

Il Principe di Parma

Opera in 4 Acts by Gunther Bartelt

Part I - English Translation

English version of the German libretto

Dramatis Personae

Raniero, Prince of Parma (Baritone)
Isabella, his wife (Dramatic Soprano)
Ludovico, their son, the heir (Baritone)
Enzo, Lieutenant, Raniero's illegitimate son (Tenor)
Conte Valeriano, General and adviser (Bass)
Chorus: soldiers, courtiers, the people of Parma

Act 1, Scene 1: The Poison of Power

Place: A magnificent antechamber in the Palazzo Ducale. Through tall windows in the background one sees the people of Parma waiting for bread before the palace gates.

Characters: Isabella (Soprano), Ludovico (Baritone), Raniero (Bass-Baritone - hidden behind a heavy curtain).

The orchestra begins with a restless, almost breathless introduction. The dull rumbling of the crowd can be heard from outside.

Ludovico (steps to the window, laughs contemptuously):

Do you hear them, Mother? The cattle roar for bread.
They think hunger gives them the right to rob us of
our midday rest.
When I rule, I shall give them an answer with
iron and lead, not with wheat!

Isabella (coldly):

Bridle your tongue, Ludovico. Not before the people, but
before your father. He has grown weak.
He feeds them with hope instead of bending them.
But you are right: a prince is not loved, he is feared.

Ludovico (Recitative):

He is old, Mother. His pity is a disease.
Yesterday I saw him offer his hand to a beggar.
The hand of a Bourbon! Thrown into the filth!
I would have had the dog driven away.
What do the people matter to me? Parma is my toy, my
quarry, my golden basin.

Duet (Isabella and Ludovico):

Ludovico:

What are the people? Only dust in the wind, lying
beneath our feet.
He who rules takes what he finds, until
every knee is bent!

Isabella:

Be clever, my son, conceal your envy
until your hour strikes. In blood and
pride and cruelty the crown alone is
worn!

Ludovico laughs and carelessly hurls a heavy golden goblet into a corner. Both exit. The curtain at the side moves. Raniero slowly emerges. He looks aged and deeply shaken.

Scene 1b: Raniero's Monologue

Raniero (Accompagnato Recitative):

I have nursed a serpent at my breast.
Is this the fruit of my loins? This arrogance?
Every word from him was a dagger-thrust into the honor of my house.
O father... you good prince... would you have wanted this?
That your heir should wield the whip where you offered bread?

Aria (Raniero):

A sustained, deeply melancholy Largo which later turns into a desperate Allegro.

O Parma, into whose hands will you fall?
Your dawn is black as the grave. I see the
alleys standing in flame when this pride
robs you of peace.
My own name - a curse on the lips of the poor! My
own flesh - a poison for this land!

(Tempo increases)

God of the righteous, hear my plea!
Is there no light that breaks the darkness?
Must I watch everything collapse that
generations built with love? Better I die
today without an heir than consecrate my
people to this madness!

Act 1, Scene 2: The Secret Is Revealed

Recitative style: quick, direct, over Valeriano's theme.

Raniero:

Valeriano! My heir is a monster.
Parma will bleed if he wears the crown. Is
there no hope? Only this arrogance?

Valeriano:

My lord, hope wears another face.
Do you remember? The maid... by the river? She
died, yet your blood lives on.

Raniero (frozen):

A son? By her?

Valeriano:

A soldier, Raniero. Noble and true.
I have watched over him. He serves in your guard.

Raniero:

Bring him to me! If he is as you say, he
shall be my heir. Go! At once!

Raniero and Valeriano exit. The curtain moves. Isabella stands there, scarf in hand, her face twisted into a grimace.

Act 1, Scene 3: Isabella's Fury

Isabella (Aria): "Vieni, o notte" (Punished Version)

Isabella:

A bastard in the castle?

A servant on the throne?

Never!

Come, night, with your poisons!

Break, fate, these chains! A cup of

wine, a sharpened blade, I send

you both into torment!

Ludovico shall rule - and you shall die!

Act 2: The Field of Honor

Place: A tent camp of the ducal troops in the hills before Parma. Twilight. Campfires burn. Soldiers clean their weapons or play cards.

Mood: Rough, but warm-hearted and disciplined.

Scene 1: Enzo's Introduction

Soldiers' chorus in the background: a strong, rhythmic male chorus about duty and homeland.

Song of the Soldiers (Chorus and Enzo)

Drink from your glass, the final draught, soldier;
the battle calls to the oath-bed, to the grave. There
you drink suffering, there you drink wine from
festering wounds full of leaden gleam. You dream
of peace and the end of the journey, yet at the end
you lie only in the moldering coffin.

Enzo (Recitative):

Rest yourselves, men. Tomorrow the march will be hard.

(To himself)

The stars stand clear above Parma.

Why do I feel an unease I cannot name? I am a
soldier; my life belongs to steel, and yet... as if I
had a destiny beyond the sword.

Enzo (Aria):

*A radiant, heroic tenor piece. Only honor
is my shield, only duty my faithful
servant. Though no coat of arms fills
my name, I defend the divine path!*

Scene 2a: The Encounter (Incognito)

Raniero and Valeriano enter, both wrapped in simple travelling cloaks. Enzo notices them and reaches for his sword.

