

**Isabella,
Three Sailing Ships
and a Con Man**

(1963)

by Dario Fo

CHARACTERS:

Two Carpenters

The Executioner [Prisoner's Escort]

*The Actor under sentence of death, who also plays
Christopher Columbus*

A Female Relation of the Actor

Three Ladies in Waiting attending the Queen

Queen Isabella

King Ferdinando

Two Heralds/Standard-Bearers

A Friar

Five Learned Gentlemen

Quintinilla, the Queens's Treasurer

Father Diego

A Nosy Monk

Admiral Pinzon

Bishop Fonseca

Crazy Giovanna

Maria, Wife of the Infante

Two Public Prosecutors

The Vice Consul

*Actors belonging to the Condemned Man's theatre
company*

Spectators, Sailors, Monks and Townspeople

Act One

Scene One

Before the curtain rises, we hear what sounds like the beating of drums, of the kind that are used in the French theatre to tell the audience that the show is about to begin. As the curtain rises we see that the drum sound is being produced by the hammering of two CARPENTERS who are nailing boards across poles in order to build a platform.

The stage setting is suggestive of a broad sixteenth-century Spanish piazza. Carnival lanterns hang overhead. In the centre of the square a scaffold is being set up for a gallows. There is also a fairground pole. One of the CARPENTERS is on top of a ladder, hammering away vigorously. The other, down on the platform, hammers more slowly, hitting the off-beat.

FIRST CARPENTER: I ask you – is nothing sacred? How can they go executing people during Carnival!

SECOND CARPENTER: Well I suppose if you've got to die, one day's much the same as the next.

The two of them hammer in unison.

FIRST CARPENTER: But how can you execute people when everyone else's enjoying themselves? [*He hammers*] There's no respect in this world any more, not even for the gallows.

They hammer with alternate blows.

SECOND CARPENTER: Anyway, the fellow they're doing today should feel at home... [*They alternate hammer blows*] ...on this stage, even if it is Carnival: it seems he was an actor.

They hammer in unison.

FIRST CARPENTER: An actor? They're going to hang an actor? For heaven's sake! [*Hammering furiously*] The only serious thing left in Spain was the gallows... [*They alternate hammer blows*] But no sir, now they're going to make a mockery of that too! This Inquisition is a joke!

A prolonged bout of hammering.

SECOND CARPENTER: Why's that, then? Can't an actor be a heretic too?

FIRST CARPENTER: Oh, do me a favour...! [*He hammers slowly, leisurely*] How can someone be a heretic when they only repeat things that they've learned off by heart? [*He takes a rip saw and begins sawing one of the planks*] I tell you, in Isabella's time you wouldn't

find people carrying on like this! Carnival was a time of laughter, and executions were reserved for Lent. But what's the point! Nothing's sacred any more.

From off-stage we hear the chanting of a procession approaching.

SECOND CARPENTER: Get a move on, they're coming.

From back-stage a procession enters. Its mood is a cross between funeral and carnival. It should resemble the processions portrayed by Goya and Ensor: hooded monks, girls with white masks, black and silver banners, censers for incense, and, at the heart of the procession, the CONDEMNED MAN, wearing the classic cone-shaped hat, with a sign saying 'Arch-Heretic' round his neck. He wears a long shift. His wrists are chained with a long chain. Bringing up the rear of the procession is a large banner, four or five metres long, a kind of arras mounted on two long poles which are shouldered by two hooded monks. The whole procession chants.

PROCESSION:

*Fides fidelis,
Now repentant, cleansed in spirit,
You shall be happy.
The heretic roars in great agony,
Now he fries, howling, and it's as if he was laughing.
His sobbings, with his laughter, rise to the heavens,
A mixture of sugar and salt:
Carnival is a time for every humorous match.*

The arras, which is decorated with allegorical scenes depicting the Holy Inquisition, is set up behind the stage to act as a backdrop. One part of the procession mounts onto the stage, while the rest gather front-stage. The PRISONER tries to join in the chanting.

ESCORT: [*He wears a black hood and a rounded mask with no nose*] Oi... who said you could chant?

PRISONER: Aren't I allowed to?

ESCORT: Of course not! You're condemned to death. You're supposed to be absorbed in silent thought about your impending fate. Mortified. So it's logical that we do the chanting, so as to cheer you up a bit.

PRISONER: Exactly. Well, I'm cheering myself up a bit too. I'm giving you a hand.

ESCORT: No, you start exercising your mind. You start despairing that in a while you're going to die.

PRISONER: But supposng I don't want to think about it?

ESCORT: Then we can get a move on, can't we!

Two HOODED FRIARS begin to organise the proceedings.

PRISONER: Wait a minute – I thought you were supposed to burn me at the stake.

ESCORT: Don't worry, sunshine, you're going to get the full treatment. We're going to hang you and burn you at the stake at the same time.

PRISONER: Amazing! Now that's what I call technological progress!

They remove his hood, and put a noose round his neck. They begin piling up firewood.

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER: Stop! Stop! Orders from the Inquisitor-General...

CHORUS: A pardon! A pardon!

ESCORT: I don't believe it... you're joking... a pardon indeed?!

PRISONER: Ha, ha, it's Carnival...

CHORUS: You see, they've tricked us. Dragging us out here under false pretences to chant and comfort the man's mortal soul... then they go and pardon him!

ESCORT: *[Reading the heading off the sheet that has been handed to him by the MESSENGER] 'An Act of Mercy...'* *[To the TORCHBEARER] Bring that light over here. I can't see a thing.*

PRISONER: I told you so... I said it was all a joke... Me – an arch heretic, ha ha. Arch heretic indeed... and all this just because I happened to be performing in one of Rojas's plays. *[He slips the two links at each end of his chain over two hooks protruding from the beam, thereby turning it into a sort of swing, on which he then sits, swinging his legs]* Rojas... And how was I supposed to know that Rojas was up before the Inquisition?! Hey, I'm up here, if anyone feels like getting me down...

ESCORT: *[Having glanced through the decree]* No, its all right... relax everyone – it's not a pardon after all.

PRISONER: It isn't?

CHORUS: Good job too!

PRISONER: What do you mean, 'good job too'?

ESCORT: As your last wish, you asked that you and your company be permitted to perform a play about Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella. Well, your wish has been granted. You can start performing, here and now. This is so that everyone can see that in our country, when a man is on the scaffold, he can say what he likes. On this stage, censorship does not exist.

PRISONER: Hey, now wait a minute! I never said anything about performing a play about Columbus.

ESCORT: What play *did* you want, then?

PRISONER: I never asked to do a play at all!

CHORUS: Oh yes you did.

PRISONER: Oh no I didn't!

ESCORT: Well, someone else must have asked on your behalf, then.

ONE OF THE ENTOURAGE: Someone's played a joke on you.

He sniggers.

SECOND MEMBER OF THE ENTOURAGE: A Carnival trick, ha, ha!

THIRD MEMBER OF ENTOURAGE: I love it! Just imagine, putting on a play on a scaffold! And misery-face there can collect the tickets.

They all laugh.

PRISONER: Well, I really hate to disappoint you, but I have no intention of clowning about up here, just to amuse the likes of you! A fellow has other things to do. I have to start preparing myself... spiritually... for a decent death. [*He begins chanting*] Fides fidelis...

ESCORT: No, no, you start preparing for a decent *performance*! That's my orders, and I don't want trouble! The Inquisitor-General has granted you permission to perform '*Christopher Columbus*', and perform it you will, otherwise...

PRISONER: Otherwise what...? [*Ironically*] You'll kill me?

ESCORT: Yes... I mean, look, if you don't make too much of a fuss, I promise that instead of the usual hanging plus bonfire, which is a terrible way to go... Thwack! [*He grabs the executioner's axe from one of the HOODED ATTENDANTS and takes a swing at him, narrowly missing his throat*] We'll chop your head off.

PRISONER: [*Leaping backwards in alarm*] Don't *do* things like that!

ESCORT: In fact, I tell you what – I'll even do it myself. I'm a dab hand, you know. [*He shows him the axe*] One quick hack with this, and the job's done. [*He fingers the back of his neck*] Let's have a feel... Oh, child's play... You won't even say 'Ouch'!

As he goes to hand back the axe, a WOMAN comes over to the PRISONER.

WOMAN: Psst!

PRISONER: What?

WOMAN: Tell them you'll do the play... You've got to play for time... My father's gone to the High Court to try to get you a pardon.

PRISONER: Oh really?

ESCORT: *[He turns round, to see the two of them talking]* Oh really what? Why did you say 'Oh really'?

PRISONER: Who said?

EXECUTIONER: You said!

PRISONER: I said? I said what?

EXECUTIONER: You said 'Oh really'.

PRISONER: Oh really? I said... ? A slip of the tongue... Oh no – that's right... You see, I was about to say... *[The WOMAN signals to him to shut up]* Oh really... So if you use your big chopper, I won't even say 'ouch'? Ha, ha... !

EXECUTIONER: You don't think I'd waste my breath lying to a walking corpse like yourself, do you?

PRISONER: No need to get upset! Alright, clear the stage, because we're about to start. *[He waves the HOODED MONKS off the scaffold]* Where are my actors?

Enter a number of ACTORS. They bring with them a theatrical backcloth.

ACTORS: Here we are.

PRISONER: Where? Ah, I hardly recognised you, all dressed up like that. Ah, well done... Bring the Inquisition banner to the front here. *[Two of the HOODED MONKS lift the arras by its poles and bring it to the front of the scaffold platform, and set it up as if it was the curtain for this bizarre theatre]* There's two holes there, put the poles in there, so that we can use the banner as a curtain. *[To the people standing round the platform]* Move over there. *[Most of these ad hoc spectators go and sit themselves front-stage centre, with their backs to the audience]* Have you brought everything?

ACTOR: Don't worry. We'll sort everything out – you just get on with the Prologue.

PRISONER: *[Turning to the audience]* Right. Act One, Scene One. *[He addresses a small group who have sat themselves right in the middle of the forestage]* Oh no, now I'm afraid you can't stay there, because otherwise people behind you won't be able to see... *[He is referring to the real spectators in the audience]* ...And they've paid! Move to the sides. *[They do so,*

grumbling] And if there's anyone who'd like to come up and give us a hand, they'd be more than welcome. Because unfortunately we're a bit short of actors.

Some of the 'audience' get up and go behind the banner. The EXECUTIONER tags along behind them. He is dressed completely in black, in a costume resembling that of Pulcinella, but in negative.

EXECUTIONER: Might I be of service?

PRISONER: Ha, ha, Pulcinella in mourning... why not! I think we could find a little part for you...

EXECUTIONER: Make me the sweetheart, alright? I want to be in love.

PRISONER: Yes, yes, you can be in love. Now, ladies and gentlemen, you are going to have to imagine yourselves suddenly getting thirty years younger: in other words, we are turning the clock back. To 1486, to be precise. It's a fair old leap. I should think most of you weren't even born then... [*Looking at somebody in the audience*] ...except you, maybe. Watch closely... I'll count to three: one, two, hey! Here we are!

Two of the HOODED ATTENDANTS hurry the arras off, stage-right

We find ourselves in one of the apartments of QUEEN DONNA ISABELLA. Her maids are preparing a bath for her, and they are singing.

Over one of the beams on the scaffold a kind of canopy is draped, giving an effect like a battlefield pavilion, with its cloth sides reaching the floor. With the aid of the two CARPENTERS, three GIRLS put the finishing touches to the scene, singing all the while. A number of rustic stools are brought on-stage, together with a large number of shirts, decorated with ribbons and lace. The QUEEN enters, in a dilapidated bath tub, whose visual appearance makes ironic reference to the royal throne, with its sit-up back topped by a carved eagle. Two SERVANTS push this contraption forward, moving like circus horses. The bath tub, with its royal contents, is clumsily hoisted onto the platform, and is filled with water from buckets which are brought on-stage, passed hand-to-hand. The action of this is meant to be graceful, but merely looks grotesque. One of the GIRLS spreads a sheepskin at her feet, and another GIRL helps her. As the QUEEN apparently gets undressed behind the tent, a YOUNG LAD hoists himself up to get a look. He gets a kicking for his pains. The SOLDIERS too, on each side of the platform, are moved aside by the girls. The GIRLS sing:

THE FABLE OF THE OYSTER AND THE PEARL

*The young man of Tunisia
who, black as an oyster,
fell in love with her,
had eyes of onyx,
the body of a statue,
the gaze of a virgin,
for he was so timid:
And that was why she fell in love,*

she fell in love with him.

*Leonora, fairer than fair,
the Infanta of Castille,
with skin like magnolia,
with ears like conches,
fell in love with him,
 fell in love with him:*

*with the young man of Tunisia,
who, blacker than an oyster,
when he saw her, turned pale.
The arms of that oyster
closed around her.
With lips that were trembling,
Leonora, fairer than fair,
gave him her mouth.
 gave him her mouth.*

*But from the keep tower, she was seen
by her three pale brothers.
The arrows flashed:
The young man of Tunisia
plummeted into the sea with her,
 plummeted into the sea with her.*

*He plummeted with her, his arms around her,
He, black as an oyster,
and with her he sank,
She, pale as mother of pearl.
The black man, on the sea bed
closed like an oyster,
And in the pallor of death,
 she became a pearl.*

The SPECTATORS applaud.

ONE OF THE AUDIENCE: But who's that in the bath there?

ANOTHER: Queen Isabella.

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Isabella? But I'd heard she only baths once in a blue moon.

ANOTHER: [Looks up to the sky, humming 'Blue Moon']

YET ANOTHER: Ssssh!

The KING enters, wearing slightly over-elaborate royal trappings.

A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE: Look, that's Ferdinand.

FERDINAND *crosses the stage with a ludicrously slow, mournful step, as if walking in a religious procession.*

ANOTHER: Is he coming to have a bath too?

YET ANOTHER: No. He doesn't agree with them.

ANOTHER: Oh, at last! A civilised king!

Some of the SPECTATORS laugh; others hiss at them to shut up.

FERDINAND: [*He goes over to ISABELLA's tent and addresses her*] Bathing again?

ISABELLA: Yes, why?

FERDINAND: What do you mean, why? This is the second time in a week! If word gets around that you're always washing like this, *and* that you shave everywhere... like the Arab women, even under your armpits...

ISABELLA: If you ask me, it's very civilised.

FERDINAND: Yes, but it's not Catholic!

ISABELLA: Oh yes! Anything that comes from the Arabs must be a sin, isn't that right?! Oh how very intelligent! How very orthodox!

FERDINAND: But given that the things that you think are alright, the orthodoxes consider a sin, wouldn't it be an idea, just for our own sakes, to behave like proper people?

ISABELLA: You've upset me now, darling, so do please shut up.

FERDINAND: Oh yes, lovely language... A fine way for a queen to speak.

ISABELLA: When I'm in my house I speak how I like.

FERDINAND: In your house? And since when has this been *your* house? As far as I am aware, this palace is still the property of the Alcade Medira.

ISABELLA: Precisely. We're not even renting! People would never believe it: the queen of Spain, homeless, forced to accept lodgings, one month here, another month there... And then, since the fish starts to smell after a while, let's have some fresh air! Strike camp and off we go! We are just two fishes, darling!

FERDINAND: Fishes?

ISABELLA: Royal fishes, perhaps, but still fishes! Although, on second thoughts, you're just a crab...! Just my luck – I caught the crab!

A GIRL *enters*.

GIRL: Madame, Father Galeros is here, with the man from Genoa.

ISABELLA: Oh yes... Tell them to come back in half an hour...No, wait a minute: tomorrow... some other time... I'm not in the mood today... Tell them I'm busy.

The GIRL exits.

FERDINAND: Quite right you haven't got time, because in half an hour there's the salami licky.

ISABELLA: The what?

FERDINAND: Salaam alaykum! I've got to meet the ambassadors today.

ISABELLA: Well, they'll just have to kiss *your* hands... or whatever it is they kiss... Because I'm not coming down...

FERDINAND: Might I ask why?

ISABELLA: Because I'm not in the mood for parading around with no clothes on, that's why...

The two SERVANTS wheel the bath away on a trolley. They wave as they go, to the accompaniment of a trumpet fanfare, as if on board a ship leaving harbour. The KING and QUEEN and the LADIES IN WAITING wave them goodbye.

FERDINAND: No clothes on?

ISABELLA: Yes! Listen, what am I supposed to wear? That red Malaga caparison, or that khaki puffy thing? They've already seen me in them a thousand times! Do you realise, I haven't had a new dress, I mean a real dress, in almost a year, now. I have to do the best I can, with some sempstress. [*Her phrases – 'always making do' and 'the wife of a king' are spoken in unison by FERDINAND too, who knows his wife's complaints off by heart*] Make do, always making do. Me, the wife of a king! Do you realise that some of my ladies in waiting have a new dress every month? Even go to Perugia and Venice, to order them. And I get nothing.

FERDINAND: Well, why don't you just get one of them to lend you something?

ISABELLA: Oh yes, bloody marvellous! Lend me... And whose do you think that yellow dress was that I was wearing last week for the surrender of the city of Cordoba? Me, the Queen of Victory, the Liberator of Christianity from the Moorish tyrants, reduced to having to borrow dresses from her ladies in waiting!

FERDINAND: Here we go with the Moors again! Sometimes I think you're almost sorry that I've cleared them out of half of Spain.

ISABELLA: Of course I'm sorry. Haven't I always told you, even before this last campaign began: leave the Moors alone, they're our last link for trading with the Egyptian and Persian markets. But oh no, he has to play the hard man!

FERDINAND: I had to. Anyway, there are certain compromises with my beliefs that I find repugnant!

ISABELLA: Listen, don't start playing the philosopher.

FERDINAND: What exactly do you mean by that?

ISABELLA: I mean that when you start saying things simply for the pleasure of listening to the sound of your own voice, without first thinking what it is you're saying, I get an overwhelming desire to give you a kick up the backside.

FERDINAND: Well said! Now you insult me, threaten me, even! In front of the girls!

ISABELLA: Don't worry, you know perfectly well that they don't speak Castilian.

FERDINAND: Even if they don't, I'm not having it.

ISABELLA: What aren't you having? Relax, my little periwinkle.

FERDINAND: Periwinkle? Why periwinkle?

ISABELLA: Don't worry, darling, it's just a nickname. What the French call 'one of God's little creatures'.

FERDINAND: Hey, now look, stop that, otherwise...

ISABELLA: Otherwise what? You don't think you're talking to one of your bungling generals, do you?

FERDINAND: Bungling generals? Heroes, rather, who have fought and won...

ISABELLA: Thanks to my cannons.

The MAIDS wrap the QUEEN in a sheet.

