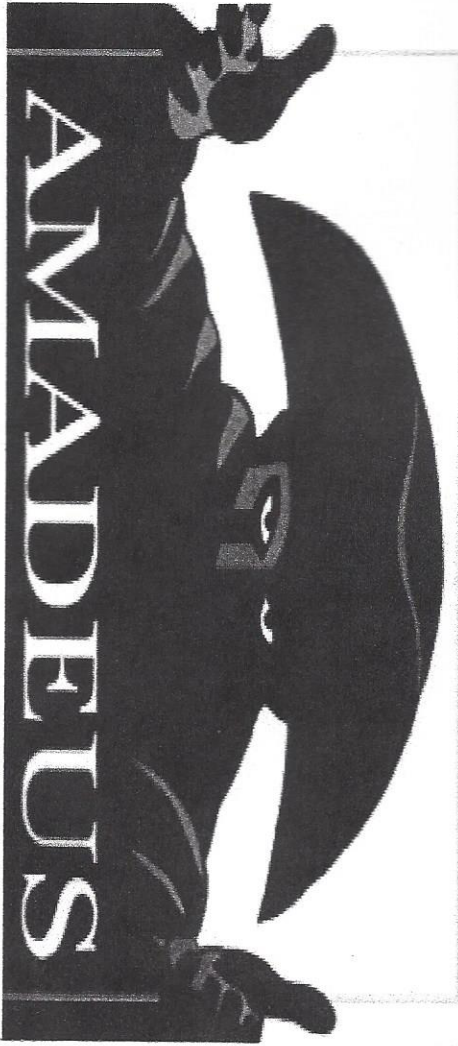




ANTONIO SALIERI

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

CONSTANZE WEBER, *wife to Mozart*

JOSEPH II, *Emperor of Austria*

COUNT JOHANN KILIAN VON STRACK, *Royal Chamberlain*
-COUNT FRANZ OKSINI-ROSENBERG, *Director of the Imperial Opera*

BARON GOTTFRIED VAN SWIETEN, *Prefect of the Imperial*

Library

TWO "VENTICELLI"—"*Little Winds*," *purveyors of information, gossip and rumor*

A MAJORDOMO

SALIERI'S VALET (Silent part)

SALIERI'S COOK (Silent part)

KAPELLMEISTER BONNO (Silent part)

TERESA SALIERI, *wife of Salieri* (Silent part)

KATHERINA CAVALIERI, *Salieri's pupil* (Silent part)

CITIZENS OF VIENNA

The VENTICELLI also play the TWO GALLANTS at the party in Act One.

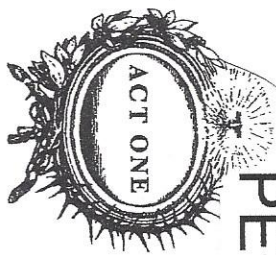
The CITIZENS OF VIENNA also play the SERVANTS, who move furniture and bring on props as required.

The action of the play takes place in Vienna in November 1823 and, in recall, the decade 1781-1791.

The *s which now and then divide the page indicate changes of Scene: but there is to be no interruption. The scenes must flow into one another without pause from the beginning to the end

A Play by

PETER SHAFFER



SCENE I

Vienna

[Darkness.

Savage whisps fill the theater. We can distinguish nothing at first from this snakelike hissing save the word Salieri! repeated here, there and everywhere around the theater. Also, the barely distinguishable word Assassini!

The whisps overlap and increase in volume, slashing the air with wicked intensity. Then the light grows upstage to reveal the silhouettes of men and women dressed in the top hats and skirts of the early nineteenth century—CITIZENS OF VIENNA, all crowded together in the Light Box, and uttering their scandal.]

WHISPERERS: Salieri!... Salieri!... Salieri!

[Upstage, in a wheelchair, with his back to us, sits an old man. We can just see, as the light grows a little brighter, the top of his head, encased in an old red cap, and perhaps the shawl wrapped around his shoulders.]

Salieri!... Salieri!... Salieri!

[Two middle-aged gentlemen hurry in from either side, also wearing the long cloaks and tall hats of the period. These are the two VENTICELLI: purveyors of fact, rumor and gossip throughout the play. They speak rapidly—in this first appearance extremely rapidly—so that the scene has the air of a fast

and dreadful overture. Sometimes they speak to each other, sometimes to us—but always with the urgency of men who have ever been first with the news.]

VENTICELLO 1: I don't believe it.

VENTICELLO 2: I don't believe it.

V.1: I don't believe it.

V.2: I don't believe it.

WHISPERERS: *Salieri!*

V.1: They say.

V.2: I hear.

V.1: I hear.

V.2: They say.

V.1 & V.2: *I don't believe it!*

WHISPERERS: *Salieri!*

V.1: The whole city is talking.

V.2: You hear it all over.

V.1: The cafés.

V.2: The Opera.

V.1: The Prater.

V.2: The gutter.

V.1: They say even Metternich repeats it.

V.2: They say even Beethoven, his old pupil.

V.1: But why now?

V.2: After so long?

V.1: Thirty-two years!

V.1 & V.2: *I don't believe it!*

WHISPERERS: *SALIERI!*

V.1: They say he shouts it out all day!

V.2: I hear he cries it out all night!

V.1: Stays in his apartments.

V.2: Never goes out.

V.1: Not for a year now.

V.2: Longer. Longer.

V.1: Must be seventy.

V.2: Older. Older.

V.1: Antonio Salieri—

V.2: The famous musician—

V.1: Shouting it aloud!

V.2: Crying it aloud!

V.1: Impossible.

V.2: Incredible.

V.1: I don't believe it!

V.2: I don't believe it!

WHISPERERS: *SALIERI!*

V.1: I know who started the tale!

V.2: I know who started the tale!

[Two old men—one thin and dry, one very fat—detach themselves from the crowd at the back and walk downstage, on either side: Salieri's VALET and PASTRY COOK.]

V.1: *[Indicating him].* The old man's valet!

V.2: *[Indicating him].* The old man's cook!

V.1: The valet hears him shouting!

V.2: The cook hears him crying!

V.1: What a story!

V.2: What a scandal!

[The VENTICELLI move quickly upstage, one on either side, and each collects a silent informant. VENTICELLO ONE walks down eagerly with the VALET; VENTICELLO TWO walks down eagerly with the COOK.]

V.1: *[To VALET].* What does he say, your master?

V.2: *[To COOK].* What exactly does he say, the Kapellmeister?

V.1: Alone in his house—

V.2: All day and all night—

V.1: What sins does he shout?

V.2: The old fellow—

V.1: The recluse—

V.2: What horrors have you heard?

V.1 & V.2: *Tell us! Tell us! Tell us at once! What does he cry? What does he cry? What does he cry?*

[VALET and COOK gesture toward SALIERI.]

SALIERI: *[In a great cry].* MOZART!!!

[Silence]

V.1: *[Whispering].* Mozart!

V.2: *[Whispering].* Mozart!

SALIERI: *Perdonami, Mozart! Il tuo assassino ti chiede perdono!*

V.1: *[In disbelief].* Pardon, Mozart!

V.2: *[In disbelief].* Pardon your assassin!

V.1 & V.2: *God preserve us!*

SALIERI: *Pietà, Mozart! . . . Mozart, pietà!*

V.1: Mercy, Mozart!

V.2: Mozart, have mercy!

V.1: He speaks in Italian when excited!

V.2: German when not!

V.1: *Perdonami, Mozart!*

V.2: Pardon your assassin!

[The VALET and the COOK walk to either side of the stage and stand still. Pause. The VENTICELLI cross themselves, deeply shocked.]

V.1: There was talk once before, you know.

V.2: Thirty-two years ago.

V.1: When Mozart was dying.

V.2: He claimed he'd been poisoned!

V.1: Some said he accused a man.

V.2: Some said that man was Salieri!

V.1: But no one believed it.

V.2: They *knew* what he died of!

V.1: Syphilis, surely.

V.2: Like everybody else.

[Pause]

V.1: *[Slyly].* But what if Mozart was right?

V.2: If he really *was* murdered?

V.1: And by him. Our First Kapellmeister!

V.2: Antonio Salieri!

V.1: It can't possibly be true.

V.2: It's not actually credible.

V.1: Because *why*?

V.2: Because *why*?

V.1 & V.2: *Why on earth would he do it?*

V.1: And why confess *now*?

V.2: After thirty-two years!

WHISPERERS: *Salieri!*

[Pause]

SALIERI: *Mozart! Mozart! Perdonami! . . . Il tuo assassino ti chiede perdono!*

[Pause. They look at him, then at each other.]

V.1: What do you think?

V.2: What do you think?

V.1: I don't believe it!

V.2: I don't believe it!

[Pause]

V.1: All the same . . .

V.2: Is it just possible?

V.1 & V.2: *[Whispering].* Did he do it after all?

WHISPERERS: SALIERI!

[The VENTICELLI go off. The VALET and the COOK remain, on either side of the stage. SALIERI swirls his wheelchair around and stares at us. We see a man of seventy in an old stained dressing gown with an old Turkish-style turban on his head. He rises and squints at the audience, as if trying to see it.]

SCENE 2

Salieri's Apartment.
November 1823. The small hours.

SALIERI: [Calling to audience]. Vi saluto! Ombri del Futuro! Antonio Salieri—a vostro servizio!

[A clock outside in the street strikes three.]

I can almost see you in your ranks—waiting for your turn to live. Ghosts of the Future! Be visible. I beg you. Be visible. Come to this dusty old room—this time, the smallest hours of dark November, eighteen hundred and twenty-three—and be my confessors! Will you not enter this place and stay with me till dawn? Just till dawn—sneary six o'clock!

WHISPERERS: *Salieri! . . . Salieri! . . .*

[The curtains slowly descend on the CITIZENS OF VIENNA.

Faint images of long windows are projected on the silk.]

SALIERI: Can you hear them? Vienna is a City of Slander. Everyone tells tales here: even my servants. I keep only two now. [He indicates them.] They've been with me ever since I came here, fifty years ago. The keeper of the razor; the maker of the cakes. One keeps me tidy, the other keeps me full. [To them] "Leave me, both of you! Tonight I do not go to bed at all!"

[They react in surprise.]

"Return here tomorrow morning at six precisely—to shave, to feed your capricious master!" [He smiles at them both and claps his hands in dismissal.] *Via. Via, via, via! Grazie!*

[They bow, bewildered, and leave the stage. He peers hard at the audience, trying to see it.]

Now, won't you appear? I need you—desperately! This is the last hour of my life. Those about to die implore you! . . . What must I do to make you visible? Raise you up in the flesh to be my last, last audience? . . . Does it take an Invocation? That's

how it's always done in opera! Ah yes, of course: that's it. An Invocation. The only way. [He rises.] Let me try to conjure you now—Ghosts of the distant Future—so I can see you.

[He gets out of the wheelchair and huddles over to the fortepiano. He stands at the instrument and begins to sing in a high cracked voice, interrupting himself at the end of each sentence with figurations on the keyboard in the manner of a recitativo secco. During this, the house lights slowly come up to illuminate the audience.]

[Singing]

Ghosts of the future!

Shades of time to come!

So much more unavoidable than those of time gone by!

Appear with what sympathy incarnation may endow you!

Appear you:

The yet to be born!

The yet to hate!

The yet to kill!

Appear . . . posterity!

[The light on the audience reaches its maximum. It stays like this during all of the following.]

[Speaking again] There. It worked. I can see you! That is the result of proper training. I was taught invocation by Gluck, who was a true master at it. He had to be. In his day, that was what people went to the opera for: the raising of gods, and ghosts. Nowadays, since Rossini became the rage, they prefer to watch the escapades of hairdressers. [Pause] *Scusate*. Invocation is an exhausting business! I need refreshment. [He sits again in his wheelchair, moves himself over to the cake-stand, selects a cake and eats it.] It's a little repellent, I admit, but actually, the first sin I have to confess to you is gluttony. Sticky gluttony at that. Infantine, *Italian* gluttony! The truth is that all my life I have never been able to conquer a lust for the sweetmeats of Northern Italy, where I was born. From the ages of three to seventy-

three, my entire career has been conducted to the taste of almonds sprinkled with sifted sugar. [*Lustfully*] Veronese biscuits! Milanese macaroons! Snow dumplings with pistachio sauce! . . . Do not judge me too harshly for this. All men harbor patriotic feelings of some kind. . . . My parents were provincial subjects of the Austrian Empire. A Lombardy merchant and his Lombardy wife. Their notion of place was the tiny town of Legnago—which I could not wait to leave. Their notion of God was a superior Habsburg emperor, inhabiting a Heaven only slightly farther off than Vienna. All they required of Him was to protect commerce, and keep them forever preserved in *mediocrity*. . . . My own requirements were very different. [*Pause*] I wanted *Fame*. Not to deceive you, I wanted to blaze like a comet across the firmament of Europe! Yet only in one special way. Music! Absolute music! . . . A note of music is either right or wrong *absolutely*! Not even time can alter that: music is God's art. [*Excited by the recollection*] Already when I was ten a spray of sounded notes would make me dizzy almost to falling! By twelve, I was stumbling about the fields of Lombardy humming my arias and anthems to the Lord. My one desire was to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past! . . . Every Sunday I saw Him in church, painted on the flaking wall. I don't mean Christ. The Christs of Lombardy are simpering sillies, with lambkins in their arms. No: I mean an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes. Tradesmen had put him up there. Those eyes made bargains, real and irreversible. "You give me so—I'll give you so! No more. No less!" [*He eats a sweet biscuit in his excitement.*] The night before I left Legnago forever, I went to see Him, and made a bargain with Him myself! I was a sober sixteen, filled with a desperate sense of *right*. I knelt before the God of Bargains, and I prayed through the moldering plaster with all my soul.

[*He kneels.*]

"*Signore*, let me be a composer! Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return, I will live with virtue. I will strive to better the lot of my fellows. And I will honor You with much music all the days of my life!" As I said *Amen*, I saw His eyes flare. [*As "God"*] "*Bene*. Go forth, Antonio. Serve Me and mankind, and you will be blessed!" . . . "*Grazie!*" I called back. "I am Your servant for life!"

[*He gets to his feet again.*]

The very next day, a family friend suddenly appeared—out of the blue—took me off to Vienna and paid for me to study music!

Shortly afterwards I met the Emperor, who favored me.

Clearly my bargain had been accepted!

[*Pause*]

The same year I left Lombardy, a young prodigy was touring Europe. A miraculous virtuoso aged ten years. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

[*Pause. He smiles at the audience.*]

And now, gracious ladies! obliging gentlemen! I present to you—for one performance only—my last composition, entitled *The Death of Mozart; or, Did I Do It?* . . . Dedicated to posterity on this, the last night of my life!

[*He bows deeply, undoing as he does so the buttons of his old dressing gown. When he straightens himself, divesting himself of this drab outer garment and his cap, he is a man in the prime of life, wearing a sky-blue coat and the elegant decent clothes of a successful composer of the 1780s. The house lights go down again on the audience.*]

SCENE 3

Transformation to the Eighteenth Century

[*Music sounds softly in the background: a serene piece for strings by Salieri. SERVANTS enter. One takes away the dressing gown and cap; another places on the table a wig-stand bearing a powdered wig; a third brings on a chair and places it at the left, upstage.*]

At the back, the blue curtains rise and part to show the EMPEROR JOSEPH II and his COURT bathed in golden light, against a golden background of mirrors and an immense golden fireplace. His Majesty is seated, holding a rolled paper, listening to the music. Also listening are COUNT VON STRACK; COUNT ORSINI-ROSENBERG; BARON VAN SWIETEN; and an anonymous PRIEST, dressed in a soutane. An old wigged COURTIER enters and takes his place at the keyboard: KAPPELLMEISTER BONNO.]

SALIERI: [*In a young man's voice: vigorous and confident*]. The place throughout is Vienna. The year—to begin with—1781. The age still that of the Enlightenment: that clear time before the guillotine fell in France and cut all our lives in half. I am thirty-one. Already a prolific composer to the Habsburg court. I own a respectable house and a respectable wife—Teresa.

[*Enter TERESA: a padded, placid lady who seats herself uprightly in the upstage chair.*]

I do not mock her, I assure you. I required only one quality in a domestic companion—lack of fire. And in that omission Teresa was conspicuous. [*Ceremoniously, he puts on his powdered wig.*] I also had a prize pupil: Katherina Cavalleri.

[*KATHERINA swirls on from the opposite side: a beautiful girl of twenty. The music becomes vocal: faintly, we hear a SOPRANO singing a concert aria. Like TERESA'S, KATHERINA'S*

part is mute, but as she enters she stands by the fortepiano and energetically mines her rapturous singing. At the keyboard, old BONNO accompanies her appreciatively.]

She was later to become the best singer of her age. But at that time she was mainly a bubbling student with merry eyes and a sweet, catable mouth. I was very much in love with Katherina—or at least in lust. But because of my vow to God I was entirely faithful to my wife. I had never laid a finger upon the girl—except occasionally to depress her diaphragm in the way of teaching her to sing. My ambition burned with an unquenchable flame. Its chief goal was the post of First Royal Kapellmeister, then held by Giuseppe Bonno [*Indicating him*], seventy years old, and apparently immortal.

[*All on stage, save SALIERI, suddenly freeze. He speaks very directly to the audience.*]

You, when you come, will be told that we musicians of the eighteenth century were no better than servants: the willing slaves of the well-to-do. This is quite true. It is also quite false. Yes, we were servants. But we were learned servants! And we used our learning to celebrate men's average lives.

[*A grander music sounds. The EMPEROR remains seated, but the other four men in the Light Box—STRACK, ROSENBERG, VAN SWIETEN and the PRIEST—come slowly out onto the main stage and process imposingly down it, and around it, and up it again to return to their places. Only the PRIEST goes off, as do TERESA on her side, and KATHERINA on hers.*]

[*Over this*] We took unremarkable men—usual bankers, run-of-the-mill officials, ordinary soldiers and statesmen and wives—and sacramentalized their mediocrity. We smoothed their noons with strings *divisi*! We pierced their nights with *chitarrini*! We gave them processions for their strutting, serenades for their rutting, high horns for their hunting and drums for their wars! Trumpets sounded when they entered the world, and trombones groaned when they left it! The savor of their days remains

behind because of us, our music still remembered while their politics are long forgotten.

[The EMPEROR hands his rolled paper to STRACK and goes off. In the Light Box are left standing, like three icons, ROSENBERG, plump and supercilious, aged sixty; STRACK, stiff and proper, aged fifty-five; VAN SWIETEN, cultivated and serious, aged fifty. The lights go down on them a little.]

Tell me, before you call us servants, who served whom? And who, I wonder, in your generations, will immortalize you?

[The two VENTICELLI come on quickly downstage, from either side. They now appear younger also, and are dressed well, in the style of the late eighteenth century. Their manner is more confidential than before.]

V.1: [To SALIERI]. Sir!

V.2: [To SALIERI]. Sir!

V.1: [To SALIERI]. Sir. Sir.

V.2: [To SALIERI]. Sir. Sir. Sir!

[SALIERI bids them wait for a second.]

SALIERI: I was the most successful young musician in the city of musicians. And now suddenly, without warning—

[They approach him eagerly, from either side.]

V.1: Mozart!

V.2: Mozart!

V.1 & V.2: Mozart has come!

SALIERI: These are my Venticelli. My "Little Winds," as I called them. [He gives each a coin from his pocket.] The secret of successful living in a large city is always to know to the minute what is being done behind your back.

V.1: He's left Salzburg.

V.2: Means to give concerts.

V.1: Asking for subscribers.

SALIERI: I'd known of him for years, of course. Tales of his prowess were told all over Europe.

V.1: They say he wrote his first symphony at five.

V.2: I hear his first concerto at four.

V.1: A full opera at fourteen!

SALIERI: [To them]. How old is he now?

V.2: Twenty-five.

SALIERI: [Carefully]. And how long is he remaining?

V.1: He's not departing.

V.2: He's here to stay.

[The VENTICELLI glide off.]

SCENE 4

The Palace of Schönbrunn

[Lights come up on the three stiff figures of ROSENBERG, STRACK and VAN SWIETEN, standing upstage in the Light Box. The CHAMBERLAIN hands the paper he has received from the EMPEROR to the DIRECTOR OF THE OPERA. SALIERI remains downstage.]

STRACK: [To ROSENBERG]. You are required to commission a comic opera in German from Herr Mozart.

SALIERI: [To audience]. Johann von Strack. Royal Chamberlain. A court official to his collarbone.

ROSENBERG: [Loftily]. Why in German? Italian is the only possible language for opera!

SALIERI: Count Orsini-Rosenberg. Director of the Opera. Benevolent to all things Italian—especially myself.

STRACK: [Firmly]. The idea of a national opera is dear to His Majesty's heart. He desires to hear pieces in good plain German. VAN SWIETEN: Yes, but why comic? It is not the function of music to be funny.

SALIERI: Baron van Swieten. Prefect of the Imperial Library.