Enzo:

Halt! Who steals here under cover of shadow? The camp is closed to strangers!

Valeriano (calmly):

Bridle your anger, Lieutenant. We are wanderers seeking the protection of the army.

Raniero (regarding Enzo with fascination, aside):

Valeriano... look at him. That brow... those eyes.
It is as if I saw myself - only without the burden of the crown.

Trio (Enzo, Raniero, Valeriano):

Enzo:

You look weary, strangers. Share my bread and my fire.

Raniero:

Your kindness honors you, young man. Have you no family waiting for you?

Enzo:

My father is the grave, my mother memory. I stand alone - and yet for all.

Valeriano (aside):

The seed has taken root. The prince sees his salvation.

Scene 2b: The Provocation (The Invasion of Evil)

Suddenly the idyll is torn apart by fanfares. Ludovico rides into the camp with an escort of courtiers. He is drunk and arrogant.

Ludovico:

Where is the commander of this filthy hole?
I need fresh horses and wine for my hunting party!

(He does not see Raniero and Valeriano in the shadows, but stares at Enzo with hatred.) You there! Bastard of an officer! Move!

Enzo (keeps his composure):

My prince, the horses are for the service of the state, not for the pleasure of a hunt.

Ludovico (mad with rage):

You dare contradict me? A Bourbon?

(He raises the riding crop to strike Enzo. Raniero steps from the shadows and catches Ludovico's arm.)

Raniero (with a thunderous voice):

Hold!

Finale II:

The entire camp freezes. The soldiers recognize the prince and fall to their knees. Ludovico turns pale with shock and shame. Enzo realizes in horror that he has entertained the prince as though he were a wanderer.

Enzo:

My prince... forgive me!

Raniero (looking deeply at Enzo):

There is nothing to forgive.

You acted like a true prince - and he like a servant.

Ludovico (venomously, aside):

He will pay for that. He and that nameless dog!

Act 3: The Feast of Shadows (The Poisoned Banquet)

Place: The magnificent Hall of Mirrors in the Palazzo Ducale in Parma. Everything gleams with gold and candlelight. Mood: outwardly festive and triumphant, yet fear seethes beneath the surface.

Scene 1: The Calm Before the Storm

The chorus of courtiers sings a hymn of praise to the prince and the victory. Dance music - an elegant minuet - is heard, though lightly underlaid with dissonance to suggest unease.

Isabella (aside to Ludovico):

The glass is ready. The wine is sweet as death.
As soon as your father calls Enzo before the court, he will drink.
The testament will be his shroud.

Ludovico (nervous, greedy):

And the bastard? What about him?

Isabella:

The guards stand ready.
As soon as the prince falls, you cry: 'Murder!' We
point to Enzo.
The people will see the stranger hang before the sun rises.

Scene 2: The Great Proclamation

Raniero steps forward. He appears strong, almost rejuvenated by hope. Valeriano stands at his side; Enzo, in dress uniform - visibly uneasy amid the courtly splendor - stands somewhat apart.

Raniero (Recitative):

Citizens of Parma, loyal servants of the court!
A prince is only as strong as the truth he guards.
I have long walked in darkness, but today... today I bring you the light of justice!

He beckons Enzo forward. The crowd whispers.

Raniero (to Enzo):

Step forward, Lieutenant. You have protected my life; now you shall protect my legacy.

Scene 3: The Toast (The Primo Finale of Act 3)

Isabella steps forward with a golden goblet. A grand ensemble follows: quintet with chorus.

Isabella (with false mildness):

My husband, before you speak, moisten your lips.
A toast to Parma, to victory, and... to this young hero.

Raniero (takes the goblet):

To the future! To my son!

At the very moment he says 'son,' he drinks deeply. The music stops abruptly. A shrill chord in the orchestra.

Raniero (stops, clutches his throat):

The fire... it burns... Valeriano...

Valeriano (rushes to him):

My prince! What has happened?

Isabella (screaming shrilly):

Poison! He has been poisoned! Look at the lieutenant - he wanted to steal the crown! Guards, seize the murderer of my husband!

Enzo (horrified):

Betrayal! I am innocent!

Grand Finale:

A tremendous confusion. Raniero collapses, though he is not yet dead (he is carried away by his loyal servants). Enzo draws his sword, but is pressed by superior numbers. Valeriano throws himself between them, clears a path, and roars to Enzo.

Valeriano:

Flee to the crypt! Wait there! I shall come!

Enzo flees beneath the roaring of the court: 'Death to the bastard!'

Act 4: Reckoning in the Depths

Finale: The Last Goblet

Place: A gloomy chamber adjoining the family crypt of the Bourbons. Raniero lies upon a stone couch. Candles burn down. Pale moonlight falls through barred windows. Mood: sepulchral cold, despair, and the oppressive weight of approaching death.

Scene 1: The Last Judgment

Isabella enters the room; she already believes herself regent. She wears black silk - mourning as a mask of power. She starts when Raniero raises himself once more. He holds the same golden goblet in his hand.