FERDINAND: Cannons, you call them... Thirty three broken down wrecks with only three cannonballs for each of them.

ISABELLA: Three apiece, that's right. But at Seville, it only took one broadside from those "wrecks" – thirty three balls – and all the Moors turned white as sheets. Poor things... You might mock, but I know! I know you'd love to get your hands on those "wrecks". But you've no

chance, petal! Military cannons remain a fixed part of the bride's trousseau, and God help anyone who touches them! You know, sometimes I wonder whether you didn't just marry me for my artillery. It's not everyone who's got a wife with her own supply of cannons! You're very lucky!

FERDINAND: [*In a huff*] That's it, make fun of me... hit me! I know you think I'm just your personal trampoline. And then you say that you fell in love with me...

ISABELLA: Darling, how could I help it? A big boy, so charming, so good looking, so child-like... !

FERDINAND: Ha, mother love, eh? So that's why you won't even let me have the keys to the house!

ISABELLA: Darling, remember it was *you* that came and hung your hat on *my* hook... sorry, your crown... That's fine gratitude... Never forget, Ferdinand, that unlike you, MY father was a real king. [FERDINAND *makes an impatient gesture and laughs mockingly*] Remember that my brother was already a king when...

FERDINAND: Oh yes! And what a king! Henry the Fourth, nicknamed the 'Impotent King'. I ask you, a king who lets himself be replaced by his sister! They tell me that when you were crowned, people were shouting: "Finally, we've got a queen with... thingummies" [*He imitates the sound of a drum-roll*] Long live the King!

He imitates a trumpet fanfare.

ISABELLA: Now there's fine language to use in front of a lady!

FERDINAND: Lady? You're no lady, you're a monster. A tyrant. If there's a decree to be signed, then *she* has to examine it. I put forward a proposition, my counsellors accept it, and then *she* sticks her nose in and I'm back where I started... And everyone looks at me as if to say: 'What a joke of a king!'

Enter the LADY IN WAITING, from previously. She hands the QUEEN a letter.

LADY IN WAITING: Majesty, the holy Father who was here earlier asked me to give you this.

ISABELLA: It's from your pal the Duke of Medina. Tell the Father that I shall not be receiving them, precisely because they've come with a letter of introduction. It's about time we put an end to all this nepotism.

The LADY IN WAITING exits.

FERDINAND: There you are, see... ! The letter's addressed to me, and you don't even let me see it... Let alone ask my opinion. If you ask me, that Genoa fellow...

ISABELLA: He'll just be another con-artist trying to get us to finance some voyage or other...

FERDINAND: It wouldn't have cost you anything just to find out what I think...

ISABELLA: But darling, it's for your own good. I don't want you tiring yourself out. You know that if you think too much, you get constipated.

FERDINAND: No! That's too much! [*He spins round angrily and bangs his head on one of the poles*] Stop it... !

ISABELLA: Alright, darling, I'll stop... Come to your little Isabella, and let's make peace.

FERDINAND: No.

ISABELLA: Yes, Ferdinand. Now, don't go throwing a tantrum.

FERDINAND: No.

ISABELLA: Come to your little Isabella.

FERDINAND: No.

ISABELLA: [*She turns on a commanding voice*] Ferdinand, come here at once.

She begins applying a white cosmetic paste to her face

FERDINAND: Sometimes I wonder why you bother bathing at all, if you're going to daub that stuff all over you. Not to mention painting your eyes. Just because you've seen the Arab women doing it. And then you call yourself a Catholic...

ISABELLA: Ah, I see you're looking for another kicking...

FERDINAND: Not at all – respect for Catholicism.

ISABELLA: Ferdinand, look, being a Catholic doesn't mean that you have to be stupid! If I look to the Moors, it's because I recognise that in many ways they're more civilised than we are. It was from them that I learnt that to be religious does not necessarily mean having to be dirty and stink like a goat.

FERDINAND: Excuse me, why are you looking at me?

ISABELLA: [*Ignoring his comment*] From them I have learned to understand even Plato and Aristotle.

FERDINAND: Ha! You see! Ridiculous! A woman, reading Plato and Aristotle! Anyway, it's a sin to read books written by pagans.

ISABELLA: Do you really believe what you're saying?

FERDINAND: Absolutely.

ISABELLA: Then take that!

She kicks him.

FERDINAND: Ouch! What's got into you?

ISABELLA: It's your fault! I was seized with an overwhelming desire. You are a half-baked bundle of banality! And a bigot into the bargain!

FERDINAND: But, but now you're even kicking me in front of the girls?!

ISABELLA: Relax – I already told you, they don't understand Castilian.

FERDINAND: You know what I think? You're mad!

ISABELLA: I see. Mad. Just because I treat you as you deserve and don't let you walk all over me. But the party's over now, ducky.

FERDINAND: What do you mean, "over"?

ISABELLA: I mean that until a short while ago the country was at war, and so I decided to let things be, pretended not to see...

FERDINAND: What did you decide to pretend not to see?

ISABELLA: Don't play the innocent, Ferdinando. My cannons... the cannons that you went and pawned with the Florentine bankers! You got 300,000 ducats on the strength of them, and the money's due back on Thursday... [*Addressing FERDINAND, who has taken a gem from her jewellery casket*] And you can put that down too, because it's mine, thank you...

FERDINAND: Where do you get all this nonsense about cannons?

ISABELLA: From the Florentines, actually, darling. Because they came to double-check the signature. My signature, which you so painstakingly falsified. A truly disgusting trick!

FERDINAND: The rats... ! Look dear, I owe my soldiers a month's back pay. Anyway, we really don't need those rotten old cannons any more. I've decided to have done with war. Finished! I've had enough.

He keeps a careful distance between himself and the QUEEN.

ISABELLA: Oh really? Well, even supposing I believe you, what about when somebody else decides to start a war, and you suddenly find those same cannons that you sold to the Florentines, sold to someone else, and pointing in the general direction of your regal head? What would you say to that?!

FERDINAND: Damn those Tuscans! They wheedle their way in everywhere. A fine way to run a kingdom. You need money – you go to the Tuscans... You need to mount an expedition? Go

and see the Genoese. You need to fit out a ship? Try the Vicenzans or the Piacenzans. And when you want weapons, it's the Milanese. Just because they're all half-starved back home, they decide to come and live off the fat of the land in Spain. And we, who had to fight the war, end up in the...

ISABELLA: Ferdinando!

FERDINAND: Shi...ne on, Harvest Moon!

ISABELLA: Well done, darling! You've finally seen the light. Now, just go downstairs and get on with the hand-kissing... And treat them properly, please. Go on, be off with you!

FERDINAND: Alright.

ISABELLA: [*To one of her LADIES.*] My hat, Arabella! [*She addresses FERDINAND*] In that casket you'll find a false bottom. In it is a purse with 300,000 ducats in it. Make the most of it – it's the last that you'll be getting.

FERDINAND: Oh, 300,000... ! Are you sure?

ISABELLA: Am I sure, he asks me! I put them there just for you. [*FERDINAND rattles the purse*] Don't shake it, I can't stand the jangling.

FERDINAND: Alright, alright, but where did you get them?

ISABELLA: Don't go worrying about it – just run along, and don't forget, when it comes to doing anything, darling, don't use your own brain, because it's not really big enough.

FERDINAND: There, you see! You treat me like a simpleton who's only good for bed. Ouf!

ISABELLA: There we go again... saying certain things in front of the girls...

FERDINAND: But you already said they don't understand Castilian!

ISABELLA: Yes, but 'bed' is the first word they learn. [*One of the GIRLS is arranging a lace collar around the QUEEN's neck*] Not so tight: you're throttling me!

Exit FERDINAND From off-stage we hear a loud scream

FERDINAND: [*Coming back on-stage*] What's the matter, what are they doing to you?

ISABELLA: It wasn't me that screamed.

Enter COLUMBUS. He has a GIRL in his arms, one of the Queen's maids. The girl is unconscious. The FRIAR supports her head.

COLUMBUS: I beg your pardon, Majesty, but the girl... She seems to have passed out... We should really lay her out... Majesty, your humble servants...

COLUMBUS *and the FRIAR bow deeply, still holding the GIRL.*

ISABELLA: Forget all that – this is no time for bowing and scraping. Come over here.

COLUMBUS: Forgive me, Majesty: we'll need a table. Quick, a table so that we can lay the girl out.

ISABELLA: Why a table... ? Lay her out on my bed.

COLUMBUS: No, if you don't mind, something hard would be better.

ISABELLA: [*To one of her LADIES*] Himure! Poor thing, what on earth's come over her? She was fine a moment ago.

COLUMBUS: I don't know: she collapsed...

FERDINAND: You don't think she's possessed by the devil, do you?

SICK GIRL: [*Groaning*] Go away – leave me alone!

GIRLS: It's the Devil! She's seen the Devil! Give her your blessing, Father!

COLUMBUS *puts a handkerchief in the GIRL's mouth.*

FRIAR: I've already blessed her, but it hasn't helped; we're going to have to take her to a church... we need holy water.

FERDINAND: Oh well done! Great idea – bringing devils into the Queen's bedroom!

ISABELLA: Will you be quiet, dear! I wonder if it could be epilepsy? [*She turns to one of her MAIDS*] Go and get the doctor.

The GIRL leaves.

COLUMBUS: We're going to need two bowls, one with hot water – boiling – and the other one cold. [*One of the MAIDS goes to get the bowls*] Thank you.

ISABELLA: What was that that you put in her mouth?

COLUMBUS: A handkerchief, so that she doesn't bite her tongue.

ISABELLA: So you think it might be epilepsy too?

COLUMBUS: No. I would say it's probably a hysterical fit...

ISABELLA: A hysterical fit...?

COLUMBUS: Father, would you mind going downstairs a moment? In the mule's saddlebag there should be a box with some small bottles. Could you bring it up for me?

FRIAR: [*He takes a couple of steps, but then stops, visibly worried*] Hang on, that mule kicks... I don't want to end up with a hoof in my guts...

COLUMBUS: Alright then, walk backwards when you're going up to her, and that way she'll think you're leaving.

FRIAR: Oh, what a good idea! Excellent! If you'll excuse me...

He bows to ISABELLA.

ISABELLA: Go ahead, Father, go ahead.

The FRIAR leaves.

MAID: Here's the bowl with the hot water.

COLUMBUS: [*Taking it*] Good, now we need to...

MAID: Look out, it's hot.

COLUMBUS: What's hot?

MAID: The bowl's hot.

COLUMBUS: [*He suddenly registers the fact*] Oo-ouch!

Automatically he passes the bowl to another of the MAIDS, as if playing netball. The bowl finishes up in ISABELLA's hands.

ISABELLA: It's not hot at all.

MAID: Correct, Majesty. That's the one with the cold water. *This* is the one with the hot water.

COLUMBUS: Ah. Excellent. Give it to me.

MAID: Watch out, it's hot.

COLUMBUS: Hot?

MAID: Yes, hot.

COLUMBUS: Ooouch! [*He puts the bowl on the stomach of the prostrate GIRL. She starts screaming.*] Yes, it's hot. I know, it's hot. [*The GIRL screams more shrilly*] Alright, we've got the message. It's hot. That'll do! No need to scream the house down. [*He points to the bowl containing the cold water*] Would you mind damping her forehead?

MAID: Let me do it.

SICK GIRL: Go away! Leave me alone!

COLUMBUS: And that brazier down there, by her feet.

ISABELLA: [*As one of the MAIDS goes to get the brazier*] What are you trying to do? Roast her?!

COLUMBUS: No, I just want to burn a bit of incense. Do you have any incense?

ISABELLA: [*She goes to her casket, takes out incense and hands it to him*] I have some sandalwood too, if you need it. Here!

COLUMBUS: Thanks.

FERDINAND: I hope this isn't witchcraft!

ISABELLA: Oh do shut up!

COLUMBUS: [*He takes a small book from his pocket, and begins to read. He walks slowly round the table on which the GIRL is lying. As he passes the brazier, he throws on incense*]

Erubuit: Decet alba quidem pudor ora, sed iste,
 si simules, prodest; verus obesse solet.
Cum bene deiectis gremium spectabis ocellis,
 quantum quisque ferat, respiciendus erit.
Forsitan immundae...
Labitur occulte fallitque volatilis aetas
et celer admissis labitur Annus equis.....[*Latin Verse*]

MAIDS: [*In chorus*] Amen.

FRIAR: [*He re-enters, holding a wooden box*] Is this the box?

COLUMBUS: Yes. Thank you. [*He pulls a phial out of the box*] Would you mind helping the lass take a sniff?

ISABELLA: Give it to me. Fetch a seat for the Father!

FRIAR: No, no thank you. I can't sit down.

ISABELLA: You can't sit down? Why?

FRIAR: Some mules have no respect...

He backs off, bending double. ISABELLA takes the phial. She removes the stopper and puts the bottle under the sick GIRL's nose.

COLUMBUS: Not too close; it makes you sneeze.

ISABELLA: [*Taking a sniff*] Makes you sneeze? Aaaa... aaa...! Goodness... [*The QUEEN is about to sneeze, but one of the LADIES IN WAITING sneezes in her place*] Thank you, dear.

MAID: Your servant, majesty.

FERDINAND: Me too, me too...! [*He takes the phial*] I do enjoy a good sneeze... [*He takes a sniff and begins a sneeze. Then, with an effort, he stops himself. He looks worried*] I say, Father, it isn't a sin, is it?

FRIAR: I don't know, but I wouldn't think so.

COLUMBUS: If anything, sneezing frees us from the bad humours in our bodies.

FRIAR: And also from the Devil.

FERDINAND: Down with the Devil!

COLUMBUS *gives the FRIAR a sniff. He then takes a sniff himself, and passes the phial to ISABELLA. She takes a sniff, and so do her LADIES. There is a chorus of sneezes, in alternating rhythm, which finally ends up like the E... E... E... prior to a three-part harmony.*

SICK GIRL: [*Coming round*] Oh goodness, what happened?!

ISABELLA: Nothing, nothing, we were just sneezing... Don't get up, dear, you're ill.

COLUMBUS: No, no, let her get up: she's better now. What did I tell you? It was just a fit.

ISABELLA: Oh well done! But are you a doctor?

COLUMBUS: No, majesty, I am a simple sailor. But you know how it is: a sailor needs to know how to handle these little problems.

FERDINAND: Well done! You've done more than just 'handle' it... Reciting psalms in Latin, eh!

COLUMBUS: You're too kind.

FERDINAND: Don't be modest.

COLUMBUS: You're too kind.

FERDINAND: Are you the chap from Genoa who was asking to speak with me?

COLUMBUS: I am he...

ISABELLA: Christopher Columbus...

COLUMBUS: Cristobal Colon, as I am known in these parts.

FERDINAND: Good, good, well done... Christopher Christobal. I have to go down, they're waiting for me.

COLUMBUS: Farewell, majesty.

FERDINAND: Yes, yes... We may see each other again. Listen, Father, why don't you come down with me? A bit of company, with those toadies I have to put up with...

FRIAR: Willingly... Excuse me... Your Highness...

The QUEEN nods her assent.

FERDINAND: [*To the FRIAR*] I say, your man from Genoa is a pretty smart chap! [*To ISABELLA.*] See you later, Isabella.

ISABELLA: Later, my little winkle.

FERDINAND: [*Irritated*] Look, stop it, will you...? Now you're even doing it in front of strangers... You're evil.

ISABELLA: Alright, alright, I'm evil. But for a start, you can put down that gold medallion you just picked up. It's mine.

FERDINAND: You see...! She never misses a chance to humiliate me...! In front of all these people, too...!

COLUMBUS: [*Lost in thought, bowing to the KING as he leaves*] Your winkleship... I mean your majesty!

ISABELLA: Do sit down, Columbus. I presume it was the Friar who told you that His Majesty is a sucker for mumbo-jumbo, specially in Latin...?

COLUMBUS: I don't understand, your Highness... really...

ISABELLA: [*With a hint of a ironic smile*] You don't, eh? So why are you blushing...? Don't worry, I'm not upset... In fact, I must say that I'm really rather partial to actors. [*A trifle treacherously*] Why did you read out that exorcism?

COLUMBUS: It wasn't an exorcism, madame, but a prayer.

ISABELLA: A prayer... by Ovid?

COLUMBUS: [*Amazed*] You recognised it?!

ISABELLA: Of course. [*She recites the verses, at an easy pace*]

The young girl blushes
Modesty calls for a pale face,
and it will suit you best if you feign it.

In fact, the less credible that the truth is...

COLUMBUS: Exactly. But how do you know it?

ISABELLA: A suitor of mine once taught it to me. I thought it was a love song, but then I discovered that it was part of the advice given to an apprentice prostitute by a brothel keeper.

COLUMBUS: Now that, I promise you, I never realised.

ISABELLA: I like your style, Columbus. That was clever, the way you engineered your entrance. You know, I like men with imagination, men with new ideas, not fixed ideas.

COLUMBUS: Well, your Highness. If you'll permit me, that's exactly why I am here. A big idea. And if you'll be good enough to hear me out...

ISABELLA: What is this idea? I'm all ears.

COLUMBUS: To get to India. By sea. But going the other way round.

ISABELLA: In other words, following the African coastline. King John of Portugal has already thought of that...

COLUMBUS: No, I'm not talking about going round Africa. I'm talking about a much shorter route to the Indies. Aiming out across the Western Sea, and getting to the Indies by the back way...

Enter two HERALDS, with the arras/curtain from previously. They set it up as before. Two LADIES IN WAITING join with COLUMBUS and ISABELLA in singing and miming the following song:

LADIES IN WAITING AND HERALDS: Happily, Columbus tell his tale;
Isabella is wrapt and enchanted.
She feels already as if she is at sea with him.
Wave after wave sweeps up
and around her, the room spins.

ISABELLA AND LADIES IN WAITING:

"Oh, Columbus, tell us do,
Why is it that on the bottom part of the world
Which is all upside down,
The sea doesn't fall out, and the people too?"

COLUMBUS *takes a bucket and acts out his explanation in dance form.*

COLUMBUS:

"Take a bucket with water in it.
If you swing it, the water stays in.

It's not a very precise example,
But it's effective, when you see it staying in."

The GIRLS enter with a lighted candle and an apple.

LADIES IN WAITING AND HERALDS: Now explain the eclipse of the sun.

COLUMBUS: Here, you see, the sun is a candle.
And the earth becomes an apple,
And the moon is your beautiful breast.

LADIES IN WAITING AND HERALDS: It's already late and Columbus is still talking:

COLUMBUS: In the lands of Asia...

HERALDS: ...he says...

COLUMBUS: ...there is a bird, phoenix by name,
with a face like a splendid woman.
Feathers of gold, of silver and diamonds:
the man who can catch it will be happy indeed.

