly of his love!

WOMEN

Friend, it makes me weep,
so true the play appears!

MEN

Keep quiet there!

The devil take you!

SILVIO

(to himself)

I can hardly contain myself!

CANIO

So blinded was I by my passion,
that I had hoped — if not for love —
at least for merciful compassion!

And gladly every sacrifice

I placed upon my heart,

and trustful, I believed in you

more than in God Himself!

But only evil dwells

in your abandoned soul:

yes, you are heartless and you know

no law but of your senses.

Go, you do not deserve my grief,

woman without shame!

In my disgust I will

crush you beneath my feet!

THE CROWD

Bravo!

NEDDA

(cold but serious)

Well, then, if you so judge me

unworthy of you, drive me out forthwith!

CANIO

(with derision)

Ah, ha! You could ask for nothing better
than to run off to your paramour.

You are cunning!

But no, by God, you'll stay

and tell me now your lover's name!

NEDDA

(trying to resume the play)

Now, there, get going.

Truly I never thought
you could be so terrible.

There is no tragic business here.

Taddeo, come now and tell him
that the man sitting with me here a while ago
was our own timorous and harmless Harlequin!

*(She stifles her laughter as she meets Canio's
glance.)*

CANIO

(wild with rage)

Ah! You defy me still!

And still don't understand
that I'll not yield?

His name or your life! His name!

NEDDA

Ah! No, by my mother!

I may be unworthy,

all you will,

but, by God, I am no coward!

BEPPE

We must go!

TONIO

Silence, fool!

NEDDA

My love is stronger than your raging!

I will not speak! Not if it cost my life!

(a murmur in the crowd)

CANIO

(shrieking as he seizes a knife)

His name! His name!

NEDDA

No!

SILVIO

(drawing a dagger)

By the devil, he means it...

*(Convulsed with rage, Canio seizes Nedda and
stabs her with the knife.)*

BEPPE and THE CROWD

What are you doing?

CANIO

This for you!

NEDDA

Ah!

CANIO

And this!

BEPPE and THE CROWD

Stop!

CANIO

In your death spasm
you'll tell me!

NEDDA

Help!...Silvio!

SILVIO

(rushing onto the inner stage)

Nedda!

CANIO

*(turns like a beast, leaps on Silvio and stabs
him.)*

Ah, then! It's you! Welcome!

(Silvio collapses to the floor.)

THE CROWD

Jesus and Mary!

(Several of the men rush to disarm Canio.

*Stupefied and motionless, he lets his knife slip to
the floor.)*

CANIO

The comedy is ended!

Curtain