

# **HENRY IV**

by  
**Luigi Pirandello**

**Edited and Introduction by**  
**William-Alan Landes**

**PLAYERS PRESS**



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## HENRY IV

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## INTRODUCTION

Henry IV is one of Pirandello's most popular plays. It has had a long and successful history playing in London, New York, Paris and most Italian cities. Its popularity continues and periodically it is produced as a mainstage presentation.

The play opens in the majestic throne room of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (1050 – 1106) with courtiers discussing the intrigues of Pope Gregory. When one of the courtiers lights his pipe and another arrives costumed in the period of Henry IV of France, we realize that this is a masquerade. We learn that twenty years before, when his beloved Matilda, for a masque, dressed as the Countess Matilda, her suitor Henry donned the costume of Henry IV. But his rival for her affections, Baron Belcredi, spiked Henry's horse, and he was thrown. Regaining consciousness, Henry believed he was the true emperor. His wealthy sister, to indulge him, provided a castle and the means to live out his delusion. Now, twenty years later, Matilda, widow and mistress of Belcredi, comes with her lover and her daughter Frida to the castle. A psychiatrist has suggested that their appearance might shock Henry back into reality. The irony is that for years Henry has been sane, but preferred the elegance and splendor of his fantasy life. The sight of the beautiful Frida, in her youth and warm vitality, overwhelmingly evokes the life Henry might have had. He embraces her madly. Belcredi angrily steps forward and Henry runs him through with a courtier's dress-sword. As Belcredi dies, Henry realizes that he must now and forever wear the mark of a true madman. But, is this bad?

Pirandello believes that this 'satirical comedy' works on the interplay of rationality and irrationality in our lives. The play is a retreat from reality—a senseless mad flight along the highway which we all travel a little distance each day of our lives. George Freedly called it "one of the most brilliant plays of the modern theatre."

This is an extremely absorbing drama, probing the troubled consciousness of mankind. For all the fantasy surrounding Henry, his problem is a poignant and very modern one. He has crossed the bridge of life into his own fantasy world and rather than return, he would live out this dream. The murder doesn't really change anything, it just simplifies Henry's decision. Only briefly does reality offer any allure, but safety in the reality of the delusion is far more permanent. *Henry IV* is a profound philosophical fantasy on the plight of human personality in a purely entertaining dramatic package.

*William-Alan Landes*

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**LANDOLPH**

**HAROLD**

**ORDULPH**

**SECOND VALET**

**FIRST VALET**

**BERTHOLD**

**GIOVANNI**

**DI NOLLI**

**BELCREDI**

**DONNA MATILDA**

**FRIDA**

**HENRY IV**

**THE VOICE OF GIOVANNI**

**HENRY IV**  
**A TRAGEDY IN THREE ACTS**

**ACT I**

*A grand hall in the villa, furnished and decorated so as to look exactly like the throne room of Henry IV in the royal residence at Goslar, Hanover. Among the antique decorations are two modern life-size portraits in oil painting. They are placed against the back wall, and mounted in a wooden stand that runs the whole length of the wall. (It is wide and protrudes, so it is like a large bench.) One of the paintings is on the right; the other on the left of the throne, which is in the middle of the wall and divides the stand.*

*The Imperial chair and Baldachin.*

*The two portraits represent a lady and a gentleman, both young, dressed up in carnival costumes: one as "Henry IV," the other as the "Marchioness Matilda of Tuscany." Exits to Right and Left.*

*(When the curtain goes up, the two valets jump down, as if surprised, from the stand on which they have been lying, and go and take their positions, as rigid as statues, on either side below the throne with their halberds in their hands. Soon after, from the second exit, right, enter Harold, Landolph, Ordulph and Berthold, young men employed by the Marquies Charles Di Nolli to play the part of "Secret Counsellors" at the court of "Henry IV." They are, therefore, dressed like German knights of the Eleventh Century. Berthold, nicknamed Fino, is just entering on his duties for the first time. His companions are telling him what he has to do and amusing themselves at his expense. The scene is to be played rapidly and vivaciously.)*

**LANDOLPH.** *(To Berthold as if explaining.)* And this is the throne room.

**HAROLD.** At Goslar.

**ORDULPH.** Or at the castle in the Hartz, if you prefer.

**HAROLD.** Or at Wurms.

**LANDOLPH.** According as to what's doing, it jumps about with us, now here, now there.

**ORDULPH.** In Saxony.

**HAROLD.** In Lombardy.

**LANDOLPH.** On the Rhine.

**SECOND VALET.** *(Without moving, just opening his lips.)* I say...

**HAROLD.** *(Turning around.)* What is it?

**FIRST VALET.** *(Like a statue.)* Is he coming in or not? *(He alludes to the Emperor, Henry IV.)*

**ORDULPH.** No, no, he's asleep. You needn't worry.

**SECOND VALET.** *(Releasing his pose, taking a long breath and going to lie down again on the stand.)* You might have told us at once.

