

Right you are! (If you think so) – Act III

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In Italiano – [Così è \(se vi pare\)](#)

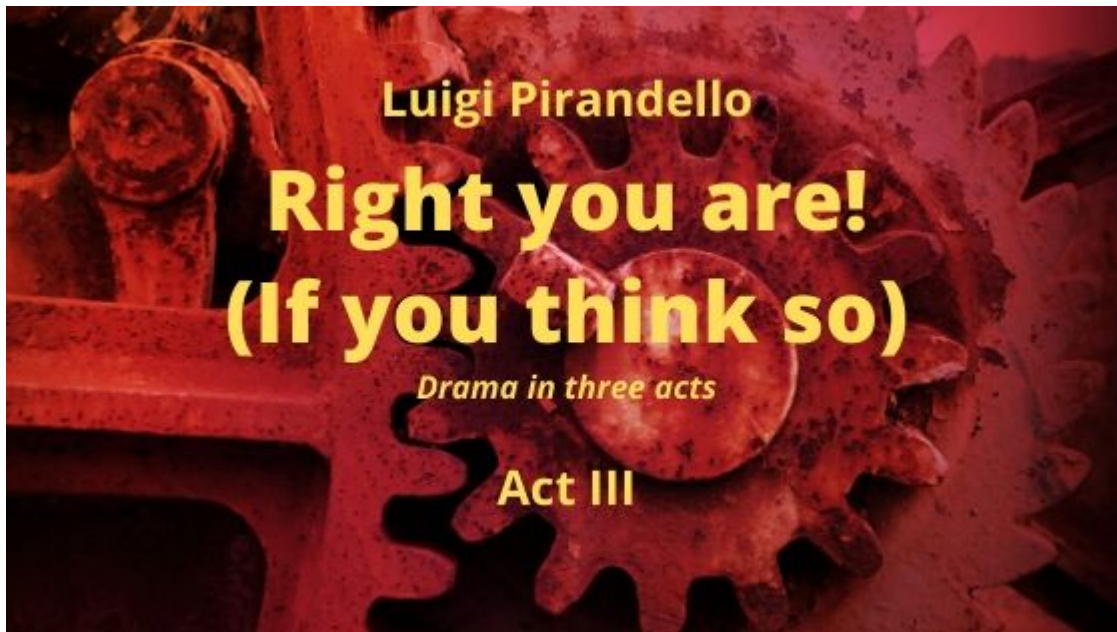
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Right you are! (If you think so)

Act III

English version by Arthur Livingston – (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922)

The same scene.

As the curtain rises, Laudisi is sprawling in an easy chair, reading a book. Through the door that leads into the parlor on the left comes the confused murmur of many voices. The butler

appears in the rear door, introducing the police commissioner, Centuri.

Centuri is a tall, stiff, scowling official, with a decidedly professional air. He is in the neighborhood of forty.

The butler: This way, sir. I will call Signor Agazzi at once.

Laudisi (*drawing himself up in his chair and looking around*): Oh, it's you, Commissioner!

(He rises hastily and recalls the butler, who has stepped out through the door): One moment, please! Wait!

(To Centuri): Anything new, Commissioner?

Commissioner (*stiffly*): Yes, something new!

Laudisi: Ah! Very well.

(To the butler): Never mind. I'll call him myself.

He motions with his hand toward the door on the left. The butler bows and withdraws): You have worked miracles, Commissioner! You're the savior of this town. Listen! Do you hear them! You are the lion of the place! How does it feel to be the father of your country? But say, what you've discovered is all solid fact?

Commissioner: We've managed to unearth a few people.

Laudisi: From Ponza's town? People who know all about him?

Commissioner: Yes! And we have gathered from them a few facts, – not many, perhaps, but well authenticated.

Laudisi: Ah, that's nice. Congratulations! For example...

Commissioner: For example? Why, for instance, here... well, here are all the communications I have received. Read 'em yourself!

From an inner pocket he draws a yellow envelope, opened at one

end, from which he takes a document and hands it to Laudisi.

Laudisi: Interesting, I am sure. Very interesting!...

He stands, reading the document carefully, commenting from time to time with exclamations in different tones. First an "ah" of satisfaction, then another "ah" which attenuates this enthusiasm very much. Finally an "eh" of disappointment, which leads to another "eh" of complete disgust:

Laudisi: Why, no, what's all this amount to, Commissioner?

Commissioner: Well, it's what we were able to find out.