Ardent Freemason. Yet to find *anything* funny. Known, for his enthusiasm for old-fashioned music, as "Lord Fugue."

VAN SWIETEN: I heard last week a remarkable *serious* opera from Mozart: *Idomeneo, King of Crete*.

ROSENBERG: I heard that too. A young fellow trying to impress beyond his abilities. Too much spice. Too many notes.

STRACK: [*Firmly, to ROSENBERG*]. Nevertheless, kindly convey the commission to him today.

ROSENBERG: [*Taking the paper reluctantly*]. I believe we are going to have trouble with this young man.

[ROSENBERG leaves the Light Box and strolls down the stage to SALIERI.]

He was a child prodigy. That always spells trouble. His father is Leopold Mozart, a bad-tempered Salzburg musician who dragged the boy endlessly round Europe, making him play the keyboard blindfolded, with one finger, and that sort of thing. [To SALIERI] All prodigies are hateful—*non è vero, Compositore?*

SALIERI: *Divengono sempre sterili con gli anni*.

ROSENBERG: *Precisamente. Precisamente*.

STRACK: [*Calling suspiciously*]. What are you saying?

ROSENBERG: [*Airily*]. Nothing, Herr Chamberlain! . . . *Niente, Signor Pomposo!* . . .

[*He strolls on out. STRACK strides off, irritated. VAN SWIETEN now comes downstage.*]

VAN SWIETEN: We meet tomorrow, I believe, on your committee to devise pensions for old musicians.

SALIERI: [*Deferentially*]. It's most gracious of you to attend, Baron. VAN SWIETEN: You're a worthy man, Salieri. You should join our

Brotherhood of Masons. We would welcome you warmly.

SALIERI: I would be honored, Baron!

VAN SWIETEN: If you wished, I could arrange initiation into my lodge.

SALIERI: That would be more than my due.

VAN SWIETEN: Nonsense. We embrace men of talent of all conditions. I may invite young Mozart also—dependent on the impression he makes.

SALIERI: [*Bowing*]. Of course, Baron.

[VAN SWIETEN goes out.]

[To audience] Honor indeed! In those days almost every man of influence in Vienna was a Mason, and the Baron's lodge by far the most fashionable. As for young Mozart, I confess I was alarmed by his coming. Not by the commission of a comic opera, even though I myself was then attempting one called *The Stolen Bucket*. . . No, what worried me were reports about the man himself. He was praised altogether too much.

[*The VENTICELLI hurry in from either side.*]

V.1: Such gaiety of spirit!

V.2: Such ease of manner!

V.1: Such natural charm!

SALIERI: [*To the VENTICELLI*]. Really? Where does he live?

V.1: Peter Platz.

V.2: Number eleven.

V.1: The landlady is Madame Weber.

V.2: A real bitch.

V.1: Takes in male lodgers, and has a tribe of daughters.

V.2: Mozart is after one of them.

V.1: Constanze.

V.2: Flighty little piece.

V.1: Her mother's pushing marriage.

V.2: His *father* isn't!

V.1: Daddy is worried sick!

V.2: Writes him every day from Salzburg!

SALIERI: [*To them*]. I want to meet him. What houses does he visit?

V.1: He'll be at the Baroness Waldstädten's tomorrow night.

SALIERI: *Grazie*.

V.2: Some of his music is to be played.

SALIERI: [*To both*]. *Restiamo in contatto*.

V.1 & V.2: *Certamente, Signore!*

[*They go off.*]

SALIERI: [To audience]. So to the Baroness Waldstätten's I went. That night changed my life.

SCENE 5

The Library of the Baroness Waldstätten

[In the Light Box, two elegantly curtained windows surrounded by handsome subdued wallpaper.

Two SERVANTS bring on a large table loaded with cakes and desserts. Two more carry on a grand high-backed wing chair, which they place ceremoniously downstage at the left.]

SALIERI: [To audience]. I entered the library to take first a little refreshment. My generous hostess always put out the most delicious confections in that room whenever she knew I was coming. Dolci, caramelli, and most especially a miraculous *crema al mascarpone*—which is simply cream cheese mixed with granulated sugar and suffused with rum—that was totally irresistible!

[He takes a little bowl of it from the cake-stand and sits in the wing chair, facing out front. Thus seated, he is invisible to anyone entering from upstage.]

I had just sat down in a high-backed chair to consume this paradisaical dish—unobservable, as it happened, to anyone who might come in.

[Offstage, noises are heard.]

CONSTANZE: [Off]. Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!

[CONSTANZE runs on from upstage: a pretty girl in her early twenties, full of high spirits. At this second she is pretending

to be a mouse. She runs across the stage in her gay party dress, squeaking, and hides under the fortepiano.

Suddenly a small, pallid, large-eyed man in a shabby set of clothes runs in after her and freezes—center—as a cat would freeze, hunting a mouse. This is WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART. As we get to know him through his next scenes, we discover several things about him: he is an extremely restless man, his voice, light and high; his manner, excitable and volatile.]

MOZART: Miaouw!

CONSTANZE: [Betraying where she is]. Squeak!

MOZART: Miaouw! . . . Miaouw! . . . Miaouw!

[The composer drops on all fours and, wrinkling his face, begins spitting and stalking his prey. The mouse—giggling with excitement—breaks her cover and dashes across the floor. The cat pursues. Almost at the chair where SALIERI sits concealed, the mouse turns at bay. The cat stalks her—nearer and nearer—in its knee breeches and elaborate coat.]

I'm going to pounce-bounce! I'm going to scrunch-munch! I'm going to chew-poo my little mouse-wouse! I'm going to tear her to bits with my paws-claws!

CONSTANZE: No!

MOZART: Paws-claws—paws-claws—paws-claws! Ohh!

[He falls on her: she screams.]

SALIERI: [Dryly, to audience]. Before I could rise, it had become difficult to do so.

MOZART: I'm going to bite you in half with my fangs-wangs! My little Stanzerl-wanzerl-banzerl!

[She laughs delightedly, lying prone beneath him.]

You're trembling! . . . I think you're frightened of puss-wuss! . . . I think you're scared to death! [Intimately] I think you're going to shit yourself!

[She squeals but is not really shocked. He emits a little babyish giggle.]

In a moment it's going to be on the floor!

CONSTANZE: Sssh! Someone'll hear you!

[*He imitates the noise of a fart.*]

Stop it, Wolferl! Ssh! . . .

MOZART: Here it comes now! I can hear it *coming!* . . . Oh, what a melancholy note! Something's dropping from your boat!

[*Another fart noise, slower. CONSTANZE shrieks with amusement.*]

CONSTANZE: Stop it now! It's stupid! Really stupid!

[*SALIERI sits appalled.*]

MOZART: Hey—hey—what's "Trazom"?

CONSTANZE: What?

MOZART: T-r-a-z-o-m. What's that mean?

CONSTANZE: How should I know?

MOZART: It's Mozart spelled backwards—shit-wit! If you ever married me, you'd be Constanze Trazom.

CONSTANZE: No, I wouldn't.

MOZART: Yes, you would. Because I'd want everything backwards once I was married. I'd want to lick my wife's arse instead of her face.

CONSTANZE: You're not going to lick anything at this rate. Your father's never going to give his consent to us.

[*The sense of fun deserts him instantly.*]

MOZART: And who cares about his consent?

CONSTANZE: You do. You care very much. You wouldn't do it without it.

MOZART: Wouldn't I?

CONSTANZE: No, you wouldn't. Because you're too scared of him. I know what he says about me. [*Solemn voice*] "If you marry

that dreadful girl, you'll end up lying on straw with beggars for children!"

MOZART: [*Impulsively*]. Marry me!

CONSTANZE: Don't be silly.

MOZART: Marry me!

CONSTANZE: Are you serious?

MOZART: [*Defiantly*]. Yes! . . . Answer me this minute: yes or no!

Say yes, then I can go home, shit in the bed, and shout, "I did it!"

[*He rolls on top of her delightedly. The MAJORDOMO of the house stalks in, upstage.*]

MAJORDOMO: [*Imperiously*]. Her Ladyship is ready to commence.

MOZART: Ah! . . . Yes! . . . Good! [*He picks himself up, embarrassed, and helps CONSTANZE to rise. With an attempt at dignity*] Come, my dear. The music waits!

CONSTANZE: [*Suppressing giggles*]. Oh, by all means—Herr Trazom!

[*He takes her arm. They prance off together, followed by the disapproving MAJORDOMO. SALIERI sits shaken.*]

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. And then, right away, the concert began. I heard it through the door—some serenade—at first only vaguely, too horrified to attend. But presently the sound insisted—a solemn Adagio in E flat.

[*The Adagio from the Serenade for thirteen wind instruments (K. 361) begins to sound. Quietly and quite slowly, seated in the wing chair, SALIERI speaks over the music.*]

SALIERI: It started simply enough: just a pulse in the lowest registers—bassoons and basset horns—like a rusty squeezebox. It would have been comic except for the slowness, which gave it instead a sort of serenity. And then suddenly, high above it, sounded a single note on the oboe.

[*We hear it.*]

It hung there unwavering, piercing me through, till breath could hold it no longer, and a clarinet withdrew it out of me, and sweetened it into a phrase of such delight it had me trembling. The light flickered in the room. My eyes clouded! [*With ever-increasing emotion and vigor*] The squeezebox groaned louder, and over it the higher instruments wailed and warbled, throwing lines of sound around me—long lines of pain around and through me. Ah, the pain! Pain as I had never known it. I called

up to my sharp old God, "What is this? . . . What?!" But the squeezebox went on and on, and the pain cut deeper into my shaking head, until suddenly I was running—

[He bolts out of the chair and runs across the stage in a fever, to a corner, down right. Behind him in the Light Box, the library fades into a street scene at night: small houses under a rent sky. The music continues, fainter, underneath.]

—dashing through the side door, stumbling downstairs into the street, into the cold night, gasping for life. [Calling up in agony] "What?! What is this? Tell me, Signore! What is this pain? What is this need in the sound? Forever unfulfillable, yet fulfilling him who hears it, utterly. Is it Your need? Can it be Yours? . . ."

[Pause]

Dimly the music sounded from the salon above. Dimly the stars shone on the empty street. I was suddenly frightened. It seemed to me that I had heard a voice of God—and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard—and it was the voice of an obscene child!

[Light change. The street scene fades.]

SCENE 6

Salieri's Apartment

[It remains dark.]

SALIERI: I ran home and buried my fear in work. More pupils—till there were thirty and forty. More committees to help musicians. More motets and anthems to God's glory. And at night I prayed for just one thing. [He kneels desperately.] "Let your voice enter me! Let me be your conduit! . . . Let me!" [Pause. He rises.] As

for Mozart, I avoided meeting him—and sent out my Little Winds for whatever scores of his could be found.

[The VENTICELLI come in with manuscripts. SALIERI sits at the fortepiano, and they show him the music alternately, as SERVANTS unobtrusively remove the Waldstädten table and wing chair.]

V.1: Six fortepiano sonatas composed in Munich.

V.2: Two in Mannheim.

V.1: A Parisian symphony.

SALIERI: [To audience]. Clever. They were all clever. But yet they seemed to me completely empty!

V.1: A Divertimento in D.

V.2: A Cassazione in G.

V.1: A Grand Litany in E flat.

SALIERI: [To audience]. The same. Conventional. Even boring. The productions of a precocious youngster—Leopold Mozart's swanky son—nothing more. That Serenade was obviously an exception in his work: the sort of accident which might visit any composer on a lucky day!

[The VENTICELLI go off with the music.]

Had I in fact been simply taken by surprise that the filthy creature could write music at all? . . . Suddenly I felt immensely cheered! I would seek him out and welcome him myself to Vienna!

SCENE 7

The Palace of Schönbrunn

[Quick light change. The EMPEROR is revealed standing in bright light before the gilded mirrors and the fireplace,

attended by CHAMBERLAIN STRACK. His Majesty is a dapper, cheerful figure, aged forty, largely pleased with himself and the world. Downstage, from opposite sides, VAN SWIETEN and ROSENBERG hurry on.]

JOSEPH: Fêtes and fireworks, gentlemen! Mozart is here! He's waiting below!

[All bow.]

ALL: Majesty!

JOSEPH: *Je suis follement impatient!*

SALIERI: [To audience]. The Emperor Joseph the Second of Austria. Son of Maria Theresa. Brother of Marie Antoinette. Adorer of music—provided that it made no demands upon the royal ear. [To the EMPEROR, deferentially] Majesty, I have written a little march in Mozart's honor. May I play it as he comes in?

JOSEPH: By all means, Court Composer. What a delightful idea! Have you met him yet?

SALIERI: Not yet, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Fêtes and fireworks, what fun! Strack, bring him up at once.

[STRACK goes off. The EMPEROR comes onto the stage proper.]

Mon Dieu, I wish we could have a competition! Mozart against some other virtuoso. Two keyboards in contest. Wouldn't that be fun, Baron?

VAN SWIETEN: [Stiffly]. Not to me, Majesty. In my view, musicians are not horses to be run against one another.

[Slight pause]

JOSEPH: Ah. Well—there it is.

[STRACK returns.]

STRACK: Herr Mozart, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Ah! Splendid! . . . [Conspiratorially he signs to SALIERI, who moves quickly to the fortepiano.] Court Composer—allons! [To STRACK] Admit him, please.

[Instantly SALIERI sits at the instrument and strikes up his

march on the keyboard. At the same moment MOZART struts in, wearing an ornate surcoat, with dress sword. The EMPEROR stands downstage, and as MOZART approaches and begins his bow, he signs to him to halt and listen. Bewildered, MOZART does so, becoming aware of SALIERI playing his March of Welcome. It is an extremely banal piece, vaguely—but only vaguely—reminiscent of another march to become very famous later on. All stand frozen in attitudes of listening, until SALIERI comes to a finish. Applause.]

JOSEPH: [To SALIERI]. Charming . . . Comme d'habitude! [He turns and extends his hand to be kissed.] Mozart.

[MOZART approaches, bows extravagantly, and kneels.]

MOZART: Majesty! Your Majesty's humble slave! Let me kiss your royal hand a hundred thousand times!

[He kisses it greedily, over and over, until its owner withdraws it in embarrassment.]

JOSEPH: Non, non, s'il vous plaît! A little less enthusiasm, I beg you. Come sit, *levez-vous!* [He assists MOZART to rise.] You will not recall it, but the last time we met, you were also on the floor! My sister remembers it to this day. This young man—all of six years old, mind you—slipped on the floor at Schönbrunn—came a nasty purler on his little head. . . . Have I told you this before?

ROSENBERG: [Hastily]. No, Majesty!

STRACK: [Hastily]. No, Majesty!

SALIERI: [Hastily]. No, Majesty!

JOSEPH: Well, my sister Antoinette runs forward and picks him up herself. And do you know what he does? Jumps right into her arms—hoopla, just like that!—kisses her on both cheeks and says, "Will you marry me: yes or no?"

[The COURTIERS laugh politely. MOZART giggles uncomfortably.]

I do not mean to embarrass you, Herr Mozart. You know every-one here, surely?

MOZART: Yes, Sire. [*Bowing elaborately. To ROSENBERG*] Herr Director! [*To VAN SWIETEN*] Herr Prefect.

VAN SWIETEN: [*Warmly*]. Delighted to see you again!

JOSEPH: But not, I think, our esteemed Court Composer! . . . A most serious omission! No one who cares for art can afford not to know Herr Salieri. He wrote that exquisite little March of Welcome for you.

SALIERI: It was a trifle, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Nevertheless . . .

MOZART: [*To SALIERI*]. I'm overwhelmed, *Signore!*

JOSEPH: Ideas simply pour out of him—don't they, Strack?

STRACK: Endlessly, Sire. [*As if tipping him*] Well done, Salieri.

JOSEPH: Let it be my pleasure then to introduce you. Court Composer Salieri—Herr Mozart of Salzburg.

SALIERI: [*Sleekly, to MOZART*]. *Finalmente. Che gioia. Che diletto straordinario.*

[*He gives him a prim bow and presents the copy of his music to the other composer, who accepts it with a flood of Italian.*]

MOZART: *Grazie, Signore! Mille milioni di benvenuti! Sono commosso! E un onore eccezionale incontrare! Compositore brillante e famosissimo! [He makes an elaborate and showy bow in return.]*

SALIERI: [*Dryly*]. *Grazie.*

JOSEPH: Tell me, Mozart, have you received our commission for the opera?

MOZART: Indeed I have, Majesty! I am so grateful I can hardly speak! . . . I swear to you that you will have the best, the most perfect entertainment ever offered a monarch. I've already found a libretto.

ROSENBERG: [*Startled*]. Have you? I didn't hear of this!

MOZART: Forgive me, Herr Director, I entirely omitted to tell you.

ROSENBERG: May I ask why?

MOZART: It didn't seem very important.

ROSENBERG: Not important?

MOZART: Not really, no.

ROSENBERG: [*Irritated*]. It is important to *me*, Herr Mozart.

MOZART: [*Embarrassed*]. Yes, I see that. Of course.

ROSENBERG: And who, pray, is it by?

MOZART: Stephanie.

ROSENBERG: A most unpleasant man.

MOZART: But a brilliant writer.

ROSENBERG: Do you think?

MOZART: The story is really amusing, Majesty. The whole plot is set in a—[*He sniggers*] in a . . .

JOSEPH: [*Eagerly*]. Where? Where is it set?

MOZART: It's—it's rather saucy, Majesty!

JOSEPH: Yes, yes! Where?

MOZART: Well, it's actually set in a *seraglio*.

JOSEPH: A what?

MOZART: A pasha's harem.

ROSENBERG: And you imagine that is a suitable subject for performance at a national theater?

MOZART: Yes! . . . Why not? It's very funny, it's amusing! . . . On my honor, Majesty, there's nothing offensive in it. Nothing offensive in the world. It's full of proper German virtues, I swear it!

SALIERI: [*Blandly*]. *Scusate, Signore*, but what are those? Being a foreigner, I'm not sure.

JOSEPH: You are being *cattivo*, Court Composer.

SALIERI: Not at all, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Come then, Mozart. Name us a proper German virtue!

MOZART: Love, Sire. I have yet to see that expressed in any opera.

VAN SWIETEN: Well answered, Mozart.

SALIERI: [*Smiling*]. *Scusate*. I was under the impression one rarely saw anything *else* expressed in opera.

MOZART: I mean manly love, *Signore*. Not male sopranos screeching. Or stupid couples rolling their eyes. All that absurd Italian nonsense.

[*Pause. Tension. ROSENBERG coughs.*]

I mean the real thing.

JOSEPH: And do you know the real thing yourself, Herr Mozart?

MOZART: Under your pardon, I think I do, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Bravo. When do you think it will be done?

MOZART: The First Act is already finished.

JOSEPH: But it can't be more than two weeks since you started!

MOZART: Composing is not hard when you have the right audience to please, Sire.

VAN SWIETEN: A charming reply, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Indeed, Baron. Fêtes and fireworks! I see we are going to have fêtes and fireworks! *Au revoir, Monsieur Mozart.* Soyez bienvenu à la court.

MOZART: [*Speaking expertly*]. *Majesté! Je suis comblé d'honneur d'être accepté dans la maison du Père de tous les musiciens! Servir un monarque aussi plein de discernement que votre Majesté, c'est un honneur qui dépasse le sommet de mes dûs!*

[*A pause. The EMPEROR is slightly taken aback by this flood of French.*]

JOSEPH: Ah. Well—there it is! I'll leave you gentlemen to get better acquainted.

SALIERI: Good day, Majesty.

MOZART: *Votre Majesté.*

[*They both bow. JOSEPH goes out.*]

ROSENBERG: Good day to you.

STRACK: Good day.

[*They follow the King.*]

VAN SWIETEN: [*Warmly shaking his hand*]. Welcome, Mozart. I shall see much more of you. Depend on it!

MOZART: Thank you.

[*He bows. The BARON goes. MOZART and SALIERI are left alone.*]

SALIERI: *Bene.*

MOZART: *Bene.*

SALIERI: I, too, wish you success with your opera.

MOZART: I'll have it. It's going to be superb. I must tell you I have already found the most excellent singer for the leading part.

SALIERI: Oh? Who is that?

MOZART: Her name is Cavalleri. Katherina Cavalleri. She's really German, but she thinks it will advance her career if she sports an Italian name.

SALIERI: She's quite right. It was my idea. She is in fact my prize pupil. Actually she's a very innocent child. Silly in the way of young singers—but, you know, she's only twenty.

MOZART: Yes.

[*Without emphasis, MOZART freezes his movements and SALIERI takes one easy step forward to make a fluent aside.*]

[*To audience*] I had kept my hands off Katherina. Yes! But I could not bear to think of anyone else's upon her—least of all his!

MOZART: [*Unfreezing*]. You're a good fellow, Salieri! And that's a jolly little thing you wrote for me.

SALIERI: It was my pleasure.