**FIRST VALET.** *(Going over to Harold.)* Have you got a match, please?

**LANDOLPH.** What? You can't smoke a pipe here, you know.

**FIRST VALET.** *(While Harold offers him a light.)* No; a cigarette. *(Lights his cigarette and lies down again on the stand.)*

**BERTHOLD.** *(Who has been looking on in amazement, walking round the room, regarding the costumes of the others.)* I say...this room...these costumes...which Henry IV is it? I don't quite get it. Is he Henry IV of France or not? *(At this Landolph, Harold, and Ordulph, burst out laughing.)*

**LANDOLPH.** *(Still laughing; and pointing to Berthold as if inviting the others to make fun of him.)* Henry of France he says: ha! ha!

**ORDULPH.** He thought it was the king of France!

**HAROLD.** Henry IV of Germany, my boy: the Salian dynasty!

**ORDULPH.** The great and tragic Emperor!

**LANDOLPH.** He of Canossa. Every day we carry on here the terrible war between Church and State, by Jove.

**ORDULPH.** The Empire against the Papacy!

**HAROLD.** Antipopes against the Pope!

**LANDOLPH.** Kings against antikings!

**ORDULPH.** War on the Saxons!

**HAROLD.** And all the rebels Princes!

**LANDOLPH.** Against the Emperor's own sons!

**BERTHOLD.** *(Covering his head with his hands to protect himself against this avalanche of information.)* I understand! I understand! Naturally, I didn't get the idea at first. I'm right then: these aren't costumes of the Sixteenth Century?

**HAROLD.** Sixteenth Century be hanged!

**ORDULPH.** We're somewhere between a thousand and eleven hundred.

**LANDOLPH.** Work it out for yourself: if we are before Canossa on January 25, 1077...

**BERTHOLD.** (*More confused than ever.*) Oh my God! What a mess I've made of it!

**ORDULPH.** Well, just slightly, if you thought you were at the French court.

**BERTHOLD.** No, the English court! Of course, the French!

**LANDOLPH.** That is just four hundred years earlier.

**BERTHOLD.** (*Getting angry.*) Good Heavens! You ought to have told me it was Henry IV of Germany. I can't tell you how many books I've read in the last fifteen days.

**HAROLD.** But surely you knew that poor Tito was Adalbert Bishop of Bremen in this house?

**BERTHOLD.** How would I know that!

**LANDOLPH.** Well, don't you see how it is? When Tito died, the Marquis Di Nolli...

**BERTHOLD.** Oh, it was he, was it? He might have told me.

**HAROLD.** Perhaps he thought you knew.

**LANDOLPH.** He didn't want to engage anyone else in substitution. He thought the remaining three of us would do. But he began to cry out: "With Adalbert driven away"...because, you see, he didn't imagine poor Tito was dead; but that, as Bishop Adalbert, the rival bishops of Cologne and Mayence had driven him off...

**BERTHOLD.** (*Taking his head in his hand.*) But I don't know a word of what you're talking about.

**ORDULPH.** So much the worse, for you, my boy!

**HAROLD.** But the trouble is that not even we know who you are.

**BERTHOLD.** What? Not even you? You don't know who I'm supposed to be?

**ORDULPH.** Hum! "Berthold."

**BERTHOLD.** But which Berthold? And why Berthold?

**LANDOLPH.** (*Solemnly imitating Henry IV.*) "They've driven Adalbert away from me. Well then, I want Berthold! I want Berthold!" That's what he said.

