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FOUR ACTS), PP. 241-366**

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# Poet Lore

VOLUME XIX

AUTUMN 1908

NUMBER III

## PHANTASMS\*

(A drama in four acts)

By ROBERT BRACCO

Translated by *Dirce St. Cyr.*

### CHARACTERS

PROFESSOR RAYMOND ARTUNNI.†	SISTER ELISABETH.
JULIA, his wife.	AN OLD WOMAN.
MADAME MARNIERI.	MANLIO.
LUCIANO, her son.	ROBERT.
MADAME GILBERTA MIRELLI.	ALMERICO.
THE MARCHIONESS ANTONUCCI.	PAOLO.
ADALGISA.	ERNEST.
DONNA SOPHIA.	SEVERAL OTHER DISCIPLES.
FAUSTINA.	JOSEPH, the Professor's old servant.

† Professor Raymond Artunni is a man about forty-five — Julia, his wife, is about twenty-eight.

NOTICE for the actor who has to interpret the part of RAYMOND ARTUNNI.

The actor should not keep strictly to the pathological side of the character. It is a nervous kind of consumption which makes the invalid very agitated, impetuous, and vivacious. Therefore he has almost no cough, no asthma, excepting in some rare moments, when extremely tired out; consequently the actor must often speak frenetically, vehemently, effectively, and often his words should be delivered very emphatically.

For my part, as author, I regard this kind of consumption more as a moral illness than a physical one. It is almost the 'Symbol of Jealousy.'

ROBERTO BRACCO

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## ACT I

*A parlor in DOCTOR RAYMOND ARTUNNI's country house. The room is furnished with austere elegance, almost as solemn as an ancient house. It seems almost like a room in an ancient castle. The furniture also gives you that impression. On the right side there is a table, on which stands a vase containing a few flowers, some books, a hand-bell. Near the table an arm-chair covered with dark leather. Up stage center, the general entrance, opening into a small parlor. On the right side of this door, a window, opening on the garden a door, on both sides, left and right.*



## SCENE I

*The old servant* JOSEPH, MANLIO, LUCIANO

*Joseph (looking quite worried).*— Please be seated. As I said before, I am afraid I shall not be able to announce you to the doctor.

*Manlio.*— If the Doctor cannot see us, then do announce us to his wife.

*Joseph.*— I shall do so. Whom shall I announce?

*Manlio.*— What? (*Pointing to LUCIANO.*) Have you even forgotten Mr. Luciano Marnieri?

*Joseph.*— No, I do remember him.

*Manlio.*— Then his name is sufficient. I shall remain in obscurity.

*Luciano.*— But I beg your pardon, why do you send in my name?

*Manlio (mockingly).*— Good gracious! 'Why do you send in my name?' You have always been his favorite assistant, of course then he will not refuse to see us.

*Luciano.*— I came here with you to please my companions, not on my own account.

*Manlio.*— What does that mean?

*Luciano.*— I know what it means!

*Manlio (quickly to the servant).*— All right. Please tell the Doctor Artunni that 'two pupils of his wish to see him.' Nothing else.

*Joseph (slowly goes to the door on the left, opens it with caution, and immediately closes it after him. Exit.)*

*Luciano (to Manlio).*— I think it is useless to speak to her. Let us go and try again some other time.

*Manlio.*— Go now, after announcing ourselves? You must be crazy! It would be very impolite.

*Luciano (making a gesture as if yielding).*

*Joseph (entering again).*— Mrs. Artunni will see you in a few minutes. *(Slowly exit from the center door.)*

*Manlio.*— That poor old man is suffering from hypochondria! The air of the country does not agree with him. Have you noticed that every one around here looks so sad? What's the trouble with all the people?

*Luciano (in a dreamy way, approaches the window, and contemplates the view.)*

*Manlio.*— Did you not notice also that pretty country woman, down in the garden, who looked so healthy, yet so sad? She was lying down on the straw, holding the tail of a pig that wanted to run away. She looked like Ariadne at the moment when Theseus was abandoning her. When I said to her: 'Hello, my pretty girl, is this Dr. Artunni's house?' Her answer, 'Yes sir,' was so sad that it made me shiver. In order to see her smile, I asked her name. You know how all the country girls are pleased when you ask them their names? But she was not. In the same sorrowful manner she said 'Caroline.' *(Pause.)* What are you looking so attentively at?

*Luciano.*— Nothing.