MOZART: Let's see if I can remember it. May I?

SALIERI: By all means. It's yours.

MOZART: *Grazie, Signore.*

[*MOZART tosses the manuscript onto the lid of the fortepiano, where he cannot see it, sits at the instrument and plays SALIERI's March of Welcome perfectly from memory—at first slowly, recalling it, but on the reprise of the tune, very much faster.*]

The rest is just the same, isn't it? [*He finishes it with insolent speed.*]

SALIERI: You have a remarkable memory.

MOZART: [*Delighted with himself*]. *Grazie ancora, Signore!* [*He plays the opening seven bars again, but this time stops on the interval of the fourth, and sounds it again with displeasure.*] It doesn't really work, that fourth, does it? . . . Let's try the third above . . . [*He does so—and smiles happily.*] Ah yes! . . . Good!

[He repeats the new interval, leading up to it smartly with the well-known military-trumpet arpeggio which characterizes the celebrated March from The Marriage of Figaro, "Non più andrai." Then, using the interval—tentatively, delicately, one note at a time, in the treble—he steals into the famous tune itself.]

On and on he plays, improvising happily what is virtually the March we know now, laughing gleefully each time he comes to the amended interval of a third. SALIERI watches him with an answering smile painted on his face.

MOZART's playing grows more and more exhibitionistic, revealing to the audience the formidable virtuoso he is. The whole time he himself remains totally oblivious of the offense he is giving. Finally, he finishes the March with a series of triumphant flourishes and chords.
[An ominous pause.]

SALIERI: Scusate. I must go.

MOZART: Really? [Springing up and indicating the keyboard] Why don't you try a variation?

SALIERI: Thank you, but I must attend on the Emperor.

MOZART: Ah.

SALIERI: It has been delightful to meet you.

MOZART: For me too! . . . And thanks for the march!

[MOZART picks up the manuscript from the top of the forte-piano and marches happily offstage. A slight pause. SALIERI moves toward the audience. The lights go down around him.]

SALIERI: [To audience]. Was it then—so early—that I began to have thoughts of murder? . . . Of course not: at least not in life. In art it was a different matter. I decided I would compose a huge tragic opera: something to astonish the world! And I knew my theme. I would set the legend of Danaus, who, for a monstrous crime, was chained to a rock for eternity, his head repeatedly struck by lightning! Wickedly in my head I saw Mozart in

that position. . . . In reality, of course, the man was in no danger from me at all. . . . Not yet.

SCENE 8

The First Performance of The Abduction from the Seraglio

[The light changes, and the stage instantly turns into an eighteenth-century theater. The backdrop projection shows a line of softly gleaming chandeliers.

The SERVANTS bring in chairs and benches. Upon them, facing the audience and regarding it as if watching an opera, sit the EMPEROR JOSEPH, STRACK, ROSENBERG and VAN SWIETEN.

Next to them: KAPELMEISTER BONNO and TERESA SALIERI. A little behind them: CONSTANZE. Behind her: CITIZENS OF VIENNA.]

SALIERI: The first performance of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. The creature's expression of manly love.

[MOZART comes on briskly, wearing a gaudy new coat embellished with scarlet ribbons, and a new powdered wig. He struts quickly to the fortepiano, sits at it and mimes conducting. SALIERI sits nearby, next to his wife, and watches MOZART intently.]

He himself contrived to wear for the occasion an even more vulgar coat than usual. As for the music, it matched the coat completely. For my dear pupil Katherina Cavalieri he had written quite simply the showiest Aria I'd ever heard.

[Faintly we hear the whizzing scale passages for soprano which end the aria "Märtem aller arten."]

Ten minutes of scales and ornaments, amounting in sum to a

vast emptiness. So ridiculous was the piece, in fact—so much what might be demanded by a foolish young soprano—that I knew precisely what Mozart must have demanded in return for it.

[*The final orchestral chords of the Aria. Silence. No one moves.*]

Although engaged to be married, *he'd had her!* I knew that beyond any doubt. [*Bluntly*] The creature had had my darling girl.

[*Loudly we hear the brilliant Turkish finale of Seraglio. Great applause from those watching. MOZART jumps to his feet and acknowledges it. The EMPEROR rises—as do all—and gestures graciously to the "stage" in invitation. KATHERINA CAVALIERI runs on in her costume, all plumes and flourishes, to renewed cheering and clapping. She curtsies to the EMPEROR—is kissed by SALIERI—presented to his wife—curtsies again to MOZART and, flushed with triumph, moves to one side.*]

In the ensuing brief silence, CONSTANZE rushes down from the back, wildly excited. She flings herself on MOZART, not even noticing the EMPEROR.

CONSTANZE: Oh, well done, lovey! . . . Well done, pussy-wussy! . . .

[*MOZART indicates the proximity of His Majesty.*]

Oh! . . . ?*Scuse me!* [*She curtsies in embarrassment.*]

MOZART: Majesty, may I present my fiancée, Fräulein Weber.

[*CAVALIERI reacts in total surprise.*]

JOSEPH: *Enchanté, Fräulein.*

CONSTANZE: Your Majesty!

MOZART: Constanze is a singer herself.

JOSEPH: Indeed?

CONSTANZE: [*Embarrassed*]. I'm not at all, Majesty. Don't be silly, Wolfgang!

JOSEPH: So, Mozart—a good effort. Decidedly that. A good effort.

MOZART: Did you really like it, Sire?

JOSEPH: I thought it was most interesting. Yes, indeed. A trifle . . . how shall one say? [*To ROSENBERG*] How shall one say, Director?

ROSENBERG: [*Subserviently*]. Too many notes, Your Majesty?

JOSEPH: Very well put. Too many notes.

MOZART: I don't understand.

JOSEPH: My dear fellow, don't take it too hard. There are in fact only so many notes the ear can hear in the course of an evening.

I think I'm right in saying that, aren't I, Court Composer?

SALIERI: [*Uncomfortably*]. Well, yes, I would say yes, on the whole, yes, Majesty.

JOSEPH: There you are. It's clever. It's German. It's quality work. And there are simply too many notes. Do you see?

MOZART: There are just as many notes, Majesty, neither more nor less, as are required.

[*Pause*]

JOSEPH: Ah . . . Well—there it is! [*He goes off abruptly, followed by ROSENBERG and STRACK. The rest of the audience leaves also,*

CAVALIERI with a furious scowl.]

MOZART: [*Nervously*]. Is he angry?

SALIERI: Not at all. He respects you for your views.

MOZART: I hope so. . . . What did you think yourself, sir? Did you care for the piece at all?

SALIERI: Yes, of course, Mozart—at its best, it is truly charming.

MOZART: And at other times?

SALIERI: [*Smoothly*]. Well, just occasionally, at other times—in Katherina's aria, for example—it was a little excessive.

MOZART: Katherina is an excessive girl. In fact, she's insatiable. . . . I mean in regard to vocal ornaments.

SALIERI: All the same, as my revered teacher the Chevalier Gluck used to say to me, one must avoid music that smells of music.

MOZART: What does that mean?

SALIERI: Music which makes one aware too much of the virtuosity of the composer.

MOZART: [*Mischievously*]. Well—I would hate to offend a *Chevalier*. Even though I myself am one.

SALIERI: Indeed?

CONSTANCE: [*Brightly*]. Oh yes! The Pope made Wolfgang a Chevalier when he was only fourteen!

SALIERI: [*Smiling*]. Extraordinary.

MOZART: They say Gluck used the name all the time. He insisted on being addressed by it.

SALIERI: And you prefer not to be?

MOZART: I think titles are absurd, in connection with music.

SALIERI: Ah. [*Slyly*]. Even—"Court Composer"?

MOZART: What? . . . [*Realizing*] Ah. Oh. Ha, ha. Well! . . . That's different, of course. . . . My father's right, again. He always tells me I should padlock my mouth. . . . Actually I shouldn't speak at all!

SALIERI: [*Soothingly*]. Nonsense. I'm just being what the Emperor would call *cattivo*. Won't you introduce me to your charming fiancée?

MOZART: Oh, of course! Constanze, this is Herr Salieri, the Court Composer. Fräulein Weber.

SALIERI: [*Bowing*]. Delighted, *cara Fräulein*.

CONSTANCE: [*Bobbing*]. How do you do, Excellency?

SALIERI: May I ask when you marry?

MOZART: [*Nervously*]. We have to secure my father's consent. He's an excellent man—a wonderful man—but in some ways a little stubborn.

SALIERI: Excuse me, but how old are you?

MOZART: Twenty-six.

SALIERI: Then your father's consent is scarcely indispensable.

CONSTANCE: [*To MOZART*]. You see?

MOZART: [*Uncomfortably*]. Well, no, it's not *indispensable*—of course not! . . .

SALIERI: My advice to you is to marry and be happy. You have found—it's quite obvious—*un tesoro raro!*

CONSTANCE: Ta very much.

SALIERI: [*He kisses CONSTANCE's hand. She is delighted.*] Good night to you both.

CONSTANCE: Good night, Excellency!

MOZART: Good night, sir. And thank you. . . . Come, Stanzerl.

[*They depart delightedly. He watches them go.*]

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. As I watched her walk away on the arm of the creature, I felt the lightning thought strike: "*Have her! Her for Katherina!*" . . . Abomination! . . . Never in my life had I entertained a notion so sinful!

[*Light change: the eighteenth century fades. The VENTICELLI come on merrily, as if from some celebration. One holds a bottle; the other, a glass.*]

V.1: They're married!

SALIERI: [*To them*]. What?

V.2: Mozart and Weber—married!

SALIERI: Really?

V.1: His father will be furious!

V.2: They didn't even wait for his consent!

SALIERI: Have they set up house?

V.1: Wipplingerstrasse.

V.2: Number twelve.

V.1: Not bad.

V.2: Considering they've no money.

SALIERI: Is that really true?

V.1: He's wildly extravagant.

V.2: Lives way beyond his means.

SALIERI: But he has pupils.

V.1: Only three.

SALIERI: [*To them*]. Why so few?

V.2: He's embarrassing.

V.1: Makes scenes.

V.2: Makes enemies.

V.1: Even Strack, whom he cultivates.

SALIERI: Chamberlain Strack?

V.2: Only last night.

V.1: At Kapellmeister Bonno's.

SCENE 9

Bonno's Salon

[*Instant light change. Upstage, BONNO, stands with a few guests. MOZART comes in with STRACK. He is high on wine, and holding a glass. The VENTICELLI join the scene, but still talk out of it to SALIERI. One of them fills MOZART's glass.*]

MOZART: Seven months in this city and not one job! I'm not to be tried again, is that it?

STRACK: [*Amiably*]. Of course not.

MOZART: I know what goes on, and so do you. Germany is completely in the hands of foreigners. Worthless Italians like Kapellmeister Bonno!

STRACK: Please! You're in the man's house!

MOZART: Court Composer Salieri!

STRACK: Hush!

MOZART: Did you see his last opera—*The Stolen Bucket*?! . . . Did you?

STRACK: Of course I did.

MOZART: Unbearable!

[*He sits at the fortepiano and thumps on it monotonously.*]

MOZART: [*Singing*]. Pom-pom, pom-pom, pom-pom, pom-pom! Tonic and dominant, tonic and dominant, from here to resurrection! Not one interesting modulation all night. Salieri is a musical idiot.

STRACK: Please!

V.1: [*To SALIERI*]. He'd had too much to drink.

V.2: He often has.

MOZART: Why are Italians so terrified by the slightest complexity in music? Show them one chromatic passage and they faint! . . . "*Oh, how sick! How morbid!*" [*Falsetto*] *Morboso!* . . . *Nervoso!* . . . *Ohimè!* . . . No wonder the music at this court is so dreary! . . . And in opera they just use the same old conventions over and over again! [*Illustrating at the keyboard*] *Tremolando* shows rage! *Sforzando* shows excitement! C Minor means gravity!—D Minor means terror! . . . Round and round like donkeys at a grindstone!

STRACK: [*Half-amused*]. Lower your voice!

MOZART: Lower your breeches. . . . That's just a joke!—

[*Unobserved by him, Count ROSENBERG has entered upstage. He wears a waistcoat of dark green silk and an expression of supercilious interest. MOZART sees him. A pause.*]

[*Pleasantly, to ROSENBERG*] You look like a toad . . . I mean, your waistcoat. And you were goggling like a toad.

ROSENBERG: [*Blandly*]. You would do best to retire tonight, for your own sake.

MOZART: [*Sharply*]. Salieri has fifty pupils. I have three. How am I to live? I'm a married man now! . . . Of course, I realize you don't concern yourselves with money in these exalted circles. All the same, did you know behind his back His Majesty is known as Kaiser Keep-it? [*He giggles naughtily.*]

STRACK: *Mozart!*

[*He stops. All the guests upstage are watching.*]

MOZART: I shouldn't have said that, should I? . . . Forgive me. It was just a joke. Another joke! . . . I can't help myself! . . . We're all friends here, aren't we?

[*STRACK and ROSENBERG glare at him. Then STRACK leaves abruptly, much offended.*]

What's wrong with him?

ROSENBERG: Good night. [*He turns to go also.*]

MOZART: No, no, no—please! *[He grabs the DIRECTOR'S arm.]*

Your hand please, first!

[Unwillingly, ROSENBERG gives him his hand. MOZART kisses it.]

[Humbly] Give me a post, sir.

ROSENBERG: That is not in my power, Mozart.

MOZART: The Princess Elizabeth is looking for an instructor. One word from you could secure it for me.

ROSENBERG: I regret that is solely in the recommendation of Court Composer Salieri. *[He disengages himself.]*

MOZART: Do you know I am better than any musician in Vienna? . . . Do you?

[ROSENBERG leaves. MOZART calls after him.]

Italians! . . . I'm sick of them! . . . Italians everywhere!

[He runs at the upstage guests in mock aggression. Old BONNO shepherds them offstage in alarm. The VENTICELLI leave hurriedly, another way. MOZART is left alone—save of course for SALIERI standing out of the scene, to one side. MOZART looks about him, then suddenly giggles to himself like a child, and starts to sing with bravado, to the tune that one day will be that of "Là ci darem lo mano" in his Don Giovanni.]

MOZART: *[Singing]*. "The girl who doesn't love me—the girl who doesn't love me—the girl who doesn't love me—can lick my arse instead!" . . .

[But suddenly he strikes his own head fiercely in self-rebuke, and dashes offstage.]

SALIERI: *[Watching him go, to audience]*. Barely one month later that thought of revenge became more than thought.

SCENE IO

The Waldstätten Library

[Two simultaneous shouts bring up the lights. Against the handsome wallpaper stand three musked figures: CONSTANZE, flanked on either side by the VENTICELLI. All three are guests at a party, and are playing a game of forfeits.]

Two SERVANTS stand frozen, holding the large wing chair between them. Two more hold the big table of sweetmeats.]

V.1: Forfeit! . . . Forfeit! . . .

V.2: Forfeit, Stanzel! You've got to forfeit!

CONSTANZE: I won't.

V.1: You have to.

V.2: It's the game.

[The SERVANTS unfreeze and set down the furniture. SALIERI moves to the wing chair and sits.]

SALIERI: *[To audience]*. Once again—believe it or not—I was in the same concealing chair in the Baroness's library *[Taking a cup from the little table]* and consuming the same delicious dessert.

V.1: You lost—now there's the penalty!

SALIERI: *[To audience]*. A party celebrating the New Year's Eve. I was on my own—my dear spouse, Teresa, visiting her parents in Italy.

CONSTANZE: Well, what? . . . What is it?
[VENTICELLO ONE snatches up an old-fashioned round ruler from off the fortepiano.]

V.1: I want to measure your calves.

CONSTANZE: Oooo!

V.1: Well?

CONSTANZE: Definitely not. You cheeky bugger!

V.1: Now come on!

V.2: You've got to let him, Stanzerl. All's fair in love and forfeits.

CONSTANZE: No, it isn't—so you can both buzz off!

V.1: If you don't let me, you won't be allowed to play again.

CONSTANZE: Well, choose something else.

V.2: I've chosen that! Now get up on the table. Quick, quick! *Allez-oop! [Gleefully, he shifts the plates of sweetmeats to the forte-piano.]*

CONSTANZE: Quick, then! . . . Before anyone sees!

[The two masked men lift the shrieking masked girl up onto the table.]

V.1: Hold her, Friedrich.

CONSTANZE: I don't have to be held, thank you!

V.2: Yes, you do—that's part of the penalty.

[He holds her ankles firmly, while VENTICELLO ONE thrusts the ruler under her skirts and measures her legs. Excitedly, SALIERI reverses his position so that he can kneel in the wing chair and watch. CONSTANZE giggles delightedly, then becomes outraged—or pretends to be.]

CONSTANZE: Stop it! . . . Stop that! That's quite enough of that!

[She bends down and tries to slap him.]

V.1: Seventeen inches—knee to ankle!

V.2: Let me do it! You hold her.

CONSTANZE: That's not fair!

V.1: Yes, it is. You lost to me too.

CONSTANZE: It's been done now! Let me down!

V.2: Hold her, Karl.

CONSTANZE: No! . . .

[VENTICELLO ONE holds her ankles. VENTICELLO TWO thrusts his head entirely under her skirts. She squeals.]

No—stop it! . . . No! . . .

[In the middle of this undignified scene, MOZART comes rushing on, also masked.]

MOZART: *[Outraged].* Constanze!

[They freeze. SALIERI ducks back down and sits hidden in the chair.]

Gentlemen, if you please.

CONSTANZE: It's only a game, Wolferl! . . .

V.1: We meant no harm, 'pon my word.

MOZART: *[Stiffly].* Come down off that table, please.

[They hand her down.]

Thank you. We'll see you later.

V.2: Now look, Mozart, don't be pompous—

MOZART: Please excuse us now.

[They go. The little man is very angry. He tears off his mask.]

[To CONSTANZE] Do you realize what you've done?

CONSTANZE: No, what? . . . *[Flustered, she busies herself restoring the plates of sweetmeats to the table.]*

MOZART: Just lost your reputation, that's all! You're now a loose girl.

CONSTANZE: Don't be so stupid. *[She, too, removes her mask.]*

MOZART: You are a married woman, for God's sake!

CONSTANZE: And what of it?

MOZART: A young wife does not allow her legs to be handled in public. Couldn't you at least have measured your own ugly legs?

CONSTANZE: *What?*

MOZART: *[Raising his voice].* Do you know what you've done?! . . . You've shamed me, that's all! *Shamed me!*

CONSTANZE: Oh, don't be so ridiculous!

MOZART: Shamed me—in front of *them!*

CONSTANZE: *[Suddenly furious].* You? Shamed you? . . . That's a laugh! If there's any shame around, lovey, it's *mine!*

MOZART: What do you mean?

CONSTANZE: You've only had every pupil who ever came to you.

MOZART: That's not true.

CONSTANZE: Every single female pupil!

MOZART: Name them! *Name them!*

CONSTANZE: The Aurnhammer girl! The Rumbek girl! Katherina Cavalieri—that sly little whore! *She wasn't even your pupil—she was Salieri's. Which actually, my dear, may be why he has hundreds and you have none. He doesn't drag them into bed!*

MOZART: Of course he doesn't! He can't get it up, that's why! . . .

Have you heard his music? That's the sound of someone who *can't get it up!* At least I can do *that!*

CONSTANZE: I'm sick of you!

MOZART: No one ever said I couldn't do *that!*

CONSTANZE: [*Bursting into tears*]. I don't give a fart! I hate you! I hate you for ever and ever—I hate you! [*A tiny pause. She weeps.*]

MOZART: [*Helplessly*]. Oh, Stanzerl, don't cry. Please don't cry. . . .

I can't bear it when you cry. I just didn't want you to look cheap in people's eyes, that's all. Here! [*He snatches up the ruler.*] Beat me. Beat me. . . . I'm your slave. Stanzi marini. Stanzi marini bini gini. I'll just stand here like a little lamb and bear your strokes. Here. Do it. . . . *Batti.*

CONSTANZE: No.

MOZART: *Batti, batti. Mio tesoro!*

CONSTANZE: No!

MOZART: Stanzerly wanzerly piggly poo!

CONSTANZE: Stop it.

MOZART: Stanzy wanzzy had a ft. Shit her stays and made them split!

[*She giggles despite herself.*]

CONSTANZE: Stop it.

MOZART: When they took away her skirt, Stanzy wanzzy ate the dirt!

CONSTANZE: Stop it now! [*She snatches the ruler and gives him a whack with it. He yowls playfully.*]

MOZART: Oooo! Oooo! Oooo! Do it again! Do it again! I cast myself at your stinking feet, Madonna!

[*He does so. She whacks him some more as he crouches, but always lightly, scarcely looking at him, divided between tears and laughter. MOZART drums his feet with pleasure.*]

Ow! . . . Ow! . . . Ow!