Laudisi: But this doesn't prove anything, you understand! It leaves everything just where it was. There's nothing of any significance whatever here. *(He looks at the Commissioner for a moment and then, as though suddenly making up his mind, he says:)* I wonder, Commissioner, would you like to do something really great – render a really distinguished service to this town; and meanwhile lay up a treasure in heaven?

Commissioner *(looking at him in perplexity):* What are you thinking of, sir?

Laudisi: I'll explain. Here, please, take this chair! *(He sets the chair in front of Agazzi's desk):* I advise you, Mr. Commissioner, to tear up this sheet of paper that you've brought and which has absolutely no significance at all. But here on this other piece of paper, why don't you write down something that will be precise and clear?

Commissioner: Why... why... myself? What do you mean? What should I write?

Laudisi *(insisting):* Just say something – anything – that these two old acquaintances of Ponza's whom you managed to get hold of might have said. Come, Commissioner, rise to the occasion! Do something for the commonwealth! Bring this town back to normal again! Don't you see what they are after? They

all want the truth – a truth that is: Something specific; something concrete! They don't care what it is. All they want is something categorical, something that speaks plainly! Then they'll quiet down.

Commissioner: The truth – a truth? Excuse me, have I understood you clearly? You were suggesting that I commit a forgery? I am astonished that you dare propose such a thing, and when I say I am astonished, I'm not saying half what I actually feel. Be so good as to tell the Commendatore that I am here!

Laudisi (*dropping his arms dejectedly*): As you will, Commissioner!

He steps over to the door on the left. As he draws the portières and swings the door more widely open, the voices become louder and more confused. As he steps through, there is a sudden silence. The Police Commissioner stands waiting with a satisfied air, twirling one of the points of his mustache. All of a sudden, there is commotion and cheering in the next room. Cries of delight and applause, mixed with handclapping. The Police Commissioner comes out of his reverie and looks up with an expression of surprise on his features, as though not understanding what it's all about.

Through the door to the left come Agazzi, Sirelli, Laudisi, Amalia, Dina, Signora Sirelli, Signora Cini, Signora Nenni, and many other ladies and gentlemen. Agazzi leads the procession. They are all still talking and laughing excitedly, clapping their hands, and crying "I told you so! Fine! Fine! Good! How wonderful! Now we'll know!" etc...

Agazzi (*stepping forward cordially*): Ah, my dear Centuri, I was sure you could! Nothing ever gets by our chief!

Company: Fine! Good! What did you find out! Have you brought something? Is it she? Is it he? Tell us?

Commissioner (*who doesn't yet understand what all the excitement is about. For him it has been a mere matter of routine*): Why, no... why, Commendatore, simply... you understand...

Agazzi: Hush! Give him a chance!... Commissioner. I have done my best. I... but what did Signor Laudisi tell you?

Agazzi: He told us that you have brought news, real news!

Sirelli: Specific data, clear, precise!... Laudisi (*amplifying*),... not many, perhaps, but well authenticated! The best they've managed to trace! Old neighbors of Ponza, you see; people well acquainted with him...

Everybody: Ah! At last! At last! Now we'll know! At last!

The Commissioner hands the document to Agazzi.

Commissioner: There you have it, Commendatore!

Agazzi (*opening the sheet, as all crowd around him*): Let's have a look at it!

Commissioner: But you, Signor Laudisi...

Laudisi: Don't interrupt, please, the document speaks for itself! Agazzi, you read it.

Agazzi (*to Laudisi*): But give me a chance, won't you? Please! Please! Now! There you are!

Laudisi: Oh, I don't care. I've read the thing already.

Everybody (*crowding around him*): You've read it already? What did it say? Is it he? Is it she?

Laudisi (*speaking very formally*): There is no doubt whatever, as a former neighbor of Ponza's testifies, that the woman Frola was once in a sanatorium!

The Group (*cries of disappointment*): Oh really! Too bad! Too

bad!

Signora Sirelli: Signora Frola, did you say?

Dina: Are you sure it was she?

Agazzi: Why, no! Why, no, it doesn't say anything of the kind!

(Coming forward and waving the document triumphantly): It doesn't say anything of the kind!

General excitement.

Everybody: Well, what does it say? What does it say?

Laudisi *(insisting)*: It does too! It says "the Frola woman" – the Frola woman, categorically.

Agazzi: Nothing of the kind! The witness says that he thinks she was in a sanatorium. He does not assert that she was. Besides, there is another point. He doesn't know whether this Frola woman who was in a sanatorium was the mother or the daughter, the first wife, that is!

Everybody *(with relief)*: Ah!

Laudisi *(insistingly)*: But I say he does. It must be the mother! Who else could it be?