**HAROLD.** We three looked one another in the eyes: who's got to be Berthold?

**ORDULPH.** And so here you are, "Berthold," my dear fellow!

**LANDOLPH.** I'm afraid you will make a bit of a mess of it.

**BERTHOLD.** (*Indignant, getting ready to go.*) Ah, no! Thanks very much, but I'm off! I'm out of this!

**HAROLD.** (*Restraining him with the other two, amid laughter.*) Steady now! Don't get excited!



**LANDOLPH.** Cheer up, my dear fellow! None of us know who we are really. He's Harold; he's Ordulph; I'm Landolph! That's the way he calls us. We've got used to it. But who are we? Names of the period! Yours, too, is a name of the period: Berthold! Only one of us, poor Tito, had got a really decent part, as you can read in history: that of the Bishop of Bremen. He was just like a real bishop. Tito did it awfully well, poor chap!

**HAROLD.** Look at the study he put into it!

**LANDOLPH.** Why, he even ordered his Majesty about, opposed his views, guided and counselled him. We're "secret counsellors"...in a manner of speaking only; because it is written in history that Henry IV was hated by the upper aristocracy for surrounding himself at court with young men of the bourgeoisie.

**ORDULPH.** Us, that is.

**LANDOLPH.** Yes, small devoted vassals, a bit dissolute and very gay...

**BERTHOLD.** So I've got to be gay as well?

**HAROLD.** I should say so! Same as we are!

**ORDULPH.** And it isn't too easy, you know.

**LANDOLPH.** It's a pity; because the way we're got up, we could do a fine historical reconstruction. There's any amount of material in the story of Henry IV. But, as a matter of fact, we do nothing. We have the form without the content. We're worse than the real secret counsellors of Henry IV, because certainly no one had given them a part to play...at any rate, they didn't feel they had a part to play. It was their life. They looked after their own interests at the expense of others, sold investitures and...what not! We stop here in this magnificent court...for what?...just doing nothing. We're like so many puppets hung on a wall, waiting for someone to come and move us or make us talk.

**HAROLD.** Ah no, old sport, not quite that! We've got to give the proper answer, you know. There's trouble if he asks you something and you don't chip in with the cue.

**LANDOLPH.** Yes, that's true.

**BERTHOLD.** Don't rub it in too hard! How the devil am I to give him the proper answer, if I've studied Henry IV of France, and now he turns out to be Henry IV of Germany? *(The other three laugh.)*

**HAROLD.** You'd better start to prepare yourself at once.

**ORDULPH.** We'll help you out.

**HAROLD.** We've got any number of books on the subject. A brief run through the main points will do to begin with.

**ORDULPH.** At any rate, you must have got some sort of general idea.

**HAROLD.** Look here! *(Turns him around and shows him the portrait of the Marchioness Matilda on the wall.)* Who's that?

**BERTHOLD.** *(Looking at it.)* That? Well, the thing seems to be

somewhat out of place, anyway: two modern paintings in the midst of all this respectable antiquity!

**HAROLD.** You're right! They weren't there in the beginning. There are two niches there behind the pictures. They were going to put up two statues in the style of the period. Then the places were covered with those canvasses there.

**LANDOLPH.** (*Interrupting and continuing.*) They would certainly be out of place if they really were paintings!

**BERTHOLD.** What are they, if they aren't painting?

**LANDOLPH.** Go and touch them! Pictures all right...but for him... (*Makes a mysterious gesture to the right, alluding to Henry IV.*) ...who never touches them!

**BERTHOLD.** No? What are they for him?

**LANDOLPH.** Well, I'm only supposing, you know; but I imagine I'm about right. They're images such as...well...such as a mirror might throw back. Do you understand? That one there represents himself, as he is in this throne room, which is all in the style of the period. What's there to marvel at? If we put you before a mirror, won't you see yourself, alive, but dressed up in ancient costume? Well, it's as if there were two mirrors there, as you will see, when you have lived with us, comes to life, too.

**BERTHOLD.** I say, look here...I've no particular desire to go mad here.

**HAROLD.** Go mad, be hanged! You'll have fine time!

**BERTHOLD.** Tell me this: how have you all managed to become so learned?

**LANDOLPH.** My dear fellow, you can't go back over eight hundred years of history without picking up a bit of experience.

**HAROLD.** Come on! Come on! You'll see how quickly you get into it!

**ORDULPH.** You'll learn wisdom, too, at this school.

**BERTHOLD.** Well, for Heaven's sake, help me a bit! Give me the main lines, anyway.

**HAROLD.** Leave it to us. We'll do it all between us.

**LANDOLPH.** We'll put your wires on you and fix you up like a first-class marionette. Come along! (*They take him by the arm to lead him away.*)

**BERTHOLD.** (*Stopping and looking at the portrait on the wall.*) Wait a minute! You haven't told me who that is. The Emperor's wife?