[*And then suddenly SALIERI, unable to bear another second, cries out involuntarily.*]

SALIERI: *Ab!!!*

[*The young couple freezes. SALIERI, discovered, hastily converts his noise of disgust into a yawn, and stretches as if waking up from a nap. He peers out of the wing chair.*]

Good evening.

CONSTANZE: [*Embarrassed*]. Excellency. . . .

MOZART: How long have you been there?

SALIERI: I was asleep until a second ago. Are you two quarreling?

MOZART: No, of course not.

CONSTANZE: Yes, we are. He's been very irritating.

SALIERI: [*Rising*]. *Caro Herr*, tonight is the time for New Year resolutions. Irritating lovely ladies cannot surely be one of ours.

May I suggest you bring us each a sorbetto from the dining room?

MOZART: But why don't we all go to the table?

CONSTANZE: Herr Salieri is quite right. Bring them here—it'll be your punishment.

MOZART: Stanzi!

SALIERI: Come now, I can keep your wife company. There cannot be a better peace offering than a sorbetto of aniseed.

CONSTANZE: I prefer tangerine.

SALIERI: Very well, tangerine. [*Greedily*] But if you could possibly manage aniseed for me, I'd be deeply obliged. . . . So the New Year can begin coolly for all three of us.

[*A pause. MOZART hesitates—and then bows.*]

MOZART: I'm honored, *Signore*, of course. And then I'll play you at billiards. What do you say?

SALIERI: I'm afraid I don't play.

MOZART: [*With surprise*]. You don't?

CONSTANZE: Wolfert would rather play at billiards than anything. He's very good at it.

MOZART: I'm the best! I may nod occasionally at composing, but at billiards—never!

SALIERI: A virtuoso of the cue.

MOZART: Exactly! It's a virtuoso's game! . . . [*He snatches up the ruler and treats it as if it were a cue.*] I think I shall write a Grand Fantasia for Billiard Balls! Trills. Accacciaturas! Whole arpeggios in ivory! Then I'll play it myself in public! . . . It'll have to be *me* because none of those Italian charlatans like Clementi will be able to get his fingers round the cue!

[*He gives a swanky flourish of the hand and starts to strut off stage, then suddenly realizes what he has just said and stops.*]

Scusate, Signore!

[*SALIERI gives him a cold nod. MOZART leaves, embarrassed.*]

CONSTANZE: He's a love, really.

SALIERI: And lucky too, in you. You are, if I may say so, an astonishing creature.

CONSTANZE: Me? . . . Ta very much.

SALIERI: On the other hand, your husband does not appear to be so thriving.

CONSTANZE: [*Seizing her opportunity*]. We're desperate, sir.

SALIERI: What?

CONSTANZE: We've no money and no prospects of any. That's the truth.

SALIERI: I don't understand. He gives many public concerts.

CONSTANZE: They don't pay enough. What he needs is pupils. Illustrious pupils. His father calls us spendthrifts, but that's unfair. I manage as well as anyone could. There's simply not enough.

Don't tell him I talked to you, please.

SALIERI: [*Intimately*]. This is solely between us. How can I help?

CONSTANZE: My husband needs security, sir. If only he could find

regular employment, everything would be all right. Is there nothing at court?

SALIERI: Not at the moment.

CONSTANZE: [*Harder*]. The Princess Elizabeth needs a tutor.

SALIERI: Really? I hadn't heard.

CONSTANZE: One word from you and the post would be his. Other pupils would follow at once.

SALIERI: [*Looking off*]. He's coming back.

CONSTANZE: Please . . . please, Excellency. You can't imagine what a difference it would make.

SALIERI: We can't speak of it now.

CONSTANZE: When, then? Oh, please!

SALIERI: Can you come and see me tomorrow? Alone?

CONSTANZE: I can't do that.

SALIERI: I'm a married man.

CONSTANZE: All the same.

SALIERI: When does he work?

CONSTANZE: Afternoons.

SALIERI: Then come at three.

CONSTANZE: I can't possibly!

SALIERI: Yes or no? . . . In his interests? . . .

[*A pause. Constanze hesitates—opens her mouth—then abruptly runs off. The curtains descend on the Light Box.*]

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. So: I'd done it! Spoken aloud! Invited her! . . . What of that vow made in church? Fidelity—virtue—all of that? I couldn't think of that now!

[*SERVANTS remove the Waldstätten furniture. Others replace it with two small gilded chairs, center, quite close together. Others, again surreptitiously, bring in the old dressing gown and cap which SALIERI discarded before Scene 3, placing them on the fortepiano.*]

SCENE 11

Salieri's Apartment

[*On the curtains are thrown projections of long windows.*]

SALIERI: Next afternoon I waited in a fever. Would she come? I had no idea. And if she did, how would I behave? Was I actually going to seduce a young wife of two months standing? . . . Part of me—much of me—wanted it, badly. Badly. Yes, badly was the word!

[*The clock strikes three. On the second stroke, the bell sounds. He rises excitedly.*]

There she was! On the stroke! She'd come. . . . She'd come!

[*Enter from the right the COOK, as fat, but forty years younger. He proudly carries a plate piled with brandied chestnuts. SALIERI takes them from him nervously, nodding with approval, and sets them on the table.*]

[*To the COOK*] Grazie. Grazie tanti. . . . Via, via, via!

[*The COOK bows as SALIERI dismisses him, and goes out the same way, smirking suggestively. The VALET comes in from the left—he is also forty years younger—and behind him*]
 CONSTANZE, *wearing a pretty hat and carrying a portfolio.*

SALIERI: Signora!

CONSTANZE: [*Curtsying*]. Excellency.

SALIERI: *Benvenuta.* [*To VALET in dismissal*] Grazie.

[*The VALET goes.*]

Well. You have come.

CONSTANZE: I should not have done. My husband would be frantic if he knew. He's a very jealous man.

SALIERI: Are you a jealous woman?

CONSTANZE: Why do you ask?

SALIERI: It's not a passion I understand. . . . You're looking even prettier than you were last night, if I may say so.

CONSTANZE: Ta very much! . . . I brought you some manuscripts by Wolfgang. When you see them, you'll understand how right he is for a royal appointment. Will you look at them, please, while I wait?

SALIERI: You mean now?

CONSTANZE: Yes. I have to take them back with me. He'll miss them otherwise. He doesn't make copies. These are all the originals.

SALIERI: Sit down. Let me offer you something special.

CONSTANZE: [*Sitting*]. What's that?

SALIERI: [*Producing the box*]. *Capezzoli di Venere*. Nipples of Venus. Roman chestnuts in brandied sugar.

CONSTANZE: No, thank you.

SALIERI: Do try. My cook made them especially for you.

CONSTANZE: Me?

SALIERI: Yes. They're quite rare.

CONSTANZE: Well then, I'd better, hadn't I? Just one. . . . Ta very much. [*She takes one and puts it in her mouth. The taste amazes her*]. Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Oh! . . . They're *delishi*!

SALIERI: [*Justfully watching her eat*]. Aren't they?

CONSTANZE: Mmmmm!

SALIERI: Have another.

CONSTANZE: [*Taking two more*]. I couldn't possibly.

[*Carefully he moves round behind her, and seats himself on the chair next to her.*]

SALIERI: I think you're the most generous girl in the world.

CONSTANZE: Generous?

SALIERI: It's my word for you. I thought last night that Constanze is altogether too stiff a name for that girl. I shall rechristen her *Generosa. La Generosa*. Then I'll write a glorious song for her under that title and she'll sing it, just for me.

CONSTANZE: [*Smiling*]. I am much out of practice, sir.

SALIERI: *La Generosa*. [*He leans a little toward her*]. Don't tell me it's going to prove inaccurate, my name for you.

CONSTANZE: [*Coolly*]. What name do you give your wife, Excellency?

SALIERI: [*Equally coolly*]. I'm not an excellency, and I call my wife Signora Salieri. If I named her anything else, it would be *La Statua*. She is a very upright lady.

CONSTANZE: Is she here now? I'd like to meet her.

SALIERI: Alas, no. At the moment she's visiting her mother in Verona. [*She starts very slightly out of her chair. SALIERI gently restrains her.*]

SALIERI: Constanze: tomorrow evening I dine with the Emperor. One word from me recommending your husband as tutor to the Princess Elizabeth, and that invaluable post is his. Believe me, when I speak to His Majesty in matters musical, no one contradicts me.

CONSTANZE: I believe you.

SALIERI: Bene. [*Still sitting, he takes his mouchoir and delicately wipes her mouth with it.*] Surely service of that sort deserves a little recompense in return?

CONSTANZE: How little?

[*Slight pause*]

SALIERI: The size of a kiss.

[*Slight pause*]

CONSTANZE: Just one?

[*Slight pause*]

SALIERI: If one seems fair to you.

[*She looks at him—then kisses him lightly on the mouth. Longer pause.*]

Does it?

[*She gives him a longer kiss. He touches her with his hand. She breaks off.*]

CONSTANZE: I fancy that's fairness enough.

[*Pause*]

SALIERI: [*Carefully*]. A pity . . . It's somewhat small pay, to secure a post every musician in Vienna is hoping for.

CONSTANZE: What do you mean?

SALIERI: Is it not clear?

CONSTANZE: No. Not at all.

SALIERI: Another pity . . . A thousand pities.

[*Pause*]

CONSTANZE: I don't believe it . . . I just don't believe it!

SALIERI: What?

CONSTANZE: What you've just said.

SALIERI: [*Hastily*]. I said nothing. What did I say?

[*CONSTANZE gets up and SALIERI rises in panic.*]

CONSTANZE: Oh, I'm going! . . . I'm getting out of this!

SALIERI: Constanze . . .

CONSTANZE: Let me pass, please.

SALIERI: Constanze, listen to me! I'm a clumsy man. You think me sophisticated—I'm not at all. Take a true look. I've no cunning. I live on ink and sweetmeats. I never see women at all. . . . When I met you last night, I envied Mozart from the depths of my soul. Out of that envy came stupid thoughts. For one silly second I dared imagine that, out of the vast store you obviously possess, you might spare me one coin of tenderness your rich husband does not need—and inspire me also.

[*Pause. She laughs.*]

I amuse.

CONSTANZE: Mozart was right. You're wicked.

SALIERI: He said that?

CONSTANZE: "All Italians are performers," he said. "Be very careful with that one." Meaning you. He was being comic, of course.

SALIERI: Yes.

[*Abruptly he turns his back on her.*]

CONSTANZE: But not that comic, actually. I mean, you're acting a pretty obvious role, aren't you, dear? A small-town boy, and all the time as clever as cutlers! . . . [*Mock tender*] Ah! You are sulking? Are you? . . . When Mozart sulks, I smack his botty.

He rather likes it. Do you want me to scold you a bit and smack your botty too? *[She hits him lightly with the portfolio. He turns in a fury.]*

SALIERI: How dare you?! . . . You silly, common girl!

[A dreadful silence]

[Lez] Forgive me. Let us confine our talk to your husband. He is a brilliant keyboard player, no question. However, the Princess Elizabeth also requires a tutor in vocal music. I am not convinced he is the man for that. I would like to look at the pieces you've brought, and decide if he is mature enough. I will study them overnight—and you will study my proposal. Not to be vague, that is the price. *[He extends his hand for the portfolio, and she surrenders it.]* Good afternoon.

[He turns from her and places it on a chair. She lingers—tries to speak—cannot—and goes out quickly.]

SCENE 12

The Same

[SALIERI turns in a ferment to the audience.]

SALIERI: Fiasco! . . . Fiasco! . . . The sordidness of it! The sheert sweating sordidness! . . . Worse than if I'd actually done it! . . . To be that much in sin and feel so ridiculous as well! *[Crying out]* Noble, noble Salieri! . . . What had he done to me, this Mozart? Before he came, did I behave like this? Toy with adultery? Blackmail women? It was all going—slipping—growing rotten . . . because of him!

[He moves upstage in a fever—reaches out to take the portfolio on the chair—but as if fearful of what he might find inside it, he withdraws his hand and sits instead beside it. A

pause. He contemplates the music lying there as if it were a great confection he is dying to eat, but dare not. Then suddenly he snatches at it—tears the ribbon—opens the case and stares greedily at the manuscripts within.

Music sounds instantly, faintly, in the theater, as his eye falls on the first page. It is the opening of the Twenty-ninth Symphony, in A major. Over the music, reading it.]

She had said that these were his original scores. First and only drafts of the music. Yet they looked like fair copies. They showed no corrections of any kind. It was puzzling—then suddenly alarming.

[He looks up from the manuscript at the audience: the music abruptly stops.]

What was evident was that Mozart was simply transcribing music completely finished in his head. And finished as most music is never finished.

[He resumes looking at the music. Immediately the Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola sounds.]

Displace one note and there would be diminishment. Displace one phrase and the structure would fall.

[He looks up again: the music breaks off.]

Here again—only now in abundance—were the same sounds I'd heard in the library.

[He resumes reading, and the music also resumes: a ravishing phrase from the slow movement of the Concerto for Flute and Harp.]

The same crushed harmonies—glancing collisions—agonizing delights.

[He looks up again. The music stops.]

The truth was clear. That Serenade had been no accident.

[Very low, in the theater, a faint thundery sound is heard accumulating, like a distant sea.]

I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink strokes at—an Absolute Beauty!

[He rises to his feet, holding the portfolio. And out of the thundery roar writhes and rises the clear sound of a soprano, singing the Kyrie from the C minor Mass. The accretion of noise around her voice falls away—it is suddenly clear and bright, then clearer and brighter. The light also grows bright, too bright: burning white, then scalding white! SALIERI stands in the downpour of it, in the flood of the music, which is growing ever louder—filling the theater—as the soprano yields to the full chorus singing fortissimo its massive counterpoint.]

This is by far the loudest sound the audience has yet heard.

SALIERI staggers toward us, holding the manuscripts in his hand, like a man caught in a tumbling and violent sea. Finally the drums crash in below. SALIERI throws down the portfolio of manuscripts—and falls senseless to the ground. At the same second the music explodes into a long, echoing, distorted boom, signifying some dreadful annihilation. The sound remains suspended over the prone figure in a menacing continuum—no longer music at all. Then it dies away, and there is only silence.

The light fades again.

A long pause.

SALIERI is quite still, lying among the manuscripts. Finally the clock sounds: seven times. SALIERI stirs as it does. Slowly he raises his head and looks up. And now—quietly at first—he addresses his God.]

SALIERI: *Capisco!* I know my fate. Now for the first time I feel my emptiness as Adam felt his nakedness. . . . [Slowly he rises to his feet.] Tonight at an inn somewhere in this city stands a giggling child who can put on paper, without actually setting down his billiard cue, casual notes which turn my most considered ones into lifeless scratches. *Grazie, Signore!* You gave me the desire to serve You—which most men do not have—then saw to it the service was shameful in the ears of the server. *Grazie!* You gave

me the desire to praise You—which most men do not feel—then made me mute. *Grazie tante!* You put into me the perception of the Incomparable—which most men never know!—then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre. [His voice gains power.]

Why? . . . What is my fault? . . . Until this day I have pursued virtue with rigor. I have labored long hours to relieve my fellow men. I have worked and worked the talent You allowed me. [Calling up] You know how hard I've worked! Solely that in the end, in the practice of the art, which alone makes the world comprehensible to me, I might hear Your Voice! And now I do hear it—and it says only one name: MOZART! . . . Spiteful, smuggering, conceited, infantine Mozart—who has never worked one minute to help another man! Shit-talking Mozart, with his botchy-smacking wife! Him You have chosen to be Your sole conduit! And my only reward—my sublime privilege—is to be the sole man alive in this time who shall clearly recognize Your Incarnation! [Savage] *Grazie e grazie ancora!*

[He hurls the portfolio into a corner.]

So be it! From this time we are enemies, You and I! I'll not accept it from you—do you hear? . . . They say God is not mocked. I tell You, Man is not mocked! . . . I am not mocked! . . . They say the spirit bloweth where it listeth: I tell You no! It must list to virtue or not blow at all! [Yelling] *Dio ingiusto!*—You are the Enemy! I name Thee now—*Nemico Eterno!* And this I swear: To my last breath I shall block You on earth, as far as I am able! [He glares up at God. To audience] What use, after all, is Man, if not to teach God His lessons?

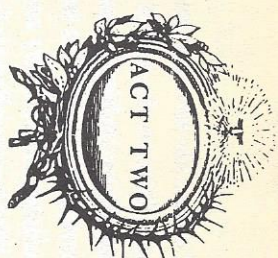
[He slips off his powdered wig, crosses to the fortepiano and takes from its lid where they lie the old dressing gown and cap which he discarded when he conducted us back to the eighteenth century. He slips these on. As he does this, he speaks again in the voice of an old man. It is 1823 again.]

Before I tell you what happened next—God's answer to me—

and indeed Constanze's—and all the horrors that followed—let me stop. The bladder, being a human appendage, is not something you need concern yourselves with yet. I being alive, though barely, am at its constant call. It is now one hour before dawn—when I must dismiss us both. When I return, I'll tell you about the war I fought with God through His preferred Creature—Mozart, named *Amadeus*. In the waging of which, of course, the Creature had to be destroyed.

[He bows to the audience, reaches out to snatch up a pastry—then, unexpectedly, puts it back on the plate in sudden self-disgust, and slowly hobbles off stage. The manuscripts lie where he spilled them in his fall. As he disappears, the house lights slowly come up.]

END OF ACT ONE



SCENE I

Salieri's Apartment

[The lights go down in the theater as SALIERI returns as the old man.]

SALIERI: I have been listening to the cats in the courtyard. They are all singing Rossini. It is obvious that cats have declined as badly as composers. Domenico Scarlatti owned one which would actually stroll across the keyboard and pick out passable subjects for fugue. But that was a Spanish cat of the Enlightenment. It appreciated counterpoint. Nowadays all cats appreciate is coloratura. Like the rest of the public.

[He comes downstage and addresses the audience directly.]

This is now the very last hour of my life. You must understand me. Not forgive. I do not seek forgiveness. I was a good man, as the world calls good. What use was it to me? Goodness could not make me a good composer! . . . Was Mozart "good?" Goodness is nothing in the furnace of art.

[Pause]

On that dreadful Night of the Manuscripts my life acquired a terrible and thrilling purpose. The blocking of God in one of His purest manifestations. I had the power. God needed Mozart to let Himself into the world. And Mozart needed me to get him worldly advancement. So it would be a battle to the end—and Mozart was the battleground.

[Pause]

One thing I knew of Him. He was a cunning Enemy. Witness the fact that in blocking Him in the world I was also given the satisfaction of obstructing a disliked human rival. I wonder which of you will refuse that chance if it is offered.

[*He regards the audience maliciously and takes off the dressing gown and cap. She wears a hat and shawl.*]

I felt the danger at once, as soon as I'd spoken my challenge. How would He answer? Would He strike me dead for my impiety? Don't laugh. I was not a sophisticate of the salons. I was a small-town Catholic, full of dread!

[*He puts on the powdered wig again and speaks again in his younger voice. We are back again in the eighteenth century.*]

The first thing that happened, barely one hour later—

[*The doorbell sounds. CONSTANCE comes in, followed by a helpless VALET.*]

Suddenly Constance was back. [*In surprise*] At ten o'clock at night! . . .

Signora!

CONSTANCE: [*Stiffly*]. My husband is at a soiree of Baron van Swieten. A concert of Sebastian Bach. He didn't think I would enjoy it.

SALIERI: I see. [*Curly, to the goggling VALET*] I'll ring if we require anything. Thank you.

[*The VALET goes out. Slight pause.*]

CONSTANCE: [*Flatly*]. Where do we go, then?

SALIERI: What?

CONSTANCE: Do we do it in here? . . . Why not?

[*She sits, still wearing her hat, in one of the little gilded upright chairs. Deliberately she loosens the strings of her bodice, so that one can just see the tops of her breasts, hitches up her silk skirts above the knees, so that one can also just see the flesh above the tops of the stockings, spreads her legs and regards him with an open stare.*]

[*Speaking quietly*] Well? . . . Let's get on with it.

[*For a second SALIERI returns the stare, then looks suddenly away.*]

SALIERI: [*Stiffly*]. Your manuscripts are there. Please take them and go. Now. At once.

[Pause]

CONSTANCE: You shit. [*She jumps up and snatches the portfolio.*]

SALIERI: *Via! Don't return!*

CONSTANCE: You rotten shit!

[*Suddenly she runs at him, trying furiously to hit at his face. He grabs her arms, shakes her violently and hurls her on the floor.*]

SALIERI: *Via!*

[*She freezes, staring up at him in hate.*]

[*Calling to audience*] You see how it was! I would have liked her—oh, yes, just then more than ever! But I wanted nothing petty! . . . My quarrel now wasn't with Mozart—it was through him! Through him to God, who loved him so. [*Scornfully*]

Amadeus! . . . Amadeus! . . .