Sirelli: No, of course, it's the daughter! It's the daughter!

Signora Sirelli: Just as the old lady said herself!

Amalia: Exactly! That time when they took her away by force from her husband!...

Dina: Yes, she says that her daughter was taken to a home.

Agazzi: Furthermore, observe another thing. The witness does not really belong to their town. He says that he used to go there frequently, but that he does not remember particularly. He remembers that he heard something or other!...

Sirelli: Ah! How can you depend on such a man's testimony? Nothing but hearsay!

Laudisi: But, excuse me! If all you people are so sure that Signora Frola is right, what more do you want? Why do you go looking for documents? This is all nonsense!

Sirelli: If it weren't for the fact that the prefect has accepted Ponza's side of the story, I'll tell you...

Commissioner: Yes, that's true. The prefect said as much to me...

Agazzi: Yes, but that's because the prefect has never talked with the old lady who lives next door.

Signora Sirelli: You bet he hasn't. He talked only with Ponza.

Sirelli: But, for that matter, there are other people of the same mind as the prefect.

A Gentleman: That is my situation, my situation exactly. Yes sir! Because I know of just such a case where a mother went insane over the death of her daughter and insists that the daughter's husband will not allow her to see the girl. The same case to a T.

A second Gentleman: Not exactly to a T! Not exactly to a T! In the case you mention the man didn't marry again. Here, this man Ponza is living with another woman...

Laudisi (*his face brightening with a new idea that has suddenly come to him*): I have it, ladies and gentlemen! Did you hear that? It's perfectly simple. Dear me, as simple as Columbus's egg!

Everybody: What? What? What? What?

The second Gentleman: What did I say? I didn't realize it was important.

Laudisi: Just a moment, ladies and gentlemen! (*Turning to Agazzi*): Is the prefect coming here, by chance?

Agazzi: Yes, we were expecting him. But what's the new idea?

Laudisi: Why, you were bringing him here to talk with Signora Frola. So far, he is standing by Ponza. When he has talked with the old lady, he'll know whether to believe Ponza or her. That's your idea! Well, I've thought of something better that the prefect can do. Something that only he can do.

Everybody: What is it? What is it? What is it?

Laudisi (*triumphantly*): Why, this wife of Ponza's, of course... at least, the woman he is living with! What this gentleman said suggested the idea to me.

Sirelli: Get the second woman to talk? Of course! Of course!

Dina: But how can we, when she is kept under lock and key?

Sirelli: Why, the prefect can use his authority – order her to speak!

Amalia: Certainly, she is the one who can clear up the whole mystery.

Signora Sirelli: I don't believe it. She'll say just what her husband tells her to say.

Laudisi: She must speak before the prefect. Of course!

Sirelli: She must speak with the prefect privately, all by himself.

Agazzi: And the prefect, as the final authority over the man, will insist that the wife make a formal explicit statement before him. Of course, of course! What do you say, Commissioner?

Commissioner: Why certainly, there's no doubt that if the

prefect were so inclined...

Agazzi: It is the only way out of it, after all. We ought to phone him and explain that he needn't go to the trouble of coming here. You attend to that, will you, Commissioner?

Commissioner: Very glad to! My compliments, ladies! Good afternoon, gentlemen!

Signora Sirelli: A good idea for once, Laudisi.

Dina: Oh, uncle, how clever of you! Wise old uncle!

The Company: The only way out of it! Yes! Yes! Fine! At last!

Agazzi: Curious none of us thought of that before!

Sirelli: Not so curious! None of us ever set eyes on the woman. She might as well be in another world, poor girl.

Laudisi (*as though suddenly impressed by this latter reflection*): In another world? Why yes, – are you really sure there is such a woman?

Amalia: Oh I say! Please, please, Lamberto!

Sirelli (*with a laugh*): You mean to say you think there is no such woman?

Laudisi: How can you be sure there is? You can't guarantee it!

Dina: But the old lady sees her and talks with her every day.

Signora Sirelli: And Ponza says that, too. They both agree on that point!

Laudisi: Yes, yes. I don't deny that. But just a moment! To be strictly logical: there must be a phantom in that house.

All: A phantom?

Agazzi: Oh, go on with you!

Laudisi: Let me finish. – It's the phantom of the second wife, if Signora Frola is right. It's the phantom of the daughter, if Signor Ponza is right. It remains to be seen if what is a phantom for him and her is actually a person for herself. At this point it seems to me there's some reason to doubt it.

Amalia: Oh, come on! You'd like us all to be as mad as you are!

