

Act I

Scene I

The stage represents a somber forest. To the right, midway back in the midst of a thicket of trees, near a cavern, is an ancient, half-destroyed sarcophagus made of jet-black stone, surrounded by thick bushes. To the left, close to the audience, is an oddly-shaped piece of stone upon which one can sit.

The end of the Overture has depicted a storm. AT RISE, thunder grumbles and one sees light flashing, shining through the thick foliage of the dark forest. The stage is in the deepest obscurity. Janskin advances slowly, furtively, at the head of his band of Gypsies, Petrusco right behind him. He seems to be seeking his way.

PETRUSCO: What a frightful storm!

JANSKIN: Yes, it caught us quite unprepared. But should poor devils of Gypsies such as we complain of the weather? We're used to such rain and storm.

(The Gypsies stop for a moment; some of them go and sit on the sarcophagus at the right.)

PETRUSCO: Where are we?

JANSKIN *(looking around)*: I'm not sure yet...

(A lightning bolt shines. In its light, Janskin notices the ancient sarcophagus; he rushes towards those who are seated on it.)

JANSKIN: Get away from there, you fools!

PETRUSCO: Why?

JANSKIN: Why? Why? Because this place is cursed!

(All the Gypsies react with terror. Those surrounding the sarcophagus quickly distance themselves from it.)

PETRUSCO *(emotionally)*: Tell us, Janskin... Are we going to stop here?

JANSKIN: No. I'm the only one who'll be staying. You all—leave! You'll wait for me by the big rock near Olben's thatched cottage.

PETRUSCO: Ah! The old blind man—Understood—but what about you? Why aren't you coming with us?

JANSKIN: Questions again! *(abruptly)* I'm waiting for someone here. *(to the Gypsies)* Get going and be careful not to be caught by the Police—you know they're not our friends. Go!

(On Janskin's order, the Gypsies make off and disappear.)

JANSKIN: How strange fate is! I was once the son of wealthy Tyrolians, yet now I'm only the leader of a miserable band of Gypsies. That's the result of my many sins. After having reduced my father to misery, I ran wildly through the world—and caroused everywhere, I robbed, I stole and I enjoyed playing with the fate of men. But now I'm weary of this life. I repent it. I want nothing more than to reconcile with my old father. I returned to Tyrol, looking for him, but there, I learned that he had left over a year ago. I sought the help of Zametti, an old friend of my youth. He told me that my father and my sister, Cecilia, had come to live in this county, not far from the

shores of the Adriatic. I've seen Zametti again recently. I found out that he secretly loves Cecilia. He wants to marry her. That wedding will serve my cause. In the midst of all the rejoicing, I will show myself to my father. He won't be able to refuse to forgive me. Then, I can say goodbye forever to the Gypsies whom I command. I want to end my life as an honest man. Still, I'm uneasy... Zametti has now dedicated himself to the studies of the works of Paracelsus, Albertus Magnus and Doctor Faustus—cursed works—he has sacrilegious designs. I can say no more. I know he plans to come today to this dark place... I must stop him before he succumbs to Evil. Hark! Someone's coming. Could it be him?

(Pietro, a box under his arm, enters. He seems seized by some vivid terror.)

PIETRO: What evil forest! How sinister everything looks. I haven't got one drop of warm blood left in my veins. *(to his master)* Ah, sir, why have we come here?

(Enter Zametti, somber and preoccupied.)

ZAMETTI: Shut up!

PIETRO: Some great evil is going to happen to us, I feel it.

ZAMETTI: Quiet, I tell you. *(going to the front of the stone sarcophagus)* Place the box here.

PIETRO *(trembling)*: Yes, sir.

JANSKIN *(aside)*: It's him!

(He emerges from the corner where he was hidden.)

ZAMETTI *(hearing the noise of Janskin's feet)*: Someone's here! *(aloud in a threatening voice)* Who goes there?

JANSKIN *(approaching)*: A friend.

ZAMETTI *(upset)*: Janskin! What brings you here?

JANSKIN: The desire to see and speak to you.

ZAMETTI: The moment is ill-chosen. Go away!

JANSKIN: No. I choose to stay.

ZAMETTI: What for?