**HAROLD.** No! The Emperor's wife is Bertha of Susa, the sister of Amadeus II of Savoy.

**ORDULPH.** And the Emperor, who wants to be young with us, can't stand her, and wants to put her away.

**LANDOLPH.** That is his most ferocious enemy: Matilda, Marchioness of Tuscany.

**BERTHOLD.** Ah, I've got it: the one who gave hospitality to the Pope!

**LANDOLPH.** Exactly: at Canossa!

**ORDULPH.** Pope Gregory VII!

**HAROLD.** Our bête noir! Come on! Come on! *(All four move toward the right to go out, when from the left, the old servant John enters in evening dress.)*

**GIOVANNI.** *(Quickly, anxiously.)* Hss! Hss! Frank! Lolo!

**HAROLD.** *(Turning round.)* What is it?

**BERTHOLD.** *(Amazed at seeing a man in modern clothes enter the throne room.)* Oh! I say, this is a bit too much, this chap here!

**LANDOLPH.** A man of the Twentieth Century, here? Oh, go away! *(They run over to him, pretending to menace him and throw him out.)*

**ORDULPH.** *(Heroically.)* Messenger of Gregory VII, away!

**HAROLD.** Away! Away!

**GIOVANNI.** *(Annoyed, defending himself.)* Oh, stop it! Stop it, I tell you!

**ORDULPH.** No, you can't set foot here!

**HAROLD.** Out with him!

**LANDOLPH.** *(To Berthold.)* Magic, you know! He's a demon conjured up by the Wizard of Rome! Out with your swords! *(Makes as if to draw a sword.)*

**GIOVANNI.** *(Shouting.)* Stop it, will you? Don't play the fool with me! The Marquis has arrived with some friends...

**LANDOLPH.** Good! Good! Are there ladies, too?

**ORDULPH.** Old or young?

**GIOVANNI.** There are two gentlemen.

**HAROLD.** But the ladies, the ladies, who are they?

**GIOVANNI.** The Marchioness and her daughter.

**LANDOLPH.** *(Surprised.)* What do you say?

**ORDULPH.** The Marchioness?

**GIOVANNI.** The Marchioness! The Marchioness!

**HAROLD.** Who are the gentlemen?

**GIOVANNI.** I don't know.

**HAROLD.** *(To Berthold.)* They're coming to bring us a message from the Pope, do you see?

**ORDULPH.** All messengers of Gregory VII! What fun!

**GIOVANNI.** Will you let me speak, or not?

**HAROLD.** Go on, then!

**GIOVANNI.** One of the two gentlemen is a doctor, I fancy.

**LANDOLPH.** Oh, I see, one of the usual doctors.

**HAROLD.** Bravo Berthold. You'll bring us luck!

**LANDOLPH.** You wait and see how we'll manage this doctor!

**BERTHOLD.** It looks as if I were going to get into a nice mess right away.

**GIOVANNI.** If the gentlemen would allow me to speak...they want to come here into the throne room.

**LANDOLPH.** (*Surprised.*) What? She? The Marchioness here?

**HAROLD.** Then this is something quite different! No play-acting this time!

**LANDOLPH.** We'll have a real tragedy: that's what!

**BERTHOLD.** (*Curious.*) Why? Why?

**ORDULPH.** (*Pointing to the portrait.*) She is that person there, don't you understand?

**LANDOLPH.** The daughter is the fiancée of the Marquis. But what have they come for, I should like to know?

**ORDULPH.** If he sees her, there'll be trouble.

**LANDOLPH.** Perhaps he won't recognize her any more.

**GIOVANNI.** You must keep him there, if he should wake up.

**ORDULPH.** Easier said than done, by Jove!

**HAROLD.** You know what he's like!

**GIOVANNI.** ...even by force, if necessary! Those are my orders. Go on! Go on!

**HAROLD.** Yes, because who knows if he hasn't already wakened up?

**ORDULPH.** Come on then!

**LANDOLPH.** (*Going toward John with the others.*) You'll tell us later what it all means.

**GIOVANNI.** (*Shouting after them.*) Close the door there, and hide the key! That other door too. (*Pointing to the other door on right. To the two valets.*) Be off, you two! There! (*Pointing to exit right.*) Close the door after you, and hide the key!