Signora Nenni: Heavens: how he makes my flesh creep!

Signora Cini: I can't think why you enjoy frightening us like this!

All: Nonsense! It's a joke, a joke!

Sirelli: She's a woman of flesh and bones, rest assured. And we'll have her talk, we'll have her talk!

Agazzi: You suggested it yourself, didn't you? – having her talk with the prefect?

Laudisi: Certainly the woman from that house should talk with the prefect – if there is such a woman – and if she is a woman!

Signora Sirelli: Dear me, dear me! That man simply drives me mad.

Laudisi: Well, supposing we wait and see! Everybody. Well, who is she then? But people have seen her! His wife! On the balcony! She writes letters!

Police Commissioner (*in the heat of the confusion comes into the room, excitedly announcing*): The prefect is coming! The prefect!

Agazzi: What do you mean? Coming here? But you went to...

Commissioner: Why yes, but I met him hardly a block away. He was coming here; and Ponza is with him.

Sirelli: Ah, Ponza!

Agazzi: Oh, if Ponza is with him, I doubt whether he is coming here. They are probably on their way to the old lady's. Please, Centuri, you just wait on the landing there and ask him if he won't step in here as he promised?

Commissioner: Very well! I'll do so! *(He withdraws hurriedly through the door in the rear):*

Agazzi: Won't you people just step into the other room?

Signora Sirelli: But remember now, be sure to make him see the point! It's the only way out, the only way.

Amalia *(at the door to the left):* This way, ladies, if you please!

Agazzi: Won't you just stay here, Sirelli; and you, too, Lamberto?

All the others go out through the door to the left.

Agazzi *(to Laudisi):* But let me do the talking, won't you!

Laudisi: Oh, as for that, don't worry. In fact, if you prefer, I'll go into the other room...

Agazzi: No, no, it's better for you to be here. Ah, here he is now!

The Prefect is a man of about sixty, tall, thick set, good natured, affable.

Prefect: Ah, Agazzi, glad to see you. How goes it, Sirelli? Good to see you again, Laudisi. *(He shakes hands all around):*

Agazzi *(motioning toward a chair):* I hope you won't mind my having asked you to come here.

Prefect: No, I was coming, just as I promised you!

Agazzi (*noticing the Police Commissioner at the door*): Oh, I'm sorry, Commissioner! Please come in! Here, have a chair!

Prefect (*good-naturedly to Sirelli*): By the way, Sirelli, they tell me that you've gone half nutty over this blessed affair of our new secretary.

Sirelli: Oh, no, governor, believe me. I'm not the only one! The whole village is worked up.

Agazzi: And that's putting it very mildly.

Prefect: What's it all about? What's it all about? Good heavens!

Agazzi: Of course, governor, you're probably not posted on the whole business. The old lady lives here next door... .

Prefect: Yes, I understand so.

Sirelli: No, one moment, please, governor. You haven't talked with the poor old lady yet.

Prefect: I was on my way to see her.

(*Turning to Agazzi*): I had promised you to see her here, but Ponza came and begged me, almost on his knees, to see her in her own house. His idea was to put an end to all this talk that's going around. Do you think he would have done such a thing if he weren't absolutely sure?

Agazzi: Of course, he's sure! Because when she's talking in front of him, the poor woman...

Sirelli (*suddenly getting in his oar*): She says just what he wants her to say, governor; which proves that she is far from being as mad as he claims.

Agazzi: We had a sample of that, here, yesterday, all of us.

Prefect: Why, I understand so. You see he's trying all the

time to make her believe he's mad. He warned me of that. And how else could he keep the poor woman in her illusion? Do you see any way? All this talk of yours is simply torture to the poor fellow! Believe me, pure torture!

Sirelli: Very well, governor! But supposing she is the one who is trying to keep him in the idea that her daughter is dead; so as to reassure him that his wife will not be taken from him again. In that case, you see, governor, it's the old lady who is being tortured, and not Ponza!

Agazzi: The moment you see the possibility of that, governor... Well, you ought to hear her talk; but all by herself, when he's not around. Then you'd see the possibility all right...

Sirelli: Just as we all see it!

Prefect: Oh, I wonder! You don't seem to me so awfully sure; and for my part, I'm quite willing to confess that I'm not so sure myself. How about you, Laudisi?

Laudisi: Sorry, governor, I promised Agazzi here to keep my mouth shut.

Agazzi (*protesting angrily*): Nothing of the kind! How dare you say that? When the governor asks you a plain question... It's true I told him not to talk, but do you know why? He's been doing his best for the past two days to keep us all rattled so that we can't find out anything.