JANSKIN: You'll soon find out. *(gesturing to Pietro to get away)*

PIETRO *(who doesn't understand)*: What?

JANSKIN *(aloud)*: Leave us!

PIETRO: Where do you want me to go?

JANSKIN: I don't know. Away from us.

PIETRO *(aside)*: Hum! This one's got a face well-suited to this God-forsaken place. *(another gesture by Janskin)* I obey, I obey.

(Pietro goes toward the back; we occasionally lose sight of him.)

ZAMETTI *(to Janskin)*: What do you want with me?

JANSKIN: In the position in which I find myself, I can't see you, except in secret, and for only a moment. Thus, I'm going to hasten to talk plainly. The first time I presented myself before you, I was only able to tell you of my past misfortunes and my hopes for the future. Yet, I was struck by your air of suffering and distress. Since then, I've gathered information. I've followed you and your labors without your suspecting it—and now, I know everything.

ZAMETTI: What do you mean?

JANSKIN: Listen, Zametti. You must realize: the same studies filled our youth. Like you, I was drawn to the Great Work, I sought to discover the Philosopher's Stone, I burned more coal in my furnace than is produced in a year in the Black Forest. I studied it all: chemistry, alchemy,

astrology—but after dirtying my hands and tiring my eyes, I became convinced that the best thing was to take men as they are, the weather as it comes, and money for what it's worth. You, on the other hand, are still filled with an ambition that is inflamed further by each new success. You've reached the ends of science. Fatal path! Deplorable talent! That will cause your ruin, and perhaps ours as well.

ZAMETTI: What are you talking about?

JANSKIN: That Hellish sprit that resides here—

ZAMETTI: O Merciful Heaven! You know—

JANSKIN: —Everything! I know that a nefarious Genie dwells in this mysterious and dark forest. Remember: we visited this place in our youth. It is here that you formed your arcane and presumptuous design. Here that you first dared interrogate the Spirits from Beyond. Your plan is already more than half-fulfilled—but trust me, Zametti, stop your mad quest before it is too late.

ZAMETTI: Why do you ask this from me?

JANSKIN: For your own safety, my happiness—that of my sister and my father.

ZAMETTI: I cannot turn away from my path.

JANSKIN: Do you want your ruin and ours?

ZAMETTI: I can't stop—not after so much toilsome labor.

JANSKIN: Content yourself with being the most knowledgeable of men, and don't become the most sinful. My friend, on you depends my fate, that of my father—and of Cecilia!

ZAMETTI: Cecilia!

JANSKIN: You love her and her love is equal to yours. Tomorrow, you will lead her to the altar. Your marriage guarantees the peace of my father's old age and puts an end to my misfortunes. In a few days, we will again be a single family—and our happiness will be your work. I know your soul to be great and generous. Never has any vile calculation directed your thoughts. Friend of all the unfortunate, your fortune is theirs. Everywhere, they bless you, they love you. Your own son, your only son, the first of a first marriage, entrusted to Cecilia's care, repeats your name, the name of his father, with love. But all fear your ambition. Why aren't you content with your fate? Why do you want to penetrate a mystery that Heaven has wisely hidden from the weakness of men?

ZAMETTI: My task must be accomplished. My labors demand an unparalleled result. I won't leave my work unfinished. The Genius of Black Stone will soon grant me a slave submissive to my will. Soon, perhaps, I will insure centuries of glory for myself—and Cecilia.

JANSKIN: My friend, I entreat you, abandon your dire plans. There's still time.

ZAMETTI: Leave me alone!

JANSKIN: At least, before executing them, wait until after you're married to my sister.

ZAMETTI: Why?

JANSKIN (*in an solemn voice*): Her virtues will protect you from the wrath of Heaven.

ZAMETTI: Yes—that could be.

JANSKIN: Swear to me to return to your castle this very night.

ZAMETTI: This very night...

JANSKIN: It must be!

ZAMETTI: I don't know...

JANSKIN: I'm begging you. In the name of our friendship and for the well-being of us all.

(There is a noise outside. Pietro runs towards it.)

PIETRO: A man's coming from that direction.

ZAMETTI: Heavens!

(Petrusco enters, out of breath.)