ALL:

As they listened to him, they felt happy,
As if laid out on the grass,
After having had a good drink and made love,
With a woman resting on her side.

HERALDS AND LADIES IN WAITING: But it's still a daft way to get to the Indies.

COLUMBUS: Isabella's fallen asleep, so it's goodnight bucket, until tomorrow.

COLUMBUS sees that the QUEEN has fallen asleep. He bows, and as he moves off he trips over the bucket and blows the candle out. The lights go out.

Trumpets sound. The lights come up again. As previously, the HERALDS remove the arras/curtain. COLUMBUS is sitting in the centre arch, like a prisoner on trial.

The KING and QUEEN are sitting in two armchairs. Next to ISABELLA is a bench. On it are a number of wooden hands, each portraying a different hand gesture, one with fingers splayed, one with a finger pointing, etc. ISABELLA is holding one with a pointing index finger, as if pointing at someone.

Other benches are occupied by scholarly GENTLEMEN and THEOLOGIANS. One of them is closely questioning COLUMBUS. He is followed by a SERVANT carrying an umbrella on the end of a long pole.

FIRST LAWYER: My dear Columbus, or Colom, or Colon... or whatever you call yourself. You

state that you have captained vessels engaged on, shall we say, trade and commerce. Might I ask, did you also engage in piracy?

COLUMBUS: [*Without losing his composure*] Indeed I have. Yes, I have been a pirate.

A murmur runs round the court-room.

ONE OF THE SPECTATORS: Hey! Columbus a pirate! I'd never heard that before!

COLUMBUS: Indeed. I was a privateer in the service of the Anjou family, during their War of Succession with the Kingdom of Naples. This involved me in attacking, capturing, and, dare I say, plundering Aragonese ships...

FERDINAND: Uncle Alfonso's ships, eh? Serves him right, the old stinker!

ISABELLA: Quiet, Ferdinando! [*The KING curls up as if withdrawing into himself, muttering*] That'll do! [*She raises the wooden hand with one finger to her lips, indicating to him to be quiet*] Ssssh...!

FIRST LAWYER: And did you perhaps also attack and plunder non-Aragonese ships?

ISABELLA: What's all this got to do with anything? Are we here to find about a new sea route to the Indies, or to cross-examine a chicken-thief?

FIRST LAWYER: A chicken thief? You're getting warm, Majesty! Ask our Genovese friend what he was doing on the corsair ship flying the French flag which, on the thirteenth of August 1476, off San Vicente, attacked a Genovese galleon which was carrying 5,000 tons of grain and 3,000 head of live poultry!

FERDINAND: Oh I say... Chickens in bulk, eh?

Seeing the QUEEN's reaction coming, he withdraws into himself almost to the point of disappearing.

ISABELLA: Will you shut up!

She gives him a slap with the wooden hand.

FIRST LAWYER: Unfortunately for these plunderers, the galleon caught fire, and as a result, both attackers and the attacked were roasted alive, along with 3,000 assorted chickens, ducks and capons.

A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE: Oh God, this is making me hungry!

FIRST LAWYER: Our Columbus was one of the few to get out alive. Now, just think. [*He addresses the SERVANT with the umbrella, who has absentmindedly stopped and left him uncovered*] Wake up, man! [*The SERVANT follows after him again*] What are we to think of a man who happily goes about attacking the ships of his own fellow countrymen? What are we to call a man who sends his own brothers to death by burning... ?

A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE: The Head of the Inquisition!

EXECUTIONER: [*Sticking his head out from the wings*] Who said that? Who said that...?

FIRST LAWYER: [*Pointing to the prisoner playing COLUMBUS*] It was him!

EXECUTIONER: The prisoner? Ha, ha. Alright, carry on, because he's for the ... [*He motions with his hand to indicate chopping his head off*] ...chop anyway!

He returns to the wings.

FIRST LAWYER: [*Pointing to the prisoner playing COLUMBUS*] What are we to think of a man so devoid of love for his fatherland?

FERDINAND: [*Waxing rhetorical, rising to his feet*] Indeed, indeed! The fatherland is like a mother! [*He signals to the YOUNG MAN with the umbrella to follow him*] Now, as we know, a man who does not love his mother is either a son of a you-know-what and so can hardly be blamed... Or he's an orphan... And, as such, we feel pity for the poor fellow... But we can hardly go appointing the chap admiral, just because he's socially deprived. The Navy isn't an orphanage, you know!

The QUEEN tugs at his arm to make him sit down.

ISABELLA: Quiet, Ferdinando! Come here. Sit down and shut up. [*To COLUMBUS*] Columbus, you stand accused of being a traitor! Step up and defend yourself, or you can kiss the Indies goodbye.

COLUMBUS: But what can I say?! This is all a pack of lies! At San Vicente Point, I was not *with* the pirates. I was on the galleon that was attacked!

FIRST LAWYER: Oh yes, that's right, he was with the hens... Or rather, no, with the cocks, but dressed as a capon!

All the LAWYERS laugh. Their laughter transforms into a clucking noise. COLUMBUS joins them, imitating the sound of a chicken, and answering them. This episode ends with FERDINAND letting out a shrill laugh, reminiscent of the cock-a-doodle-doo of a cockerel.

FERDINAND: [*Laughing, speaking to COLUMBUS*] That was good. I liked that.

COLUMBUS: A cheap joke, I'm afraid, Highness.

FERDINAND: Well, I'm sorry to have to go, but I'm afraid I have to leave you.

He gets up to leave.

ISABELLA: What do you mean, darling?

FERDINAND: Duty calls, dear. [*ISABELLA changes wooden hands. She takes one with the*

fingers extended, and offers it for him to kiss] I'm off to the Siege of Malaga! But please, do carry on...No, don't bother getting up.

He goes up onto the gallows scaffold. From the beams are hanging an armoured breastplate, a helmet, shoulder pieces and the other bits comprising a suit of armour.

SERVANTS *help the KING to dress. By the end, he looks like a sort of armour-plated puppet.*

ISABELLA: To the Siege of Malaga?

ALL: *[In chorus] Evviva! Evviva! The Moors are in Malaga! [Brief pause] Death to the Infidel! Hooray!*

ISABELLA: War again?

CHORUS: Yes!

ISABELLA: But what are you trying to do, bankrupt us?

CHORUS: Death to the heathens!

ISABELLA: Aren't you satisfied that we're up to our necks in debt already?!

CHORUS: Moors are heathens!

FERDINAND: Don't be silly, darling. Relax. And just let me get on with my war.

ISABELLA: Oh yes, relax, relax! I can see I'm not going to get a new dress this month either.

FERDINAND: I wouldn't say so, necessarily. This time I've got a group of businessmen from Pisa and Genoa financing me. If I take Malaga, they've promised me a lot of money, and so you'll get more than just a dress... It's high time I provided you with a home!

ISABELLA: I wish I could believe you... Goodbye, Ferdinando, goodbye, and please, don't go playing the hero, especially when they start chucking the boiling oil...

FERDINAND: Don't worry, dear.

He exits, mounted on two wooden poles, which the HERALDS carry on their shoulders.

ISABELLA: Don't forget to write... And watch out for the Malaga girls... You know you're allergic to them!

ALL: *[In chorus] Evviva! Evviva! The Moor is in Malaga. [Pause] Death to the Heathens... Yes!*

A large globe is carried onstage. A second LEARNED GENTLEMAN takes up the questioning.

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Alright, alright, I'm prepared to believe that the earth is

spherical... I'll even agree that, in theory, if you head westwards, you might even reach the Indies... But you've still got to cross the sea.

ALL: *[In chorus]* And what a sea!

FERDINANDO *comes on-stage, accompanied by two STANDARD-BEARERS with staves and drums. From the other side of the stage, enter the SARACEN. He too is armed with a long stave. The two ENSIGNS beat rhythmically on their drums as counterpoint to the following speeches. The KING and the SARACEN fight.*

THE TWO ENSIGNS: "Ferdinando went with his army and laid siege to the city of Malaga. The king heaped fire and destruction on it. But the Moor was strong, and inflicted a hundred wounds! Heads were rolling and bodies bleeding; on all sides the crescent moon and the cross were slaughtering each other."

FERDINAND: *[Stopping the fighting]* But now we are tired. Let's stop for a breather. *[Both he and the SARACEN pause for breath, panting]* Ah, ha... and now we fight again, harder than before. *[The two ENSIGNS now fight]* The sound of clashing metal, the clatter of pikes, the thud of clubs, the rattle of armour, and the laments of women.

A MOORISH WOMAN *shows her face over the the top of the tower and lets out a little scream.*

FIRST ENSIGN: *[Looking at the WOMAN]* Hey – not bad!

SECOND ENSIGN: *[As he runs him through]* Ha, ha, I'll say...!

FERDINAND: But now we're exhausted. We shout...

ENSIGN: Pax!

FERDINAND: Pax! Everyone stop! Tomorrow's a holiday. And the plague's broken out.

Exit the KING and the SOLDIERS. The LEARNED GENTLEMEN continue in the same epic vein as before.

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: The ancient writers say that beyond the horizon of the Western Sea...

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Which is called the Ocean...

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: As if by magic, *[Roll of drums]* huge chasms appear, and *[Roll of drums]* whirlpools appear, and *[Roll of drums]* smoking swamps, like boiling pitch... and that fearsome sea screeches and vomits up all kinds of horrible things...

OTHER LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Craters open up spitting forth showers of lava...

The entire CHORUS lets out a gasp.

FIRST LEARNED GENTLEMAN: A spray of foam which swells like an enormous balloon... and another... and another... Enormous, swelling balloons, bigger even than clouds... And then, all of a sudden, a big bang!

There is a crash on the drums.

THREE LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*In chorus*] Sufficient to destroy even the largest of ships.

We return to Malaga. The drums comment on the action.

FERDINAND AND STANDARD BEARERS: Death! Death! Pestilence and plague! Rabies and scabies! And even one case of amoebic dysentery!

STANDARD BEARERS: And bedbugs. And fleas. And lice!

FERDINAND: Even on our flags!

STANDARD BEARERS: What a joke of a war!

FERDINAND: Three months we've been running this siege! I've had to pawn my trousers to pay my soldiers... This war's a joke!

STANDARD BEARERS: [*Aside*] This king's a joke!

They exit, marching in time with the drum.

COLUMBUS: If I might be permitted to speak...

EXECUTIONER: [*Who had played the part of one of the LEARNED GENTLEMEN. Whispering to COLUMBUS*] What do you think? How was I?

COLUMBUS: You are the best actor that I've ever seen.

EXECUTIONER: Do I get to play the love scene later on?

COLUMBUS: Ssssh!

ISABELLA: Silence!

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Ssssh!

COLUMBUS: If you'll permit me... I have been to see that sea. I have been up as far as the furthest lands, which are called Thule... or Iceland.

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Well, what did you see?

COLUMBUS: I have seen everything. [*As COLUMBUS is speaking, enter a LEARNED GENTLEMAN with a shaggy beard and a scary face. COLUMBUS takes fright for a moment*] Well, almost everything... No smoking vapours on the horizon, though... In those lands, I saw

sciapods!

ISABELLA: Sciapods? What's a sciapod?

COLUMBUS: They are men, your Majesty, with just one leg and just one foot.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: And the women?

COLUMBUS: The women too, unfortunately... They're built a bit like mermaids, except that instead of ending in a fishtail and flippers, they end in a great big foot!

FIRST LEARNED GENTLEMAN: And how do they walk?

COLUMBUS: They don't walk, they hop...

FIRST LEARNED GENTLEMAN: [*With mocking irony*] Ho, ho, ho! Hopping indeed! How's that, then?

COLUMBUS: [*He hits him on the foot with a stick*] Like this! [*The LEARNED GENTLEMAN lets out a yell and starts hopping around on one leg*] ...There you go... perfect... My compliments...

Everybody laughs.

ISABELLA: Don't push your luck, Columbus...

COLUMBUS: Beg pardon, Highness. [*He continues, warming to his theme*] In those lands I also came across the Nasaloids. Men, with enormous noses. [*He stares at the enormous nose of one of the LEARNED GENTLEMEN*] So large in fact, that in order to blow their noses, the poor devils were forced to use huge sheets, bed sheets, double bed sheets, in fact...

ISABELLA: [*Indicating disgust*] Ugh!

COLUMBUS: [*Playing it down*] Well, *small* double beds...

ISABELLA: Oh, how absolutely horrible... Please, stop it.

COLUMBUS: Forgive me, Highness. I can see that when I speak of sheets it distresses you.

ISABELLA: No, no, you don't have to apologise. The fact is that I am... How can I put it... Ah yes... I'm pregnant.

Enter the three LADIES IN WAITING. They support the QUEEN and walk her round the scaffold/platform. Each time round, the QUEEN's belly swells visibly and her walk changes with her increasing pregnancy.

ALL: [*In chorus, while the two ENSIGNS beat the drum*] Evviva! Evviva! The Queen's had a baby. [*Brief pause*] Long live the King! Three cheers for the Father!

ONE OF THE LEARNED GENTLEMEN: May we get back to our discussion? But I must ask you, given the delicate state of our Queen, to use rather more genteel terminology and only describe nice things. And if anyone starts talking about noses, then I'll break his.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Is it allowed to talk about women?

LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*Consulting together*] No.

COLUMBUS: Would I be permitted to talk about swallows?

LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*Consulting together*] What kind of swallows?

COLUMBUS: Normal swallows... without noses.

LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*Consulting together*] Permission granted.

ISABELLA *re-enters. She sits down, lovingly supported by her LADIES IN WAITING. With her, one of the STANDARD BEARERS also enters, with a guitar. At a signal from COLUMBUS, he begins playing, to provide a musical backdrop to what he has to say. As and when COLUMBUS indicates, he plays more intensely.*

COLUMBUS: Thank you. This autumn, I was standing on the beach at Palos, facing the ocean and watching the swallows leaving. And where were they going? They were flying, precisely, westwards. Towards that horizon beyond which, according to our learned friend, there is nothing but flames, billowing smoke and volcanoes belching...

He stops in his tracks, aware of their looks of disapproval.

ISABELLA: Ugh!

LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Hey, no! Tut, tut!

COLUMBUS: Belching, but putting a hand in front of their mouths. In short, an inferno. And how could you expect poor little swallows to fly through a stinking pit like that? The fact is that this inferno does not exist, and has never existed. Instead, there is a paradise, an eternal spring: that same spring which those swallows bring back to us in April, when they return.

ISABELLA: Oh well done, Columbus, well done! I never knew you were a poet. Go ahead, tell me more about these swallows...

COLUMBUS: Willingly.

CHIEF LEARNED GENTLEMAN: I too would like permission to speak, if I may.

ISABELLA: About swallows?

The second round begins.

CHIEF LEARNED GENTLEMAN: About swallows too.

ISABELLA: Without noses, I hope.

CHIEF LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Yes, Majesty, without noses.

ISABELLA: Permission granted.

She exits.

CHIEF LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Anyway, gentlemen, you may find it strange, but I...
[*Speaking to the GUITARIST, who is attempting to accompany him musically*] Oh, do stop it, will you...! You may find it strange, gentlemen, but I am in agreement with Columbus.

OTHER LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Hey, no!

COLUMBUS: Oh, *thank* you.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Don't mention it. It is true that beyond the horizon there is no such inferno.

COLUMBUS: There you go, no inferno.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Nor chasms.

COLUMBUS: Nor chasms.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Nor exploding balloons.

COLUMBUS: Nor exploding...

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: But in fact a sea which is identical to that which we already know.

COLUMBUS: Could you repeat that, please.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN AND COLUMBUS: A sea which is identical to that which we already know.

COLUMBUS: Wonderful!

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: And definitely much larger.

COLUMBUS: Obviously, much larger.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Definitely deeper.

COLUMBUS: Deeper, obviously.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: And probably with larger fish.

Enter the QUEEN, looking pregnant. A bed is brought on-stage, and ISABELLA goes to lie on it.

COLUMBUS: Thank you, thank you.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Don't mention, it, Columbus. I agree with you...

COLUMBUS: You see, he agrees with me.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: ...that it is possible to reach the Indies by heading westwards. However, not in a month, as you believe.

COLUMBUS: Not in a month?

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: No, sir. If you compare the average speed of a ship with that of a swallow... [*Pointing to a chair*] Please, sit down. [*COLUMBUS sits down*] ...you find that it would take at least four months to cover that distance.

COLUMBUS: Four months?

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Precisely. And now, pray tell me, what king has a ship so splendidly fitted out and with such an amazing crew as to be able to last four months at sea, with no ports to call at for food and fresh drinking water? Not to mention the problem of women.

ONE OF THE LADIES IN WAITING: Could you keep your voices down, please. The Queen is trying to sleep.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Alright, alright. Perhaps we could take this opportunity, then, to discuss this blessed problem of the women?

In subdued tones, they continue discussing around the bed, and absentmindedly begin using the QUEEN's distended belly as if it is a globe of the world.

COLUMBUS: Listen, I'm not just boasting, but I have seen with my own eyes the map which Toscanelli, the greatest scientist in the world... [*The LEARNED GENTLEMAN who wanted to discuss the problem of women makes a gesture of disappointment*] As I was saying, the greatest scientist in the world... Toscanelli had drawn that specifically... [*As they pass by ISABELLA's bed, they all bow*] He had drawn that specifically... [*Another bow*] He had drawn... [*Another bow*] He had drawn that map specifically for King John the Second of Portugal. Well now, that map was accompanied by a note in his own hand, which completely supported my theory. In other words, the Indies were to be found at a maximum of 25 or 26 days' sailing after leaving the Canaries and pointing westwards. In other words, a quarter. The distance is one quarter of the entire circumference of the world. In other words, only 640 leagues. [*In the heat of the moment, he prods the QUEEN's belly with his forefinger. She lets out a shriek*] Forgive me... Did I hurt you?

ISABELLA: No, it's not you... it's the labour pains... Please, would you withdraw.

Absentmindedly, COLUMBUS sits on the knee of one of the LEARNED GENTLEMEN.

ONE OF THE LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Ouch!

COLUMBUS: God, everyone seems to be having labour pains around here... the minute they put on a bit of weight...!

OTHER LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Could I ask you to show us the map, or at least a copy of it?

COLUMBUS: I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I was given the map on trust, and for me to have made a copy of it would have been stealing. I regret that I cannot help you, gentlemen; I am no thief.

Enter two STANDARD BEARERS, with drum.

STANDARD BEARERS: The truth of the matter is that Columbus was a thief. He'd had the map copied, but he didn't dare show it. Because otherwise, if King John got to hear of it, he'd have had him killed.