Laudisi: Don't you believe him, governor. On the contrary. I've been doing my best to bring these people to common sense.

Sirelli: Common sense! And do you know what he calls common sense? According to him it is not possible to discover the truth; and now he's been suggesting that Ponza is living not with a woman, but with a ghost!

Prefect (*enjoying the situation*): That's a new one! Quite an idea! How do you make that out, Laudisi?

Agazzi: Oh, I say!... You know how he is. There's no getting anywhere with him!

Laudisi: I leave it to you, governor. I was the one who first suggested bringing you here.

Prefect: And do you think, Laudisi, I ought to see the old lady next door?

Laudisi: No, I advise no such thing, governor.

In my judgment you are doing very well in depending on what Ponza tells you.

Prefect: Ah, I see! Because you, too, think that Ponza...

Laudisi: No, not at all... because I'm also satisfied to have all these people stand on what Signora Frola says, if that does them any good.

Agazzi: So you see, eh, governor? That's what you call arguing, eh?

Prefect: Just a moment! Let me understand!

(Turning to Laudisi): So you say we can also trust what the old lady says?

Laudisi: Of course you can! Implicitly! And so you can depend upon what Ponza says. Implicitly!

Prefect: Excuse me, I don't follow you!

Sirelli: But man alive, if they both say the exact opposite of each other!...

Agazzi *(angrily and with heat):* Listen to me, governor, please. I am prejudiced neither in favor of the old lady nor in favor of Ponza. I recognize that he may be right and that she may be right. But we ought to settle the matter, and there is only one way to do it.

Sirelli: The way that Laudisi here suggested.

Prefect: He suggested it? That's interesting? What is it?

Agazzi: Since we haven't been able to get any positive proof, there is only one thing left. You, as Ponza's final superior, as the man who can fire him if need be, can obtain a statement from his wife.

Prefect: Make his wife talk, you mean?

Sirelli: But not in the presence of her husband, you understand.

Agazzi: Yes, making sure she tells the truth!

Sirelli:... tell whether she's the daughter of Signora Frola, that is, as we think she must be...

Agazzi:... or a second wife who is consenting to impersonate the daughter of Signora Frola, as Ponza claims.

Prefect:... and as I believe myself, without a shadow of doubt! (*Thinking a moment*): Why, I don't see any objection to having her talk. Who could object? Ponza? But Ponza, as I know very well, is more eager than anybody else to have this talk quieted down. He's all upset over this whole business, and said he was willing to do anything I proposed. I'm sure he will raise no objection. So if it will ease the minds of you people here... Say, Centuri (*the Police Commissioner rises*), won't you just ask Ponza to step in here a moment? He's next door with his mother-in-law.

Commissioner: At once, Your Excellency! (*He bows and withdraws through the door at the rear*):

Agazzi: Oh well, if he consents...

Prefect: He'll consent, all right. And we'll be through with it in a jiffy. We'll bring her right in here so that you

people...

Agazzi: Here, in my house?

Sirelli: You think he'll let his wife come in here?

Prefect: Just leave it to me, just leave it to me! I prefer to have her right here because, otherwise you see, you people would always suppose that I and Ponza had...

Agazzi: Oh, please, governor, no! That's not fair!

Sirelli: Oh, no, governor, we trust you implicitly!

Prefect: Oh, I'm not offended, not at all! But you know very well that I'm on his side in this matter; and you'd always be thinking that to hush up any possible scandal in connection with a man in my office... No, you see. I must insist on having the interview here... Where's your wife, Agazzi?

Agazzi: In the other room, governor, with some other ladies.

Prefect: Other ladies? Aha, I see! (*Laughing*): You have a regular detective bureau here, eh?

The Police Commissioner enters with Ponza.

Commissioner: May I come in? Signor Ponza is here. Prefect. Thanks, Centuri. This way, Ponza, come right in! (*Ponza bows*):

Agazzi: Have a chair, Ponza. (*Ponza bows and sits down*):

Prefect: I believe you know these gentlemen? (*Ponza rises and bows*):

Agazzi: Yes, I introduced them yesterday. And this is Laudisi, my wife's brother. (*Ponza bows*):

Prefect: I venture to disturb you, my dear Ponza, just to tell you that here with these friends of mine...

At the first words of the prefect, Ponza evinces the greatest

nervousness and agitation.

Prefect: Was there something you wanted to say, Ponza?

Ponza: Yes, there is something I want to say, governor. I want to present my resignation here and now.

Prefect: Oh, my dear fellow, I'm so sorry! But just a few moments ago down at the office you were talking...