*(The two valets go out by the first door on right. John moves over to the left to show in Donna Matilda Spina, the young Marchioness Frida, Dr. Dionysius Genoni, the Baron Tito Belcredi, and the young Marquis Charles Di Nolli, who, as master of the house, enters last.)*

**DONNA MATILDA SPINA** is about 45, still handsome, although there are two patent signs of her attempts to remedy the ravages of time with make-up. Her head is thus rather like a Valkyrie. This facial make-up contrasts with her beautiful sad mouth. A widow for many years, she now has as her friend the Baron Tito Belcredi, whom neither she nor anyone else takes seriously...at least as it would appear.

What **TITO BELCREDI** really is for her at bottom, he alone knows; and he is, therefore, entitled to laugh, if his friend feels the need of pretending not to know. He can always laugh at the jests which the beautiful Marchioness makes with the others at his expense. He is slim, prema-

turely gray, and younger than she is. His head is bird-like in shape. He would be a very vivacious person, if his ductile agility (which among other things makes him a redoubtable swordsman) were not enclosed in a sheath of Arab-like laziness, which is revealed in his strange, nasal drawn-out voice.

**FRIDA** is the daughter, 19, of the Marchioness. She is sad, because her imperious and too beautiful mother puts her in the shade, and provokes facile gossip against her daughter as well as against herself. Fortunately for her, she is engaged to the Marquis Charles Di Nolli.

**CHARLES DINOLLI** is a stiff young man, very indulgent towards others, but sure of himself for what he amounts to in the world. He is worried about all the responsibilities which he believes weigh on him. He is dressed in deep mourning for the recent death of his mother.

**DR. DIONYSIUS GENONI** has a bold rubicund Satyr-like face, prominent eyes, a pointed beard (which is silvery and shiny) and elegant manners. He is nearly bald.

(All enter in a state of perturbation, almost as if afraid, and all, except Di Nolli, looking curiously about the room. At first, they speak sotto voce.)

**DI NOLLI.** (To Giovanni.) Have you given the orders properly?

**GIOVANNI.** Yes, my Lord; don't be anxious about that.

**BELCREDI.** Ah, magnificent! Magnificent!

**DOCTOR.** How extremely interesting! Even in the surroundings his raving madness...is perfectly taken into account!

**DONNA MATILDA.** (Glancing around for her portrait, discovers it, and goes up close to it.) Ah! Here it is! (Going back to admire it, while mixed emotions stir within her.) Yes...yes... (Calls her daughter Frida.)

**FRIDA.** Ah, your portrait!

**DONNA MATILDA.** No, no...look again; it's you, not I, there!

**DI NOLLI.** Yes, it's quite true. I told you so, I...

**DONNA MATILDA.** But I would never have believed it! (Shaking as if with a chill.) What a strange feeling it gives one! (Then looking at her daughter.) Frida, what's the matter? (She pulls Frida to her side, and slips an arm around her waist.) Come here; don't you see yourself in me in that picture?

**FRIDA.** (With a gasp.) It is me...in that picture.

**DONNA MATILDA.** Don't you think so? Don't you, really? (Turning to Belcredi.) Look at it, Tito! Tell me what you think!

**BELCREDI.** (Without looking.) Ah, no! I shan't look at it. For me, a priority, certainly not!

**DONNA MATILDA.** Stupid! You think you are paying me a compli-

ment! (*Turning to Doctor Genoni.*) What do you say, Doctor? Do say something, please!

(*The doctor starts to move to go near to the picture.*)

**BELCREDI.** (*With his back turned, pretending to attract his attention secretly.*) Hss! No, Doctor! For the love of Heaven, have nothing to do with it!

**DOCTOR.** (*Getting bewildered, but smiling.*) And why shouldn't I?

**DONNA MATILDA.** Don't listen to him! Come here! He's insufferable!

**FRIDA.** He acts the fool by profession; didn't you know that?

**BELCREDI.** (*To the Doctor, seeing him go over.*) Look at your feet, Doctor! Mind where you're going!

**DOCTOR.** Why?

**BELCREDI.** Be careful you don't put your foot in it!

**DOCTOR.** (*Laughing feebly.*) No, no. After all, it seems to me there's no reason to be astonished at the fact that a daughter should resemble her mother!