The LADIES IN WAITING, having previously arranged themselves around the QUEEN in order to hide her from the eyes of the audience, pull a large doll in swaddling clothes out of a big basket which had been brought onstage with the bed.

WOMEN: It's a boy! The baby's born! It's a boy!

They pass the newborn child to the LEARNED GENTLEMEN and exit with the QUEEN.

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Long Live the Infante! Let's have a 21 gun salute.
[Roll of drums] Hooray!

Pause. Another drum roll.

TWO STANDARD BEARERS: On the same day that the Infante was born, Malaga surrendered!

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Hooray! Hooray! Three cheers for the baby!

COLUMBUS and the LEARNED GENTLEMEN *pass the baby between them as if it were a rugby ball.*

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: [Retrieving the baby] Oh! Poor thing!

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Long live plunder and booty! Hooray!

Pause.

STANDARD BEARERS: But there *is* no plunder and booty! [Pause] The King's had it all away.

Pause.

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Oh, for goodness sake...

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: [*Unperturbed, pointing at the infant's head*] But don't you realise that when you talk about 640 leagues being a quarter of the circumference of the southern part of the globe, that would give us a globe whose bottom part measures 50 leagues less than the top part. In other words, according to you, the world looks like an upside down pear!!

Without thinking, he turns the baby upside down to illustrate his point.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: ...and we're not allowed to mention women.

ISABELLA: [*Entering and seeing what is going on*] Oh! For heaven's sake, man! That's no way to hold a baby! Poor little thing! There, there, there. [*She rocks it in her arms for a moment, and then passes it to one of the girls, turning it upside down as she does so*] Take him away.

COLUMBUS: I never said that the difference between the two halves was as big as that. Anyway, what makes you so sure that the world really isn't pear-shaped?

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: [*Running towards the group standing around the QUEEN*] Listen to that! Columbus is claiming that the world is shaped like a pear!

The LEARNED GENTLEMAN leans out from the platform in such a way as to lose his balance. He ends up literally horizontal, his feet on the scaffold platform and his hands clutching a long pole.

ISABELLA: [*To the accompaniment of jeers and guffaws*] Do you think so? Oh now really! Columbus, I'm afraid that's going a bit far...

FIRST LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Gentlemen, I have had enough. I am leaving!

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Me too. Four years now, we've had to put up with this charlatan's ravings!

COLUMBUS: Who are you calling charlatan? Would you mind stepping outside...?

ISABELLA: Gentlemen, silence! It is indeed four years. And now all get back to your seats, because nobody has yet given the order to adjourn. Listen, Columbus, would you be in a position to demonstrate to us your claim that the earth is slightly, how shall I say... pearoid?

COLUMBUS: Pearoid...? Yes, perhaps if we were to apply the theory of projected shadows, using a pear and a light source, a light source which projects the shadow of the pear, leaving the pear intact. [*To one of the LADIES IN WAITING*] Could you please get me a pear?

SPECTATOR: Ah, it's time for Columbus's famous experiment with the pear... Where he stands it on its end...

COLUMBUS *takes a candle.*

SECOND SPECTATOR: Yes, I know, I've heard about it too. But it's a trick. The pear isn't raw. He boils it first.

A SOLDIER: Silence, please.

COLUMBUS: Please, could you possibly get me a pear?

He takes a mirror.

GIRL: Raw or cooked?

COLUMBUS: It doesn't matter, either way.

GIRL: Anyone else want a pear?

Enter FERDINANDO with the baby in his arms, followed by the LADIES IN WAITING. He hands them the baby, before speaking.

CHIEF LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Personally speaking, I'd prefer a cheese roll...!

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: No, I'm sorry, your majesty, I refuse to be a party to exhibitions which are only worthy of a sideshow at some fairground. I refuse to accept that I am an inhabitant of a pear: Madame, I am not a maggot.

FERDINAND: Well, God bless the little maggots. Excuse me, Isabella, but duty calls. I have to go and conquer Baza.

ISABELLA: Baza too? Oh no you're not!

FERDINAND: Oh yes I am!

ISABELLA: Oh no you're not!

STANDARD BEARERS: [*As before, forcefully, and with a roll on the drum*] Evviva! Evviva! For Christ, King and Country! Hooray!

LEARNED GENTLEMEN AND COLUMBUS: Oh no you're not!

FERDINAND AND STANDARD BEARERS: Oh yes we are!

As they exit.

LEARNED GENTLEMEN AND COLUMBUS: No you're not...!

FERDINAND AND STANDARD BEARERS: Yes we are...!

LEARNED GENTLEMEN AND COLUMBUS: Oh all right, then!

ISABELLA: Friends, if I might interrupt your discussions for a moment, I say that it's time we put a bit of faith in our dear Columbus.

COLUMBUS: Thank you, Majesty.

ISABELLA: Leaving aside his excellent scientific arguments, there is also the fact, and do not forget it, that he is willing to risk his own life by going on this voyage.

COLUMBUS: In person, even!

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Yes, but he's also going to be risking the ships that we give him... And the lives of the sailors...

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Not to mention the women...

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Where do women come into it?! As I was saying, the sailors... whose wife and mothers would hold us responsible if anything happened to them.

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: See, women! I told you women come into it! Women always come into it.

FIRST LEARNED GENTLEMAN: "Murderers," they would cry. "What have you done with our sons, our husbands...?"

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Our fathers...

FIRST LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Our brothers...

LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Not to mention...

The LEARNED GENTLEMEN take up grotesquely theatrical poses and postures, culminating in unison with:

LEARNED GENTLEMEN: Women...

ISABELLA: [*With irony*] Well done! You've convinced me! But I notice you weren't arguing the same way last week, and the week before, when you saw our soldiers marching off to Baza to be slaughtered by the Saracens? [*SOLDIERS fence and fight their way across the stage. One of them dies in the arms of the SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN. Together they form a strange monument*] I didn't hear you worrying about what we were going to tell the wives and mothers of *those* poor devils.

CHIEF LEARNED GENTLEMAN: But this is a holy war. Spain is fighting for its life!

Enter several SOLDIERS, bearing the body of another on two poles. They are preceded and followed by men and women dressed in cloaks and hoods.

ISABELLA: Oh yes? And when it comes to divvying up the plunder, do we send a share to the

widows? Do we send the orphans a share of the profits of the slave trade? And what about the port taxes...? And the excise duties...? Who benefits from them? Come on, speak up! *We're* the ones who benefit. And the widows, nix! We just send them down to church to light memorial candles and to mutter their 'R.I.P.'s. Alright, then: this expedition to find the Indies is also a holy war for Spain... as above. In other words, for us, because if we don't hurry up and find, as quickly as possible, a way of unhooking our trade from the Turkish blockade, then we'll all go under. So I say it's worth the risk of giving Columbus a couple of ships, even if they do sink.

COLUMBUS: Thank you, Highness!

Enter two HERALDS, with drums.

HERALDS: Victory! Victory! Baza has fallen. They've surrendered.

FERDINAND: [*Entering*] I took it! I took it!

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*Absentmindedly*] Evviva! Evviva! For God and King! [*They pause*] Hooray!

FERDINAND: Today the whole of Christianity rejoices, because...

ISABELLA: [*Irritated*] Ferdinando! If you don't mind, I was in the middle of saying something.

FERDINAND: I think I've got a right to...

ISABELLA: Don't interrupt, Ferdinand. It's bad manners.

FERDINAND: It's you who shouldn't be interrupting me.

ISABELLA: Me? I'll speak to you when we get home.

FERDINAND: For the holy Cross we fought, and under the Cross we won...!

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*Their cheers are becoming noticeably feebler*] Evviva! Evviva! For God and King! Hooray!

ISABELLA: Poor cross, what a multitude of sins you have to bear... [*Decisively, pulling herself together*] Anyway, don't say I didn't warn you. The party will soon be over! Soon you won't be able to use the pretext of "holy crusades" to go out capturing choice little black boys and girls and flogging them off all over Europe...

CHIEF LEARNED GENTLEMAN: I say, that's going a bit far.

ISABELLA: A bit far?! Haven't we even sent them to the Vatican!?

FIRST LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Yes, but we *gave* them to the Vatican!

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: One hundred young lads, all around the age of 18, to be

precise, who were then shared out among the bishops and cardinals.

EXECUTIONER: [*Dressed as a LEARNED GENTLEMAN*] That's a lie! Who says so? Heresy! Burn him at the stake! Dirty liar! Hang him!

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Who's a dirty liar? I'm only telling you what the historian says.

EXECUTIONER: Which historian?

SECOND LEARNED GENTLEMAN: Las Casas. Bishop Las Casas.

EXECUTIONER: Bishop...? Ah, um... Forget I said that!

He disappears again.

ISABELLA: Please, will you stop interrupting me, when I'm acting!

SPECTATORS: Yes, quite right.

ISABELLA: [*Returning to her regal tone of voice*] As I was saying... soon you're going to run out of pretexts... There's not many Moors left in Spain now – just a few in Granada...

FERDINAND: [*Leaping to his feet*] Of course, Granada! I'd almost forgotten Granada!

STANDARD BEARERS: Evviva! Evviva! For God and King! To Granada!

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*Barely audible*] Evviva! Evviva! Long live the liberation of Granada! Hooray! Even at the last you will be liberated, Granada!

They exit.

COLUMBUS: But you're going to have to hurry, because before long it won't be so easy for you to say: 'Well, things may be going badly, but it's not our fault... it's the fault of the Moors... or of the Jews... of the greedy, grasping Jews.' No! That's not going to wash for much longer. Before long, they'll be wanting *your* heads too.

ISABELLA: [*She exits, followed by her LADIES IN WAITING*] And ours too, for God's sake!

COLUMBUS: And I'd say that day won't be long in coming.

VOICE: [*From behind the arras*] Now then, Columbus! Don't start on the politics.

COLUMBUS: We'll come to that later. When Granada has fallen.

STANDARD BEARERS: [*Entering, with drums*] Granada has fallen...! Evviva! Collapsed, capitulated and crushed!

CHORUS OF LEARNED GENTLEMEN: [*From off-stage*] For God and King! Hooray!

Enter all available actors and actresses, dressed as ordinary common people. From the platform, FERDINAND distributes alms like confetti. Many hands reach out to get it.

FERDINAND: [*Euphoric*] Double wages for all my soldiers this week! Two thousand rations of rye to the people, and the same to my horses... Gifts, gifts! A gift for you and another for you! And another for you... Here, my faithful people, take this, and eat... Here, pumpkin seeds, really good, you've no idea...!

COLUMBUS catches the bag. Four or five starvelings leap up to grab the food, and their movements suggest a dance. Two BEGGARS tussle with each other for the bag.

FIRST BEGGAR: It's mine! Let go. He gave it to me!

SECOND BEGGAR: Who says, you tramp!

COLUMBUS: [*Crunching seeds, while he speaks with his friend the MONK, who also chews the seeds*] Ha, ha! Look at them, fighting over a bag of pumpkin seeds... pretty lousy ones at that. If they'd only give me the chance, I'd bring them so much food, it'd make them sick! I'd come back with cartloads of the stuff... not to mention... [*At each pause, he spits out seed husks*] ...nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger... Ouch! Every time I say giner, I bite a finger. Kiss it better!

He offers a finger for the MONK to kiss.

MONK: [*Running off*] No!

EXECUTIONER: Hello. How was I as the learned gentleman? Was I good?

COLUMBUS: Very good. Come over here and change your costume, because in the next bit you're going to be a monk.

EXECUTIONER: I don't want to be a monk. I want to be in love!

COLUMBUS: Alright, you can be a monk in love!

They exit. At the end of the alms scene, as the common people are leaving the stage, enter ISABELLA. She sits on the right hand side of the small stage, and checks her accounts in a big accounting book.

ISABELLA: Hey, no...! There's a lot of money missing here... a lot...

FERDINAND: I assure you, dear, this time I haven't touched a thing. I promise you, on my own head.

ISABELLA: That's not much of a promise, is it, seeing it's half empty. Anyway, someone here is stealing... And not just one person: it's RIFE... Anyone would think we were in Ireland!

FERDINAND: Ireland? What's Ireland got to do with it...?

ISABELLA: Well I could hardly say Italy, could I... Too old hat.

FERDINAND: True. So, according to you, who's doing the stealing?

ISABELLA: I told you, it's *rife*.

FERDINAND: Well let's hold an inquiry, then.

ISABELLA: Oh yes, brilliant, an inquiry. Can you imagine how many big names an inquiry would drag up – even those who were conducting the inquiry – let alone ministers and that sort of thing...!

FERDINANDO: You're right. It is like being in Ireland!

ISABELLA: So you see, it'd be best to let sleeping dogs lie.

FERDINAND: I can't, though. It runs into millions.

ISABELLA: Write-off! Forget 'em!

FERDINAND: I've got debts, though. I've got an army to support.

ISABELLA: You'll have to find some other way.

FERDINAND: That's easy to say... [*Suddenly he has a bright idea*] We could give that Genovese a go, with his project... What's his name... ? Columbus.

COLUMBUS: [*Appearing, as if by magic*] You called, Majesty? I just happened to be passing, and I heard...

ISABELLA: Sit down; make yourself at home [*Continuing speaking as if COLUMBUS does not exist*] You might have an idea there.

FERDINAND: No, no, it's a silly idea...

COLUMBUS: Why?

FERDINAND: It'd take at least four months to get the ships fitted out.

COLUMBUS: [*Servile and hopeful*] I could do it in less, Majesty.

FERDINAND: [*As if not hearing COLUMBUS's words*] No, we need to find some cash *now*...

ISABELLA: Listen to me, issue an order for ships to be prepared for Columbus's trip.

COLUMBUS: [*Almost fainting with emotion*] Oh, Mamma... !

FERDINAND: And what about my urgent need for cash?

COLUMBUS: [*Aside*] Oh shut up, will you!

ISABELLA: This month we'll just have to make and mend.

COLUMBUS: [*Overjoyed, half aside*] What a wonderful woman, make and mend...!

FERDINAND: [*Sticking his head into the wings*]] Quintinilla!

QUINTINILLA *enters from the opposite side of the stage.*

QUINTINILLA: Here I am, Majesty.

FERDINAND: What were you doing behind that door?

QUINTINILLA: Oh nothing, just listening at the keyhole.

FERDINAND: [*Matter-of-fact*] So you already know what needs doing?

QUINTINILLA: Yes. It's a good keyhole.

FERDINAND: Good. Now, sort things out with Columbus. Find out what he needs, draw up the paperwork, and bring it to me.

ISABELLA: Make a good job of it, but get a move on.

COLUMBUS: Thank you, oh Queen of the Catholics. May Allah bless you.

He exits, with QUINTINILLA.

FERDINAND: Here we go again! I get the ideas, I give out the orders, and then they thank you.

ISABELLA: Ferdinando, how boring you are! Now, concentrate. Let's see where we're going to find the money to get us through this month.

FERDINAND: Why don't we double port duties and excise tax? Plus, we could slap a little customs duty on all transit goods.

ISABELLA: Brilliant! Have you thought about whose head this little hammer blow would fall on?

FERDINAND: Obviously, on the Venetians, and, more particularly, on the Genovese.

ISABELLA: Astounding! And do you know what I say? That if you try a stunt like that, at the very least, Pope Innocent the Eighth will send us a Bull of Excommunication and a little bottle of poison, with a request that we drink a glassful every morning at breakfast time.

FERDINAND: Why?

ISAELLA: Because the Pope's from Genoa too. And he just happens to be related to a whole tribe of shipowners, traders and bankers.

FERDINAND: Ouf! Damn, bloody Genovesi!

COLUMBUS *and* QUINTINILLA *enter and sit on the other side of the stage, opposite the KING and QUEEN.*

COLUMBUS: These are my requirements, Majesty. [*He reads from a sheet of paper.*
QUINTINILLA *notes his demands in long hand*] Upon reaching the coast of the Indies, I shall receive the golden spurs...

ISABELLA: I see I'm going to have to pawn my crown!

COLUMBUS: And a knighthood...

FERDINAND: There go my horses.

COLUMBUS: Sir Christopher Columbus. Sounds good, eh? I also think Admiral of the Fleet would be in order.

QUINTINILLA: Admiral of the Fleet.

ISABELLA: We'll have to sell the few ships we've got left.

COLUMBUS: Vice-regent of all the islands I discover...

ISABELLA: I've still got two daughters to marry off. Where am I going to find their dowry?!

COLUMBUS: Plus 15 per cent on the gold and on the sale of all the slaves that I acquire for you. We cannot accept customers' complaints in regard of defective slaves.

FERDINAND: Aha! The converted Jews... What do you think? They're all ever so rich; we'll force them to leave Spain, and then we can keep all their gold here.

ISABELLA: What an excellent idea. Well done, Ferdinando! Sometimes I'm amazed at you. You really have hit rock bottom, haven't you! Even your Neapolitan Uncle Alfonso wouldn't try a dirty stunt like that any more! Shame on you!

A MONK: [*Entering, breathless and excited, and with his arms outstretched*] A heresy! A heresy!

ISABELLA: [*To QUINTINILLA*] What's up?

QUINTINILLA: Oh nothing, Majesty. There's a bit of an argument between the monasteries: the Franciscans versus the Geronomites.

FERDINAND: Wait a minute – aren't the Geronomites almost all Jews?

ISABELLA: That's right. Jews who've converted to Christianity.

The first MONK is now joined by others, and then by a whole crowd, consisting of all the available actors.

ALL: Heresy! Heresy!

FIRST MONK: Heretics, heretics, they believe in the Apocrypha! Drive out the sinners!

SECOND MONK: *And they read Plato. And Aristotle. And even Lucian. And the Epicureans!*

A MAN: On the walls of their churches they have paintings of naked women!

SECOND MAN: [*Lecherously*] I like it, I like it! Where do we find these churches? Naked, eh?!

A MODERATE MAN: Don't get the wrong idea. They're not trollops, you know. They're all saints.

MAN: Naked?!

MODERATE MAN: Saints on their way to torment.

LEWD MAN: Naked!!

FIRST MONK: That's right. They're portrayed naked.

MODERATE MAN: Obviously. It was the pagan soldiers stripped them.

LEWD MAN: Bravo!

MODERATE MAN: Anyway, what's wrong with that...? Even the Pope has naked women painted on the ceilings of his churches in Rome. Mountains of them.

LEWD MAN: Long Live Mountains!

MODERATE MAN: But don't you know it's the Renaissance?

LEWD MAN: Long Live the Renaissance! And mountains!

ANOTHER MAN: Things are more progressive, now...

MODERATE MAN: Closed minds, when it comes to content – but when it comes to form – phew!