Ponza: Oh, really, this is an outrage, governor! This is just plain persecution, plain persecution!

Prefect: Oh, now, don't take it that way, old man. See here. These good people...

Agazzi: Persecution, did you say? On my part?... Ponza. On the part of all of you! And I am sick and tired of it! I am going to resign, governor. I refuse to submit to this ferocious prying into my private affairs which will end by undoing a work of love that has cost me untold sacrifice these past two years. You don't know, governor! Why, I've treated that dear old lady in there just as tenderly as though she were my own mother. And yesterday I had to shout at her in the most cruel and terrible way! Why, I found her just now so worked up and excited that...

Agazzi: That's queer! While she was in here Signora Frola was quite mistress of herself. If anybody was worked up, Ponza, it was you. And even now, if I might say...

Ponza: But you people don't know what you're making me go through!

Prefect: Oh, come, come, my dear fellow, don't take it so hard. After all, I'm here, am I not? And you know I've always stood by you! And I always will!

Ponza: Yes, governor, and I appreciate your kindness, really!

Prefect: And then you say that you're as fond of this poor old lady as you would be if she were your own mother. Well, now, just remember that these good people here seem to be prying into your affairs because they, too, are fond of her!...

Ponza: But they're killing her, I tell you, governor! They're killing her, and I warned them in advance.

Prefect: Very well, Ponza, very well! Now we'll get through with this matter in no time. See here, it is all very simple. There is one way that you can convince these people without the least doubt in the world. Oh, not me – I don't need convincing. I believe you.

Ponza: But they won't believe me, no matter what I say.

Agazzi: That's not so! When you came here after your mother-in-law's first visit and told us that she was mad, all of us... well, we were surprised, but we believed you. (*Turning to the Prefect*): But after he left, you understand, the old lady came back...

Prefect: Yes, yes, I know. He told me.

(*Turning to Ponza again*): She came back here and said that she was trying to do with you exactly what you say you were trying to do with her. It's natural, isn't it, that people hearing both stories, should be somewhat confused. Now you see that these good people, in view of what your mother-in-law says, can't possibly be sure of what you say. So there you are. Now, such being the case, you and your mother-in-law – why, it's perfectly simple – you two just step aside. Now you know you're telling the truth, don't you? So do I! So you can't possibly object to their hearing the testimony of the only person who does know, aside from you two.

Ponza: And who may that be, pray?

Prefect: Why, your wife!

Ponza: My wife!

(Decisively and angrily): Ah, no! I refuse! Never in the world! Never!

Prefect: And why not, old man?

Ponza: Bring my wife here to satisfy the curiosity of these strangers?

Prefect *(sharply):* And my curiosity, too, if you don't mind! What objection can you have?

Ponza: Oh, but governor, no! My wife! Here? No! Why drag my wife in? These people ought to believe me!

Prefect: But don't you see, my dear fellow, that the course you're taking now is just calculated to discredit what you say?

Agazzi: His mistake in the first place, governor, was trying to prevent his mother-in-law from coming here and calling – a double discourtesy, mark you, to my wife and to my daughter!

Ponza: But what in the name of God do you people want of me? You've been nagging and nagging at that poor old woman next door; and now you want to get your clutches on my wife! No, governor! I refuse to submit to such an indignity! She owes nothing to anybody. My wife is not making visits in this town. You say you believe me, governor? That's enough for me! Here's my resignation! I'll go out and look for another job!

Prefect: No, no, Ponza, I must speak plainly. In the first place I have always treated you on the square; and you have no right to speak in that tone of voice to me. In the second place you are beginning to make me doubt your word by refusing to furnish me – not other people – but me, the evidence that I have asked for in your interest, evidence, moreover, that so far as I can see, cannot possibly do you any harm. It seems to me that my colleague here, Signor Agazzi, can ask a lady to

come to his house! But no, if you prefer, we'll go and see her.

Ponza: So you really insist, governor?

Prefect: I insist, but as I told you, in your own interest. You realize, besides, that I might have the legal right to question her...

Ponza: I see, I see! So that's it! An official investigation! Well, why not, after all? I will bring my wife here, just to end the whole matter. But how can you guarantee me that this poor old lady next door will not catch sight of her?

Prefect: Why, I hadn't thought of that! She does live right next door.

Agazzi (*speaking up*) . We are perfectly willing to go to Signor Ponza's house.

Ponza: No, no, I was just thinking of you people. I don't want you to play any more tricks on me. Any mistakes might have the most frightful consequences, set her going again!