Isabella (entering with controlled dignity, playing the victor): The candles burn low, the night is still and Parma waits for the hand that will rule it.

He sleeps... he sleeps... the old, weary prince.

The crown inclines toward the place where my blood thirsts for it.

She steps closer - and stops. Raniero raises himself.

Raniero (with a broken but authoritative voice, raising the goblet):

Come closer, Isabella. The night is long, and the wine of fidelity is not yet drained. You thought my silence had been bought but the death you brewed has only baptized me anew. The poison has opened my eyes wide to the hell that you are, and that has destroyed my house.

Isabella (draws back, tries to deceive him):

You are raving - fever has confused you!

Poison... I know of no poison this night!

Rest, my husband - I am at your side, as ever faithful in joy and sorrow.

Raniero (bitter, almost laughing):

Faithfulness! That word in your mouth sounds like the barking of a sick dog. I know you - I have known you since the day I recognized your true heart. You never loved me - you loved only power, the golden chain you dreamed of every night.

Duet - Raniero / Isabella

Raniero:

We swore life to each other before the altar now
we swear death, since all is revealed.
The lie has come to its end, the night to its final word,
and Parma carries us both now to one last place. You
filled the cup now empty it with me! No throne awaits
you only dust and grave-goods.

Isabella (struggling, fighting, pleading):

No - no! I do not want to die!
Let me - let me go!
I shall recant everything I
shall confess everything!

Raniero (with iron, dying

strength): Too late is repentance,
too late the weeping now. You
wished to bury me so let us rest
together.

In a brutal, desperate struggle he forces her to drink the rest of the poison. Isabella sinks to the floor, shaken by convulsions.

Isabella (dying, with her last strength, full of

hatred): Cursed... be Enzo... cursed be your blood...
cursed be Parma... and all your brood...

She dies. Raniero sinks back onto his couch, breathing heavily, but still alive.

Raniero (alone, whispering):

So ends what began in love and light.
Forgive me, Parma - I fulfilled my duty.

Scene 2: The Duel of the Sons

Enzo rushes in, pursued by Ludovico, who has drawn his sword. Raniero watches from the couch, too weak to intervene. Valeriano has not yet arrived.

Ludovico (beside himself with hatred, sword raised):

Here ends your dream, you nameless bastard!
You came from nothing - to nothing you shall be damned!
No father protects you anymore, no general hides you no
shadow of this world and no mercy finds you!

Aria of Ludovico - "My Mother, My Blood"

Ludovico suddenly stops. The music slows. His hatred breaks open into pain. I saw her die - I saw her face the most beautiful face the sun ever saw in its light. She loved me alone, she loved me wholly and you - you dog - you robbed her of her final radiance! She wanted the crown - yes, she wanted it greatly yet everything she did, she did for me, for me alone, for me!

Not one drop of poison was brewed without my knowledge
but you were the reason to which she entrusted everything!
Had you never come - had you never appeared in this camp,
in our lives, on our stages she would still be living today! She
would still be here!

Her death is your work - and your blood clings to it!

O Mother... O Mother... why are you gone?

I hear your silence in every place.

You gave me my soul, you gave me my meaning now I
no longer know who I am without you.

(short silence - then hatred breaks through again) And
for that you die! For that alone!

Not for the crown - for her you shall scream!

I avenged her, Enzo - I avenged my blood!

Now die like a dog - without mercy, without courage!

Enzo (standing firm, in a calm, deep voice):

Ludovico - stop. Hear me before we die.

There is still time for truth - even amid these shards.

Aria of Enzo - "I Was Alone"

The music grows softer, almost chamber-like - strings, delicate and sorrowful.

I was alone - alone from the beginning.

My father? A name withheld from me in the light. My mother? A maid in a foreign kitchen modest, quiet, full of goodness without guile. She scrubbed pots, carried in the wood, she sang me songs - softly, simply, freely. And when she died - I counted twelve years nothing remained to me but what the poor possess: scars. No brother stood by me, no sister wept no human being in the world to mourn with me, to say: I am with you. - I stood alone at the grave and laid down a handful of earth, all that I had. I went to the army because the army took me in because there, for the first time, a man came up to me and said: comrade - a single word that held me, that carried me in every hard place. There I found brothers - not made of blood, but of fire, sweat, and camp-night.

They stood fast for me, they covered my back that is the only family I know, the only one that does not fail.

(He pauses - his gaze at Ludovico changes.)

And you... you, Ludovico... you could have been my brother. I would have embraced you - I would have loved you with all my heart. I would never have touched the crown, never desired it I am a soldier, not a prince; my heart belongs to the sound of drums, not to the gold of throne-room walls. But you - you stretched out your hand to me full of enmity, you gave me steel instead of brotherhood. And that, Ludovico - that wounds me deeper still than any wound you have dealt me - and its echo will pursue me to the grave: that I never had the brother.

(Silence. Then, with sorrowful resolve.)

Now come. If you will have it so - so be it.

But know this: I fight without hatred - I fight alone.

They fence. Enzo is the better fighter and disarms Ludovico. He stands over him - and hesitates. The sword sinks.