**BELCREDI.** Hullo! Hullo! He's done it now; he's said it.

**DONNA MATILDA.** (*With exaggerated anger, advancing towards Belcredi.*) What's the matter? What has he said? What has he done?

**DOCTOR.** (*Candidly.*) Well, isn't it so?

**BELCREDI.** (*Answering the Marchioness.*) I said there was nothing to be astounded at...and you are astounded! And why so, then, if the thing is so simple and natural for you now?

**DONNA MATILDA.** (*Still more angry.*) Fool! Fool! It's just because it is so natural! Just because it isn't my daughter who is there. (*Pointing to the canvas.*) That is my portrait; and to find my daughter there instead of me fills me with astonishment, an astonishment which, I beg you to believe, is sincere. I forbid you to cast doubts on it.

**FRIDA.** (*Slowly and wearily.*) My God! It's always like this...rows over nothing...

**BELCREDI.** (*Also slowly, looking dejected, in accents of apology.*) I cast no doubt on anything! I noticed from the beginning that you haven't shared your mother's astonishment; or, if something did astonish you, it was because the likeness between you and the portrait seemed so strong.

**DONNA MATILDA.** Naturally! She cannot recognize herself in me as I was at her age; while I, there, can very well recognize myself in her as she is now!

**DOCTOR.** Quite right! Because a portrait is always there fixed in the twinkling of an eye: for the young lady something far away and without

memories, while, for the Marchioness, it can bring back everything: movements, gestures, looks, smiles, a whole heap of things...

**DONNA MATILDA.** Exactly!

**DOCTOR.** (*Continuing, turning toward her.*) Naturally enough, you can live all these old sensations again in your daughter.

**DONNA MATILDA.** He always spoils every innocent pleasure for me, every touch I have of spontaneous sentiment! He does it merely to annoy me.

**DOCTOR.** (*Frightened at the disturbance he has caused, adopts a professorial tone.*) Likeness, dear Baron, is often the result of imponderable things. So one explains that...

**BELCREDI.** (*Interrupting the discourse.*) Somebody will soon be finding a likeness between you and me, my dear professor!

**DINOLLI.** Oh! Let's finish with this, please! (*Points to the two doors on the Right, as a warning that there is someone there who may be listening.*) We've wasted too much time as it is!

**FRIDA.** As one might expect when he's present. (*Alludes to Belcredi.*)

**DINOLLI.** Enough! The doctor is here; and we have come for a very serious purpose which you all know is important for me.

**DOCTOR.** Yes, that is so! But now, first of all, let's try to get some points down exactly. Excuse me, Marchioness, will you tell me why your portrait is here? Did you present it to him then?

**DONNA MATILDA.** No, not at all. How could I have given it to him? I was just like Frida then...and not even engaged. I gave it to him three or four years after the accident. I gave it to him because his mother wished it so much. (*Points to Di Nolli.*)

**DOCTOR.** She was his sister? (*Alludes to Henry IV.*)

**DINOLLI.** Yes, Doctor; and our coming here is a debt we pay to my mother who has been dead for more than a month. Instead of being here, she and I... (*Indicating Frida.*) ...ought to be traveling together...

**DOCTOR.** ...taking a cure of quite a different kind!

**DINOLLI.** Hum! Mother died in the firm conviction that her adored brother was just about to be cured.

**DOCTOR.** And can you tell me, if you please, how she inferred this?

**DINOLLI.** The conviction would appear to have derived from certain strange remarks which he made, a little before mother died.

**DOCTOR.** Oh, remarks! Ah! It would be extremely useful for me to have those remarks, word for word, if possible.

**DINOLLI.** I can't remember them. I know that mother returned awfully upset from her last visit with him. On her death-bed, she made me promise that I would never neglect him, that I would have doctors see him, and examine him.

**DOCTOR.** Um! Um! Let me see! Let me see! Sometimes very small

reasons determine...and this portrait here then?

**DONNA MATILDA.** For Heaven's sake, doctor, don't attach excessive importance to this. It made an impression on me because I had not seen it for so many years!

**DOCTOR.** If you please, quietly, quietly...

**DI NOLLI.** Well, yes, it must be about fifteen years ago.

**DONNA MATILDA.** More, more: eighteen!

**DOCTOR.** Forgive me, but you don't quite know what I'm trying to get at. I attach a very great importance to these two portraits... They were painted, naturally, prior to the famous...and most regrettable pageant, weren't they?