Agazzi: You're not very fair to us, Ponza, it seems to me.

Prefect: Or you might bring your wife to my office, rather...

Ponza: No, no! Since you're going to question her anyway, we might as well get through with it. We'll bring her here, right here. I'll keep an eye on my mother-in-law myself. We'll have her here right away, governor, and get an end of this nonsense once and for all, once and for all!

He hurries away through the rear exit.

Prefect: I confess I was not expecting so much opposition on his part.

Agazzi: Ah, you'll see. He'll go and cook up with his wife just what she's to say!

Prefect: Oh, don't worry as to that! I'll question the woman myself.

Sirelli: But he's more excited than he's ever been before.

Prefect: Well, I confess I never saw him just in this state of mind. Perhaps it is the sense of outrage he feels in having to bring his wife...

Sirelli: In having to let her loose for once, you ought to say!

Prefect: A man isn't necessarily mad because he wants to keep an eye on his wife.

Agazzi: Of course he says it's to protect her from the mother-in-law.

Prefect: I wasn't thinking of just that – he may be jealous of the woman!

Sirelli: Jealous to the extent of refusing her a servant? For you know, don't you, he makes his wife do all the housework?

Agazzi: And he does all the marketing himself every morning.

Commissioner: That's right, governor! I've had him shadowed. An errand boy from the market carries the stuff as far as the door.

Sirelli: But he never lets the boy inside.

Prefect: Dear me, dear me! He excused himself for that servant business when I took the matter up with him.

Laudisi: And that's information right from the source!

Prefect: He says he does it to save money.

Laudisi: He has to keep two establishments on one salary.

Sirelli: Oh, we weren't criticizing how he runs his house; but

I ask you as a matter of common sense: he is a man of some position, and do you think that this second wife of his, as he calls her, who ought to be a lady, would consent to do all the work about the house?...

Agazzi: The hardest and most disagreeable work, you understand...

Sirelli:... just out of consideration for the mother of her husband's first wife?

Agazzi: Oh, I say, governor, be honest now! That doesn't seem probable, does it?

Prefect: I confess it does seem queer...

Laudisi:... in case this second woman is an ordinary woman!

Prefect: Yes, but let's be frank. It doesn't seem reasonable. But yet, one might say – well, you could explain it as generosity on her part, and even better, as jealousy on his part. Mad or not mad, there is no denying that he's jealous!

A confused clamor of voices is heard from the next door.

Agazzi: My, I wonder what's going on in there!

Amalia enters from the door on the left in a state of great excitement.

Amalia: Signora Frola is here!

Agazzi: Impossible! How in the world did she get in? Who sent for her?

Amalia: Nobody! She came of her own accord!

Prefect: Oh, no, please – just a moment! No! Send her away, madam, please!

Agazzi: We've got to get rid of her. Don't let her in here! We

must absolutely keep her out!

Signora Frola appears at the door on the left, trembling, beseeching, weeping, a handkerchief in her hand. The people in the next room are crowding around behind her.

Signora Frola: Oh, please, please! You tell them, Signor Agazzi! Don't let them send me away!

Agazzi: But you must go away, madam! We simply can't allow you to be here now!

Signora Frola (*desperately*): Why? Why? (*Turning to Amalia*): I appeal to you, Signora Agazzi.

Amalia: But don't you see? The prefect is there! They're having an important meeting.

Signora Frola: Oh, the prefect! Please, governor, please! I was intending to go and see you.

Prefect: No, I am so sorry, madam. I can't see you just now! You must go away!

Signora Frola: Yes, I am going away. I am going to leave town this very day! I am going to leave town and never come back again!

Agazzi: Oh, we didn't mean that, my dear Signora Frola. We meant that we couldn't see you here, just now, in this room. Do me a favor, please! You can see the governor by and by.

Signora Frola: But why? I don't understand! What's happened!

Agazzi: Why, your son-in-law will soon be here! There, now do you see?

Signora Frola: Oh, he's coming here? Oh, yes, in that case... Yes, yes,...I'll go! But there was something I wanted to say to you people. You must stop all this. You must let us alone. You think you are helping me. You are trying to do me a favor; but

really, what you're doing is working me a great wrong. I've got to leave town this very day because he must not be aroused. What do you want of him anyway? What are you trying to do to him? Why are you having him come here? Oh, Mr. Governor...

Prefect: Come, Signora Frola, don't worry, don't worry. I'll see you by and by and explain everything. You just step out now, won't you?

Amalia: Please, Signora Frola... yes, that's right! Come with me!