Enzo (softly, lowering his sword):

I cannot. You are my blood - poisoned though it is.

Live, Ludovico. Live - and become what you should have been.

In this moment of mercy, Ludovico draws a hidden dagger and thrusts it into Enzo's back.

Enzo (cries out, falls to his knees):

Betrayal... without honor... without honor...

With one final superhuman effort, Enzo turns and drives his sword through Ludovico's heart.

Ludovico (dying, with his last breath - almost unbelieving):

You... have... won...

Both sink to the ground. Silence.

Scene 3: The Lament of the Survivor

Valeriano storms in with soldiers. He stops on the threshold. Four dead. Blood and candlelight. He hurries to Enzo, kneels. Enzo dies in his arms.

Enzo (dying, barely audible):

Valeriano... was it... good?

Valeriano (with choked voice):

It was good, my boy. It was more than good.

Enzo dies. Valeriano lays him gently down. He rises. He walks slowly to Raniero - who is still alive, but barely breathing. Their eyes meet. Raniero nods once - then he is dead. Valeriano straightens. He looks into the room. He is alone.

Solo Aria of Valeriano - "I Remain Behind"

The music begins like a funeral march of the cellos - deep, heavy, inexorable.

I have survived battles - I have survived cold,
I have survived hunger and all that fate weaves. I
bore the sword for a prince full of trust I believed
fidelity could build walls.
Yet what walls still stand in this night?
What stone holds firm when all wood flares to ash?
Three dead here - three crowns cold in the dust and I... I
still stand. Prey to fate.
I raised Enzo like another's child -
I saw in him the light when all lamps were blind. He never
asked about origin, never about rank or name he fought
because he loved: honor, justice, and banners.
And Raniero - my prince - how long did I carry you? Through
mistrust, through error - yet you never forgot: the duty of the
father, even when you did not know it.
You saw in Enzo the legacy you had always missed.
Now you both lie still - and I stand upright here.
What kind of victory is this, that leaves everything to me? The
burden of the survivors is heavier than death one lives on
while everything one loved burns away.

O Parma, weep! Your pride is broken, your
heroes fallen, your truth spoken -
too late, as ever, when the blood has already flowed, when the
doors of fate have finally closed.
What remains to me now? The silence and the office. I
shall bear witness - I, the only one who comes from this
night as a living man - I shall speak, I shall tell what
happened, on every road.
Not for the sake of glory - no.
Not for honor, not for stone.
But so that it may be known what died here: not
princes only - but everything that called us to
goodness, to justice, to what Enzo was: a child of
the people - pure and true.

He lets the sword fall. The metal rings loudly on the stone floor:

I lay down what I carried all my life.
There is nothing more to protect. Only the final path.

He slowly steps back. The curtain falls to one final, mighty orchestral chord, which then slowly fades away.

Il Principe di Parma

Opera in 4 Acts by Gunther Bartelt

Part II - Performance Version

English scene text and stage directions; Italian sung and spoken text unchanged

Dramatis Personae

Raniero, Prince of Parma (Baritone)
Isabella, his wife (Dramatic Soprano)
Ludovico, their son, the heir (Baritone)
Enzo, Lieutenant, Raniero's illegitimate son (Tenor)
Conte Valeriano, General and adviser (Bass)
Chorus: soldiers, courtiers, the people of Parma

Act 1, Scene 1: The Poison of Power

Place: A magnificent antechamber in the Palazzo Ducale. Through tall windows in the background one sees the people of Parma waiting for bread before the palace gates.

Characters: Isabella (Soprano), Ludovico (Baritone), Raniero (Bass-Baritone - hidden behind a heavy curtain).

The orchestra begins with a restless, almost breathless introduction. The dull rumbling of the crowd can be heard from outside.

Ludovico (steps to the window, laughs contemptuously):

Odi quel grido, madre? La plebe urla per il pane.
Credon che la fame dia loro il diritto di disturbar
la quiete del nostro riposo.
Quando lo scettro sarà nel mio pugno, risponderò io: col
ferro e col piombo, non col frumento!

Isabella (coldly):

Frena la lingua, Ludovico. Non temere il volgo, ma
guarda a tuo padre. Egli è fatto debole.
Nutre i sudditi di speranza, invece di piegarli.
Ma dici il vero: un Principe non si ama, si teme.

Ludovico (Recitative):

È vecchio, madre. La sua pietà è un morbo.
Ier l'ho veduto tender la mano a un mendico.
La mano d'un Borbone! Gettata nel fango!
Io avrei scacciato quel cane randagio.
Che m'importa del popolo? Parma è il mio gioco, la
mia preda di caccia, il mio scrigno d'oro.

Duet (Isabella and Ludovico):

Ludovico:

Cos'è la plebe? Polvere al vento, che
ai nostri piedi si umilierà.
Chi regna prende ogni momento, finché
ogni ginocchio si piegherà!

Isabella:

Sii scaltro, o figlio, cela l'astio,
finché la tua ora scoccherà. Tra
sangue, orgoglio e fiero strazio, la
corona sol si porterà!