LEWD MAN: Correct. But just look at the domes! Popping up all over Rome, they are! One next to the other! So round, so curved. In Spain, as a minimum, they'd have put a screen in front of them, and probably a bra too! But the Italians barely even notice these things.

MONK: Oh yes? What about Savonarola, in Florence? He's burned *hundreds* of naked women.

LEWD MAN: Live naked women?

MONK: Well, pictures of naked women.

MEMBER OF THE CROWD: Down with naked women!

LEWD MAN: Shut up you, you're depraved! You know what, I reckon that Savonarola will come to a sticky end. I smell bonfires!

THE CROWD: Heresy! Heresy! Down with the False Christians! Out with the Jews! Out with the Extortioners! Give back the money you stole from us! Exploiters! Heathens! Imagine it, they eat fish all week, except Friday... and on Friday, they eat raw pork! Down with the false converts!

FERDINAND: [*As the CROWD exits*] There, you see! We didn't have to lift a finger. Providence is with us. Buck up, Isabella. Sign this decree, and then we can expel them. That way, we get their property.

ISABELLA: No, I couldn't. I'm a queen, me, not a son of a you-know-what.

FERDINAND: Are you implying that I, on the other hand...

ISABELLA: Where do you come into it?! You, poor thing, you were born an orphan. Who knows what your mother was? And anyway, you're a military man...

FERDINAND: [*Insulted*] What?

ISABELLA: Yes, I mean that certain things are open to you: rape, pillage, that sort of thing... Those are the ways of war. Then, afterwards, a few stirring words: Fatherland! Family! Morality! The blood so generously spilled by our sons... ! And there you go, back on your feet.

FERDINAND: You could add, back on our feet, but up to our necks in shit.

ISABELLA: Which of course is why military men like yourself always walk with their heads high. Here in Spain, of course, I mean...

QUINTINILLA: [*He enters, followed by COLUMBUS, and hands a sheet of parchment to the QUEEN*] Here you are, Majesty. Here are Columbus's requirements, if you'd care to take a look...

COLUMBUS: ...and then sign on the dotted line...

ISABELLA: Fine. Let's have a look.

So saying, she picks up her quill pen.

FERDINAND: No – wait. You should look at mine first.

He puts his own parchment down on the table, and removes that of COLUMBUS.

ISABELLA: [*Irritated*] I told you, no. Here's what I'll do with your stupid expropriation order...

She rips it up.

FERDINAND: Oh yes? Well then, this is what I'll do with your project for the Indies...

He rips up COLUMBUS's document.

COLUMBUS: [*In a state of consternation, picking up bits of paper, which have fallen like confetti all over the stage*] Hey, no! That's not fair! Why take it out on me? [FERDINANDO goes and sits in a corner of the stage] So what do I do now?

ISABELLA: Don't take it personally, Columbus. It would have had to be rewritten anyway. I could never have signed it with conditions like that.

COLUMBUS: Alright, why don't we just talk about it, then? Just show me the bits you don't like.

ISABELLA: But Columbus, don't you understand that now is not the moment? There's half a revolution going on. [*We hear shouting from off-stage*] Do you hear that din... And I'm supposed to stand here arguing about whether you get golden blooming spurs!

VOICES OFF-STAGE: Spain for the Spaniards! Defend our race! God is with us!

COLUMBUS: It's only the usual bunch of nutters.

FERDINAND: Nutters?! How dare you call the best part of our nation nutters? You should watch your words, my dear Columbus!

ISABELLA: And as for your "requirements": Vice Regent, plus 10 per cent on the slaves, 8 per cent on the gold If you like, I'll just abdicate, and you can marry Ferdinando... That way we can crown you queen, and have done with it.

COLUMBUS: Well, I didn't mean to... Perhaps you're right, I went a bit far... I was just thinking...

ISABELLA: There, well done: just think, go away and have a good think, and in a month or two, if I'm in the mood and assuming I have the time, we'll talk about it. Goodbye.

She makes as if to leave.

COLUMBUS: [*Distraught*] In a month or two? But I don't even know where I'll be in a month or two. Majesty, I don't want to overstress the point, but I am very horribly penniless. I don't have two cents to rub together.

FERDINAND: She's not the Social Security, you know.

ISABELLA: [To FERDINAND] Quiet, periwinkle! [Turning to COLUMBUS] Columbus, I would help you if I could. Unfortunately, I'm even worse off than you are. I don't know where I could find that kind of money.

FERDINAND: I suppose you really took me for the King of the Big Money?

ISABELLA: No, you're just the Joker that takes everything. Goodbye, Columbus... And pay attention to this: when you go down, if you happen to run into those "nutters", don't call them crazy, don't look down on them, but join them, and shout as loud as you can, because at this precise moment it's the only way to save us.

Exit ISABELLA and FERDINAND. Enter a number of fanatics, shouting, with sticks in their hands. . COLUMBUS and QUINTINILLA join in the chorus.

SONG OF THE DALLY, DALLY, DALLY, DALLY, DALLY.

*Dally, Dally, Dally, Dally, Dally, Dally,
Every now and then it gives a certain pleasure
To be able to kill someone,
To be able legally to let off
The envy of feeling yourself to be nobody.
Plunged as we are in wretchedness,
Come on, let us sing, let us cover, with raspberries,
This lament of animals on their knees:
Come on, let us tread them underfoot,
Come on, come on,
Let us tread them underfoot without pity.
Oh what a great invention is the enemy,
An enemy who is unarmed.
Let us thank whoever it was procured him for us,
Pointed him out and already beat him for us.
Let us thank the authorities,
With the forces of law and order in the streets
We are convinced that the world is a party,
That everything is made for us,
And that
Everything is made for us,
For us respectable people,
For us right-thinking people,
For us moralists,

For us conformists,
Because Christ died for us,
Because we had him killed,
But then we had him gilded,
And nailed on crosses of silver,
And raised him on our trophies and our shields,*

*Because, as we know, exceptions notwithstanding,
This will be the end of every poor Christ.*

At the end of the song, enter the two HERALDS, with drums, tending to drown out the shouting of the FANATICS. They try to gain the crowd's attention.

COLUMBUS: That Ferdinando's an idiot... Crook, wretch! He's ruined me, he has...

QUINTINILLA: Precisely! And what about that Queen of his? She pretends to be all heart, but that hasn't stopped her signing the decree for chasing out the Jews.

COLUMBUS: What? You're kidding!

QUINTINILLA: I'm not. They've got two months to get out. They're letting them sell anything they want, but they aren't allowed to take gold, silver or precious stones out of Spain.

COLUMBUS: That's a pretty pickle! So what do they get when they sell their houses, then?

HERALD: *[Up until this point he has been reading in a whisper; he now raises his voice]* You are entitled to trade your goods for sheep and mules, for goods manufactured locally, and for religious indulgences which can be obtained from the relevant church authorities.

ISABELLA: *[Entering from the back of the stage, with FERDINAND]* Please, remove that clause about the sale of indulgences. At once! It's too embarrassing...

FERDINAND: But, my dear, that's going to be worth something like 30 per cent.

ISABELLA: I don't care. I told you, I don't want it... *[She bursts into tears]* It's disgusting!

FERDINAND: Alright, alright: if you like we can also return all the money we've taken off them.

ISABELLA: Oh, well said! So what do we give our daughter, when she gets married next month, ugly little thing that she is...

FERDINAND: *[He puts his arm round her waist and leads her offstage]* Precisely! What a shame there are so few Jews to be driven out.

COLUMBUS: Poor sods! Where are they all going to end up?

QUINTINILLA: In Italy, most of them. Some of them have managed to get credit notes from Italian banks. They've sold their houses, land, everthing, at knock-down prices, to the Venetians and the Piedmontese.

COLUMBUS: So the only people who'll benefit from all this will be the Italians – all the Italians except me.

QUINTINILLA: Because you're half asleep, my boy. Do you know what I think? You're finished. You don't have the spirit you had when you first arrived here. Good God, you don't even tell your fancy stories any more!

COLUMBUS: To tell you the truth, I *do* have a little trick up my sleeve, but I reckon it's too risky.

QUINTINILLA: Listen, the position that you're in, what's one risk more or less? Anyway, history's great deeds are done by people under pressure – and you, my friend, are under pressure.

COLUMBUS: Too true. Tell you what, would you mind coming with me to the monastery of Radiba?

QUINTINILLA: Who do you want to see?

COLUMBUS: The Queen's son's tutor... If I can get hold of him.

QUINTINILLA: Who, Father Diego the theologian? But you're joking... !

COLUMBUS: Yes, I know, he's very intelligent. But he's also disgustingly honest. Just imagine, he collected a huge amount of money for the poor, and then he actually gave it to them.

A MONK appears at the top of the small ladder that leads to the platform. He hands COLUMBUS a bell, so that he can ring it. COLUMBUS does so.

MONK: [*Pretending to run and open a non-existent door*] Coming.

COLUMBUS: You have to box clever with a man like that.

They find themselves around a table, standing before FATHER DIEGO. Hands are shaken and introductions are made. Some wine is brought. COLUMBUS, or rather the actor playing Columbus, takes advantage of the introductions in order to talk to the WOMAN who had advised him to perform the play in order to gain time. The WOMAN is discovered leaning against the wings, stage right.

ACTOR PLAYING THE PART OF COLUMBUS: Hey! Have you got any news for me?

WOMAN: Possibly. Father Cohen has gone to speak with His Eminence's secretary personally. They're going to see the King together. You'll see – they'll get you off...

ACTOR: Jesus, I hope you're right! [*The actor playing QUINTINILLA tries to bring him back to his part*] They're going to have to get a move on, though, because we're just about to finish Act One.

He is drawn away into the group of FRIARS.

WOMAN: But there's still a whole other act, isn't there? Keep it up – you'll see, your pardon will come.

FATHER DIEGO: So you really have decided to leave?

COLUMBUS: Yes. Tomorrow at the latest. I'm going to England. It appears that Bartolomeo, my brother, has managed to make a deal with King Henry.

COLUMBUS *and* FATHER DIEGO *attempt to draw to one side, but they keep tripping over the MONK who had opened the door, and who now does everything he can to overhear the secrets being discussed by COLUMBUS.*

FATHER DIEGO: For your trip to the Indies?

COLUMBUS: Yes, and to tell the truth, he didn't take a lot of convincing... Obviously, my brother was able to speak a little bit more freely than I've been able to.

FATHER DIEGO: Why? You haven't been hiding something from the Queen, have you?

COLUMBUS: Unfortunately, yes. [*He goes and sits down. The nosey MONK comes and stands behind him*] You see, it wouldn't be very proper to show one king documents that had been stolen from the king next door. Not to mention the fact that King John of Portugal has a very poor sense of humour. [*He gets up. The nosey MONK sits on his chair. COLUMBUS sits down again. On the MONKS's knee. He leaps up and lets out a yell*] He'd have sent out two of his hatchet men with orders to use my balls for rosary beads...

FATHER DIEGO: You could have shown them in confidence.

COLUMBUS: Confidence, at the court of Isabella?! [*He swaps seats, but once again he finds himself sitting on the MONK's knee. Another yell*] With all those hangers-on... informers... spies, hiding in every corner!

He gives the nosey MONK a mean look.

FATHER DIEGO: But you're telling *me*.

COLUMBUS: I'm only telling you because I'm leaving tomorrow. He won't be able to catch up with me in England. Ha! Isabella, you'll have to eat your words, you'll see. But it serves her right. Seven years she made me suffer. A lot of fine words... [*He goes to sit on another seat, having first made sure that there's nobody occupying it*] but all to no avail. [*He leaps up, as if bitten by a scorpion. By now he is obsessed by the idea that every seat in the place must have a monk sitting on it*] A monk... A little monk!

FATHER DIEGO: Where?

COLUMBUS: There, there, a little monk! Oh, mamma mia, a little monk, there! What a nice little monk... What a small little monk... ! [*He regains control of himself*] Sorry, my mistake... It's a nun...

FATHER DIEGO: Oh!

COLUMBUS: Yes, Isabella is going to regret this... And Ferdinando!

FATHER DIEGO: [*Amused*] You're talking as if the success of your expedition is already guaranteed.

COLUMBUS: [*Suddenly becoming serious*] Certainly it's guaranteed. Look here.

He pulls out some papers.

NOSEY MONK: What's all that?

QUINTINILLA: [*Out of the side of his mouth, in a loud whisper*] It's a copy of Toscanelli's letter, and his maps, removed from the secret archive of King John the Second of Portugal.

He lays out a folder containing documents.

FATHER DIEGO: Amazing!

COLUMBUS: Now, as you can see, it would hardly have been delicate to go to the Queen and say: "You know, since I'm bored, and I've wasted time, I'm off." I had to succeed in convincing the Queen without showing all my cards.

FATHER DIEGO: And are you sure that the authority of Toscanelli [*The MONK's curiosity gets too much for him. He pokes his head right in the folder. FATHER DIEGO suddenly shuts the folder, imprisoning the MONK's face*] ...would have been sufficient to satisfy her?

COLUMBUS: Well, if Toscanelli wasn't enough... here's my trump card! [*Like a conjuror, he pulls out a heavy golden mask and displays it in front of him*] With this I'd have had her eating out of my hand!

QUINTINILLA AND FATHER DIEGO: Ooooh – what's that?!

COLUMBUS: Pretty scary, eh! [*He laughs*] Have you never heard tell of certain kings of our hemisphere who go round with things like this on their faces?

FATHER DIEGO: No. Not at all.

COLUMBUS: Precisely. This mask comes from the other hemisphere. It is worn by the kings of Jipango. It appears that they never take it off, not even to eat.

MONK: And how do they manage it, with such a small opening for the mouth?

COLUMBUS: [*Put out*] They eat through their noses. In fact, they eat only small fruit: grapes, berries, and cherries.

FATHER DIEGO: And the cherry stones?

COLUMBUS: [*Shrilly*] They spit them out through the eyeholes!

MONK: Brilliant!

FATHER DIEGO: Let's have a look... [*He takes the mask*] Phew, what a weight!

COLUMBUS: Obviously. It's solid gold.

QUINTINILLA: And how did you come by it?

COLUMBUS: I had it from an Arab I met in Guinea, in the days when I was transporting slaves. You see, that Arab was the only man – note this – the only man in a village inhabited entirely by women.

MONK: Entirely by women!

PECTATOR: And how were they, these women?

COLUMBUS: Splendid creatures. Gentle, delicate... A bit undressed, but slender, bronzed, and most particularly very well-anointed, and also bejewelled... very bejewelled. I, in order to gain the Arab's friendship, passed myself off as a Muslim. I speak fairly good Arabic. He believed me, told me a load of secrets, which was how I came to know that all those splendid, bronzed, undressed and particularly bejewelled women, that all those very young women, had been brought by him from the Indies, where he had been carried thanks to a terrible storm which had driven him off to the West, forcing him to cross the entire Ocean. In twenty days, thanks to that storm, he had arrived from Africa to the Indies. I was amazed. Anyway, before he would let me leave, that Arab made me swear on the Koran that never – yes, I know it's terrible, but... Anyway, I had to swear that I would never talk with anybody about what I had seen and known. Then he kissed me, embraced me, and gave me this wonderful golden mask.

QUINTINILLA: I'm amazed!

FATHER DIEGO: I, in turn, am also amazed. This story is so fantastic that...

COLUMBUS: Fantastic but true.

QUINTINILLA: Certainly, given the proof offered by the mask...

FATHER DIEGO: But why didn't you tell all this to the Queen?

COLUMBUS: Oh yes – tell them that I swore on the Koran! Don't forget that everyone loves a good bonfire these days... especially with winter coming and the poor devils can't afford the cost of a coal fire... And you can't beat a good burning at the stake... So anyway, that's why I'm not waiting. I'm off, immediately. Goodbye, Father.

He gets up, and takes his leave of the MONKS.

Enter, front-stage, two HERALDS with a drum. As COLUMBUS and his friend exit, FATHER DIEGO furtively goes to meet ISABELLA on the central platform. They mime conferring excitedly.

HERALD: [*With a roll of drums*] The honest monk believed the story, and that night went to

wake Isabella. He told her of Toscanelli's maps and of the golden mask brought from the Indies; he told her that Columbus was about to leave for England, to seek ships from Henry of York.

They exit.

ISABELLA: For heaven's sake, we have to stop him. You must persuade him to stay. Tell him that we'll accept all his conditions, apart from the one about being Queen in my place, of course. [*Exit Father Diego*] Quintinilla!

QUINTINILLA: [*He approaches the QUEEN*] Here I am! Just keyholing, Majesty.

ISABELLA: Give orders for Columbus's voyage to be prepared. At once. [*Another man steps forward, and she addresses him*] Speak, Pinzon.

PINZON: If Columbus is agreeable, I would be happy to go with him. With my *Pinta*. An excellent ship, believe me. That would make three ships.

Exit ISABELLA and PINZON. Enter COLUMBUS.

QUINTINILLA: [*Going over to him; excited*] They fell for it, Captain – hook line and sinker! We've won!

COLUMBUS: We fooled them! Fooled them with a mask of gilded bronze!

QUINTINILLA: Christopher, without doubt you are the biggest bullshitter I have ever known!

COLUMBUS: My dear friend, in a world of liars like this, you have to spin a good tale to survive.

QUINTINILLA: And so, you really could say that Columbus was doubly brazen-faced.

A dozen actors enter, dressed as SAILORS. They leap up onto the platform and begin to sing. During the song, the platform is transformed into a ship. The poles become masts; sails, rope ladders and flags are hoisted. The sides of the platform are turned up, and become the sides of the ship. Halfway through the song, enter ISABELLA and FERDINAND, followed by the court. They are here to see the ship off as it sets out on its voyage.

SONG:

*Christopher Columbus,
Who was doubly brazen-faced,
In telling such a load of lies,
obtained his three ships.
But what a lot of setbacks he had to go through,
Before he got the answer "Yes".
From the beginning, talking of grades and meridians,
He was treated like a charlatan.
But the minute he started telling lies,*

*Doors were opened and hats began to fly.
So he learned this moral at first-hand:
If you want to gain the trust of a man,*

*Don't be too scrupulous, you have to swindle him,
Because, having lived in the swindle for a while,
He will no longer distinguish sweet smell from stink,
The true from the false, the weeds from the flowers,
Living in greyness, he will not see colours.
But when you suggest to him that he might make money,
He'll even lick your feet, he'll make a thousand bows.
Christopher Columbus, with two faces of bronze,
Telling a lie or two,
Obtained his three ships,
And finally set sail for India.
But as we know, those who swindle
are in their turn swindled:
He went looking for the Indies,
and he ended up in America.*

END OF ACT ONE

Act Two

Scene One

The actors line up on the platform, which is now decorated as a kind of podium. They are wearing the costumes of the LORDS AND LADIES of the court of Isabella. They sing:

Gloria, Gloria!