Signora Frola: Oh, my dear Signora Agazzi, you are trying to rob me of the one comfort I had in life, the chance of seeing my daughter once in a while, at least from a distance!

She begins to weep.

Prefect: What in the world are you thinking of? We are not asking you to leave town. We just want you to leave this room, for the time being. There, now do you understand?

Signora Frola: But it's on his account, governor... it's on his account I was coming to ask you to help him! It was on his account, not on mine!

Prefect: There, there, everything will be all right. We'll take care of him. And we'll have this whole business settled in a jiffy.

Signora Frola: But how... how can I be sure? I can see that everybody here hates him. They are trying to do something to him.

Prefect: No, no, not at all! And even if they were, I would look after him. There, there, don't worry, don't worry!

Signora Frola: Oh, so you believe him? Oh, thank you; thank you, sir! That means that at least you understand!

Prefect: Yes, yes, madam, I understand, I understand! And I cautioned all these people here. It's a misfortune that came to him long, long ago. He's all right now! He's all right now!

Signora Frola:... Only he must not go back to all those things.

Prefect: You're right, you're quite right, Signora Frola, but as I told you, I understand!

Signora Frola: Yes, governor, that's it! If he compels us to live this way – well, what does it matter. That doesn't do anybody any harm so long as we're satisfied, and my daughter is happy this way. That's enough for me, and for her! But you'll look after us, governor. They mustn't spoil anything. Otherwise there's nothing left for me except to leave town and never see her again – never, not even from a distance. You must not irritate him. You must leave him alone. Oh, please!

At this moment a wave of surprise, anxiety, dismay, sweeps over the company. Everybody falls silent and turns to the door. Suppressed exclamations are audible.

Voices: Oh! Oh! Look! There she is! Oh! Oh!

Signora Frola (*noticing the change in people, and groaning, all of a tremble*): What's the matter? What's the matter?

The Company divides to either hand.

A Lady has appeared at the door in back. She is dressed in deep mourning and her face is concealed with a thick, black, impenetrable veil.

Signora Frola (*uttering a piercing shriek of joy*): Oh, Lena! Lena! Lena! Lena!

She dashes forward and throws her arms about the veiled woman with the passionate hysteria of a mother who has not embraced her daughter for years and years. But at the same time from beyond the door in the rear another piercing cry comes. Ponza

dashes into the room.

Ponza: No! Julia! Julia! Julia!

At his voice Signora Ponza draws up stiffly in the arms of Signora Frola who is clasping her tightly. Ponza notices that his mother-in-law is thus desperately entwined about his wife and he shrieks desperately.

Ponza: Cowards! Liars! I knew you would! I knew you would! It is just like the lot of you!

Signora Ponza (*turning her veiled head with a certain austere solemnity toward her husband*): Don't be afraid! Just take her away! Go!

Signora Frola, at these words, turns to her son-in-law and humbly, tremblingly, goes over and embraces him.

Signora Frola: Yes, yes, you poor boy, come with me, come with me!

Their arms about each other's waists, and holding each other up affectionately, Ponza and his mother-in-law withdraw through the rear door. They are both weeping.

Profound silence in the company.

All those present stand there with their eyes fixed upon the departing couple. As Signora Frola and Ponza are lost from view, all eyes turn expectantly upon the veiled lady. Some of the women are weeping):

Signora Ponza (*having looked at them through her veil, speaking with dark solemnity*): What else do you want of me, after this, ladies and gentlemen? There is a misfortune here, as you see, which must stay hidden: otherwise the remedy which our compassion has found cannot avail.

The Prefect (*moved*): We want to respect your compassions

madam. It's only that we'd like you to tell us . . .

Signora Ponza (*slowly, and with clear articulation*): Tell you what? The truth? Simply this: I am the daughter of Signora Frola...

All (*with a happy intake of breath*): Ah!

Signora Ponza:... and the second wife of Signor Ponza...

All (*amazed and disenchanted, quietly*):... What?

Signora Ponza (*continuing*):... and, for myself, I am nobody!

The Prefect: No, no, madam, for yourself you must be either one or the other!

Signora Ponza: No! I am she whom you believe me to be.

She looks at them all through her veil for a moment, then leaves.

Silence.

Laudisi: And there, my friends, you have the truth!

(With a look of derisive defiance at them all): Are you satisfied?

He bursts out laughing.

Curtain

1917 – Right you are! (If you think so)

Drama in three acts

Introduction, Analysis, Summary

Characters, Act I

Act II

Act III

In Italiano – Così è (se vi pare)

En Español – Así es... si así te parece

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