*Manlio.*— Do you see our companions?

*Luciano (in an absent-minded way).*— No. *(Stepping aside in order to let MANLIO look out from the window.)*

*Manlio.*— Yes, we can see them! There they are sitting on the grass like pasturing sheep! Did you hear what Robert promised us? . . . If he fails to find a four-leaf clover, he will invite all of us to lunch. I'll wager we won't. That boy is so lucky that no doubt he will find a five-leaf one instead! I must tell you. . . .

*(Enter JULIA from left, immediately closing the door after her with caution.)*

## SCENE II

MANLIO, LUCIANO, JULIA

*Luciano (who was looking at that side, seeing JULIA enter, immediately pulls MANLIO's coat to stop him. Timidly, bowing respectfully).*—Madame—

*Manlio (turning quickly, also bowing low, but in a vivacious manner).*—Mrs. Artunni.

*Julia (bowing just a little coolly).*— What can I do for you?

*Manlio.*— You have of course recognized our illustrious Doctor

Luciano Marnieri (*to LUCIANO*). Why don't you thank me for calling you illustrious? (*To JULIA*.) For a year he was the right hand of your husband, and of course you were obliged to bear his company for a year. But I am sure you have forgotten the name and the face of this tattler (*pointing to himself*).

*Julia (seriously)*.— Not the face, but you must excuse me if I don't remember all the names of my husband's pupils.

*Manlio (introducing himself)*.— Manlio Andenzi, doctor of medicine, who was graduated years ago, and I believe for life.

*Luciano*.— Don't annoy madame with your jokes, but tell her the object of our visit.

*Manlio*.— Why don't you speak?

*Luciano (interrupting him)*.— Manlio, I beg of you?

*Manlio*.— Of course it would be useless! I am the orator, and I hope Mrs. Artunni will forgive my good humor, because, you see, to-day is a holiday for us! You must have understood, Madame,— we are here to see the doctor. And there are quite a few of us. We two represent the vanguard, the whole regiment is outside—pasturing—we have only to give the signal, and in a body they will attack the castle. Our first idea was to come all together and surprise him. Then we changed our minds, and decided to be more prudent. We reasoned thus: 'The doctor, after all, is away in the country with his wife, to enjoy these beautiful spring days, therefore we must not be too indiscreet.' I am not joking now, I am quite serious. We, his pupils, all know how the Doctor Artunni adores you. Is it not strange that such a serious, austere man as he is could yet be so timid and try to dissimulate his love for you like a young boy out of school? Perhaps it was this very ingenuity that won our devotion entirely (*trying to joke again*). All this, of course, is all right, but because he adores his wife we should not be deprived of him. Why did he abandon us? Why did he leave his chair in the university? Why did he leave his pupils, as he used to call us? What for? Only to come over here and bury himself in the country? To do what? Play the—farmer?

*Luciano (severely)*.— Manlio!

*Manlio*.— Let me talk. It is better that I should unburden myself before we see him, especially as I have the pleasure of speaking to Madame Artunni, who, I am sure, will help us out. (*To JULIA seriously*.) A noble woman like you must feel very sorry that a genius like your husband should give up his mission. Am I not right in hoping that you will influence him to return to us?

*Julia (with her back turned, she has been listening to the light and serious*



talk of MANLIO trying to control her emotion, but at his last words she decided to break the silence).—I see that you and your companions do not know anything about him.

*Luciano (noticing her emotion).*—What?

*Manlio.*—You scare us!

*Julia.*—Poor Raymond is so ill that, even if he would, he could never go back to you.

*Luciano (becoming very pale).*

*Manlio (astonished).*—When did he become ill?

*Julia.*—I don't know! He hid it for a long time, even from me. I believe he never told any one of it in order to keep me in total ignorance of it. Only a year ago, before deciding to retire to this old country house, he told me he had incurable tuberculosis. You remember for a month he never went out. When you called on him he would try to be gay. And if some one noticed that he was getting tired, he would immediately reassure him it was only overwork. But just after this he told me the truth. And now every day repeats it to me that there is no hope.

*Luciano (trying to control his emotion).*

(Pause)

*Manlio.*—I am sure there must be some exaggeration. You are so devoted to him that, unwittingly, you are exaggerating, or unconsciously encouraging his exaggeration. And he—yes, it is true—is one of our best physicians, yet he is so nervous, so suggestive—But how can he have the same perception, when it regards himself?