*Columbus returned from the Indies with parrots,
With ten savages dressed in bird feathers,
Guano necklaces, worn with much decorum.*

Enter COLUMBUS, followed by several sailors.

As for gold, though, there wasn't a lot.

*But his entry into Castille was a triumph,
In the eyes of all there was amazement,
He would have to return for a further battle,
And everyone believed him, put their trust in him.
Those who previously made fun of him, were now praising him;
Offering him their tasty younger daughters,
Albeit against their will, and even their wives,
And they made him Admiral, by grace of the King.*

Gloria, Gloria!

*After a year had passed, he set off again for the Antilles,
Returning with slaves painted up like butterflies,
And many a dirty monkey that did their dirty business;
As for gold, though, there wasn't a lot.*

But his stories caused great amazement,

*even though some people didn't believe him.
"We're going to have to go back,
I'm certain I'm not mistaken."
And some credulous people put their trust in him.
Those who previously were singing,
were now singing counterpart:
"So this discovery is not really worth so much?"
But they still applaud him, even if against their will,
He's still Admiral, by fault of the King.*

Gloria, Gloria!

*For the third time, Columbus reached the Antilles,
But he returned bound in chains like a rebel,
And the holds were packed with gold.
All gold, which now belongs to the King.*

*They will have a trial, but with reluctance.
In Isabella's heart there is such clemency:
It was he who filled their cupboard.
But kings are not noted for their gratitude.
Those who were already making fun of him,
now let loose on him:
"Columbus is a villain, is a dirty crook,
is a thief, a spy, and does not love Holy Mary,
and now he is not even Admiral any longer,
and he doesn't love Jesus,
he doesn't love Jesus!*

*The final part of the song is danced by the assembled COURTIERS, in such a way as to give
the impression that we are at a palace party.*

CHORUS: Long live the bride and groom! Hooray! Hooray!

*From out of the group of dancers emerges a SAILOR, with a WOMAN on his arm; then
another, with a BISHOP on his arm.*

FONSECA: Put me down, put me down!

SAILOR: Oh, I am sorry, your Eminence!

FONSECA: Sorry... Sorry... That's the third time you've picked me up today!

Exit everyone except COLUMBUS and the SOLDIER.

COLUMBUS: *[In chains, turning to the SOLDIER accompanying him]* Who's getting married?

SOLDIER: Isabella's younger son.

COLUMBUS: Who, Giovanni? But he's only a baby...

SOLDIER: Behaves like a baby, but he's nineteen if he's a day.

CHORUS: Long live the bride!

*Enter CRAZY GIOVANNA: the same actress that played ISABELLA in the previous act.
Whereas previously she had a large head of blond hair, now her hair is black.*

CRAZY GIOVANNA: Down with the bride!

A COURTIER: Here she is again – Crazy Giovanna!

COLUMBUS: [*Bowing to GIOVANNA*] Your Majesty... Your Majesty... I...

GIOVANNA: Oooh! What lovely chains! From what I've seen, they must be the latest fashion. I'll have to get a set made for myself! I've noticed that a lot of people seem to be wearing them these days. I'll have to see the Inquisitor-General. They say you can get all kinds – chains for single people, for couples, even for whole families!

COLUMBUS: You majesty, I like a joke as much as the next man, but why are you making fun of me?

GIOVANNA: Joking? Who's joking? More to the point, why do you call me "Your Majesty"? I hope you haven't mistaken me for my mother...

COLUMBUS: Are you not the Queen?

GIOVANNA: I say... thanks for the compliment. Am I *really* that boring? I'm the Princess Giovanna.

COLUMBUS: Ah, Crazy Giovanna. Oops, sorry, slip of the tongue... forgive me.

GIOVANNA: Oh, it takes more than that to offend me. In fact, to tell you the truth, I really like the role of the crazy woman... and now you like me... haven't I grown, eh! But please, let's forget the formalities. Come along, I'll introduce you to some of these baboons. Look, that one down there is the bridegroom, my brother. [*She points off-stage*] Look how infatuated he is with his German lady. He can't wait to get her into bed. Hang on, I'll introduce you to her. Maria!

MARIA: [*from offstage*] What do you want, Giovanna... ?

GIOVANNA: Come here a moment... [*Enter MARIA*] Isn't she pretty! Imagine, she's barely turned eighteen and already she can say Mummy, Daddy and wee-wee! Here you are, Maria, I'd like you to meet our chief Admiral.

MARIA: Why's the admiral in chains?

GIOVANNA: Oh, it's quite normal at the court of Isabella. It's a sign of honour.

MARIA: Sign of honour?

GIOVANNA: Yes, you see. Since all the swindlers, shysters and hangers-on are free to roam where they please in this land, it's only right that anybody who actually *contributes* to the royal coffers should be in chains.

COLUMBUS: I say, Majesty...!

GIOVANNA: Quiet, Columbus... Down, boy!

MARIA: I don't understand...

GIOVANNA: Don't worry. Anyway, you're not here to understand; you're here to screw my brother.

FERDINAND: [*Entering, authoritarian*] Giovanna, what are you doing here? Maria, darling, your Giovanni is looking for you.

MARIA: Oh yes? I'm coming at once. [*She curtseys*] Admiral... Giovanna... Papa...

She runs off.

FERDINAND: Where's your mother?

GIOVANNA: She's in there. She's making up the bed for my brother and his instrument of fornication.

FERDINAND: Don't be so vulgar. Mind your manners.

GIOVANNA: Manners? Who's talking?! At least I didn't pretend not to have seen our Admiral...

FERDINAND: Oh, Columbus!?

He realises that he is in chains.

COLUMBUS: You called...?

FERDINAND: Why are you in chains? Has everyone gone mad?

SOLDIER: It was our orders, Majesty...

FERDINAND: Take them off, at once! [*While the SOLDIER fiddles with the lock*] I'm sorry, Columbus. Obviously there's been a misunderstanding. There was no order to put you in irons.

GIOVANNA: But in boiling oil. With sage and onion stuffing. Ha, ha!

FERDINAND: [*Irritated*] Will you stop that, Giovanna?

COLUMBUS: [*So as to change the subject*] How is the Queen?

FERDINAND: Not very well. She still hasn't got over the shock. Did you know that the Infanta died?

COLUMBUS: Yes, I did hear, and I must say...

FERDINAND: I believe you. We were all terribly upset.

COLUMBUS: What can I say...?

FERDINAND: And then this young lad who is getting married... so delicate...

GIOVANNA: It's like marrying off a couple of girls.

FERDINAND: I thought I warned you, Giovanna!

GIOVANNA: [*Distancing herself*] Did I say something wrong?

Nonchalantly she pretends to be feeding a clutch of non-existent chickens.

FERDINAND: You see that? Poor Giovanna! This is a great worry for the Queen. Have you noticed how her mind wanders? It's getting worse every day.

COLUMBUS: Sounds pretty sensible to me. She called these chains the highest honour of your kingdom!

FERDINAND: Very amusing! We'll see if you manage to be so comical in front of the judges!

Two confessionals are brought onstage, on wheels. In the first is BISHOP FONSECA; in the second, the other PROSECUTOR.

TWO HERALD: [*Entering, with a drumroll*] Albeit not in official form, Columbus was put on trial for his alleged misdeeds.

ACTORS and CARPENTERS busy themselves arranging the ship on which the court proceedings will take place. The actor playing the part of COLUMBUS is approached by the WOMAN from previously.

WOMAN: Hey, cheer up! The King's received the petition and he's sent for the Inquisitor-General. All we need now is his signature.

CONDEMNED MAN: Phew! Thank goodness!

The stage is now ready. BISHOP FONSECA rises, in his role as prosecutor.

FONSECA: Christopher Columbus, we are gathered here in order to pass judgement on your operations, both as a citizen and as commander of a ship in the service of the King.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: You yourself, in your diary written during your first voyage, tell the tale of an attempted mutiny...

A gong sounds.

COLUMBUS: It's true. [*In an instant, we see him as if he is in a painting, on the very plausible poop of a ship, surrounded by men of his crew*] Look, these are all signs that we're nearing land. That's a land bird; this one here is even a nightingale; and this one, this one which is

flying low, coming right towards me... [*Suddenly he wipes his eye with his hand*] ...is a dirty bird, a classic land resident. So you can be sure that tomorrow, or the day after at most, we shall see the coast of the Indies. [*One of the SAILORS rings the bell. Absentmindedly, COLUMBUS addresses the SAILOR nearest him*]. Someone's at the door. Would you mind opening...?

FIRST SAILOR: That was the the fourth watch.

COLUMBUS: [*To the SAILOR who has climbed up into the crow's nest*] Can you see anything?

FIRST SAILOR: What do you think? Not an effing thing!

COLUMBUS: Not an effing thing?! That's no way to speak to your Captain!

FIRST SAILOR: Listen, you great Genovese bullshitter, I speak how I want to speak. I was in prison, a specialist in catching fleas. I had the life of Reilly, and there he comes with his "promises" – "I'll make you a free man", "I'll make you rich"... You're just taking us for a bloody ride, though...

SECOND SAILOR: You're right. He's diddled us. We've been at sea for more than a month now, and all week he's been claiming to see bamboo canes, birds, freshwater fish, all that kind of thing. Anyone listening to you would think we're barely a day away from dry land... And then the next day comes, and then the day after... and we still don't see an effing thing.

COLUMBUS: Another effing thing! Listen, first of all, you can moderate your language, and your manners, and then let's sit down and talk about it like reasonable people. Now, if you'll just be patient...

FIRST SAILOR: No, you great Genovese gobshite – we've had enough of patience.

SECOND SAILOR: No, let him speak! Look, we'll have to wait till tomorrow anyway...

COLUMBUS: [*Accommodating*] That is precisely what I wanted to suggest.

SECOND SAILOR: There, you see. Now this is what I call a real captain. [*Mocking*] I like him.

FIRST SAILOR: I don't.

SECOND SAILOR: I like him because all you have to do is say BOO and he gives in.

COLUMBUS: Well, I'm an easy-going elastic sort of person. [*The gong strikes. He turns to the JUDGES*] No. Liars, damn you. It's not true. It wasn't like that at all. Now I'll explain to you how things really went.

PROSECUTOR: Calm down, Columbus. Let's hear what Captain Pinzon has to say.

COLUMBUS: Pinzon, that damned liar...

PINZON: My brother and I – I in my role as captain of the Pinta – having heard of the attempted mutiny, arrived at the flagship by night...

PINZON and his BROTHER come alongside the ship. They mime the action, using two poles, as if they are poling a punt.

COLUMBUS: I summoned them, in secret.

The gong strikes. PINZON and his BROTHER freeze for a moment. Then, having laid their two poles up against the side of the ship, they use them as a means to get up on deck.

PINZON: [*He turns cautiously to COLUMBUS. In a conspiratorial tone*] Are you crazy, Christopher? What ever possessed you to come to terms with those scoundrels?

COLUMBUS: I had to! I had to play for time. They wanted to throw me in the sea. At the deep end!

PINZON: Oh yes? Well, you know what we should do? Tomorrow morning, first thing, we'll hang a couple of them. You'll see – that'll slow them down.

COLUMBUS: Hey, gently now! For a start, they might be right. I'm worried that we might be off-course. According to my calculations, we should already have arrived at least four days ago. Unless the islands have got smaller all of a sudden.

PINZON: [*Amused*] Are you saying the Indies have shrunk?

COLUMBUS: [*Playing him along*] Well, it has rained a lot recently. But joking apart, do you know what I say? If we don't sight land by tomorrow morning, we'll do an about turn.

PINZON: If you say that one more time, first thing tomorrow morning we'll be hanging *you*! No way do we about-turn from here.

PINZON AND HIS BROTHER: [*In chorus*] For Castille and for Leon! Either we return victorious, or we don't return at all!

In their excitement, they bang their big poles on the ground.

COLUMBUS: [*Shouting*] Oh, for heaven's sake, no need to get all worked up about it! [*He removes his boot, which is completely pierced through at the ankle*] Can't a man even make jokes any more? As far as I'm concerned, you can hang whom you like. You can't beat a good hanging. [*The gong sounds. The action freezes for a moment. COLUMBUS is beside himself, as he turns to face the JUDGES*] No, it's not true. Now you're trying to pass me off as a coward, and a sadist into the bargain. While you're at it, why don't you put it around that I've been living in sin with my bosun!

FERDINAND: Carry on!

The gong sounds. PINZON, aided by two other MEN, brings the two MUTINEERS before COLUMBUS. They are bound hand and foot.

PINZON: Are these the ones?

COLUMBUS: Yes, that's them. And there were four others, too, who wanted to give me a kicking...

FIRST SAILOR: Tell-tale tit, mummy's going to split...

COLUMBUS: There, he's the one, he organised the mutiny.

FIRST SAILOR: What mutiny? We were just chatting... About how much we miss home...

SECOND SAILOR: And the women...

FIRST SAILOR: Exactly. We were talking about women.

PINZON: Silence, and prepare to die! [*To his BROTHER*] You bring up the other four, and we'll hang them too.

FIRST SAILOR: You can't do that! You can't hang us without a priest!

SECOND SAILOR: We've got lots of sins to confess...

FIRST SAILOR: I haven't even done my first communion yet!

COLUMBUS: I'm sorry, but we couldn't find a priest willing to come with us. They all felt unworthy to be going to meet their maker so soon. So gather your thoughts, and pray after me: "Oh Lord, who through your great mercy have pardoned even him who betrayed you for thirty pieces of silver, do not pardon these two stinkers that we are sending you. Do not let yourself be swayed by your usual sentimentalism. They are two villains, and deserve everything they're going to get. Amen". Haul away...

The two MEN have nooses around their necks, and disguised harnesses, which enable them to be hanged with a degree of verisimilitude.

SAILORS: [*Shouting, fearfully*] Ooooh! Aaaaah!

COLUMBUS: Silence, silence! Shame on you. We are on a ship of the Catholic Queen of Catholic Spain, and you start baying and howling like dogs: Ooooh! Aaaaah! [*He imitates them, exaggeratedly*] No. First of all, you should get in tune, eh? I'll give you the note... La... [*The HANGMEN, in the manner of bellringers, pull the two ropes of the gallows with alternating heaves. The two HANGED MEN emits shouts, in tune, sounding like a bellringing festival. COLUMBUS conducts them, like the conductor of an orchestra*] On the count of three. Haul away! [*With much shouting, the two MEN are hoisted up, in a grand finale. The gong sounds. The action is interrupted. COLUMBUS is furious*] That's a dirty lie! [*He turns to the JUDGE*] It's not true, I never said a prayer like that, and nobody's ever been hanged on a ship of mine. I've always treated my sailors extremely humanely: they adored me – we were one big family...

SECOND PROSECUTOR: [*Sniggering, sarcastic*] In fact, they used to call him Mummy.

COLUMBUS: *[Imitating him]* Wrong – they called me Daddy, because they used to call the Bosun Mummy, because he was such a lovely man.

The gong sounds. The action resumes on board ship. The CREW has gathered on the bridge, armed with bowls and spoons.

FIRST SAILOR: Daddy.

COLUMBUS: I'm coming, I'm coming. Now tell me, what would you like to eat.

FIRST SAILOR: Well, it depends what there is.

COLUMBUS: *[In the stance of a waiter]* Well, let's see. Now... We've got some nice fried seafood...

CHORUS: *[In disgust]* Yuk!

FOURTH SAILOR: What else is there?

COLUMBUS: We've got fried shark... cod cutlets... fricasee of flatfish...

PINZON: That's enough! Can't you understand... Fish, bloody fish...! We want *meat!*

FOURTH SAILOR: Meat!

COLUMBUS: I'm sorry, but we've run out of rats. We ate the last one stuffed last Thursday.

PINZON: Liar! It's a lie! There's still rats left, but he's keeping them for himself!

COLUMBUS: What do you mean?

PINZON: If there's no rats left, then who was it nibbled a lump out of my shoe last night? Look at it.

He removes one of his shoes.

FIRST SAILOR: A bloody great hole!

SECOND SAILOR: You can see the teethmarks!

THIRD SAILOR: *[Aggressive, turning to COLUMBUS]* Right-ho, Captain. What do you say to that?

COLUMBUS: Alright, I'll own up. It was me.

CHORUS: You?!

COLUMBUS: *[Crying]* Yes, it was me that ate your boot. The teethmarks are mine. I couldn't

stand it: I haven't eaten a thing for five whole days. I saw your shoe and...

PINZON: But why... what about your rations?

COLUMBUS: My rations? Oh, you were not supposed to know... You never noticed, but every night I shared out my rations among you... my crew... in secret... a little bit for each of you...

CHORUS: Ooooh!

PINZON: He took the food out of his own mouth, for us...

CHORUS: For us!

COLUMBUS: Yes, that's right.

CHORUS: What a man!

FIRST SAILOR: He's not a man, he's a saint!

CHORUS: Forgive us.

FIRST SAILOR: Your hand, let me kiss your hand, Captain.

COLUMBUS: Oh, really, I don't deserve it!

CHORUS: Oh yes you do.

COLUMBUS: *[Bursting into tears again]* You're making me cry...

CHORUS: The hand!

THIRD SAILOR: Me too, I want to kiss his hand too.

He dives into the group which is trying to kiss COLUMBUS's hand.

COLUMBUS: Alright, you can kiss it! But don't overdo it. NYAAH!

He lets out a yell and hurriedly retrieves his hand.

THIRD SAILOR: I'm sorry...Hunger got the better of me.

PINZON: What I don't understand... why didn't you eat the leather uppers, instead of the wooden sole?

COLUMBUS: Ah, well... leather's meat, and yesterday was Friday.

CHORUS: And a good Catholic doesn't eat meat on a Friday!

FIRST SAILOR: Your hand, Captain... I fain would kiss your hand.

COLUMBUS: No!

The SAILORS grab his arm. When we next see it, in place of the hand there is the classic pirate's hook.

CHORUS: Oh! What a Good Man our Columbus is!

A gong sounds.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Very impressive. But to return to the hanged men, can you explain why none of those six men ever returned?

COLUMBUS: I left them down there to guard the island: it's just that they got a bit too cocky, and ended up getting in with the natives of the garrison.

FONSECA: In what sense, "in with"?

COLUMBUS: In the sense that, by the end, the natives ate them.

THIRD SAILOR: Won't you stop talking rubbish? You are nothing but a liar and a crook.

FONSECA: Hey, I say: why do you call him a crook...?

THIRD SAILOR: I say it because it's true. He's a crook. He swindled me out of sixty thousand ducats due to me as a sighting bonus.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Sighting bonus?