Ludovico laughs and carelessly hurls a heavy golden goblet into a corner. Both exit. The curtain at the side moves. Raniero slowly emerges. He looks aged and deeply shaken.

Scene 1b: Raniero's Monologue

Raniero (Accompagnato Recitative):

Ho nutrito una vipera nel mio seno!
È questo il frutto dei miei lombi? Tale arroganza?
Ogni sua parola è un pugnale nel cuore del mio casato.
O padre mio... o Re giusto... avresti mai voluto questo?
Che il tuo erede brandisse la frusta, dove tu offrivi il pane?

Aria (Raniero):

A sustained, deeply melancholy Largo which later turns into a desperate Allegro.

O Parma, in quali mani cadrai?
L'alba tua è nera come l'avel. Vedo
le strade avvolte dal fuoco, se
questo orgoglio ti ruba la pace.
Il mio nome stesso – un grido d'odio!
La mia propria carne – veleno per te!

(Tempo accelerato)

Dio dei giusti, ascolta il mio pregho! Non
v'è luce che rompa l'oscurità? Dovrò
veder crollare ogni muro, costruito con
fede, sudore e pietà? Meglio morir senza
prole stasera, che dar questo regno alla
folle chimera!

Act 1, Scene 2: The Secret Is Revealed

Recitative style: quick, direct, over Valeriano's theme.

Raniero:

Valeriano! Mio figlio è un mostro.
Parma piangerà, se lui regnerà.
Non v'è speranza? Solo questo fango?

Valeriano:

Signore, la speranza ha un altro volto.
Rammenti la serva... laggiù, al fiume? Ella
morì, ma il tuo sangue vive.

Raniero (frozen):

Un figlio? Da lei?

Valeriano:

Un soldato, Raniero. Onesto e fiero.
Io l'ho protetto. Serve nella tua Guardia.

Raniero:

Portalo a me! Se egli è puro in volto, sarà
il mio erede. Va'! Corri!

Raniero and Valeriano exit. The curtain moves. Isabella stands there, scarf in hand, her face twisted into a grimace.

Act 1, Scene 3: Isabella's Fury

Isabella (Aria): "Vieni, o notte" (Punished Version)

Isabella:

Vieni, o notte, coi tuoi veleni!
Spezza, o sorte, questi cateni!
Un servo al trono? Un figlio d'amor?
No! Solo il sangue e il mio furor! La
coppa è pronta, il ferro è acuto, per
quel bastardo il tempo è scaduto!
Raniero cadrà, il regno è mio,
Ludovico regna... o lo farò io!

Act 2: The Field of Honor

Place: A tent camp of the ducal troops in the hills before Parma. Twilight. Campfires burn. Soldiers clean their weapons or play cards.

Mood: Rough, but warm-hearted and disciplined.

Scene 1: Enzo's Introduction

Soldiers' chorus in the background: a strong, rhythmic male chorus about duty and homeland.

Song of the Soldiers (Chorus and Enzo)

Chorus:

Bevi il tuo calice, l'ultimo sorso, soldato,
La battaglia ti chiama al giuramento, alla fossa.

Enzo:

Lì bevi dolore, lì bevi il tuo vino,
Da piaghe putride dal piombo segnate.

Chorus:

Sogni la pace, la fine del cammino,
Eppure alla fine giaci nel sepolcro marcito.

Enzo:

Ah, fratelli! Non pianto ci resta,
Sol gloria o la morte — una degna risposta!

Chorus:

Bevi, soldato! La gloria ci chiama!
Per Parma! Per l'onore! — Avanti, per l'arma!

Enzo (Recitative):

Riposate, uomini. Domani la marcia sarà dura.

(To himself)

Le stelle brillano su Parma.

Perché provo un'inquietudine che non so definire? Sono un soldato, la mia vita appartiene all'acciaio, eppure... come se avessi un destino che va oltre la spada.

Enzo (Aria):

A radiant, heroic tenor piece.

L'onore è il mio solo scudo, la
fede il mio solo destin.
Benché il mio nome sia nudo, difendo
il sentiero divin!

Scene 2a: The Encounter (Incognito)

Raniero and Valeriano enter, both wrapped in simple travelling cloaks. Enzo notices them and reaches for his sword.

Enzo:

Alt! Chi si aggira nell'ombra notturna? Il campo è vietato agli stranieri!

Valeriano (calmly):

Frena lo sdegno, Luogotenente.
Siamo viandanti che cercano
l'ombra protettrice dell'esercito.

Raniero (regarding Enzo with fascination, aside):

Valeriano... guardalo. Quella fronte... quegli occhi ardenti.
È come specchiarmi nel tempo perduto — ma senza il peso della corona.

Trio (Enzo, Raniero, Valeriano):

Enzo:

Voi sembrate stanchi, o stranieri.
Dividete il mio pane e il mio fuoco.

Raniero:

La vostra bontà v'onora, giovinetto. Non
v'aspetta forse una famiglia?

Enzo:

Mio padre è la tomba, mia madre è il ricordo. Solo
io resto — eppure per tutti.

Valeriano (aside):

Il seme è germogliato.
Il Principe vede la sua salvezza.