[*CONSTANCE picks herself up and runs from the room. Pause. He calms himself, going to the table and selecting a "Nipple of Venus" to eat.*]

The next day, when Katherina Cavalleri came for her lesson, I made the same halting speech about "coins of tenderness," and I dubbed the girl *La Generosa*. I regret that my invention in love, as in art, has always been limited. Fortunately, Katherina found it sufficient. She consumed twenty "Nipples of Venus"—kissed me with brandied breath—and slipped easily into my bed.

[*KATHERINA comes in languidly, half undressed, as if from his bedroom. He embraces her, and helps slyly to adjust her peignoir.*]

She remained there as my mistress for many years behind my good wife's back—and I soon erased in sweat the sense of his little body, the Creature's, preceding me.

[*The girl gives him a radiant smile, and ambles off.*]

So much for my vow of sexual virtue. [*Slight pause*] The same evening I went to the Palace and resigned from all my commitments to help the lot of poor musicians. So much for my vow of social virtue.

[*Light change*]

Then I went to the Emperor and recommended a man of no talent whatever to instruct the Princess Elizabeth.

SCENE 2

The Palace of Schönbrunn

[*The EMPEROR stands before the vast fireplace, between the golden mirrors.*]

JOSEPH: Herr Sommer. A dull man, surely? What of Mozart?

SALIERI: Majesty, I cannot with a clear conscience recommend Mozart to teach royalty. One hears too many stories.

JOSEPH: They may be just gossip.

SALIERI: One of them, I regret, relates to a protégée of my own. A very young singer.

JOSEPH: *Charmant!*

SALIERI: Not pleasant, Majesty, but true.

JOSEPH: I see. . . . Let it be Herr Sommer, then. [*He walks down onto the main stage.*] I daresay he can't do much harm. To be frank, no one can do much harm musically to the Princess Elizabeth. [*He strolls away to one side.*]

[*MOZART enters from the other side, downstage. He wears a more natural-looking wig from now on—one indeed intended to represent his own hair of light chestnut, full and gathered at the back with ribbon.*]

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. Mozart certainly did not suspect me. The Emperor announced the appointment in his usual way—

JOSEPH: [*Pausing*]. Well—there it is. [*He goes off.*]

SALIERI: And I commiserated with the loser.

[*MOZART turns and stares bleakly out front. SALIERI shakes his hand.*]

MOZART: [*Bitterly*]. It's my own fault. My father always writes I should be more obedient. *Know my place!* . . . He'll send me sixteen lectures when he hears of this!

[*MOZART goes slowly up to the fortepiano. Lights lower.*]

SALIERI: [*Watching him, to audience*]. It was a most serious loss as far as Mozart was concerned.

SCENE 3

Vienna, and Glimpses of Opera Houses

[*The VENTICELLI glide on.*]

V.1: His list of pupils hardly moves.

V.2: Six at most.

V.1: And now a child to keep!

V.2: A boy.

SALIERI: Poor fellow. [*To audience*] I by contrast prospered. This is the extraordinary truth. If I had expected fury from God, none came. *None!* . . . Instead—incredibly—in '84 and '85 I came to be regarded as infinitely the superior composer. And this despite the fact that these were the two years in which Mozart wrote his best keyboard concerti and his string quartets.

[*The VENTICELLI stand on either side of SALIERI. MOZART sits at the fortepiano.*]

V.1: Haydn calls the quartets unsurpassed.

SALIERI: They were, but no one heard them.

V.2: Van Swieten calls the concerti sublime.

SALIERI: They were, but no one noticed.

[MOZART plays and conducts from the keyboard. Faintly we hear the Rondo from the Piano Concerto in A major, K. 488.]

[Over this] The Viennese greeted each concerto with the squeals of pleasure they usually reserved for a new style of bonnet. Each was played once—then totally forgotten! . . . By contrast, my operas were played everywhere and saluted by everyone! . . . I composed a *Semiramide* for Munich.

V.1: Rapturously received!

V.2: People faint with pleasure!

[In the Light Box is seen the interior of a brilliantly colored opera house, and an audience standing up, applauding vigorously. SALIERI, flanked by the VENTICELLI, turns upstage and bows to it. Mozart's concert can barely be heard through the din.]

SALIERI: I wrote a comic opera for Vienna. *La Grotta di Trofonio*.

V.1: The talk of the city!

V.2: The cafés are buzzing!

[Another opera house interior is lit up. Another audience claps vigorously. Again SALIERI bows to it.]

SALIERI: [To audience]. I finally finished my tragic opera *Danaius*, and produced it in Paris.

V.1: Stupendous reception!

V.2: The plaudits shake the roof!

V.1: Your name sounds throughout the Empire!

V.2: Throughout all Europe!

[Yet another opera house and another excited audience.

SALIERI bows a third time. Even the VENTICELLI now applaud him. Mozart's concert stops. He rises from the keyboard and, while SALIERI speaks, stumps directly through the scene and leaves the stage.]

SALIERI: [To audience]. It was incomprehensible. Almost as if I were being pushed deliberately from triumph to triumph! . . . I filled my head with golden opinions—yes, and this house with golden furniture!

SCENE 4

Salieri's Apartment

[The stage turns gold.

SERVANTS come on carrying golden chairs upholstered in golden brocade. They place these all over the wooden floor. The VALET appears—a little older—divests SALIERI of his sober coat and clothes him instead in another one with gold facings. The COOK—also, of course, a little older—brings in a golden cake-stand piled with more elaborate cakes.]

SALIERI: My own taste was for plain things—but I denied it! The successful lived with gold, and so would I! . . . I grew confident. I grew resplendent. I gave salons and soirees, and worshiped the season round at the altar of sophistication!

[He sits at ease in his salon. The VENTICELLI sit with him, one on either side.]

V.1: Mozart heard your comedy last night.

V.2: He spoke of it to the Princess Lichnowsky.

V.1: He said you should be made to clean up your own mess.

SALIERI: [Taking snuff]. Really? What charmers these Salzburgers are!

V.2: People are outraged by him.

V.1: He empties drawing rooms. Now van Swieten is angry with him. [The VENTICELLI laugh maliciously.]

SALIERI: Lord Fugue? . . . I thought he was the Baron's little pet.

V.2: Mozart has asked leave to write an Italian opera.

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. *Italian opera! Threat! My kingdom!*

V.1: And the Baron is scandalized.

SALIERI: But why? What's the subject?

[VAN SWIETEN comes on quickly from upstage.]

VAN SWIETEN: Figaro! . . . *The Marriage of Figaro!* That disgraceful play of Beaumarchais!

[*At a discreet sign of dismissal from SALIERI, the VENTICELLI slip away. VAN SWIETEN joins SALIERI, and sits on one of the gold chairs.*]

VAN SWIETEN: [*To SALIERI*]. That's all he can find to waste his talent on: a vulgar farce! Noblemen lusting after chambermaids! Their wives dressing up in stupid disguises anyone could penetrate in a second! . . . When I reproved him, he said I reminded him of his father! . . . I simply cannot imagine why Mozart should want to set that rubbish to music!

[MOZART enters quickly from upstage, accompanied by STRACK. They join SALIERI and VAN SWIETEN.]

MOZART: Because I want to do a piece about real people, Baron! And I want to set it in a real place! *A boudoir!* Because that to me is the most exciting place on earth! Underclothes on the floor! Sheets still warm from a woman's body! Even a pisspot brimming under the bed!

VAN SWIETEN: [*Outraged*]. Mozart!

MOZART: I want life, Baron. Not boring legends!

STRACK: [*Sitting*]. Herr Salieri's recent *Danaius* was a legend, and that did not bore the French.

MOZART: It is impossible to bore the French—except with real life!

VAN SWIETEN: I had assumed, now that you had joined our Brotherhood of Masons, you would choose more elevated themes.

MOZART: [*Impatiently*]. Oh, elevated! Elevated! . . . The only thing a man should elevate is his doodle.

VAN SWIETEN: You are provoking, sir! Has everything to be a joke with you?

MOZART: [*Desperate*]. Excuse the language, Baron, but really! . . .

How can we go on forever with these gods and heroes?

VAN SWIETEN: [*Passionately*]. Because they go on forever—that's why! They represent the eternal in us. Opera is here to ennoble us, Mozart—you and me just as well as the Emperor. It is an aggrandizing art! It celebrates the eternal in Man and ignores the ephemeral. The goddess in Woman and not the laundress.

STRACK: Well said, sir. Exactly!

MOZART: [*Imitating his drawl*]. Oh, well said, yes, well said! Exactly! [*To all of them*] I don't understand you! You're all up on perches, but it doesn't hide your arseholes! You don't give a shit about gods and heroes! If you are honest—each one of you—which of you isn't more at home with his hairdresser than Hercules? Or Horatius?

[*To SALIERI*] Or your stupid Danaius, come to that! Or *mine—mine!* *Idomeneo, King of Crete!* All those anguished antiques! They're all bores! Bores, bores, bores! [*Suddenly he springs up onto a chair, like an orator. Declaring it*] All serious operas written this century are boring!

[*They turn and look at him in shocked amazement. A pause. He gives a little giggle, and then jumps down again.*]

Look at us! Four gaping mouths. What a perfect quartet! I'd love to write it—just this second of time, this *now*, as you are! Herr Chamberlain thinking: "Impertinent Mozart. I must speak to the Emperor at once!" Herr Prefect thinking: "Ignorant Mozart. Debasing opera with his vulgarity!" Herr Court Composer thinking: "German Mozart. What can he finally know about music?" And Mozart himself, in the middle, thinking: "I'm just a good fellow. Why do they all disapprove of me?" [*Excitedly to VAN SWIETEN*] That's why opera is important, Baron. Because it's realer than any play! A dramatic poet would

have to put all those thoughts down one after another to represent this second of time. The composer can put them all down at once—and still make us hear each one of them. Astonishing device—a vocal quartet! [*More and more excited*] I tell you I want to write a finale lasting half an hour! A quartet becoming a quintet becoming a sextet becoming a septet. On and on, wider and wider—all sounds multiplying and rising together—and then together making a sound entirely new. . . . I bet you that's how God hears the world! Millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an *unending music*, unimaginable to us! [*To SALIERI*] That's our job! That's our *job*, we composers: to combine the inner minds of him and him and him, and her and her—the thoughts of chambermaids and Court Composers—and turn the audience into God.

[*Pause. SALIERI stares at him, fascinated. Embarrassed, MOZART sounds a fart noise and giggles.*]

I'm sorry. I talk nonsense all day. It's incurable—ask Stanzerl.

[*To VAN SWIETEN*] My tongue is stupid. My heart isn't.

VAN SWIETEN: No. You're a good fellow under all your nonsense: I know that. He'll make a fine new Brother, won't he, Salieri?

SALIERI: Better than I, Baron.

VAN SWIETEN: Just try, my friend, to be more serious with your gifts.

[*He smiles, presses MOZART's hand and goes. SALIERI rises.*]

SALIERI: *Buona fortuna, Mozart.*

MOZART: *Grazie, Signore.* [*Rounding on STRACK*] Stop frowning, Herr Chamberlain. I'm a jackass. It's easy to be friends with a jackass: just shake his hoof.

[*He forms his hand into a hoof. Warily STRACK takes it—then springs back as MOZART brays loudly like a donkey.*]

Hee-haw! . . . Tell the Emperor the opera's finished.

STRACK: Finished?

MOZART: Right here in my noddle. The rest's just scribbling. Goodbye.

STRACK: Good day to you.

MOZART: He's going to be proud of me. You'll see! [*He gives his flourish of the hand and goes out, delighted with himself.*]

STRACK: That young man *really* is . . .

SALIERI: [*Blandly*]. Very lively!

STRACK: [*Exploding*]. Intolerable! . . . *Intolerable!*

[*STRACK freezes in a posture of indignation.*]

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. How could I stop it? . . . How could I block this opera of *Figaro*? . . . Incredible to hear, within six weeks the Creature had finished the entire score!

[*ROSENBERG bustles in.*]

ROSENBERG: *Figaro* is complete! The first performance will be on May the first.

SALIERI: So soon?

ROSENBERG: There's no way we can stop it! [*A slight pause*]

SALIERI: [*Slyly*]. I have an idea. *Una piccola idea.*

ROSENBERG: What?

SALIERI: *Mi ha detto che c'è un balletto nel terzo atto?*

ROSENBERG: [*Puzzled*]. Sì.

STRACK: What does he say?

SALIERI: *E dimmi—non è vero che l'Imperatore ha proibito il balletto nelle sue opere?*

ROSENBERG: [*Realizing*]. *Uno balletto* . . . Ah!

SALIERI: *Precisamente.*

ROSENBERG: Oh, *capisco!* *Ma che meraviglia! Perfetto!* [*He laughs in delight.*] *Veramente ingegnoso!*

STRACK: [*Irritated*]. What is it? What is he suggesting?

SALIERI: See him at the theater.

ROSENBERG: Of course. Immediately. I'd forgotten. You are brilliant, Court Composer.

SALIERI: I? . . . I have said nothing. [*He moves away upstage.*]

[*The light begins to change, dimming down.*]

STRACK: [*Very cross*]. I must tell you that I resent this extremely. Mozart is right in some things. There is far too much Italian

chittero-chattero at this court! Now please to inform me at once, what was just said?

ROSENBERG: [*Lightly*]. *Pazienza*, my dear Chamberlain. *Pazienza*. Just wait and see!

[*From upstage, SALIERI beckons to STRACK. Baffled and cross, the CHAMBERLAIN joins him. They watch together, unseen. The light dims further.*]

SCENE 5

An Unlit Theater

[*In the background, a projection of lamps glowing faintly in the darkened auditorium. ROSENBERG sits on one of the gold chairs, center. MOZART comes in quickly from the left, wearing another bright coat, and carrying the score of Figaro. He crosses to the fortepiano.*]

ROSENBERG: Mozart! . . . *Mozart!*

MOZART: Yes, Herr Director.

ROSENBERG: [*Agreeably*]. A word with you, please. Right away.

MOZART: Certainly. What is it?

ROSENBERG: I would like to see your score of *Figaro*.

MOZART: Oh, yes. Why?

ROSENBERG: Just bring it here to me. [*Unmoving*] Into my hand, please.

[*MOZART hands it to him, puzzled. ROSENBERG turns the pages.*]

Now tell me: did you not know that His Majesty has expressly forbidden ballet in his operas?

MOZART: Ballet?

ROSENBERG: Such as occurs in your third act.

MOZART: That is not a ballet, Herr Director. That is a dance at Figaro's wedding.

ROSENBERG: Exactly. A dance.

MOZART: [*Trying to control himself*]. But the Emperor doesn't mean to prohibit dancing when it's part of the story. He made that law to prevent insertions of stupid ballet like in French operas, and quite right too.

ROSENBERG: [*Raising his voice*]. It is not for you, Herr Mozart, to interpret the Emperor's edicts. Merely to obey them. [*He seizes the offending pages between his fingers.*]

MOZART: What are you doing? . . . What are you doing, Excellency?

ROSENBERG: Taking out what should never have been put in.

[*In a terrible silence, ROSENBERG tears out the pages. MOZART watches in disbelief. Upstage, SALIERI and STRACK look on together from the dimness.*]

Now, sir, perhaps in future you will obey imperial commands.

[*He tears out some more pages.*]

MOZART: But . . . But if all that goes—there'll be a hole right at the climax of the story . . . [*Crying out suddenly*] *Salieri! This is Salieri's idea!*

ROSENBERG: Don't be absurd.

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. How did he think of that? Nothing I had ever done could possibly make him think of that on his own. Had God given him the idea?

MOZART: It's a conspiracy. I can smell it. I can smell it! It's a conspiracy!

ROSENBERG: Control yourself!

MOZART: [*Howling*]. But what do you expect me to do? The first performance is two days off!

ROSENBERG: Write it over. That's your forte, is it not?—writing at speed.

MOZART: Not when the music's *perfect*! Not when it's absolutely perfect as it is! . . . [*Wildly*] I shall appeal to the Emperor! I'll go to him myself! I'll hold a rehearsal especially for him.

ROSENBERG: The Emperor does not attend rehearsals.

MOZART: He'll attend this one. Make no mistake—he'll come to this one! Then he'll deal with you!

ROSENBERG: This issue is simple. Write your act again today—or withdraw the opera. That's final.

[*Pause. He hands back the mutilated score to its composer.*]

MOZART is shaking.]

MOZART: You shit-pot.

[ROSENBERG turns and walks imperturbably away from him.]

Sneaky—cliquey—

[*Serenely, ROSENBERG leaves the stage.*]

MOZART: [*Screaming after him*]. Count Orsini-Rosenberg! Rosen—! . . . Rosencit! . . . I'll hold a rehearsal! You'll see!

The Emperor will come! You'll see! You'll see! . . . You'll see! [*He throws down his score in a storm of hysterical rage.*]

[*Upstage in the dimness, STRACK goes out, and SALIERI ventures down toward the shrieking little man. MOZART suddenly becomes aware of him. He turns, his hand shooting out in an involuntary gesture of accusation.*]

[*To SALIERI*] I am *forbident*! . . . I am— But of course you know already.

SALIERI: [*Quietly*]. Know what?

[*MOZART flings away from him.*]

MOZART: [*Bitterly*]. No matter! [*He makes to go.*]

SALIERI: [*Always blandly*]. Mozart, permit me. If you wish, I will speak to the Emperor myself. Ask him to attend a rehearsal.

MOZART: [*Amazed*]. You wouldn't!

SALIERI: I cannot promise he will come, but I can try.

MOZART: [*Returning*]. Sir! . . .

SALIERI: Good day. [*He puts up his hands, barring further intimacy.*]

[*MOZART retreats to the fortepiano.*]

[*To audience*] Needless to say, I did nothing whatever in the matter. Yet—to my total stupefaction—

[*STRACK and ROSENBERG hurry on downstage.*]

—in the middle of the last rehearsal of *Figaro* next day . . .

[*The EMPEROR JOSEPH comes on from upstage.*]

JOSEPH: [*Cheerfully*]. Fêtes and fireworks! Fêtes and fireworks! Gentlemen, good afternoon!

SCENE 6

The Theater

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. Entirely against his usual practice, the Emperor appeared!

[*STRACK and ROSENBERG look at each other in consternation.*]

JOSEPH seats himself excitedly on one of the gold chairs, facing out front. As with the premiere of *Seraglio* seen in Act One, he watches the audience as if it were the opera.]

JOSEPH: I can't wait for this, Mozart, I assure you! *Je prévois des merveilles!*

MOZART: [*Bowing fervently*]. Majesty!

[*The courtiers sit also: STRACK on his right-hand side, ROSENBERG on his left. SALIERI also sits, near the keyboard.*]

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. What did this mean? Was this proof God had finally decided to defend Mozart against me? Was He engaging with me at last?

[*MOZART passes behind SALIERI.*]

MOZART: [*Earnestly, sotto voce*]. I am so grateful to you, I cannot express—

SALIERI: [*Aside, to him*]. Hush. Say nothing.

[MOZART goes on quickly to the fortepiano and sits at it.]

[To audience] One thing about the event seemed more than coincidence.

[Music sounds faintly: the end of the third act of Figaro, just before the dance music starts.]

Strangely, His Majesty had arrived at precisely the moment when the dancers would have begun, had not they and their music been entirely cut.

[The music stops abruptly.]

He and the rest of us watched the dramatic action proceed in total silence—whilst what should have been a party of celebrating peasants, dancing the fandango in the center of the stage, stood absolutely motionless, their arms frozen in the air.

[Flanked by his COURTIERs, the EMPEROR stares out front, following with his eyes what is obviously a silent pantomime. His face expresses bewilderment. ROSENBERG watches his sovereign anxiously. Finally, the monarch speaks.]

JOSEPH: I don't understand. . . . Is it modern?

MOZART: [Jumping up nervously from the keyboard.] No, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Then what?

MOZART: The Herr Director has removed a dance that would have occurred at this point.

JOSEPH: [To ROSENBERG.] Why was this done?

ROSENBERG: It's your own regulation, Sire. No ballet in your opera.

MOZART: [Nervously]. Majesty, this is not a ballet! . . . It is part of a wedding feast—entirely necessary for the story.

JOSEPH: Well, it certainly looks very odd the way it is. I can't say I like it.

MOZART: Nor do I, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Do you like it, Rosenberg?

ROSENBERG: It's not a question of liking, Majesty. Your own law decrees it.

JOSEPH: Yes. All the same, this is nonsense. Look at them: they're like waxworks up there.

ROSENBERG: Well, not exactly, Majesty.

JOSEPH: I don't like waxworks.

MOZART: Nor do I, Majesty.

JOSEPH: Well, who would? What do you say, Salieri? SALIERI: Italians are fond of waxworks, Majesty. [Pause] Our religion is largely based upon them.

JOSEPH: You are *cattivo* again, Court Composer.

STRACK: [Intervening creamily]. Your Majesty, Count Rosenberg is very worried that if this music is put back, it will create the most unfortunate precedent. One will have thereafter to endure hours of dancing in opera.

JOSEPH: I think we can guard against that, you know, Chamberlain. I really think we can guard against hours of dancing. [To ROSENBERG] Please restore Herr Mozart's music.