THIRD SAILOR: That's right. It's the reward that the Queen promised to whoever first saw land... and by rights it's mine, because I was on watch in the crow's nest that morning of the fourteenth... [*The gong sounds. The ladder leading to the crow's nest rises rapidly*] "Land ahoy! Land ahoy!"

COLUMBUS: Well done! It's about time somebody noticed! I sighted land yesterday evening, and I was beginning to think you'd all gone blind, I mean, it was so obvious... Of course, I do have better than average eyesight.

THIRD SAILOR: In that case, why didn't you give the signal?

COLUMBUS: Well, I didn't want to humiliate you. I wanted to leave you with some satisfaction too.

THIRD SAILOR: Thank you, so that means that the reward is mine, eh?

COLUMBUS: The reward too? Do you hear that? What do you mean, I've already given you the satisfaction of being the first to shout "Land ahoy!" all by yourself, out loud, and now you also want reward in money, do you? God, the greed, the insatiability of man!

The gong sounds.

THIRD SAILOR: And that was how he copped the reward.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Columbus, aren't you ashamed?! For those few shillings, stooping so low!

COLUMBUS: [*He begins a long, rambling speech in grammelot, which ends with:*] You see...?

He resumes speaking in his mysterious language, with gestures which indicate desperation, anger, emotion, etc, until one of the PROSECUTORS becomes exasperated and shouts at him.

FIRST PROSECUTOR: What on earth are you talking about?!

COLUMBUS: [*Halting his flow*] None of your business!

FIRST PROSECUTOR: [*Stuck for words*] Oh...

COLUMBUS: Anyway, the whole crew, yes, the whole crew can bear witness how I, the evening before, had sighted lights on the horizon.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: But what's the point in calling as witnesses a crew whom you have forced to swear and perjure themselves as and when you wished?

COLUMBUS: It's not true!

THIRD SAILOR: Yes it is true! And I can also remind you when and where, my dear Admiral, if you really have forgotten...

COLUMBUS: When?

THIRD SAILOR: Precisely on the return route.

COLUMBUS: You guessed right!

THIRD SAILOR: We had just left the Canaries. We heard the bell sound. [*The bell sounds*] Just like that: it was the signal for calling us to muster. He was up there, on the poop deck, and gave us a charming little speech.

The gong sounds.

COLUMBUS: [*Taking up the stance of a soapbox orator*] My dear stinkers! [*All the SAILORS laugh*] Let us thank the Almighty that we can now really say that we've done it. In a few days, we shall be home. I get goose pimples just thinking of it! And I think the same goes for you: I have noticed that, just like me, you can't get your eyes shut at night, partly for anxiety and partly for the scurvy, which forces us to scratch as if we had mange. I can already see the great feast that they're going to make for us when we arrive.

But nothing can repay us all the curses, the frights, sufficient to give you worms, and even the worms with jaundice, when the seas were breaking and there we were, on our knees, begging God to forgive us, and spewing up our souls. Nobody will ever be able to boast of having shit themselves like we did, for the good of humanity! For this we deserve honours, rewards, and above all, recognition. But the extent of the recognition which the others are going to offer us, will depend in large part on us. When we get there, there will be the usual sons of you-know-what, all lined up, paired off, trying to minimise the value of our discovery.

I can almost hear them now. "Yes, admittedly, it is an important undertaking from a scientific point of view, but from the money point of view... I mean, what has it brought? Four gold buttons, like first communion medals; three parrots who admittedly do speak a couple of words, but with such poor pronunciation! And then, I mean to say, those ten natives, so uncouth and degenerate, that they brought back with them...' What can I say?!

From a certain point of view, they are right: have a look down in the hold, and tell me if what we've got there are not more monkeys than natives. But no, we can't just present them like that. We're going to have to transform them, dress them up, decorate them, trick them out, in fact, we're going to have to make them look just like our free-thinking sponsors imagine that natives really should look. [*Turning to a SAILOR*] You, you can be a model. Come here. [*From a box which is brought to him he takes some poster paints*]

All the gold that we have found, we'll hang round their necks, and we'll put feathers on their heads. And now swear that every native that you ran into down there was dressed up just the same as this. Swear!

CHORUS: [*Subdued*] We swear!

COLUMBUS: If you swear like that one more time, I'll hang the lot of you! Swear properly. Swearing is a serious business. Swear!!

CHORUS OF SAILORS: We swear!

COLUMBUS: And now swear on this map too.

He unfolds a map.

CHORUS OF SAILORS: What's that?

COLUMBUS: It's the map showing all the lands and islands that we've discovered.

PINZON: But that big one there, that you've marked as a peninsula, what's that?

COLUMBUS: It's Juana.

PINZON: The place they call Cuba. Why have you marked it as a peninsula, if we've only followed a quarter of its coastline?

COLUMBUS: That's my business. It suits me for Cuba to be a peninsula, because if Cuba is a peninsula, that means it must be attached to Cathay, the immense, fabulous Cathay, where,

as Marco Polo has related, there are cities with streets paved with gold, and alleys of silver. And now, that's enough discussions: swear that everything that is written here is true. Swear! Without looking!

CHORUS OF SAILORS: We swear!

COLUMBUS: What about you? Aren't you swearing?

FIRST SAILOR: No, I'm sorry, but I really don't think I could swear on a falsehood. It's a sin.

COLUMBUS: [*Laughing*] Ha, ha, it's a sin? Anyone would think we were still in the Middle Ages... Well, listen to this, you great dummy: it's only if we get them to swallow the idea that there are enormous riches to be had, that our backers will send us down there again, with new ships, to discover new lands, and to look for new gold, and thereby give us the possibility of eating, albeit badly, almost every day. And this seems of small importance to you, oh thrice imbecile? Has nobody ever told you that the worst of sins is to be forced to pull in your belt? Because those who are hungry... those who are hungry find it difficult to concentrate their minds on praying: all they can do is swear, and obviously they end up damned to eternity!

FIRST SAILOR: Yes, maybe you're right... But all the same, I don't feel up to it.

COLUMBUS: What a stubborn person! [*He signals to one of the SAILORS to accompany him to the fo'c'sle*] I mean, when you were down there lying around all day in the arms of those beautiful Indian women, who were always ready and willing, did you think about sin then? Oh, look how his eyes glint, how he starts sighs! Oh, don't worry, it happens to all of us, if we think about it, doesn't it?

He turns to the others.

CHORUS: [*Sighing*] Ah, yes.

COLUMBUS: [*He signals to the LUTE PLAYER to play a more delicate background accompaniment*] Alright, if we are prepared to run the risk of dying in such sweet company, with flowers behind our ears, our feet in cool water and the brief horizon of a round breast before our eyes, then, lads, let's swear, let's swear on a falsehood! We may go to hell, but we'll die in paradise!

Enter GIOVANNA and the KING.

CHORUS: We swear! We swear!

They sing:

*We swear that we have seen plants
Of sesame which grow diamonds,
And islands with gigantic women
Who grab young men in order to make love.*

We swear we have seen everything you can imagine:

*Ask us, and we'll tell you,
But no matter how much you threaten us,
There is one story that we shall not tell:
Of a place with women so little serious
That they make love without first making you promise
That after the rituals you will pay them;
Who laugh, naked, before your eyes,
And tell you: Thank you, see you later,
And laugh, and laugh.
No, this treasure that we have found,
We shall keep it for ourselves,
It is not to be told.
The so little serious women are beautiful,
And they do not blanch except for love,
And they do not have a curate to say:
It's a sin, it's a sin!
And they laugh, they laugh.*

The gong sounds. Enter, carried by the usual two STANDARD-BEARERS, the arras which acts as a traverse curtain. It is placed in front of the scaffold, which is presently configured as a ship. Behind the curtain, the SAILORS take the ship apart.

GIOVANNA: What a lovely song. You should teach it to my brother, so's he can sing it to his little wifey. Because she's a bit on the fruity side too...

[*The JUDGES cough in embarrassment*]

FERDINANDO: I hope I misheard you there, Giovanna.

GIOVANNA: No, I only meant that she she enjoys laughing, singing, and leaping around bollock-naked. That's right, there's no point looking shocked: you're not going to tell me that they pray a lot?! They've been married for a fortnight: and, good God, they don't even come out of their rooms to go to mass.

FERDINANDO: Giovanna, do me the honour of withdrawing. This is neither the time nor the place...

GIOVANNA: No sir: here I represent my mother. Poor woman. At this very moment, she's discussing with the boy's tutor whether it might be appropriate to prise him apart from his wife for a while. She's sucking him dry, like a prune, my poor brother.

FERDINANDO: [*Exasperated*] Giovanna!

GIOVANNA: Isn't one allowed to speak of prunes? Is there some double meaning?

FERDINANDO: No, of course not...!

GIOVANNA: No? What a shame! Anyway, prepare yourself for the worst. The theologians have decided that it would be a grave sin to refuse to honour your wife's marital desires; and

since our beloved Maria of Austria is far from inclined to grant us a truce... [*In declamatory tone*] "The time will come when the bridal chamber of the tender Hidalgo transforms into a tomb."

FERDINANDO: Now, that's enough!

GIOVANNA: Enough?! Would you say "Enough" to my mother, whom I represent?

FERDINANDO: Don't be so silly. Your mother has no need to be represented by a daughter...

GIOVANNA: ...as crazy as me. Go on, say it! But yes, she does need me, seeing that she's lost her nerve to the extent that she won't even come and watch the slaughter that this bunch of liverish bigots is carrying out...

The arras is carried offstage, and once again we see the gallows on the platform.

FERDINANDO: Giovanna, don't exaggerate! Show some respect for your father. And there's also a priest...

GIOVANNA: It's not my fault if your p-riest's got a liver complaint. Anyway, what are you so worried about? I'm crazy! [*Bursting ino tears*] Everybody knows that I'm crazy... I can say what I want. Just because, I'm crazy...

FERDINANDO: [*Moved*] Yes, you can say what you like.

GIOVANNA: May I?

FERDINANDO: Yes.

GIOVANNA: Down with the King!

FERDINANDO: Oh!

SECOND PROSECUTOR: May we continue?

FERDINANDO: Please, go ahead.

FONSECA: [*With a forced smile*] Thank you. Let us return to our discussion of the first voyage: what else does Captain Pinzon have to tell us?

PINZON: I personally discovered that the Admiral kept a secret ship's diary, in which he wrote down the direction of the winds, their force and intensity, latitudes, the tides and their strengths, all precise to the last centimetre, while the figures that he actually entered in the ship's log were curiously incorrect.

COLUMBUS: A slip of the pen... Happens very easily...

PINZON: All the errors and miscalculations were deliberately disguised and calculated.

COLUMBUS: Calculated?

FONSECA: And in your opinion, what was the aim of these curious concealments?

PINZON: Obviously, Columbus wanted that nobody, not even the King and Queen, should ever find out the correct route for reaching the Indies.

FONSECA: In other words, if they wanted to get there, they'd have to employ his services: otherwise, thanks to Columbus's "slips of the pen" the ships would have become helplessly lost, and would have ended up goodness knows where.

COLUMBUS: No, not goodness knows where! All they needed was a halfway decent captain... and anyway, it's a known fact: sailing ships is always a bit dangerous. It would be a fine thing if a fellow could just say "I am a navigator and..."

He is interrupted by the KING.

FERDINANDO: To cut a long story short, what would have happened to them?

PINZON: Well, according to my calculations, the sailors on those ships might, with a bit of luck, have sighted land after something like four years of sailing.

COLUMBUS: After four years of sailing? [*Raising his hands to the skies*] Lord, I thank you for having created me in your likeness, and not in the likeness of this son of a bitch.

He points to PINZON.

CHORUS OF JUDGES AND SAILORS: Silence, murderer! Traitor! You're just a falsifier of charts, that's all you are!

PROSECUTOR: You betrayed those who trusted you and gave you the means to achieve these undertakings.

GIOVANNA: Oh, stop talking rubbish! Fine means indeed! A bunch of jailbirds for his crew, and three lousy tubs tricked up like ships, starting with the *Maria*, an old wreck which came apart on the coast of Hispaniola, at the first, excuse the technical term, fart of a bit of sustained wind!

Everybody laughs.

PINZON: No, madam! If you will permit me, Majesty, the *Maria* was a serious ship.

GIOVANNA: Serious?! D'you know what her sailors called her? "La Galante" – which, as you well know, means "whore". Pardon the technical term. [*The NOBLES are startled. The SAILORS laugh*] A bit heavy, eh? Well, why should I care? Anyway, I'm crazy. Ha, ha, crazy. Ha, ha! But who's crazier than me is my friend Christopher. Oh look – his pride's hurt.

COLUMBUS: No, madam, it's not my pride. It's because I no longer care about anything. Humanity disgusts me. The only people that don't disgust me are women! But that's only a

matter of time.

GIOVANNA: Well done, silly, that's exactly what they want.

COLUMBUS: They want women to disgust me too?

GIOVANNA: No, they want to see you reduced like curdled milk so's then they can bang you on the cheese block.

The SAILORS laugh.

FONSECA: My Lady, what language! Who is your confessor?

GIOVANNA: The same father who confesses you. And I can tell you, he's told me a few things about you too...

FONSECA: What do you mean? I mean...

GIOVANNA: Ha, ha, he's blushing! I'm crazy!

LADY IN WAITING: [*She enters screaming, followed by two other LADIES IN WAITING*] He's dead! Prince Giovanni has ded. In the arms of Maria his wife! Queen Isabella is out of her mind with grief.

A general hubbub follows, and a muttering of prayers. The ACTORS on-stage form up in a procession, while the LADIES IN WAITING sing:

LADIES IN WAITING:

*The earth, while virgin, drinks the torrents,
The Infante, who was already pale,
Is now of silver,
Come in order to live, he remained for a moment,
Stretched out in a languid sheet of wind.
Crazy Giovanna had foreseen it,
That as a magnolia greedy for water,
Thus, with great groans,
She would have drunk him:
Struck in the groin, he will be consumed.*

Now the LADIES IN WAITING withdraw to the rear of the stage, and come forward with the other actors. Everybody carries a large candle. They mark time for a while, and then one after another they pass in front of the BISHOP, who drops a pinch of ash onto each of their heads.

FONSECA: When the trial starts again, we'll have to go into that whole business of the slaves.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: What slaves?

FONSECA: The slaves that Columbus brought back on his ships. For us to sell. The Queen,

of course, has always deprecated this vile trade.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: We still sold them, though... And got good prices.

FONSECA: Yes indeed, but against our will, despite ourselves. Just out of a sense of humanity. In fact, what would have been better: to send them home, stuffing them back into those stinking holds, with the risk of letting them die, or pull them out, feed them up, baptise them, and allow them to be part of our holy civilisation?

SECOND PROSECUTOR: As slaves!

FONSECA: What fault is it of ours if man is born with original sin, to pay off? "You will have to work, sweat and suffer..." And here we are, humble adjutants, in order to ensure that that punishment is carried out in the best of manners.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Adjutants, but not slavemasters. In fact, we have always been ready to castigate those who went ferreting out these poor brothers of ours, to sell.

FONSECA: Indeed, we hate the slave traders. And Columbus is one of these. The worst! Up until now he has captured and transported to us the fine sum of three thousand poor savages, chosen from among the best looking and the youngest...

SECOND PROSECUTOR: ...of both sexes.

FONSECA: The Queen felt this very deeply. She only became slightly resigned to it when she heard that the money from the sales came to more than twelve million maravedi. Then she came to confession.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: When all's said and done, those poor wretches have everything to gain. They lose their liberty, it is true, but in exchange they find the comfort of our religion; they become our slaves, but also our brothers. They pick up a whole lot of diseases which previously they never knew, but one day they will know the salvation of the soul, and they will die happy.

BOTH: *[In chorus]* As happy as our pale Infante, who has just left us.

FONSECA: But Columbus must be punished! For a start, I have arranged for the freezing of the percentage which he was due on the outcome of the sales.

ALL THE MALE ACTORS: *[In chorus]* Divinam voluntatem vocamus justitiam, qua videlicet cuique persone tributurius summus.

THE LADIES IN WAITING: *[In chorus]* Pietatem tuam, precor, arrogantiam iudices divinae rationis officium.

The dialogue between the two men is continually counterpointed by this last phrase, spoken as a rosary. Suddenly, abruptly, the trial begins again.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Speaking of funerals, Admiral, would you mind telling us the story

of how you murdered Captain Adriano de Muxica.

COLUMBUS: No, not murdered... [*The confessional in which BISHOP FONSECA is sitting is pushed from the centre to stage right. COLUMBUS climbs up on it while it is still moving*] Mind if I thumb a ride? [*He continues his speech without interruption*] ...but executed after a proper trial. De Muxica was treating the natives badly, and was raping the girls. One day, in order to steal a gold ring from the nose of a native, he pulled with such violence that part of his nose remained stuck to the ring; but he wasn't put out: handkerchief, a little blow, and away...! [*He makes a gesture as if putting the whole thing in his pocket*] Dulcis in fundo, among other things, he tried to organise a mutiny in order to get rid of me.

SECOND PROSECTOR: And, naturally, he did not succeed.

COLUMBUS: No, naturally.

FONSECA: Charming!

COLUMBUS: What?

FONSECA: No, I mean: how did he die?

COLUMBUS: Killed.

They laugh.

FONSECA: What I mean is, was he given the opportunity to prepare himself for a decent death.

COLUMBUS: Yes, but he didn't want confession. He claimed that none of the confessors that we produced for him was adequate to the depth of his sins; and since he didn't even want to come down from the tower, which was indeed very high, in which he had been imprisoned, in order that he could be hanged on the ground floor, as is customary, we pushed him from the top. A drop of about thirty feet. In order to bury him, we just needed a casket of the kind they use for babies, given that he had ended up so concertinaed. Our orders from the quartermaster were to save on everything.

THIRD JUDGE: Well said.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Well, let's leave aside the question of, shall we say, emotional exchanges, and let us speak of those which are real and commercial, in other words the barter. Do you consider that you acted honestly with those savages? You gave those poor devils: mirrors, bits of glass, little bells, red hats, and in exchange you took large numbers of gold piastres. That is known as swindling, and in Spain the penalty for swindling is imprisonment. You knew that, I presume?

COLUMBUS: Of course I knew it, and I also know that there's prison for those who incite, and who enjoy the fruits of that swindle, given that they know the dishonest provenance.

FONSECA: What do you mean by that?

COLUMBUS: I mean that since all that gold, or almost all, is in the hands of Your Honour the Judge, then we're going to have to put you in prison together with me.

FONSECA: Hey, now gently, I administer the goods of the King.

COLUMBUS: So let's put the King in prison too...