PETRUSCO (*to Janskin, in a rapid voice*): The Police are in pursuit of us. Our comrades sent me. You know all the secret paths of this forest. Come, Chief, lead us and guide us out of this accursed place.

JANSKIN: What tragic luck!

PETRUSCO: Hurry! Hurry!

JANSKIN (*to Zametti*): Something dangerous that is my solemn duty has come up. My poor comrades have entrusted me with their safety. I cannot betray their trust. I'm forced to go, Zametti. But, please, swear to me that you will leave this forest instantly.

ZAMETTI (*hesitating*): Well, er—

JANSKIN: I will see you tonight. I hope I have convinced you. Goodbye.

(Janskin presses Zametti's hand and goes away quickly with Petrusco.)

PIETRO (*aside, following Janskin with his eyes*): Despite his strange appearance, that man seems to me to have a good heart after all. I wouldn't have been sorry to see him stay. Alas! I'm always afraid when I'm alone with my master... Afraid of seeing some horrible demon suddenly appear.

ZAMETTI (*emerging from his thoughts*): Could Janskin be right? And, indeed, should I fear for Cecilia? Cecilia, adored lover, it's to forever insure your happiness and mine that I wish to possess such a secret. Still, Janskin's fears may have some reality. Let's defer my latest attempt to another day... (*to Pietro*) Let's go, come.

PIETRO (*placing the box back under his arm*): With all my heart.

(They take a few steps. Suddenly, Zametti stops. He seems undecided for a moment, then returns rapidly.)

ZAMETTI (*to himself*): No I can't! An imperious desire drags me. Idle terror—so close to the goal to which I aspire—am I perhaps to abandon it forever? No, I shan't! I shan't!

PIETRO (*aside*): Ah! My God, what's the matter with him now?

ZAMETTI (*to himself*): What I plan to do here may cause my ruin. But if I keep it for myself alone—where will be the crime? What have I to worry about? Nothing. Mysterious treasure, I will acquire you and at least my labors will not remain unfulfilled. Yes, it's decided. (*rushing to Pietro and snatching the box from him*) Give this to me, Pietro.

PIETRO (*terrified*): Goodness of Heaven! Sir, what are you doing?

ZAMETTI (*opening the box*): Get out of here!

PIETRO: No, my dear master, no. I can't—I can see that you have some sinister plan. Mercy, let's leave together.

ZAMETTI (*removing several cabalistic instruments from the box*): Go away!

PIETRO: The condition in which I see you now has worried me for days. Your incessant shivering, your gloomy disposition, your pale—

ZAMETTI (*in a terrible voice*): I'm ordering you to leave!

PIETRO: My dear master, in the name of what you hold most dear—

ZAMETTI: So be it then! Stay!

(He projects his arms towards Pietro and makes a wizardly gesture. Immediately, the servant becomes motionless and dumb, transfixed by the Magician's spell. Zametti then begins his conjurations. Thunder growls, lightning flashes, a subterranean noise is heard. A circle of fire surrounds him.)

ZAMETTI (*in an imposing voice*): Genie of the Black Stone whom I have subdued by my power, hear my voice and obey! Show yourself!

(More thunder and lightning. At Zametti's voice, the subterranean uproar increases. The Black Sarcophagus shakes—and in the midst of the flames which surround it, the Genie appears. He holds a jar in his hand.)

GENIE *(in a gloomy voice, vase in hand)*: What do you want from me?

ZAMETTI: That jar that you hold, which contains the reward of my efforts.

GENIE: Fool! Is this what you want?

ZAMETTI: Yes. Give it to me!

GENIE: I know your mad ambition and your insane desires. You have much to fear, wretched human!

ZAMETTI: Don't lecture me. Give me what I want. Now!

GENIE *(giving the jar to Zametti)*: Then, take this accursed vessel. I must obey you. But know that your happiness is now gone and will never return. You will not see me again. Adieu!

(More thunder and lightning. The Genie vanishes in the midst of a burst of flames. At this moment, Pietro regains control of his senses. He sees the Black Sarcophagus, still lit by livid illuminations, utters a scream of fear and flees. Zametti, holding the mysterious jar, steps forward, seized at the same time by a strange joy and a profound horror.)

CURTAIN