ROSENBERG: But, Majesty, I must insist—

JOSEPH: [With command]. You will oblige me, Rosenberg! . . . I wish to hear Mozart's music. Do you understand me?

ROSENBERG: Yes, Majesty.

[MOZART explodes with joy, jumps over a chair and throws himself at JOSEPH's feet.]

MOZART: Oh, God, I thank Your Majesty! [He kisses the EMPEROR's hand extravagantly, as at their first meeting.] Oh, thank you—thank you—thank you, Sire, forever!

JOSEPH: [Withdrawing hand]. Yes, yes—very good. A little less enthusiasm, I beg you!

MOZART: [Abashed]. Excuse me.

[The EMPEROR rises. All follow suit.]

JOSEPH: Well—there it is!

SCENE 7

The First Performance of Figaro

[*The theater glows with light for the first performance of Figaro. COURTIERs and CITIZENs come in swiftly.*]

The EMPEROR and his COURT resume their seats and the others quickly take theirs. In the front row we note KATHERINA CAVALLIERI, all plumes and sequins, and KAPPELLMEISTER BONNO—older than ever. Behind them sit CONSTANCE and the VENTICELLI. All of them stare out at the audience as if we were the opera they have come to see: people of fashion down front; poorer people crowded into the Light Box, upstage.

SALIERI crosses as he speaks, to where two chairs have been placed side by side apart from the rest, on the left, to form his box. On the chair upstage sits his good wife, TERESA—more statuesque than ever.]

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. And so Figaro was produced in spite of all my efforts. I sat in my box on May the first, 1786, and watched it happen. A conspicuous defeat for me. And yet I was strangely excited.

[*Faintly we hear Figaro singing the tune of "Non più andrai." The stage audience is obviously delighted: they smile out front as they watch the (invisible) action.*]

My march! My poor March of Welcome—now set to enchant the world forever!

[*It fades. Applause. The EMPEROR rises, and with him the audience, to denote an intermission. JOSEPH greets KATHERINA and BONNO. ROSENBERG and STRACK go to SALIERI's box.*]

ROSENBERG: [*To SALIERI*]. Almost in your style, that last bit. But more vulgar, of course. Far more obvious than you would ever be.

STRACK: [*Drawing*]. Exactly!

[*A bell rings for the end of the intermission. The EMPEROR returns quickly to his seat. The audience sits. A pause. All look out front, unmoving.*]

SALIERI: [*Raply and quietly, to audience*]. Trembling, I heard the second act. [*Pause*] The restored third act. [*Pause*] The astounding fourth. What shall I say to you who will one day hear this last act for yourselves? You will—because whatever else shall pass away, this must remain.

[*Faintly we hear the solemn closing ensemble from Act Four of Figaro, "Abi Tutti contenti. Saremo così."*]

[*Over this*] The scene was night in a summer garden. Pinprick stars gleamed down on shaking summerhouses. Plotters glided behind pasteboard hedges. I saw a woman, dressed in her maid's clothes, hear her husband utter the first tender words he has offered her in years, only because he thinks she is someone else. Could one catch a realer moment? And how, except in a net of pure artifice? The disguises of opera had been invented for Mozart. [*He can barely look out at the "stage."*] The final reconciliation melted sight. [*Pause*] Through my tears I saw the Emperor . . . yawning.

[*JOSEPH yawns. The music fades. There is scant applause. JOSEPH rises and the COURTIERs follow suit. MOZART bows.*]

JOSEPH [*To ROSENBERG*]: [*Coolly*]. Most ingenious, Mozart. You are coming along nicely . . . I do think we must omit encores in future. It really makes things far too long. Make a note, Rosenberg.

ROSENBERG: Majesty.

[*MOZART lowers his head, crushed.*]

JOSEPH: Gentlemen, good night to you. Strack, attend me.

[*JOSEPH goes out, with STRACK. Director ROSENBERG gives MOZART one triumphant look and follows. SALIERI nods to his WIFE, who leaves with the audience. Only CONSTANCE lingers for a second, then she, too, goes. A pause. MOZART*

and SALIERI are left alone, SALIERI deeply shaken by the opera, MOZART deeply upset by its reception. He sits.]

MOZART: [Low]. Herr Salieri.

SALIERI: Yes?

MOZART: What do you think? Do you think I am coming along nicely?

[A pause]

SALIERI: [Moved]. I think the piece is . . . extraordinary. I think it is . . . marvelous. Yes.

[A pause]

MOZART: I'll tell you what it is. It's the best opera yet written. That's what it is. And only I could have done it. No one else living!

[MOZART walks away. SALIERI turns his head away swiftly, as if he has been slapped. They both freeze. The light changes.

The VENTICELLI rush on.]

V.1: Rosenberg is furious.

V.2: He'll never forgive Mozart.

V.1: He'll do anything to get back at him!

SALIERI: [Rising, to audience]. So it wasn't hard to get the piece canceled. I saw to it through the person of the resentful Director that in the entire year, *Figaro* was played only *nine times*! . . . My defeat finally turned into a victory. And God's response to my challenge remained as inscrutable as ever. . . . Was He taking any notice of me at all? . . .

[MOZART breaks his freeze and comes downstage.]

MOZART: *Widrawn!* Absolutely no plans for its revival!

SALIERI: I commiserate with you, my friend. But if the public does not like one's work, one has to accept the fact gracefully. [Aside, to audience] And certainly they didn't.

V.1: [Complaining]. It's too complicated!

V.2: [Complaining]. Too tiresome!

V.1: All those morbid harmonies!

V.2: And never a good bang at the end of songs, so you know when to clap!

[The VENTICELLI go off.]

SALIERI: [To audience]. Obviously I would not need to plot too hard against his operas in future. I must concentrate on the man. I decided to see him as much as possible: to learn everything I could of his weaknesses.

SCENE 8

The Waldstätten Library

[SERVANTS again bring on the wing chair.]

MOZART: I'll go to England! England loves music. That's the answer!

SALIERI: [To audience]. We were yet again in the library of the Baroness Waldstätten—that room fated to be the scene of ghastly encounters between us! Again, too, the compensating *crema al mascarpone*.

[He sits in the chair and eats greedily.]

MOZART: I was there when I was a boy: they absolutely adored me. I had more kisses than you've had cakes! . . . When I was a child people loved me.

SALIERI: Perhaps they will again. Why don't you go to London and try?

MOZART: Because I have a wife and child and no money. I wrote to Papa to take the boy off my hands just for a few months so I could go—and he refused! . . . He's a bitter man, of course. After he'd finished showing me off around Europe he never went anywhere himself. He just stayed up in Salzburg year after

year, kissing the ring of the farbishop and lecturing me! . . .
[*Confidentially*] The real thing is, you see, he's jealous. Under everything he's jealous of me! He'll never forgive me for being cleverer than he is.

[*He leans excitedly over SALIERI's chair like a naughty child.*]
I'll tell you a secret. Leopold Mozart is just a jealous, dried-up old turd . . . And I actually detest him.

[*He giggles guiltily. The VENTICELLI appear quickly, and address SALIERI, as MOZART freezes.*]

V.1: [*Solemnly*]. Leopold Mozart—

V.2: [*Solemnly*]. Leopold Mozart—

V.1 & V.2: Leopold Mozart is dead!

[*They go off. MOZART recoils. A long pause.*]

SALIERI: Do not despair. Death is inevitable, my friend.

MOZART: [*Desperately*]. How will I go now?

SALIERI: What do you mean?

MOZART: In the world. There's no one else. No one who understands the wickedness around. *I can't see it!* . . . He watched for me all my life—and I betrayed him.

SALIERI: No!

MOZART: I talked against him.

SALIERI: No!

MOZART: [*Distressed*]. I married where he begged me not. I left him alone. I danced and played billiards and fooled about—and he sat by himself night after night in an empty house, and no woman to care for him. . . . We used to sing a Kissing Song at bedtime when I was small. His own silly words: [*Speaking them*] "*Oragna figata fa! Marina gamina fa!*" Then Kiss—Kiss—Kiss! . . . No one kissed him after I left, ever again.

[*SALIERI rises in concern.*]

SALIERI: Wolfgang. My dear Wolfgang! Don't accuse yourself. . . . Lean upon me, if you care to. . . . Lean upon me.

[*He opens his arms in a wide gesture of benevolence. MOZART approaches and is almost tempted to embrace. But*

at the last moment he avoids it and breaks away downstage and falls on his knees, facing front.]

MOZART: [*Crying out in anguish*]. Papa!!

SALIERI: [*To the audience*]. So rose the Ghost Father in Don Giovanni!

SCENE 9

[*The two grim chords which open the overture to Don Giovanni sound loudly through the theater. MOZART seems to quail under them, as he stares out front and sinks to his knees. On the backdrop in the Light Box appears the silhouette of a giant black figure, in cloak and tricorn. It extends its arms menacingly and engulfingly, toward its begetter.*]

SALIERI: A father more accusing than any in opera. So rose the figure of a Guilty Libertine, cast into Hell! . . . I looked on astounded as from his ordinary life he made his art. We were both ordinary men, he and I. Yet he from the ordinary created legends—and I from legends created only the ordinary.

[*The figure fades. The music stops. SALIERI stands over the kneeling MOZART.*]

Could I have not stopped my war? Shown him some pity? Oh yes, my friends, at any time—if He above had shown me one drop of it! Every day I set to work I prayed—I still prayed you understand—"Make this one good in my ears! Just this one! One!" But would He ever? . . . I heard my music calmed in convention—not one breath of spirit to lift it off the shallows. And I heard his—month after month—

[*We hear the exquisite strains of the terzetto "Soave il vento" from Così Fan Tutte. Through the following, two girls in silhouette appear on the backcloth and walk away from us, arm in arm, their backs to us, and disappear.*]

The spirit singing through it unstoppable, to my ears alone! I heard his comedy of the seduction of two sisters, *Così Fan Tutte*: Thus do all women. Aloysia and Constanze immortalized—two average girls turned into divinities: their sounds of surrender sweeter than the psalms of Heaven. [To God in anguish] "Grant this to me! . . . Grant this to me! . . . [As "God"] "No, no, no: I do not need you, Salieri! I have Mozart! Better for you to be silent!" Ha Ha Ha Ha!

[The music cuts off.]

The Creature's gleeful giggle was the laughter of God. I had to end it. How? DESTITUTION! Reduce the man to destitution. . . . Starve out the God!

[SERVANTS enter and remove the wing chair.]

SCENE 10

Vienna and the Palace of Schönbrunn

[MOZART rises, a little frazier.]

SALIERI: [To MOZART]. How do you fare today?

MOZART: Badly. I have no money, and no prospect of any.

SALIERI: It would not be too hard, surely.

[Lights up on the Palace of Schönbrunn. The EMPEROR stands in the Light Box, in his golden space.]

JOSEPH: We must find him a post.

SALIERI: [To audience]. One danger! The Emperor.

[SALIERI goes upstage to JOSEPH.] There's nothing available, Majesty.

JOSEPH: There's Chamber Composer, now that Gluck is dead.

SALIERI: [Shocked]. Mozart to follow Gluck?

JOSEPH: I won't have him say I drove him away. You know what a tongue he has.

SALIERI: Then grant him Gluck's post, Majesty, but not his salary.

That would be wrong.

JOSEPH: Gluck got two thousand florins a year. What should Mozart get?

SALIERI: Four hundred. Light payment, yes, but for light duties.

JOSEPH: Perfectly fair. I'm obliged to you, Court Composer.

SALIERI: [Bowing]. Majesty. [To audience] And so easily done. Like many men obsessed with being thought generous, Joseph the Second was quintessentially stingy.

[MOZART kneels to the EMPEROR.]

JOSEPH: Herr Mozart, vous nous faites honneur!

[Lights down on JOSEPH, but he stays where he is in the Light Box. MOZART and SALIERI come downstage.]

MOZART: It's a damned insult. Not enough to keep a mouse in cheese for a week!

SALIERI: Regard it as a token, caro Herr.

MOZART: When I was young they gave me snuffboxes. Now it's tokens! And for what? Pom-pom for fireworks! Twang-twang for contredanzes!

SALIERI: I'm sorry it's made you angry. I'd not have suggested it if I'd known you'd be distressed.

MOZART: You suggested it?

SALIERI: I regret I was not able to do more.

MOZART: [Overwhelmed] Oh . . . forgive me! You're a good man! I see that now! You're a truly kind man—and I'm a monstrous fool!

[He grasps SALIERI's hand.]

SALIERI: No, please . . .

MOZART: You make me ashamed. . . . You excellent man!

SALIERI: No, no, no, no—s'il vous plaît. A little less enthusiasm, I beg you!

[MOZART laughs delightedly at this imitation of the Emperor.

SALIERI joins in.]

I shall see you soon again?

MOZART: Of course!

SALIERI: Why not visit me?

MOZART: [Warmly]. I will! . . . I promise!

SALIERI: Bene.

MOZART: Bene.

SALIERI: My friend. My new friend!

[MOZART giggles with pleasure and goes off.]

[To audience] Now, if ever, was the moment for God to crush me. I waited—and do you know what happened? I had just ruined Mozart's career at court. God rewarded me by granting me my dearest wish!

[The VENTICELLI come on.]

V.1: Kapellmeister Bonno—

V.2: Kapellmeister Bonno—

V.1 & V.2: Kapellmeister Bonno is dead!

[SALIERI opens his mouth in surprise.]

V.1: You are appointed—

V.2: By royal decree—

V.1: To fill his place!

[Lights full up on the EMPEROR, at the back. He is flanked by STRACK and ROSENBERG, standing like icons, as at their first appearance.]

JOSEPH: [Formally, as SALIERI turns and bows to him]. First Royal and Imperial Kapellmeister to our court.

[The VENTICELLI applaud.]

V.1: Bravo.

V.2: Bravo.

ROSENBERG: Evviva, Salieri!

STRACK: Well done, Salieri!

JOSEPH: [Warmly]. Dear Salieri. There it is!

[The lights go down on Schönbrunn. In the dark, the EMPEROR and his COURT leave the stage for the last time. SALIERI turns round, alarmed.]

SALIERI: [To audience]. I was now truly alarmed. How long would I go unpunished?

V.1: Mozart looks appalling.

V.2: It must be galling, of course.

V.1: I hear he's dosing himself constantly with medicine.

SALIERI: For what?

V.2: Envy, I imagine.

V.1: Actually, I hear, syphilis.

SCENE II

The Prater

[Fresh green trees appear on the backdrop. The light changes to yellow, turning the blue surround into a rich verdant green.]

MOZART and CONSTANCE enter arm in arm. She is palpably pregnant and wears a poor coat and bonnet. His clothes are poorer, too, and his manner is hectic. SALIERI promenades with the VENTICELLI.]

SALIERI: I met him next in the Prater.

MOZART: [To SALIERI]. Congratulations, sir!

SALIERI: I thank you. And to you both! [To audience] Clearly there was a change for the worse. His eyes gleamed, oddly, like a dog's when the light catches. [To MOZART] I hear you are not well, my friend.

[He acknowledges CONSTANCE, who curtsies to him.]

MOZART: It's nothing. A few pains. . . . And I do not sleep well, always.

SALIERI: Really?

MOZART: And I tend to have dreams now. Quite often.

CONSTANZE: [*Warningly*]. Wolferl!

SALIERI: Dreams? What kind? . . . You mean nightmares?

MOZART: Well . . .

CONSTANZE: Not now, dear.

SALIERI: No, please tell me.

MOZART: Actually, it's always the same one. A looming figure comes to me, wrapped in grey, doing this. [*Beckoning slowly*] It has no face. . . . What can it mean, do you think?

SALIERI: Surely you do not believe in dreams?

MOZART: No, of course not—really!

SALIERI: Surely you do not, madame?

CONSTANZE: I never dream, sir. Things are unpleasant enough to me, awake.

[*SALIERI bows.*]

MOZART: It's all fancy, of course!

CONSTANZE: [*Coldly*]. If Wolfgang had proper work, he might dream less, First Kapellmeister.

MOZART: [*Embarrassed, taking her arm*]. Stanzi, please! . . . Excuse us, sir. . . . Come, dearest. We are well enough, thank you.

[*Husband and wife continue their walk, and halt at the side of the stage. The light grows less sunny. CONSTANZE helps WOLFGANG off with his coat. He is revealed as wearing a Masonic apron. CONSTANZE leaves the stage.*]

V.1: He's growing freakish.

V.2: No question.

V.1: Grey figures with no faces!

SALIERI: [*Looking after him*]. His circumstances make him anxious, I fancy.

V.1: They've moved house again.

V.2: To the Raubensteinasse. Number 970.

V.1: They must be desperate.

V.2: It's a real slum.

SALIERI: Does he earn money at all, apart from his post?

V.1: Nothing whatever.

V.2: I hear he's starting to beg.

V.1: They say he's written letters to twenty brother Masons.

SALIERI: Really?

V.2: And they're giving him money.

SALIERI: [*To audience*]. Of course! They would. . . . I had forgotten the Masons! *Naturally* they would relieve him—how stupid of me! . . . There could be no finally starving him with the Masons there to help! As long as he asked they would keep supplying his wants! . . . How could I stop it? And quickly! . . .

V.1: Lord Fugue is most displeased with him!

SALIERI: Is he?

SCENE 12

A Masonic Lodge

[*A huge golden emblem descends, encrusted with Masonic symbols.*]

[*Enter VAN SWIETEN. He, too, is wearing the ritual apron over his sober clothes. The two men clasp hands in fraternal greeting.*]

VAN SWIETEN: [*Gravely*]. This is not good, Brother. The lodge was not created for you to beg from.

MOZART: What else can I do?

VAN SWIETEN: Give concerts, as you used to do.

MOZART: I have no subscribers left, Baron. I am no longer fashionable.

VAN SWIETEN: I am not surprised! You write tasteless comedies which give offense. I warned you, often enough.

MOZART: [*Humbly*]. You did. I admit it.

VAN SWIETEN: I will send you some fugues of Bach tomorrow. You can arrange those for my Sunday concert. You shall have a small fee.

MOZART: Thank you, Baron.

[VAN SWIETEN nods and goes out. SALIERI steps forward. He, too, wears the Masonic apron.]

[*Shouting after VAN SWIETEN*] I cannot live by arranging Bach!

SALIERI: [*Sarcastically*]. A generous fellow.

MOZART: All the same, I'll have to do it. If he were to turn the lodge against me, I'd be finished. My brother Masons virtually keep me now.

SALIERI: Wolfgang, it's embarrassing, I know—but you must allow me to relieve you also.

MOZART: No!

SALIERI: If it is the duty of a Mason to help—how much more of a friend.

MOZART: Not another word! I would never take money from you. That friendship is worth all the gold in the world. Please—no more of that!

SALIERI: You overwhelm me.

MOZART: I'll manage: you'll see! Things are looking up already. I've had a marvelous proposal from Schikaneder. He's a new member of this lodge.

SALIERI: Schikaneder? The actor?

MOZART: Yes. He owns a theater in the suburbs.

SALIERI: Well, more of a music hall, surely?

MOZART: Yes. . . . He wants me to write him a vaudeville—something for ordinary German people. Isn't that a wonderful idea? . . . He's offered me half the receipts when we open.

SALIERI: Nothing in advance?

MOZART: He said he couldn't afford anything. I know it's not much of an offer. But a popular piece about brotherly love could celebrate everything we believe as Masons!

SALIERI: It certainly could! . . . Why don't you put the Masons into it?

MOZART: Into an opera? . . . I couldn't.

[SALIERI laughs, to indicate that he was simply making a joke.]

All the same—what an ideal!

SALIERI: [*Ermestly*]. Our rituals are secret, Wolfgang.

MOZART: I needn't copy them exactly. I could adapt them a little.

SALIERI: Well. . . . It would certainly be in a great cause.

MOZART: Brotherly love!

SALIERI: Brotherly love!

[*They both turn and look solemnly at the great golden emblem hanging at the back.*]

SALIERI: [*Warnly*]. Take courage, Wolfgang. It's a glorious idea.

MOZART: It is, isn't it? It really is!

SALIERI: Of course say nothing until it is done.

MOZART: Not a word.

SALIERI: [*Making a sign: closed fist*]. Secret!

MOZART: [*Making a similar sign*]. Secret!

SALIERI: Good.

[*He steps out of the scene downstage.*]

[*To audience*] And if that didn't finish him off with the Masons—nothing would!

[*The gold emblem withdraws. We hear the merry dance of Monostatos and the hypnotized slaves from The Magic Flute: "Das Klinget so heinnlich, Das Klinget so schön!" MOZART stands entranced downstage, hearing it too—then moves smilingly into his apartment, right, to write it down. Simultaneously, to the tinkling of the glockenspiel, SERVANTS bring in a long plain table loaded with manuscripts, bottles and a plain stool, which they place beside it. MOZART sits to work, as CONSTANCE appears wearily from the back, enters this dingy room and sits too.*]

At the same time, upstage left, two other SERVANTS have placed the little gilded table bearing a loaded cake-stand and three of the gilded chairs from SALIERI's resplendent salon. We now have in view two contrasting apartments. As soon as the Masonic emblem withdraws, the music fades down and the VENTICELLI appear to SALIERI.]