FERDINANDO: Couldn't we change the subject?

Enter GIOVANNA. Everybody rises.

CHORUS: Your Highness!

FERDINANDO: Columbus, I have the impression that you don't realise the seriousness of the charges against you.

GIOVANNA: [*To COLUMBUS, winking*] Don't pay any attention. Pretend you don't know him.

FERDINANDO: First accusation: cowardice.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: You wanted to abandon the whole voyage. That's a sentence of...

COLUMBUS: What?

JAILER: [*After consulting a register, an enormous book held by another JAILER, he writes on a blackboard*] Twelve years...

FONSECA: You did in fact abandon the voyage after only twenty days' sailing...

JAILER: Ah! Well that's 14 years.

GIOVANNA: I'm going to chew his ear off, that one...

FERDINANDO: Second charge: reprehensible brutality.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: You hanged six of your sailors.

COLUMBUS: That's not true!

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Six sailors... six fours is...

JAILER: Six fours is...?

He turns to the second JAILER.

SECOND JAILER: Twenty-four!

JAILER: Less two?

SECOND JAILER: No, no!

JAILER: As you like! Twenty-four years, your Honour.

COLUMBUS: Twenty-four years...! For six sailors?! And one of them was only a tiny fellow...

JAILER: What do you mean, tiny?

COLUMBUS: Tiny. Like this... He slept in a bucket!

GIOVANNA: I say take off four years at once.

COLUMBUS: Thank you.

JAILER: Oh all right then. Twenty.

FERDINANDO: Another example of brutality: when the ambassador Caonabo came to negotiate a truce, you lopped off his nose and ears.

COLUMBUS: That's a lie! I ordered that the ambassador was to be split in two, lengthways, but the executioner was an old fellow with a twitch, and he missed his aim. As a result, zac! He clipped off his left ear. Because I didn't want people thinking I was a disordered sort of chap, with a taste for asymmetry, I had him crop off the other ear too. Looked not too bad, really... a bit off centre, but...

FERDINANDO: And the nose?

COLUMBUS: The nose... Well, that was the ambassador's fault. Just as the axe was coming down, he turned round, profile, to see what was going on, and, zac!

JAILER: Let's get on with it!

Enter two GIRLS with sheets of paper and goose quill pens, which they hand to the BYSTANDERS so that they can take notes.

FERDINANDO: Abuse of authority: you forced your sailors to perjure themselves.

JAILER: Six years.

FERDINANDO: Fraud!

FONSECA: I think the business of swindling the sailor out of his reward will do.

JAILER: [*Consulting his law book*] Theft from a gentleman... Theft from a knight... from a barber... from a farmer... from a sailor! Here we are! Two years.

COLUMBUS: What?! Two years? For a sailor? He was a Muslim! Is nothing sacred?

GIOVANNA: That's right. A bad Muslim. The kind who eat Catholics.

JAILER: Oh alright then. Knock off the two years!

FERDINANDO: Murder!

JAILER: Eleven years.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Eleven!

FERDINANDO: Prevarication.

JAILER: Nine.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Nine!

FERDINANDO: Fraudulent bankruptcy.

JAILER: Three.

COLUMBUS: Five-ish!

He waves a sheet of paper under the KING's nose.

FONSECA: Columbus, you are playing with fire!

FERDINANDO: Ah yes... speaking of fire... Arson!

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Four.

FERDINAND: Slander, libel, and nocturnal hanky-panky... What shall we say for that?

COLUMBUS: I surrender!

FERDINANDO: Still trying to be funny, eh? Be warned, Columbus – if you can't establish your innocence, you're facing a total of... [*Turning to the JAILER*] How much does that make?

JAILER: [*He works out some sums on the blackboard*] It won't go.

FERDINANDO: What?

JAILER: Eleven into seven won't go.

FERDINANDO: Well, turn it over. Multiply the seven by three...

JAILER: Ah, yes... That makes 97 years, 3 months and 1 day.

COLUMBUS: Ninety-seven years!! That's a bit blooming steep!

GIOVANNA: Don't worry, Columbus, don't *worry*! They haven't passed sentence yet. You'll see, there's going to be an amnesty.

TWO HERALDS: [*To the accompaniment of a drumroll*] Evviva, evviva! The Princess Alfonsa, wife of Henry, King of Portugal, has given birth to a baby girl!

CHORUS: Long live the Infanta!

GIOVANNA: There, what did I tell you Columbus? You'll see, they'll kock off at least two years for that. [*To the JAILER*] What does the book say?

JAILER: Amnesty for the birth of a female Infanta: three years.

HERALDS: [*To whom a JUDGE has whispered something*] Correction: the above-mentioned female was a male!

GIOVANNA: Excellent! [*To the JAILER*] What's that worth?

JAILER: Eight!

PINZON: *And* he looks just like his father!

JAILER: Ten!

GIOVANNA: Ten years off your sentence.

FERDINANDO: I lay four ducats it goes up to fifteen!

TWO MEMBERS OF THE CHORUS: [*Accepting the bet*] You're on! You're on!

FIRST LADY IN WAITING: [*Entering*] ...And he's got a smile just like his grandfather's! Our beloved King Ferdinando.

CHORUS: Hooray!

JAILER: Thirteen!

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Thirteen!

COLUMBUS: Look at that – thirteen!

FERDINANDO: Four ducats, four ducats... I'll make that six!

SECOND PROSECUTOR: [*Accepting*] Six, you're on!

FERDINANDO: Okey-dokey!

HERALDS: [*Coming onstage*] Evviva, evviva! Our Princess Eleonora has just become engaged to Philip of Flanders!

CHORUS: Hooray!

COLUMBUS: [To GIOVANNA] What's Flanders worth?

JAILER: Fifteen.

FERDINANDO: I win!

COLUMBUS: Fifteen years amnesty. Well, can't say fairer than that!

JUDGE: Eleonora is already expecting a baby.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: But they're not even married yet!

GIOVANNA: So?

COLUMBUS: Good, good... [To the JAILER] How are we doing?

JUDGE: [*Consulting the manual which KING FERDINAND has in his hand*] Well, even if you are found guilty, the most you'll get... taking away the years of amnesty... [To the JAILER] What does it come to?

JAILER: Twenty-seven!

JUDGE: Twenty-seven years!

COLUMBUS: Ha, ha! only twenty-seven years! It's a doddle!

FERDINANDO: [*Getting up*] Well, you'll have to excuse me, it's been such fun, but duty calls!

HERALDS: Evviva, evviva! Spain has declared war on France!

CHORUS: Death, death to the Frankish infidel!

HERALDS: [*They reach the edge of the stage, and then double back*] Victory, victory! The Frank has fallen, and fled...

They exit with FERDINAND.

GIOVANNA: So, Columbus, you started out with ninety-seven years in jail, and instead you've run up an amnesty total of a hundred and seven, which means that you're ten years in credit!

COLUMBUS: In other words, even if you found me guilty...

FONSECA: You mean that we've been here shouting ourselves hoarse for nothing!?

COLUMBUS: Not at all! Cheer up! We've got the book of words here – let's have a look... [*He takes the manual from the hands of the second JAILER, and reads incomprehensible words*]

Here, look: ten [*Reading aloud*] In the event that I find myself ten years in credit... [*He continues reading unintelligible words, and when he finishes he hits FONSECA*] That makes us evens. And now do you know what I say to you? You can keep your vice-regencies and your prebendaries and your percentages. Give me an old hulk of a ship, and I'll return to the Indies, and that'll be the last you ever see of me!

HERALDS: [*Re-entering, still with their drums*] Columbus went off. Everyone forgot about him. One year... Two years... Three years... Four years went by. He sailed the ocean blue. And then he returned – but he was a name forgotten.

During the HERALD's speech, a big banner is brought on stage by two SERVANTS, in order that the gallows scaffold can be transformed into a ship behind it. On the forestage we have FONSECA and the SECOND PROSECUTOR.

FONSECA: Columbus? I knew a certain Columbus back in 1611. He lisped.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Lisped?

FONSECA: Yes. Thpoke like thith, with hith ethes.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: No, that's not the one.

FONSECA: You're right. It was his thithter who lithped.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: No, he didn't have a sister!

FONSECA: Well who was it had the lisp, then?

SECOND PROSECUTOR: [*Irritated*] I don't know!! The one I'm talking about is the admiral, the ex vice-regent. You remember...

FONSECA: An admiral with a lisp? Ah, I remember. That blighter we never managed to stick the charges on, in that trial.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Yes, that's the one.

FONSECA: But he didn't lisp, did he?

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Who cares? Anyway, he won't get off so easily this time; there'll be no amnesties or jiggery-pokery to save him this time.

FONSECA: I see: politics.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: No, witchcraft.

FONSECA: Don't say things when you don't mean them! I won't permit gratuitous slanders here. Do you have the proof, the witnesses?

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Proof, you want? Witnesses? [*He points to the wings, where the*

two HERALDS *are entering*] Here they are!

FONSECA: With a lithp?

HERALDS: On the ninth of May 1502, following on the intercession of Queen Isabella and a pardon by the King, albeit stripped of all rights in the lands that he had discovered, Columbus sets off on his fourth and final voyage.

SECOND PROSECUTOR: He was expressly forbidden to enter any of the ports in the colonies.

ANOTHER CHARACTER: If he wants to anchor, he's going to have to find new lands and new ports.

HERALDS: But when he reached the Indies...

SECOND PROSECUTOR: ...ignoring the King's orders...

HERALDS: ...he asked permission to enter the port of Hispaniola...

SECOND PROSECUTOR: ...on the pretext that a storm was about to blow up, and he was seeking shelter.

HERALDS: The deputy governor went on board to meet him.

The stage has once again been transformed into a ship. COLUMBUS and a number of SAILORS are busy on deck, and the DEPUTY GOVERNOR is with them. A gong sounds.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: Come off it, Columbus... I see no storm. I'm not stupid, you know. There's not a cloud in the sky, and the sea's as smooth as glass...

COLUMBUS: Precisely. That's what I mean. Smooth as glass... Look at the bottom.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: Well? It's clear. So what?

All of a sudden he starts shouting] All hands on deck to lower the mainsail!

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: What on earth are you doing?

COLUMBUS: Out with the half-sail! Hoist the flyer!

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: My boat!

COLUMBUS: Haul away, all together... Heave! Get ready to take the wind from the lee side! Up with the anchor! Hurry, hurry... Here it comes!

People run around, some of them going up ladders, some of them pulling ropes. One, with an axe, cuts the mooring rope.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: Hey, what about me? Go back! Wait, let me go down first!

COLUMBUS: There's no time. It's too late now.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: What do you mean, too late?!

COLUMBUS: What do you order me? Look over to the West a bit, and start praying.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: Oh, God! What's that big strip coming towards us?

COLUMBUS: Waves, my friend, waves as high as three ships, one on top of the other.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: And the hurricane?!

VOICES: Here comes the wind.

COLUMBUS: Drop the mainsail... Steady as she goes, steady as she goes...

All the ACTORS on stage mime a slow see-saw movement. We have a sense of great tension, as if the wind is about to sweep everything off the ship.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: Good God, it feels like we're flying!

A crash of waves, surf and the howling of wind.

COLUMBUS: Hold on... Get hold of the masts.

A strip of blue silk, about two metres broad and long enough to cover the entire front of the stage, is run across the stage. The strip is waved from the wings, in such a way as to create the image of waves following after one another.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: But where are we going?! Columbus!

COLUMBUS: Don't you see? We're trying to get away from that cataclysm. But those other poor wretches, look, they're going right into the middle.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: Poor devils: not one of them will be saved!

COLUMBUS: But who is the miserable wretch who commands that fleet? They're dropping their sails! Well done! That means that the wind, instead of driving them on, will smash them.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: What a slaughter! Look, that's the flagship... turned bottom-up!

FIRST SAILOR: What a crash! Three ships torn apart...

FOURTH SAILOR: And those two, those two capsized...

FIRST SAILOR: What do you mean, two, there's three...

FOURTH SAILOR: There's one going down!

FIRST SAILOR: That makes four!

COLUMBUS: Yes, what a performancer eh?! But don't stand there gawping – it'll be our turn next. Bring up all the reserve anchors. How many do we have?

FIRST SAILOR: Four!

COLUMBUS: Alright, drop all four of them!

FIRST SAILOR: Without dropping the sails? We'll be torn apart!

COLUMBUS: Don't worry. We're going to work it like a kite.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: What do you mean, like a kite?

COLUMBUS: Like a child's kite, up in the air, with a string holding it to the ground. The anchors will hold us just like a kite... If the sails don't give at the first gust!

FIRST SAILOR: The anchors are down! Shall we let the chains out?

COLUMBUS: All on deck, and strapped down!

FIRST SAILOR: Everything shut down. Wait for the crash! And God help us!

There is a mighty crash. People are sent rolling in all directions. Then, as if by magic, the ship stops rolling.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: What's happened? How is it that we are so steady, not rolling any more?

COLUMBU: You see: it held! The anchor held! Look, look how the hull's riding it! You see? It's taken very little water!

SECOND SAILOR: How strange! You can move around too, now.

FOURTH SAILOR: It feels as if we're in suspension... as if we're flying.

COLUMBUS: Exactly. We're suspended, suspended like a great big kite, and as long as it holds...

There is another crash.

THIRD SAILOR: Look out, here comes the big one!

The blue silk strip is hurled up so that it rises four or five yards off the floor.

COLUMBUS: That's too much! Help!

Everybody is hurled off the ship, except for one sailor.

THIRD SAILOR: Is anyone there?

EVERYBODY: [*Looking out from behind the ship*] Has it gone?

THIRD SAILOR: Yes.

EVERYBODY: [*Getting back on the ship*] Thank goodness for that.

COLUMBUS: Take a look if the hull is still riding it!

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: Yes, it's riding. The kite is still working.

The silk strip begins to be shaken more gently.

SECOND SAILOR: Saved, we're saved! Look: the wind's dropped, and the sea's getting calmer.

THIRD SAILOR: We're saved! There's the horizon again.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: None of those twenty ships survived. All drowned!

COLUMBUS: What was I telling you? It was you who didn't want to listen to me.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR: You know what I say, Columbus? You frighten me! You've saved my life, but it frightens me, the way you did it. It smacks of witchcraft.

COLUMBUS: But instead it's only a question of intelligence. New things always frighten stupid people; and now, all of you, down here together, on your knees: let's thank the Almighty for the genius which he, luckily for you, was good enough to give me.

CHORUS: [*Singing*] Laudamus, domine...

SECOND PROSECUTOR: Are you convinced, now? He's a witch. Did you see what happened to those twenty ships? Black magic! I think the facts speak for themselves. The fact is that Christopher Columbus...

FONSECA: ...is one of the greatest sailors the world has known. *That* is what the facts show! [*COLUMBUS enters from the back of the stage, leaning on a crutch and tottering*] But how has the world thanked him? Look...! And now you want to charge him with witchcraft!! *Enough* of this!

COLUMBUS: [*Frontstage*] Enough? Ha! I'll say... enough indeed. Look at the state of me. A beggar in rags. On my last trip I caught every poxy disease going. Parrot diseases. Monkey diseases. You name it... I got back and I went knocking at the King's door... But what did I get? A kick up the arse from everyone from the Lord Chancellor to the Court dwarf... well, not the dwarf, actually... he couldn't reach. Huh! Well... it's my fault, I suppose. You lie down with

dogs and you end up with fleas. I started off so well. In this scummy world where everyone's out for themselves, all I wanted was *my* little place in the sun. Self-advancement, they say! Initiative! God helps those who help themselves! So I did – I made my little pot, I carved my little corner, but no, they didn't like that, did they...! You fight your way up from the gutter, and they kick you right back where you started. Faith, I had... Hope, I had... but Charity... charity, they had none. And so I am left, brethren [*Slightly bombastic*], to draw the necessary conclusions, and the only conclusion I can conclude is that...

EXECUTIONER: [*Wielding his axe*] OK, woah there! – Come in number twenty-seven... you're running over time with this show.

The actor playing the CONDEMNED MAN suddenly sheds the character of COLUMBUS.

CONDEMNED MAN: [*In a strangled voice*] Oh God! I'd forgotten...!

EXECUTIONER: Come along, Sunshine. We haven't got all day. Up you go.

CONDEMNED MAN: Wait. [*Turning to the WOMAN from previously*] Is there anything for me?

WOMAN: I wish I could say there was, but there isn't, and I can't. They said no.

EXECUTIONER: Alright, can we get a move on? [*Pointing to the CONDEMNED MAN, who has started leaping round the stage like a lunatic*] What's got into him now?

CONDEMNED MAN: [*Laughing uproariously*] Ha, ha! ...And to think that I was waiting here for the "cavalry" to arrive, and only now have I realised that the "cavalry" is us, us! Yes, of course! And if we always sit around here, doing nothing, passive, waiting for somebody to come and save us, and get us out, then we'll always come unstuck!

EXECUTIONER: Well said! And now, if you've finished filling your head with fancy ideas, kindly step this way, because I've got to remove it for you.

CONDEMNED MAN: Don't I even get a few last words from the scaffold? About Columbus? A sort of... summing up?

EXECUTIONER: No! Enough! Basta! Finito!

CONDEMNED MAN: What about if I sing it?

EXECUTIONER: Oh, alright then... I like a bit of a sing-song...

All the ACTORS arrange themselves as at the start of the play. Some of them are wearing the costumes of characters whom they have played subsequently and others are wearing the cloaks, the hoods and the grotesque masks of the Inquisition. They sing in chorus:

*Without a doubt there has never been seen
A greater sailor
Than our Columbus
Since the world began.*

*But this Columbus
Was a white pigeon,
Dressed up as a falcon,
Dressed as a smooth operator.
On the sea, a great captain;
On the land, a courtier,
In order to be cunning,
He played with the powerful,
Who, as soon as he wasn't looking, put him down.
And then they transformed him,
He who had been so cunning and clever,*

*Into a poor devil,
As had been foreseen.
Those who take the side of the most powerful
Do not always have the greater advantage.
If you are not a priest, it's not enough to seem like one;
It's not enough just to sing in Latin.
In fact the true cunning man is always the honest man,
And not the opportunist.
It is the man who at any cost
Always stands firm together with
The poor devils
And just men.*

As the chorus is singing the final verse, the ACTOR is carried up onto the scaffold, bound, and made to kneel before a big chopping block. The EXECUTIONER raises his axe. Everyone kneels down. Blackout. During the blackout we hear a yell from the crowd. The lights come up. On the block we see the freshly-cut head of the CONDEMNED MAN. Deprived of his head, the CONDEMNED MAN stands next to the block, with one hand resting on his own cropped head. Obviously a trick is involved here. The curtain falls.

THE END