*Julia.*—Yet he examines and studies himself in such an exacting manner that it would frighten you.

*Manlio.*—But the necessary calm for taking care of himself—

*Julia.*—The intense desire to prolong his life is worth more to him than calm.

*Manlio.*—Yet we should ask the advice of some specialists. We should have a consultation—I don't know—But we should do something. Shouldn't we, Luciano? Yes, we must.

*Luciano (looking aghast, cannot utter a word).*

*Julia.*—I begged him so much to do so.

*Manlio.*—We shall impose upon him the advice of his best colleagues.

*Julia.*—You shall see he will not listen to them, at any rate, there is no more hope now.

*Manlio.*—Can you believe it, Luciano? Can you? And all of us came here to scold him, but to express our everlasting enthusiasm. (To

JULIA). Do tell us, Mrs. Artunni, will he be able to see us? We should like to present our respects, see him, but if you fear or if you think it is not the proper moment —

Julia.— I should think he would be pleased to see his pupils. At all events it would help him morally.

Manlio.— Is he in bed?

Julia.— At this moment he is asleep, because he had a restless night. Generally he is either shut up in his studio working, or he goes around the house, in an active, agitated, but energetic manner, that to look at him, one would not believe his condition so grave. It is a remarkable phenomenon.

Manlio.— Why a remarkable phenomenon? I maintain, instead, that if he is able to expend so much vitality, there is not so much danger as he thinks.

Julia.— I don't know!

Manlio.— We are going back to tell everything to our companions. They will indeed be sorry! In half an hour we shall all return. Then, if he cannot see us, we shall come back some other time. After you have told him that we are here, you shall yourself decide what we must do. We are entirely at your disposal, and you must rely upon us as if we were — may I say it — brothers —

Julia.— I thank you.

Manlio.— Please do go now, he might be awake.

Julia.— No, if he were awake, he would certainly have called me.

(Taking leave).— Will you excuse me.

Manlio.— We shall see you soon.

Luciano (bowing without looking at her, and without being able to pronounce a word).

Julia (exits from left door, being careful to open and close it without making any noise).

### SCENE III

MANLIO, LUCIANO

Manlio (putting his hand on his forehead).— I feel as if I were dreaming! We had no warning! Absolutely no warning! (With a hopeless gesture.) But it is so! We cannot doubt it any more! Let us go, Luciano.

Luciano (trying to control his deep emotion).— Yes, Manlio (takes a few steps, then suddenly stops).

Manlio.— Well?

*Luciano.*— Wait a moment. Let me compose myself a little. That news has—

*Manlio.*— I know perfectly how you feel about it. He was very kind to you (*both deeply moved*).

*Luciano.*— Don't you think it would be better to tell our companions not to disturb that poor unfortunate?

*Manlio.*— But his wife said that perhaps our visit might be of some assistance to him.

*Luciano.*— What! To almost oblige him to see him? To almost make him own up that there is no more hope, that he has only a few months, a few days to live? It would indeed be cruel!

*Manlio.*— Excuse me, but why did you not express your opinion a few minutes ago, when his wife was here? Instead, you did not say a word, not even to express your sympathy—

*Luciano.*— I was so upset—

*Manlio.*— Now, my boy, we can't retract! Courage, Luciano, don't let us lose any more time! All our companions are acting as schoolboys on a holiday, adorning themselves with flowers, not knowing anything, they come here in a kind of procession so as to surprise us. Their gaiety would indeed be out of place now.

*Luciano.*— But remember I shall not come back with all of you.

*Manlio.*— More reason, then, to go away at once.

*Luciano.*— Yet I should like— at least to justify myself with his wife.

*Manlio.*— Let me tell you frankly you have made a very stupid resolution.

*Luciano.*— Manlio, I have not the courage to see him so ill. I haven't the courage to remain here to look and listen to him, thinking that shortly he will go.

*Manlio.*— This sensitiveness of yours borders upon weakness.

*Luciano (quickly, yet submissively).*— No, no! Manlio! It is not weakness! No, but only a matter of conscience!

*Manlio (surprised).*— Conscience!

*Luciano.*— The worst part of it is that though I feel I should not venture to see him, because I know I shall not have the courage to face him, yet a supernatural force keeps me here, body and soul, and I feel absolutely compelled to speak to him, to throw myself at his feet.

*Manlio (more surprised).*— The reason?

*Luciano.*— I don't know—

*Manlio.*— You don't know it?

(Pause)