SCENE 13

Mozart's Apartment; Salieri's Apartment

V.1: *Mozart is delighted with himself!*

V.2: *He's writing a secret opera!*

V.1: *[Grossly]. And won't tell anyone its theme.*

V.2: *It's really too tiresome.*

[The VENTICELLI go off. The music stops.]

SALIERI: *He told me. He told me everything! . . . Initiation ceremonies. Ceremonies with blindfolds. All rituals copied from the Masons! . . . He sat at home preparing his own destruction. A home where life grew daily more grim.*

[He goes upstage and sits on one of his gilded chairs, devouring a cake. MOZART also sits at his table, wrapped in a blanket, and writing the music. Opposite him CONSTANZE sits on a stool, wrapped in a shawl.]

CONSTANZE: *I'm cold . . . I'm cold all day . . . Hardly surprising since we have no firewood.*

MOZART: *Papa was right. We end exactly as he said. Beggars.*

CONSTANZE: *It's all his fault.*

MOZART: *Papa's?*

CONSTANZE: *He kept you a baby all your life.*

MOZART: *I don't understand. . . . You always loved Papa.*

CONSTANZE: *I did!*

MOZART: *You adored him. You told me so often.*

[Slight pause]

CONSTANZE: *[Flatly]. I hated him.*

MOZART: *What?*

CONSTANZE: *And he hated me.*

MOZART: *That's absurd. He loved us both very much. You're being extremely silly now.*

CONSTANZE: *Am I?*

MOZART: *[Airily]. Yes you are: little-wife-of-my-heart!*

CONSTANZE: *Do you want to know what I really thought of your father? . . . Do you remember the fire we had last night, because it was so cold you couldn't even get the ink wet? You said "What a blaze," remember? "What a blaze!" All those old papers going up? Well, my dear, those old papers were just all your father's letters, that's all—every one he wrote since the day we married.*

MOZART: *What?*

CONSTANZE: *Every one! All the letters about what a ninny I am—what a bad housekeeper I am! Every one!*

MOZART: *Stanz!*

CONSTANZE: *Shit on him! . . . Shit on him!*

MOZART: *You bitch!*

CONSTANZE: *[Savagely]. At least it kept us warm! What else will do that? Perhaps we should dance! You love to dance, Wolfer!—let's dance! Dance to keep warm! [Grandly] Write me a con-danze, Mozart! It's your job to write dances, isn't it?*

[Hysterical, she snatches up his manuscripts from the table and scatters them over the floor—pulling up her skirts and dancing roughly round the room like a demented peasant, to the tune of "Non più andrai"!]

CONSTANZE: *[Singing savagely]. Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso—notte e giorno d'intorno girando!*

MOZART: *[Shrieking]. Stop it! Stop it!*

[He rises and tries to seize her.] Stanzi-marini! Marini-bini!

Don't please! . . . Please—please I beg you! . . . Look. There's a kiss! Where's it coming from? Right out of that corner! There's another one—all wet, all sloppy wet, coming straight to you! Kiss—kiss—kiss—kiss!

[*She pushes him roughly away.*]

CONSTANZE: Get off!

[*A long pause*]

MOZART: I'm frightened, Stanzi. . . . Something awful's happening to me. The pains stay. And the dream! . . .

CONSTANZE: [*Quietly*]. I can't bear it. I can't bear much more of this.

MOZART: [*Absorbed in himself*]. The Figure's like this now—[*Beckoning more urgently*]—Here. Come here. Here . . . Its face still hidden. Always hidden.

CONSTANZE: [*Crying out*]. Stop it, for God's sake! Stop it! . . . Stop! . . . It's me who's frightened. . . . *Me!* . . . You frighten me. . . . If you go on like this I'll leave you. I swear it.

MOZART: [*Shocked*]. Stanzi!

CONSTANZE: I mean it . . . I do. . . .

[*She puts her hand to her stomach, as if in pain.*]

MOZART: I'm sorry. . . . Oh God, I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! . . . Come here to me, little-wife-of-my-heart! Come . . . Come . . .

[*He kneels and coaxes her to him. She comes half-reluctantly, half-willingly.*]

Who am I? . . . Quick: tell me. Hold me and tell who I am.

Who?—come on.

CONSTANZE: Pussy-wussy.

MOZART: Who else?

CONSTANZE: Miaowy-powy.

MOZART: And you're squeaky-pecky. And Stanzi-manzi. And Bini-gini!

[*She surrenders.*]

CONSTANZE: Wolf-polti!

MOZART: Poopy-peepee!

[*They giggle.*]

CONSTANZE: Now don't be stupid.

MOZART: [*Insistent: like a child*]. Come on—do it. Do it. . . . Let's do it. . . . "Poppy."

[*They play a private game, gradually doing it faster, on their knees.*]

CONSTANZE: Poppy.

MOZART: [*Changing it*]. Pappy.

CONSTANZE: [*Copying*]. Pappy.

MOZART: Pappa.

CONSTANZE: Pappa.

MOZART: Pappa-pappa!

CONSTANZE: Pappa-pappa!

MOZART: Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa!

CONSTANZE: Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa!

[*They rub noses.*]

TOGETHER: Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa! Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa!

CONSTANZE: *Ah!*

[*She suddenly cries out in distress, and clutches her stomach.*]

MOZART: Stanzi! . . . Stanzi, what is it?

[*The VENTICELLI hurry in.*]

SALIERI: And suddenly she was delivered! A boy!

V.2: Poor little imp.

V.1: To be born to that couple.

V.2: In that room.

V.1: With that money.

V.2: And the Father a baby himself.

[*During the above, CONSTANZE has slowly risen, and divested herself of her stuffed apron—thereby ceasing to be pregnant. Now she turns sorrowfully and walks briskly upstage and off it. MOZART follows her for a few steps, alarmed. He halts.*]

V.1: And now I hear—

V.2: Now I hear—

V.1: Something more has happened.

V.2: Even stranger.

[MOZART picks up a bottle, then moves swiftly into SALIERI's salon. He looks distracted.]

MOZART: *She's gone!*

SALIERI: What do you mean?

[*The VENTICELLI slip away.*]

MOZART: Constanze's gone away. Just for a while, she says. She's taken the baby and gone to Baden. To the spa. It'll cost us the last money we had.

SALIERI: But *why*?

MOZART: [*Distressed*]. She's right to go! It's my fault! She thinks I'm mad.

SALIERI: Surely not?

MOZART: Perhaps I am. I think maybe I am. . . .

SALIERI: Wolfgang—

MOZART: [*Terrified*]. This morning I saw a figure much like the one in my dream—only *clear*, not misty. And this time I was *awake*!—in my room—in *broad daylight*! . . . Oh God, it *spoke*! It said—it was terrible! . . .

SALIERI: Wolfgang, calm yourself. Just tell me what happened.

[*Pause. MOZART struggles to control himself.*]

MOZART: I was seated at my table working. Suddenly there came three sharp knocks at the door, and a Figure entered, all muffled in grey. But now it had a *face*! A *death's-head*!—glaring at me with frozen eyes sunk deep in little caves of bone! . . . And then it *spoke*! A horrible sound like a man hissing. . . . It said, "Wolfgang Mozart: you are required now by my Master to write a Requiem Mass. . . . It must be finished completely when you see me next. And you will tell no one." I asked, "Who has died? Who is this Requiem for? . . . And who is your Master?" . . . [*Again hissing*] "Know only this: He will be much displeased with you if it is not ready when required! Therefore write

quickly!" Then he turned and left. I went to the window to see him reappear down in the street, but he didn't. He had vanished!

[*Pause. SALIERI goes to him.*]

SALIERI: This is simply morbid fancy, my friend. [*Earnestly touching MOZART's head*] It was all in there—and only there.

MOZART: I'm being silly, aren't I?

SALIERI: [*Smiling*]. Yes, I think you are.

MOZART: Yet it had the force of real things! . . . [*In relief*] No wonder Stanzi left. I frightened her away. Poor girl. . . . And now she'll miss the Vaudeville—and I wrote so much of it for her—to make her laugh.

SALIERI: [*Surprised*]. You mean it's finished? So soon? It's only been a month.

MOZART: Oh music is easy: it's marriage that's hard.

SALIERI: I long to see it.

MOZART: The theater isn't grand. It's just a popular music hall. No one from court will be there.

SALIERI: Do you think that matters to me? I would travel anywhere for a work by you!

MOZART: Saturday will be the first performance.

SALIERI: Good! [*Sly*] I know I'm no substitute for your little wife, but I know someone who will chase away your glooms.

MOZART: [*Laughing like a child*]. Saturday night then!

SALIERI: Saturday!

[*MOZART grabs SALIERI's hand gleefully, then turns out of the scene.*]

[*Light change.*]

[*To the audience*]. What was happening? Could that grim Figure actually exist? A skull-faced ghost ordering a Mass from beyond the grave? Clearly not!

MOZART [*Turning back*]: [*Light change*]. Are you ready? It's time for the performance!

SALIERI: I can't wait! A Vaudeville by you—*che dilletto assoluto!* . . .

And—if you recall, I promised to cheer you up. Well—behold!

[KATHERINA CAVALLERI enters, now fatter, and wearing an elaborate plumed hat.]

MOZART: [*Bowing delightedly*]. Katherina!

[*She curtsies to MOZART and takes his arm.*]

SALIERI: [*To the audience*]. And so to the opera we went—a strange band of three! [*The other two freeze.*] The First Kapellmeister—sleek as a cat. His mistress—now fat and feathered like the great songbird she'd become. And Mozart—odd-looking and drunk on the cheap wine which was now his constant habit. [*They unfreeze.*] We went into the suburbs—to a crowded music hall—in a tenement!

SCENE 14

The Theater by the Weiden

[*Sudden noise. Benches are brought in and placed horizontally across the stage. A crowd of working-class Germans swarms in from the back: a chattering mass of humanity though which the three have to push their way to the front. The long table is also pushed horizontally, and the rowdy audience piles on top of it, smoking pipes and chewing sausages. Unobserved. BARON VAN SWIETEN comes in also, and stands at the back.*]

MOZART: You must be indulgent now! It's my first piece of this kind!

[*The three sit on the front bench: MOZART sick and emaciated; CAVALLERI blousy and bedizened; SALIERI as elegant as ever.*]

SALIERI: We sat as he wished us to, among ordinary Germans. The smell of sweat and sausage was almost annihilating!

[CAVALLERI presses a mouchoir to her sensitive nose.]

[*To MOZART*] This is so exciting!

MOZART: [*Happily*]. Do you think so?

SALIERI: [*Looking about him*]. Oh yes! This is exactly the audience we should be writing for! Not the dreary court . . . As always—you show the way.

[*The audience freezes.*]

[*To audience*] As always, he did. My pungent neighbors rolled on their benches at the jokes—

[*They unfreeze, briefly, to demonstrate this mirth.*]

And I, in their midst, heard *The Magic Flute*.

[*They freeze again as the serene tenor song with flute "Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton!" is heard, and the audience becomes immediately enraptured from its orchestral introduction onward.*]

He had put the Masons into it right enough. Oh yes—but how? He had turned them into a secret order of Priests. I heard voices calling out of ancient temples. I saw a vast sun rise on a timeless land where animals danced and children floated, and by its rays all the poisons we feed each other drawn up and burnt away!

[*A giant sun does indeed rise inside the Light Box, and standing in it the gigantic silhouette of a priestly figure robed in Egyptian costume and headdress, extending its arms in universal greeting.*]

SALIERI: And in this sun—behold—I saw his father. No more an accusing figure but *forgiving*—the highest Priest of the Order—his hands extended to the world in love! Mozart feared Leopold no longer. A final Legend had been made. . . . And oh, the sound of that newfound peace in him—so tender—so serene! . . . There was *The Magic Flute*—there beside me!

[*He points to MOZART, who jumps up on the bench excitedly*

to great applause and acknowledges the clapping with his arms flung wide, a bottle in his hand. He turns back to us—his eyes staring. All freeze.]

How could this be?—in the face of everything I had done to him. . . . Was this his response to all my injuries—these priceless sighs of exaltation?

[The music stops. In slow motion MOZART turns to SALIERI—and SALIERI, moved, reaches up a hand to him also in slow motion.]

[Moved] Wolfgang!—

[Still slowly, MOZART reaches down to him, but just as their hands touch, they are interrupted by a furious BARON VAN SWIETEN.]

VAN SWIETEN: [Calling out] Mozart!

[Outraged, he pushes his way to the front through the crowd of dispersing CITIZENS.]

MOZART: [Turning joyfully to greet him]. Baron! You here!—How wonderful of you to come!

SALIERI: [To audience]. I had, of course, suggested it.

VAN SWIETEN: [With cold fury]. What have you done?

MOZART: Excellency?

VAN SWIETEN: You have put our rituals into a vulgar show!

MOZART: No, sir.

VAN SWIETEN: They are plain for all to see! And to laugh at! . . .

You have betrayed the Order.

MOZART: [In horror]. No!

SALIERI: Baron, a word with you—

VAN SWIETEN: Don't speak for him, Salieri! [To MOZART, with frozen contempt] You were ever a crude vulgarian we hoped to mend. Stupid, hopeless task! Now you are a betrayer as well. I shall never forgive you! And depend on it, I shall ensure that no Freemason or person of distinction will do so in Vienna so long as I have life!

SALIERI: Baron, please, I must speak!

VAN SWIETEN: No, sir! Leave alone. [To MOZART] I did not look for this reward, Mozart. Never speak to me.

[He goes out. CAVALIERI, embarrassed, goes out another way. The lights change. The benches are taken off. SALIERI watches MOZART, who stands stunned.]

SCENE 15

Salieri's Apartment, and Outside in Vienna

SALIERI: Wolfgang? . . .

[MOZART shakes his head sharply—and walks away from him, upstage, desolate and stunned.]

Wolfgang—all is not lost.

[MOZART enters his apartment, and freezes.]

[To audience] But of course it was! Now he was ruined. Broken and shunned by all men of influence. He did not even get his half receipts from the opera.

[He sits. The VENTICELLI come in.]

V.1: Schikaneder pays him nothing.

V.2: Schikaneder cheats him.

V.1: Gives him enough for liquor.

V.2: And keeps all the rest.

SALIERI: [Ironically]. I couldn't have managed it better myself.

[MOZART sits despairingly at his table, in the gloom. He takes up a wine bottle—but it is empty. Suddenly he starts to write, with great vigor, dropping finished pages on the floor. Through this the VENTICELLI speak.]

V.1: And as for Mozart—

V.2: The poor fellow—

SALIERI: [*Urgently*]. What about him? . . . I've heard nothing from him in days . . . What is he doing?

V.1 & V.2: [*Together*]. We don't know!

V.1: [*Confidentially*]. He's become really odd, sir.

V.2: Turned dreadfully strange!

V.1: Stays in his apartment all day.

V.2: Burns his candle all night.

[MOZART jumps up quickly, and faces front, downstage, looking out in alarm.]

V.1: But appears over and over at his window—

V.2: Staring wildly down into the street.

V.1: Twitching!

V.2: Trembling!

V.1: Like a man deeply disordered!

V.2: Or one driven out of his mind!

[SALIERI looks at them startled. MOZART sits again, and resumes his feverish writing.]

V.1: [*Hushed*]. In fact, the rumor is—

V.2: [*Hushed*]. The rumor is, sir—

[*Pause*]

SALIERI: What? . . . Say it!

V.1 & V.2: *Our Wolfgang has lost his wits!*

[*Pause. SALIERI makes a sharp gesture of dismissal. The VENICEs leave quickly. Light change.*]

SALIERI: [*To audience, very disturbed*]. Was it true? Could it be possible?—*Madness?* . . . I'd never thought of that!—him retreating into that terrible refuge. Yet there would lie my Victory. Loss of wits must surely mean loss of talent . . . Triumph surged up through me. He was disarmed at last! . . . And at that same moment came chill—deep-spreading chill. [*Pause*] Was this what I had actually done? Driven a man mad? . . . [*Urgently*] I had to know. See for myself. Spy on him unseen—immediately! . . . I couldn't keep away!

[Two o'clock strikes. The VALET enters swiftly and wraps his master in a long, loose cloak of grey, hands him a wide grey hat and leaves. SALIERI speaks through this, finally pulling the hat low on his brow, and moving downstage.]

And so it was, incredibly late one freezing night in November 1791, I found myself hurrying secretly across the empty city, under a churning sky and a hidden moon, seeking his lodgings where I had never been—no notion what I might see!

[*He stops, facing the audience.*]

There was my goal: that dingy alley, the Rauhensteingasse.

[*He looks up.*]

Only one window alight, above me. . . . Stealthily I stationed myself to watch it from the shadows below—but instantly, as if sensing me, he appeared!

[MOZART rises and also comes downstage to face the audience. *He seems now to be seriously ill.*]

A drawn face distorted by fear, staring straight down at my motionless figure, standing deep-cloaked against the cold. A cry came faintly from behind the dirty glass, and through it his mouth began shaping frenzied words: "More! . . . More! . . . More time! . . . Time! [*Desperately*] "Oh pleeeeeease!"

[Both men now stand staring at the audience: MOZART mimes speaking his words as SALIERI sounds them aloud.]

I stood frozen in alarm—until suddenly, without warning, the moon sprang full out from behind a cloud, and spilled its merciless light all down me! He saw clearly who it was. And there was nothing for it but to greet him—cheerfully! . . .

[SALIERI takes off his hat and gives a ghastly smile, and a bow. MOZART mimes, as before.]

With a gesture of pure relief, he flung open the casement and called down.

MOZART: *Signore!* . . . Oh how wonderful! . . . Come up! . . . Come up!! [*Inventing joyfully*] Come up, come up and join the fun! There's nothing to eat, not even a bun! And alas and alack,

there's nothing to drink. But bottles and bottles and bottles of ink! . . . [*He giggles delightedly.*] Ascend, if you please!

SALIERI: [*To audience.*] Will-less, I climbed his straits with stone feet.

[*Faintly the rising and falling scale passage from the Overture sounds in repetition, and to this hollow music SALIERI moves slowly upstage. MOZART moves also. They face each other. The music fades.*]

He was waiting at the top.

MOZART: A thousand welcomes, sir. Enter, if you please, the Palazzo Amadeo!

[*He gives a courtly flourish, indicating his room. SALIERI "enters" it, looking around him.*]

SCENE 16

Mozart's Apartment

SALIERI: Now for the first time I saw the place to which I had consigned him. A filthy chamber in total disorder. Empty bottles everywhere—discarded linen—and across the floor an inky pavement of fresh manuscripts, stirring in icy gusts from ill-fitting windows. . . . I knew *at once* what these must be! . . . As for his face, it held a look I'd never seen before—not madness at all, but some deep-possessing physical *sickness*!

MOZART: Tell me, my friend—what are you doing here so late? It is late, isn't it?

SALIERI: I came to see you. I've been concerned. . . . Let me ask what you are doing. Surely not working at this hour?

MOZART: [*Guiltily.*] No, not really!

SALIERI: [*Indicating the floor.*] Well, what's all this?

MOZART: Nothing! Just silliness. . . . A new piece.

SALIERI: [*Sharply.*] The Requiem! *It's the Requiem*—isn't it?

MOZART: [*Defensively.*] I know. It's stupid. That Messenger isn't real—you told me and I believe you. All the same, there's no point in taking chances, is there? If he suddenly appeared and there was nothing for him, I'd look foolish. Mind you, it's not nearly finished. Time was when I could have finished a Mass in a week. Not anymore. . . . To be exact, I'm feeling very poorly.

SALIERI: [*Concerned.*] My friend!

MOZART: It's true. My body hurts all day—my joints, my head. . . . And I know why! [*Confidentially.*] I've been poisoned.

SALIERI: Poisoned?

MOZART: They say the Masons poison people who offend them! [*In panic.*] I didn't mean that! . . . [*Defiant.*] I'll tell you one thing, though. If he comes too soon, that Messenger, I'll say it to his face: "Tell your Master from me, if He takes me too quick, there won't be a Mass—so there!" He can hiss at me all he likes.

[*Pause*]

SALIERI: [*Carefully.*] My friend, what are you saying?

MOZART: Isn't it obvious? [*Pause*] It's for me, that's all.

SALIERI: What is?

MOZART: [*Factually.*] The Mass. It's for me. Myself. . . . It's ordered. I am to write my own!

[*Pause*]

There's no need ordering a Requiem if no one's going to die! . . . You know, the worst thing is denying me proper time. That shames me. I've never done that in my life—offered unfinished work.