Scene 2b: The Provocation (The Invasion of Evil)

Suddenly the idyll is torn apart by fanfares. Ludovico rides into the camp with an escort of courtiers. He is drunk and arrogant.

Ludovico:

Dov'è il comandante di questo letamaio?
Voglio cavalli freschi e vino per la mia compagnia di caccia!
Tu là! Bastardo d'un ufficiale!
Muoviti — o ti faccio frustar come un cane!

Enzo (keeps his composure):

Monsignore... i cavalli sono al servizio dello Stato — non al piacere d'una caccia.

Ludovico (mad with rage):

Osi contraddirmi?! Me — un Borbone di sangue reale?!

He raises the riding crop to strike Enzo. Raniero steps from the shadows and catches Ludovico's arm.

Raniero (with a thunderous voice):

Fèrmati!

Finale II:

The entire camp freezes. The soldiers recognize the prince and fall to their knees. Ludovico turns pale with shock and shame. Enzo realizes in horror that he has entertained the prince as though he were a wanderer.

Enzo:

Mio Principe... perdonatemi!

Raniero (looking deeply at Enzo):

Non v'è nulla da perdonare.
Tu hai agito come un vero principe — ed egli come un servo.

Ludovico (venomously, aside):

La pagherà caro. Lui — e quel cane senza nome!

Act 3: The Feast of Shadows (The Poisoned Banquet)

Place: The magnificent Hall of Mirrors in the Palazzo Ducale in Parma. Everything gleams with gold and candlelight. Mood: outwardly festive and triumphant, yet fear seethes beneath the surface.

Scene 1: The Calm Before the Storm

The chorus of courtiers sings a hymn of praise to the prince and the victory. Dance music - an elegant minuet - is heard, though lightly underlaid with dissonance to suggest unease.

Isabella (aside to Ludovico):

Il calice è pronto. Il vino è dolce — dolce come la morte.
Non appena tuo padre chiamerà Enzo dinanzi alla corte... egli berrà. Il
testamento sarà il suo sudario.

Ludovico (nervous, greedy):

E il bastardo? Cosa accadrà di lui?

Isabella:

Le guardie sono pronte.
Non appena il Principe cadrà, tu griderai: Assassinio!
Indicheremo Enzo.
Il popolo vedrà l'impiccato straniero prima che sorga il sole.

Scene 2: The Great Proclamation

Raniero steps forward. He appears strong, almost rejuvenated by hope. Valeriano stands at his side; Enzo, in dress uniform - visibly uneasy amid the courtly splendor - stands somewhat apart.

Raniero (Recitative):

Cittadini di Parma, fedeli della corte!
Un principe vale quanto la verità che custodisce nel petto.
Ho camminato a lungo nelle tenebre — ma oggi... oggi
vi porto la luce della giustizia!

He beckons Enzo forward. The crowd whispers.

Raniero (Aria) (to Enzo):

Fatti avanti, Luogotenente.
Tu hai protetto la mia vita — ora proteggerai la mia eredità.
Ho camminato a lungo nelle tenebre — ma oggi...
oggi vi porto la luce della giustizia! ora
proteggerai la mia eredità. ora proteggerà la mia
eredità. ora proteggerà la mia eredità!

Scene 3: The Toast (The Primo Finale of Act 3)

Isabella steps forward with a golden goblet. A grand ensemble follows: quintet with chorus.

Isabella (with false mildness):

Sposo mio, prima che tu parli, bagna le labbra.
Un brindisi a Parma, alla vittoria — e a questo giovane eroe.

Raniero (takes the goblet):

Alla gloria! Alla giustizia! Al futuro — al mio figlio!

At the very moment he says 'son,' he drinks deeply. The music stops abruptly. A shrill chord in the orchestra.

Raniero (stops, clutches his throat):

Il fuoco... brucia... Valeriano...

Valeriano (rushes to him):

Mio Principe! Che v'è accaduto?!

Isabella (Aria):

Veleno!
È stato avvelenato! Guardate il Luogotenente — voleva rubare la corona!

(screams)

GUARDIE — ARRESTATE L'ASSASSINO DI MIO MARITO!!!!

Enzo (horrified):

Tradimento! Sono innocente!!!

Grand Finale:

A tremendous confusion. Raniero collapses, though he is not yet dead (he is carried away by his loyal servants). Enzo draws his sword, but is pressed by superior numbers. Valeriano throws himself between them, clears a path, and roars to Enzo.

Valeriano:

Fuggi nella cripta! Aspettami là — verrò!

Enzo flees beneath the roaring of the court: 'Death to the bastard!'

Act 4: Reckoning in the Depths

Finale: The Last Goblet

Place: A gloomy chamber adjoining the family crypt of the Bourbons. Raniero lies upon a stone couch. Candles burn down. Pale moonlight falls through barred windows. Mood: sepulchral cold, despair, and the oppressive weight of approaching death.

Scene 1: The Last Judgment

Isabella enters the room; she already believes herself regent. She wears black silk - mourning as a mask of power. She starts when Raniero raises himself once more. He holds the same golden goblet in his hand.