**DONNA MATILDA.** Of course!

**DOCTOR.** That is...when he was quite in his right mind...that's what I've been trying to say. Was it his suggestion that they should be painted?

**DONNA MATILDA.** Lots of the people who took part in the pageant had theirs done as a souvenir...

**BELCREDI.** I had mine done...as "Charles of Anjou!"

**DONNA MATILDA.** ...as soon as the costumes were ready.

**BELCREDI.** As a matter of fact, it was proposed that the whole lot of us should be hung together in a gallery of the villa where the pageant took place. But in the end, everybody wanted to keep his portrait.

**DONNA MATILDA.** And I gave him this portrait of me without very much regret...since his mother... (*Indicated Di Nolli.*)

**DOCTOR.** You don't remember if it was he who asked for it?

**DONNA MATILDA.** Ah, that I don't remember... Maybe it was his sister, wanting to help out...

**DOCTOR.** One other thing: was it his idea, this pageant?

**BELCREDI.** (*At once.*) No, no, it was mine!

**DOCTOR.** If you please...

**DONNA MATILDA.** Don't listen to him! It was poor Belassi's idea.

**BELCREDI.** Belassi! What had he got to do with it?

**DONNA MATILDA.** Count Belassi, who died, poor fellow, two or three months after...

**BELCREDI.** But if Belassi wasn't there when...

**DI NOLLI.** Excuse me, doctor, but is it really necessary to establish whose the original idea was?

**DOCTOR.** It would help me, certainly!

**BELCREDI.** I tell you the idea was mine! There's nothing to be proud of in it, seeing what the result's been. Look here, doctor, it was like this. One evening, in the first days of November, I was looking at an illustrated German review in the club. I was merely glancing at the pictures, because I can't read German. There was a picture of the Kaiser, at some university town where



he had been a student...I don't remember which.

**DOCTOR.** Bonn, Bonn!

**BELCREDI.** You are right: Bonn! He was on horseback, dressed up in one of those ancient German student guild costumes, followed by a procession of noble students also in costume. The picture gave me the idea. Already someone at the club had spoken of a pageant for the forthcoming carnival. So I had the notion that each of us should choose for this Tower of Babel pageant to represent some character: a king, an emperor, a prince, with his queen, empress, or lady, alongside of him...and all on horseback. The suggestion was at once accepted.

**DONNA MATILDA.** I had my invitation from Belassi.

**BELCREDI.** Well, he wasn't speaking the truth! That's all I can say, if he told you the idea was his. He wasn't even at the club the evening I made the suggestion, just as he... (*Meaning Henry IV.*) ...wasn't there either.

**DOCTOR.** So he chose the character of Henry IV?

**DONNA MATILDA.** Because I...thinking of my name, and not giving the choice any importance, said I would be the Marchioness Matilda of Tuscany.

**DOCTOR.** I...don't understand the relation between the two.

**DONNA MATILDA.** Neither did I, to begin with, when he said that in that case he would be at my feet like Henry IV at Canossa. I had heard of Canossa of course; but to tell the truth, I'd forgotten most of the story; and I remember I received a curious impression when I had to get up my part, and found that I was the faithful and zealous friend of Pope Gregory VII in deadly enmity with the Emperor of Germany. Then I understood why, since I had chosen to represent his implacable enemy, he wanted to be near me in the pageant as Henry IV.

**DOCTOR.** Ah, perhaps because...

**BELCREDI.** Good Heavens, doctor, because he was then paying furious court to her! (*Indicates the Marchioness.*) And she, naturally...

**DONNA MATILDA.** Naturally? Not naturally at all...

**BELCREDI.** (*Pointing to her.*) She couldn't stand him...

**DONNA MATILDA.** No, that isn't true! I didn't dislike him. Not at all! But for me, when a man begins to want to be taken seriously, well...

**BELCREDI.** (*Continuing for her.*) He gives you the clearest proof of his stupidity.

**DONNA MATILDA.** No dear; not in this case; because he was never a fool like you.

**BELCREDI.** Anyway, I've never asked you to take me seriously.

**DONNA MATILDA.** Yes, I know. But with him one couldn't joke (*Changing her tone and speaking to the Doctor.*) One of the many misfortunes which happen to us women, Doctor, is to see before us every now