[*SALIERI looks at him astounded.*]

I wonder, sir, if you could oblige me—take a look at it, just a page or two, and tell me if it's worthy. You see, I don't know anymore. Everything's leaving me. Now the *sounds*: they're running away! My hand is tired—it's written too much—it can't

catch the notes now... The Kyrie's finished—you only need read that.

[He picks a few pages of manuscript off the table.]

Kyrie the first theme—Elison the second: both together make a double fugue. My father would've approved that at least. He'd say, "Only you, my boy. Only you could have done it"... Please.

[Urgently he proffers the pages. Reluctantly SALIERI takes them and sits to read. Immediately we hear the somber opening of the Requiem Mass. Over this MOZART speaks.]

Oh, it began so well, my life. Once the world was so full, so happy. All the journeys—all the carriages—all the rooms of smiles! Everyone smiled at me once—the King at Schönbrunn: the Princess at Versailles—they lit my way personally to the keyboard! Papa bowing, bowing, bowing with such joy!... "Chevalier Mozart, my miraculous son!"... Why has it all gone?... Was I so wicked?... *[Outraged] Why must I go?*

[SALIERI is reading the score with increasing disturbance. Suddenly he crumples the paper. Instantly the sound stops. He sits, deeply shaken and alarmed.]

[Watching him, in panic.] It's bad, isn't it? It's bad!

SALIERI: *[Slowly]*. Bad? ... It will help the ages to mourn.

MOZART: *[Fervently]*. Oh grazie... Grazie, Signore!

[He reaches out in gratitude, and freezes.]

SALIERI: *[To audience]*. What could I say? In my shaking hands I held a terrible contradiction that only Art can show. Something immortal—yet stinking of death. Indestructible—and yet rotting! *[He gives a faint gasp.]* Suddenly I was seized by an overwhelming horror!

MOZART: *[Unfreezing]*. I bless you.

SALIERI: *[Still to audience, clutching the manuscript]*. Who was this for, this appalling music? Not himself. Of course not himself! What need to mourn a man who will live forever?

MOZART: I bless you, Signore!

SALIERI: *[Still to audience]*. Who, then?

[He rises in growing distress.]

MOZART: I cannot believe you came here. Sought me out. No one seeks me anymore... Only you—my one Protector—*[Kneeling and laying his cheek against the man's hand]*—Antonio.

[In this gesture he freezes again. The grim Kyrie is now heard once more. Over it in huge anguish SALIERI speaks.]

SALIERI: *[To audience]*. I stood there—his despairing Mass sounding over and over in my head its gigantic lamentation—and knew absolutely who it was for!... *The boy!*... That eager boy who once stumbled around the fields of Lombardy, singing up his anthems to his Lord. *[Pause]* In ten years of unrelenting spite—I had destroyed myself!

[The music stops. SALIERI touches MOZART's head.]

And then—any feelings still left uncorrupted in me rose up, crying, "End this! Before it is too late!... Confess! Confess to him!... Get from him whatever absolution he can possibly grant. He—he alone!—the Creature you have broken... How else can you live on after?"

[A pause, SALIERI tries to find the strength to begin.]

Wolfgang, you must hear me.

[MOZART raises his head and looks at him.]

You are right. You are poisoned. It is true.

MOZART: What do you mean?

SALIERI: By me! No one else... We are both poisoned. Both—together.

MOZART: *[Bewildered]*. I don't understand.

SALIERI: Both. Both. With each other.

[Nervously MOZART rises.]

MOZART: Excuse me, sir. I'm stupid sometimes...

[He starts to back away. SALIERI follows him. The scene quickens.]

SALIERI: You with me. I with you! *[In his urgency he relapses into*

his native tongue, gesturing urgently.] *Sil—Tutti e due! Tutti e due! . . . Noi siamo avvelenati! . . . Tu con me!—Io con te!*

[*He holds up the manuscript Kyrie.*]

I eat what God gives me. Dose after dose. For all of life!

[*Savagely he tears off with his teeth a piece of the manuscript and chews it fiercely—then spits it out.*]

AVVELENATI!

[*He throws out his arms.*]

Eccomi! Antonio Salieri! . . . Il tuo Nemico! . . . Il tuo Assassino! [In sudden pity] Il tua morte!

[*He claps his breast in a sign for swearing, but MOZART only bursts out laughing and clapping delightedly.*]

MOZART: *Bravo! Bravissimo! . . . Signore, are you perhaps a little tidily? [Amused] I think you are! . . . Tidily-widly! [Mock scolding] You had some before you came! I thought that might be so!*

SALIERI: [*Desperate*]. Wolfgang, you must hear me now.

MOZART: [*Giggling defensively*]. Tidily-widly-pidly! . . . Well, why not? It's a cold night. . . . And a good performance!

SALIERI: [*Raising his voice*]. No—you have to listen! . . . Understand what has been done to you.

MOZART: What? . . . Why are you being like this? . . . It's stupid! [*With sudden apprehension*] Why have you come here? . . . What do you want? . . .

[*He retreats across the room to the table. SALIERI moves after him relentlessly. His manner becomes increasingly out of control.*]

SALIERI: Don't you know at all what I have endured from you? . . . From the day you appeared I have lived in Hell. . . . What I did to you was nothing to what you did to me!

MOZART: Stop this, please, *Signore*. I don't know what you're saying!

SALIERI: My God smiled—and permitted it! . . . Whatever I did—you would fill the world! [*Outraged*] You left me with nothing! [*He forces himself to smile, his manner wheedling.*]

No matter. You're not to blame. It's His will. I don't hate you—you're only an instrument.

MOZART: *Signore, please!* . . . This makes no sense.

SALIERI: [*Agreeing, gleefully*]. No! No!—None! . . . And now you're going. You're right: He's finished with you. You're too feeble to be used anymore. Worn through! . . . He can only use. And He does not care Amadeus. God does not care, Amadeus. He cares nothing for whom He uses—nothing for whom He denies! We are equal at least in *that*. . . . Ha?

MOZART: [*Distressed*]. Stop this! Stop it at once! You're frightening!

[*Like a child he puts his hands over his ears.*]

SALIERI: [*Urgently, seizing his arm*]. Be merciful, therefore! Show mercy—because *we can!* That's for us alone to do—us, not Him!—Us! . . . Us! . . . [*Intimately*] Grant me forgiveness, Wolfgang, for pity's sake. . . . You have to! You must! You must!

MOZART: [*Revolted*]. NO! . . . It is stupid!

[*With all his strength he pushes him away. SALIERI staggers back. MOZART glares at him—and suddenly speaks, like a scared child.*]

Go away! [*He stamps his foot*] Go away now! . . . Now!

[*He makes fierce little jabs of dismissal and, when SALIERI does not move, defiantly shoots out his lips and emits one of his fart noises. And another, louder and more challenging. Then suddenly he snatches up his blanket and runs headlong across the room, skitters to a stop and falls to the floor, hurling the blanket over his head and holding it tight to conceal himself entirely. Under this covering he sits quite still. SALIERI approaches him carefully.*]

SALIERI: [*Quietly*]. Wolfgang? . . . Wolfgang? . . . Hear me, for the last time.

[*The muffled figure starts to rock slowly to and fro. SALIERI kneels behind him.*]

I'm begging now. On my knees. Grant me your forgiveness, won't you please?

[Under his blanket MOZART starts faintly to sing his father's little bedtime "Kissing Song"—nonsense words to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star!"]

MOZART: [Singing]. "Oragna figata fa! Marina gamina fa!"

[And the sound of three kisses.]

SALIERI: Please, Wolfgang. Ti imploro!

[The song comes again, in strict repetition, together with the kisses. This he now repeats again and again without stopping, a little louder and a little more desperately each time. SALIERI speaks with equal intensity over it.]

For all my sins against you. All my damages, my trespasses unnumbered—absolve me now! For all my cruelties—my slanders and malice—my destructive wickedness and most unworthy deeds—absolve me now!

[The singing has grown faster and mechanical, as if being used as a charm to keep him at bay. Above it SALIERI finally cries out in anguish to the imperious figure.]

Amadeus! . . . Mi dia [INDULGENZA!!!]

[The singing stops. SALIERI waits, expectantly. A pause.]

SALIERI: [Hard]. Do it. . . . Do it! [But the singing implacably resumes.]

[For a moment, kneeling behind him, SALIERI reaches out to grip MOZART—but cannot. He withdraws his hand, and rises instead. The singing sounds much lower.]

SALIERI: [To audience]. Reduce the man—reduce the God. Behold my vow fulfilled. The profoundest voice in the world reduced to a nursery tune.

[MOZART stops singing.]

[Very bitterly] And so finally I left. Refused. Unheard! [Looking to Heaven] Of course! [He is almost laughing.] Of course! . . . [To God] Grazie—per sempre!!

[He steps downstage towards the audience.]

And never—never after—could I confess to anyone. Until I summoned You—tonight. [Pause] My last.

SCENE 17

[He moves to one side. CONSTANZE appears upstage, bonnet in hand and wearing a shawl. She has returned from Baden. She comes downstage toward the blanketed figure on the floor.]

CONSTANZE: [Tentatively]. Wolf? . . . I'm back.

MOZART: [Hardly daring to believe it]. Stanzi? . . .

CONSTANZE: Yes, my love. . . . Little-husband-of-my-heart!

MOZART: Oh!

[She bends down and helps him to his feet. He is very frail now—they embrace, he clinging to her in overwhelming pleasure.]

CONSTANZE: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm sorry . . .

[MOZART gives a groan.]

Oh—my dear. . . . Come now—come with me. . . . Come on, now. There. . . . There . . .

[MOZART sits weakly.]

MOZART: [Like a child still, and most earnestly]. Salieri . . . Salieri has killed me.

CONSTANZE: [Indulgently]. Yes, my dear.

[Practically she busies herself clearing the table of its manuscripts, its candle, its bottles and its inkwell.]

MOZART: He has! He told me so.

CONSTANZE: Yes, yes: I'm sure.

[She finds the chair cushions and places them at the head of the table.]

MOZART: [Petulantly]. He did . . . He did!

CONSTANZE: Hush now, lovey.

[She helps her dying husband onto the table, now his bed. He lies down, and she covers him with her shawl.]

I'm back to take care of you. I'm here now for always!

MOZART: *[In distress]*. Salieri. . . . Salieri. . . .

[He starts to weep.]

CONSTANZE: Oh lovey, be silent now. No one has hurt you. You'll get better soon, I promise.

[The VENTICELLI steal in to SALIERI.]

V.1: *[Quietly]*. Dr. Closset says there's little hope.

V.2: No point in seeing him at all.

V.1 & V.2: *[Together]*. Especially as he cannot pay.

V.1: They say he's still trying to finish that Mass.

V.2: But little wife won't let him anymore!

[The VENTICELLI leave. Faintly the Lacrimosa of the Requiem Mass begins to sound. MOZART sits up to hear it—leaning against his wife's shoulders. His hand begins feebly to beat out drum measures from the music. During the whole of the following it is evident that he is composing the Mass in his head, and does not bear his wife at all.]

CONSTANZE: Can you hear me? Try to, Wolfel! . . . Wolf-polf. . . .

Try to hear. If I've been a bore—if I've nagged a bit about money, it didn't mean anything. It's only because I'm spoilt. You spoilt me, lovey. You've got to get well, Wolf—because we need you. Karl and Baby Franz as well. There's only the three of us: we don't cost much. Just don't leave us—we wouldn't know what to do without you. And you wouldn't know much either, up in Heaven, without us. You soppy thing. You can't even cut up your own meat without help! . . . I'm not clever, lovey. It can't have been easy living with a goose. But I've looked after you, you must admit that. And I've given you fun too—quite a lot, really! . . . Are you listening?

[MOZART'S drum strokes get slower, and stop.]

Know one thing. It was the best day of my life when you mar-

ried me. And as long as I live I'll be the most honored woman in the world. . . . Can you hear me?

[She becomes aware that MOZART is dead. She opens her mouth in a silent scream, raising her arm in a rigid gesture of grief. The great chord of the "Amen" does not resolve itself, but lingers on in intense reverberation.]

SCENE 18

[The CITIZENS OF VIENNA enter, dressed in black. CONSTANZE kneels and freezes in grief as SERVANTS come in and stand at the four corners of the table on which the body lies. VAN SWIETEN also enters.]

SALIERI: *[Hard]*. The Death Certificate said kidney failure, hastened by exposure to cold. Generous Lord Fugue paid for a pauper's funeral. Twenty other corpses. An unmarked lime pit.

[VAN SWIETEN approaches CONSTANZE.]

VAN SWIETEN: What I can spare, you shall have for the children. There's no need to waste it on vain show.

[The SERVANTS lift the table and bear it with its burden upstage, to the Light Box, in which a cemetery appears, in stormy light.]

SALIERI: What did I feel? . . . Pity! Pity—at last—for the man I helped to destroy. I felt the pity my God can never feel! . . . I weakened God's flute to a thinness. God blew—as He must—without cease. The flute split in the mouth of His insatiable need!

[Some of the CITIZENS kneel, and the SERVANTS swiftly tip the table: MOZART'S body slides down into a pit at the back. We hear the sound of crows cawing and flapping up. The light goes out in the cemetery. The CITIZENS rise in the dark and face the back.]

CONSTANCE unfreezes and starts assiduously collecting the manuscripts scattered all over the floor. SALIERI now speaks with an increasingly aging voice: a sound soured more and more with its owner's bitterness.]

As for Constance, in the fullness of time she married again—a Danish diplomat, as dull as a clock—and retired to Salzburg, birthplace of the Great Composer, to become the pious keeper of his shrine.

[CONSTANCE rises, wrapping her shawl about her, and clasping manuscripts to her bosom.]

CONSTANCE: [Reverentially]. A sweeter-tongued man never lived. In ten years of blissful marriage I never heard him utter a single coarse or conceited word. The purity of his life is reflected absolutely in the purity of his music! [More briskly] In selling his manuscripts I charge by the ink. So many notes, so many schillings. . . . That seems to me the simplest way.

[She leaves the stage, a pillar of rectitude.]

SALIERI: One amazing fact emerged concerning that mysterious Messenger with the skeletal face and the [imitating it] sinister rasping voice, who came to commission the Requiem. Mozart had not imagined him. He was *real*. . . . The man was the weird-looking Servant of an eccentric Nobleman, who longed to write music and be praised for it. His wife had just died, so he sent this Servant in deepest secrecy to order a Mass from Mozart. Incredibly the Nobleman's plan was actually to copy out the manuscript himself—and pass it off as his own work! [Pause] It would seem there is literally nothing a man won't stoop to in order to be thought a great composer!

[The lights come up. The CITIZENS turn around and advance on SALIERI, bowing to him, and kissing their hands extravagantly. During his following speech they all fall on their knees in an adoring ring around him, clapping their hands at him with silent vigor and relentlessly extending their arms upwards and upwards, until they seem to obliterate him.]

And so I stayed on in the City of Musicians, revered by all: On and on and on for *thirty-two* years. And slowly I came to understand the nature of God's punishment. [Demanding directly of the audience] What had I asked for in that church as a boy? Was it not *fame*? Well now I had it! I was to become, quite simply, the most famous musician in Europe! . . . I was to be bricked up in fame! Buried in fame! Embalmed in fame! . . . This was my sentence—I must endure thirty-two years of being called "distinguished" by people incapable of distinguishing! And finally—when my nose had been rubbed in fame to vomiting—Receptions, Awards, Civic Medals, and Chains—suddenly, his masterstroke!

[The CITIZENS freeze.]

It would all be taken away from me—every scrap.

[The CITIZENS rise, turn away from him and walk indifferently off stage. The *Finale of the Jupiter Symphony* is heard, swelling louder.]

[SALIERI's voice over music] Mozart's music would sound everywhere—and mine in place on earth. I must survive to see myself become . . . extinct. . . . [Calling up savagely] Nemico dei Nemici! Dio implacabile!

[The curtains of the Light Box close. A SERVANT brings on the wheelchair and places it centrally, as before. Another SERVANT brings on the old dressing gown, shawl and turban.

SALIERI divests himself of his wig and cloak and puts on these former clothes, once more becoming the old man. He sits in the wheelchair.

The lights change. Six o'clock strikes. The SERVANTS leave, taking the wig, cloak and bat.]

SCENE 19

Salieri's Apartment, November 1823

SALIERI: [To audience]. Dawn has come. I must release you. One moment's violence and it is over. You see, I cannot accept this. To be sucked into oblivion—not even my name remembered. Oh no: I did not live on earth to be His joke for eternity. I have one trick left me—see how He deals with this!

[Confidentially] All this week I have been shouting out about murder. You heard me yourselves—do you remember? “Mozart—*pietà!* Pardon your assassin! Mozart!”

[Whispers of “SALIERI” begin: at first faintly, as at the start of the play. During the following they grow in volume, in strict and operatic counterpoint to SALIERI’s speeches.]

WHISPERERS: [Faintly]. *Salieri!* . . .

SALIERI: [Triumphantly]. I did this deliberately! . . . My servants carried the news into the street!

WHISPERERS: [Loudly]. *Salieri!*

SALIERI: The streets repeated it to one another!

WHISPERERS: [Loudly]. *Salieri! . . . Salieri! . . .*

SALIERI: Now my name is on every tongue! Vienna, City of Scandals, has a scandal worthy of it at last!

WHISPERERS: SALIERI! . . . ASSASSIN! . . . ASSASSIN! . . .

SALIERI!

SALIERI: [Falsely, enjoying it]. “Can it be true? . . . Is it possible? . . . Did he do it after all? . . .”

WHISPERERS: [Fortissimo]. SALIERI!

SALIERI: Well, my friends, now they all know for sure! They will learn of my dreadful death—and they will believe the lie forever! After today, whenever men speak of Mozart’s name with love, they will speak of mine with loathing! As his name grows

in the world, so will mine—if not in fame, then in infamy. I’m going to be immortal after all!—And He will be powerless to prevent that! [He laughs harshly.] So, Signore—see now if man is mocked!

[He rises and addresses the audience simply, gently and directly.]

Amici cari. I was born a pair of ears, and nothing else. It is only through hearing music that I know God exists. Only through writing music that I could worship. . . . All around me men hunger for General Rights. I hungered only for particular notes. They seek Liberty for Mankind. I sought only slavery for myself. To be owned—ordered—exhausted by an Absolute. This was denied me—and with it all meaning.

[He produces a cutthroat razor from his dressing gown pocket, and carefully opens it.]

Now I go to become a ghost myself. I will stand in the shadows when you come here to this earth in your turns. And when you feel the dreadful bite of your failures—and the taunting of an unachievable, uncaring God—I will whisper my name to you: “Antonio Salieri: Patron Saint of Mediocrities!” And in the depth of your downcastness you can pray to me. And I will forgive you. *Vi saluto.*

[He cuts his throat, and falls backwards into the wheelchair. MOZART’s somber Masonic Funeral Music sounds in the background.]

The COOK enters, carrying a plate of buns for breakfast, and, seeing SALIERI, screams in horror. The VALET rushes in from the opposite side. Together they pull the wheelchair with its slumped body backwards upstage, and anchor it in midstage. And then the VENTICELLI appear again, in the costume of 1823. VENTICELLO I carries books and a newspaper.]

V.1: Beethoven’s Conversation Book, November eighteen twenty-three. Visitors write the news for the deaf man.

[*He hands a book to VENTICELLO 2.*]

V.2: [*Reading*]. "Salieri has cut his throat—but is still alive!"

[*Salieri stirs and comes to life, sitting up and looking about him in outraged bewilderment.*]

The VALER and the COOK depart. SALIERI stares out front like an astomished gargoyle.]

V.1: Beethoven's Conversation Book, eighteen twenty-four. Visitors write the news for the deaf man.

[*He hands another book to VENTICELLO 2.*]

V.2: [*Reading*]. "Salieri is quite deranged. He keeps claiming that he is guilty of Mozart's death, and made away with him by poison."

[*The lights narrow to a bright cone, beating on SALIERI.*]

V.1: The German Musical Times, May twenty-fifth, eighteen twenty-five.

[*He hands newspaper to VENTICELLO 2.*]

V.2: [*Reading*]. "Our worthy Salieri just cannot die. In the frenzy of his imagination he is even said to accuse himself of complicity in Mozart's early death. A rambling of the mind believed in truth by no one but the deluded old man himself."

[*The music stops.*]

[*SALIERI lowers his head, conceding defeat.*]

V.1: I don't believe it.

V.2: I don't believe it.

V.1: I don't believe it.

V.2: I don't believe it.

V.1 & V.2: [*Together*]. No one believes it in the world!

[*The VENTICELLI go off. The lights dim a little. SALIERI stirs, rises, comes down front and looks out far into the darkness of the theater.*]

SALIERI: Mediocrities everywhere—now and to come—I absolve you all. Amen!

[*He extends his arms upwards and outwards to embrace the*

assembled audience in a wide gesture of benediction—finally folding his arms high across his breast.

The lights fade to blackness, as the last four chords of the Masonic Funeral Music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart sound through the theater.

END