Isabella (entering with controlled dignity, playing the victor):

I certi si consumano, la notte è silenziosa — e Parma attende la mano che saprà regnarla, gloriosa. Egli dorme... dorme... il vecchio Principe stanco. La corona si piega là dove il mio sangue è manco.

She steps closer - and stops. Raniero raises himself.

Raniero (Recitative) (with a broken but authoritative voice, raising the goblet):

Avvicinati, Isabella.

La notte è lunga, e il vino della fedeltà non è ancora esaurito.

Credevi di aver comprato il mio silenzio — ma la morte che hai distillato mi ha soltanto rigenerato. Il veleno mi ha aperto gli occhi — sull'inferno che tu sei, e che la mia casa ha distrutto.

Isabella (draws back, tries to deceive him):

Il veleno... non so di veleno in questa notte!

Riposati, sposo mio — sono al tuo fianco, fedele come sempre, nel giubilo e nel pianto.

Raniero (bitter, almost laughing):

Fedeltà!

Quella parola sulla tua bocca risuona come l'abbaio di un cane malato.

Ti conosco — ti ho conosciuta dal giorno in cui ho scorto il tuo vero cuore.

Non hai mai amato me — hai amato solo il potere,

la catena d'oro che sognavi ogni notte nel tuo giacere.

Duet - Raniero / Isabella

Raniero (Aria):

Ci giurammo la vita davanti all'altare — ora ci giuriamo la morte, ora che tutto è chiaro. La menzogna ha trovato la sua fine, la notte la sua ultima parola, e Parma ci porta entrambi verso un'ultima dimora. Tu hai riempito il calice — ora svuotalo con me! Nessun trono t'aspetta — solo polvere e sepolcro per te.

Isabella (Aria) (struggling, fighting, pleading):

No — no!
Non voglio morire!
Lasciami — lasciami andare!
Ritatterò ogni cosa — confesserò ogni errore!

Raniero (with iron, dying

strength): Troppo tardi è il pentimento, troppo tardi il pianto ormai. Volevi seppellirmi — lascia che insieme riposiam.

In a brutal, desperate struggle he forces her to drink the rest of the poison. Isabella sinks to the floor, shaken by convulsions.

Isabella (Aria) (dying, with her last strength, full of hatred):

Maledetto... sia Enzo... maledetto il tuo sangue... maledetta Parma...
e tutta la vostra schiatta...

She dies. Raniero sinks back onto his couch, breathing heavily, but still alive.

Raniero (alone, whispering):

Così finisce ciò che nacque nell'amore e nella luce. Perdonami,
Parma — ho compiuto il mio dovere.

Scene 2: The Duel of the Sons

Enzo rushes in, pursued by Ludovico, who has drawn his sword. Raniero watches from the couch, too weak to intervene. Valeriano has not yet arrived.

Ludovico (beside himself with hatred, sword raised):

Qui finisce il tuo sogno, bastardo senza nome!
Venisti dal nulla — nel nulla sarai condannato!
Nessun padre ti protegge più, nessun generale ti nasconde — nessuna
ombra al mondo e nessuna grazia ti raggiunge!

Aria of Ludovico - "My Mother, My Blood"

Ludovico suddenly stops. The music slows. His hatred breaks open into pain.

La vidi morire — vidi il suo volto — il volto più bello che il sole abbia
mai visto nel suo percorso. Mi amava soltanto, mi amava in tutto — e
tu — tu cane — le hai tolto l'ultimo splendore! Voleva la corona — sì, la
voleva ardentemente — ma tutto ciò che fece, lo fece per me, per me
soltanto, per me!

Nemmeno una goccia di veleno fu distillata a mia insaputa —
ma tu eri la ragione per cui ella si fidò di tutto! Se tu non fossi
mai venuto — se tu non fossi mai apparso in questo campo,
nella nostra vita, sui nostri palcoscenici — ella vivrebbe
ancora oggi!

Vivrebbe ancora qui!

La sua morte è opera tua — e il tuo sangue è su di lei!

O madre... o madre... perché sei andata via?

Sento il tuo silenzio in ogni luogo. Tu mi
desti l'anima, tu mi desti il senso — ora
non so più chi sono senza di te.

(short silence - then hatred breaks through again) Ma
per questo muori! Per questo soltanto!

Non per la corona — per lei dovrai gridare!

Ti ho vendicata, Enzo — ho vendicato il mio sangue!

Ora muori come un cane — senza grazia, senza onore!

Enzo (standing firm, in a calm, deep voice):

Ludovico — fermati. Ascoltami, prima che moriamo.

C'è ancora tempo per la verità — anche in mezzo a questi cocci.

Aria of Enzo - "I Was Alone"

The music grows softer, almost chamber-like - strings, delicate and sorrowful.

Ero solo — solo fin dall'inizio.

Mio padre? Un nome che mi fu taciuto nell'ombra. Mia madre? Una serva in una cucina straniera — modesta, silenziosa, piena di bontà senza malizia. Strofinava pentole, portava la legna, mi cantava canzoni — sottovoce, semplici e libere. E quando morì — avevo dodici anni appena — non mi rimase nulla se non ciò che i poveri hanno: le cicatrici. Nessun fratello mi stette vicino, nessuna sorella pianse — nessuno al mondo che piangesse con me, che dicesse: Sono con te. — Rimasi solo sulla tomba e deposi una manciata di terra — tutto ciò che possedevo. Andai all'esercito perché l'esercito mi accolse — perché lì per la prima volta un uomo mi si avvicinò e disse: Camerata — una sola parola, che mi sostenne, che mi portò in ogni luogo difficile. Lì trovai fratelli — non fatti di sangue, ma di fuoco, di sudore e di notti in accampamento. Loro ressero per me, loro mi coprirono le spalle — è l'unica famiglia che conosco, l'unica che non manca.

(He pauses - his gaze at Ludovico changes.) E tu... tu Ludovico... avresti potuto essere mio fratello.

Ti avrei abbracciato — ti avrei amato con tutto il cuore. Non avrei mai toccato la corona, mai reclamato — sono un soldato, non un principe, il mio cuore appartiene al suono dei tamburi, non all'oro delle pareti del salone del trono. Ma tu — tu mi hai teso la mano piena d'ostilità, mi hai dato acciaio invece di fratellanza. E questo, Ludovico — questo mi addolora più in profondità di qualsiasi ferita che tu mi abbia inferto — e l'eco ancora mi seguirà fino alla tomba: che non ho mai avuto il fratello.

(Silence, with sorrowful resolve.) Vieni dunque. Se così vuoi — sia.

Ma sappi: combatto senza odio — combatto da solo.

They fence. Enzo is the better fighter and disarms Ludovico. He stands over him - and hesitates. The sword sinks.

Enzo (softly, lowering his sword):

Non posso. Sei il mio sangue — anche se avvelenato.

Vivi, Ludovico. Vivi — e diventa ciò che avresti dovuto essere.

In this moment of mercy, Ludovico draws a hidden dagger and thrusts it into Enzo's back.

Enzo (cries out, falls to his knees):

Tradimento! Senza onore! Senza onore!

With one final superhuman effort, Enzo turns and drives his sword through Ludovico's heart.

Ludovico (dying, with his last breath - almost unbelieving):

Tu... hai... vinto...

Both sink to the ground. Silence.

Scene 3: The Lament of the Survivor

Valeriano storms in with soldiers. He stops on the threshold. Four dead. Blood and candlelight. He hurries to Enzo, kneels. Enzo dies in his arms.

Enzo (dying, barely audible):

Valeriano... è stato... abbastanza?

Valeriano (with choked voice):

È stato abbastanza, figlio mio. Più che abbastanza.

Enzo dies. Valeriano lays him gently down. He rises. He walks slowly to Raniero - who is still alive, but barely breathing. Their eyes meet. Raniero nods once - then he is dead. Valeriano straightens. He looks into the room. He is alone.

Solo Aria of Valeriano - "I Remain Behind"

The music begins like a funeral march of the cellos - deep, heavy, inexorable.

Ho sopravvissuto alle battaglie — ho sopravvissuto al freddo, ho sopravvissuto alla fame e a tutto ciò che il destino tesse. Ho portato la spada per un principe con fiducia piena — credevo che la fedeltà potesse erigere mura.

Ma quali mura reggono ancora in questa notte?

Quale pietra tiene, quando tutto il legno brucia in cenere? Tre morti qui — tre corone fredde nella polvere — e io... io sono ancora in piedi. Preda del destino. Ho allevato Enzo come un figlio non mio — vedevo in lui la luce, quando tutte le lampade erano spente. Non chiese mai delle origini, mai del rango o del nome — combatté perché amava: l'onore, il giusto e le bandiere.

E Raniero — mio Principe — quanto a lungo ti ho sorretto?

Attraverso la diffidenza, attraverso l'errore — eppure non dimenticasti mai: il dovere del padre, anche quando non lo conoscevi.

Vedesti in Enzo l'eredità che sempre ti mancò.

Ora giacete entrambi immobili — e io rimango eretto qui.

Cos'è questa vittoria, che tutto lascia a me? Il peso del superstite è più grave della morte — si continua a vivere, mentre tutto ciò che si amava si consuma.

O Parma, piangi! Il tuo orgoglio è infranto, i tuoi eroi caduti, la tua verità pronunciata — troppo tardi, come sempre, quando il sangue è già scorso, quando le porte del destino si sono chiuse per sempre.

Cosa mi resta ora? Il silenzio e il dovere. Sarò testimone — io, l'unico che ancora proviene da questa notte come vivente — parlerò, dirò ciò che accadde, su ogni cammino.

Non per amor di gloria — no.

Non per onore, non per pietra.

Ma affinché si sappia ciò che qui è morto: non solo principi — ma tutto ciò che ci chiamò alla bontà, alla giustizia, a ciò che Enzo era: un figlio del popolo — puro e vero.

He lets the sword fall. The metal rings loudly on the stone floor:

Depongo ciò che ho portato per tutta la vita.

Non c'è più nulla da proteggere. Solo l'ultimo passo.

He slowly steps back. The curtain falls to one final, mighty orchestral chord, which then slowly fades away.