

**Louis Karchin (b. 1951)**  
**Romulus (1990)**

A Comic Opera in One Act  
Based on a play by Alexandre Dumas, père (1802-1870)  
Translated into English by Barnett Shaw, Chevalier dans l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres

*Martha* - Katrina Thurman, Soprano  
*Frantz Wolf* - Steven Ebel, Tenor  
*Celestus* - Thomas Meglioranza, Baritone  
*Mayor Babenhausen* - Wilbur Pauley, Bass

**FRANTZ WOLF**, a professor of philosophy, kind, timid and absent-minded. He is between 35 and 40.  
**CELESTUS**, an astronomer, about 35, more vivacious and demonstrative than WOLF, but still a confirmed bachelor and dedicated scientist.  
**MARTHA**, sister of CELESTUS, 25, attractive, personable.  
**AN UNKNOWN**, a young man in his twenties.  
**BABENHAUSEN**, mayor of a small Austrian town, officious, overbearing, about 50.

**SETTING:** The Tyrol region of Austria.

**TIME:** The 19th century.

**SCENE:** A second-floor room in a simple house in the Austrian Tyrol.

CELESTUS *is seated, looking through a telescope.* WOLF *is by the fireplace, reading a book. Both are very absorbed in their work.* MARTHA *enters with some plates of food which she places on the table.*

[1] **MARTHA.** My philosopher and my astronomer are as busy as always. (*Neither man pays the lightest attention to her. She goes into the kitchen and returns immediately with more plates. After she places them on the table, she goes behind WOLF.*) Boo! (*WOLF doesn't budge. She stands behind CELESTUS.*) Boo! (*CELESTUS doesn't take his eye off his telescope.*) Is there anything you want, my dear brother?

**CELESTUS.** (*Eye still glued to the telescope.*) I'll never be able to see Orion as long as the wind is from the east.

**MARTHA.** He doesn't need me. (*She faces WOLF.*) Is there anything I can bring you?

**WOLF.** (*Striking his book.*) If the truth isn't here in Leibnitz, it doesn't exist.

**MARTHA.** He doesn't need me either: (*She goes to the supper table, stands by it and says loudly.*) Gentlemen! Supper is served!

**CELESTUS.** I'll never be able to get a glimpse of Orion.

**MARTHA.** That's too bad. But you'll be able to see it tomorrow when your new telescope arrives.

**CELESTUS.** It's not the telescope's fault, it's the wind's fault. It's coming from the east.

**MARTHA.** Let's hope it will change. Frantz!

**WOLF.** (*Reading.*) "I have never ceased meditating on philosophy and it has always appeared to me that there were means of establishing something solid by demonstrations of clarity." (*Looks up.*) My dear Leibnitz, your very strength is in your clarity.

**MARTHA.** Professor!

**WOLF.** (*Rising.*) Oh, pardon me, Martha. Let me wish you a good morning. I hope you had a good night's sleep.

**MARTHA.** And I hope you're distracted rather than mad. You're wishing me good morning at eight o'clock in the evening.

**WOLF.** A greeting is like a prayer. Where there are good intentions, the form doesn't matter.

**MARTHA.** Professor, I thank you for that greeting. (*WOLF goes to the table. The three begin having supper.*)

[2] **CELESTUS.** Sister, would you like to bet there is something that Wolf noticed in spite of his distraction?

**MARTHA.** Something?

**CELESTUS.** Yes, something I'm sure you've noticed.

**WOLF.** You're wrong – I didn't notice anything.

**CELESTUS.** You're a stubborn man, Wolf. I tell you that you noticed it. I think you have noticed for some time now that Martha has been sad.

**WOLF.** That's true, Martha, I did notice it.

**CELESTUS.** And for several days now, not only has she looked sad, but also pale and tired. What do you think, Wolf? Does she not look pale and tired? Wolf, look at her eyes. What do you think?

**WOLF.** I think they're beautiful.

**CELESTUS.** But they look as if she's been crying. Give me your hand. (*He takes her hand and feels her pulse.*) Wolf, feel her hand. (*He takes her hand.*)

**MARTHA.** Really, I'm not....

**WOLF.** I'm not sure if it's her hand or mine that is burning.

**MARTHA.** (*Embarrassed.*) Professor!

**CELESTUS.** Now your pale face has turned rosy red.

**MARTHA.** Celestus, why are you insisting that I'm sick?

**CELESTUS.** I have my reasons.

[3] **MARTHA.** What reasons?

**CELESTUS.** For example – last night –

**MARTHA.** What about last night?

**CELESTUS.** I heard some noise in your room.

**WOLF.** And it seemed you were awake most of the night.

**CELESTUS.** Is that right?

**MARTHA.** That I was awake? Yes. I'll tell you my dark secret. If I've looked tired for several days, it's because I've been staying up, trying to finish a layette – some baby clothes for a friend who will need them soon. But now I'm finished. Last night I was awake because Gertrude, the daughter of the mayor, Mayor Babenhausen, was sick, and I went to see her. I know you and Babenhausen detest each other, even though you live next door to each other. But Gertrude and I have been friends since we were little, and we intend to remain friends.

**[4] CELESTUS.** I don't detest the mayor, poor fellow. I find his house too noisy, that's all – children running all over the place. And you know how I dislike children. But let's not stray from the subject. Do you know why I think you are sad, pale and tired? Why you can't sleep at night?

**MARTHA.** Tell me, brother.

**CELESTUS.** You're bored.

**WOLF.** If that's true, Martha, I'll loan you my Leibnitz.

**MARTHA.** Thanks, Professor – but that would be too great a sacrifice, and I can't accept it.

**CELESTUS.** I have something better to suggest than Leibnitz.

**WOLF.** Something better? Not Spinoza, I hope.

**CELESTUS.** Not Spinoza, my friend. Listen, Martha, we can talk in front of Wolf. After three years here, he's like one of the family. Martha, you'll soon be twenty-five. And I think that it would be very wise for you to get married.

**MARTHA.** Married?

**CELESTUS.** Of course, my darling sister.

**MARTHA.** But I don't want to get married, my darling brother.

**CELESTUS.** I don't want you to marry someone against your will. Choose the one you want. What do you say to the captain's son?

**WOLF.** Pardon me, but if you have such a horror of children, why do you want her to marry?

**CELESTUS.** I have a horror of children as a species but my sister's children – it's a different matter.

**MARTHA.** Brother, it's useless for you to trouble yourself. I wouldn't marry the captain's son if the captain were a general.

**CELESTUS.** Do you think I'm going to let you be an old maid?

**WOLF.** But if she doesn't want to get married...now that's a different matter.

**CELESTUS.** Doesn't want to? Man is made for marriage.

**MARTHA.** Well then, my dear brother, why have you remained a bachelor?

**CELESTUS.** (*Embarrassed.*) Me? Well...

**WOLF.** There's an old proverb that says, "Marriage is like a besieged fortress: those outside want to get in, and those inside want to get out."

**[5] CELESTUS.** Fine advice to be giving my sister.

**WOLF.** I wasn't giving her advice.

**CELESTUS.** You said something stupid!

**WOLF.** I beg your pardon. I know this really doesn't concern me at all.

**CELESTUS.** No, it doesn't concern you, my fine philosopher. It concerns me.

**WOLF.** And your sister a little.

**CELESTUS.** Professor, I know that marriage doesn't interest you. I know what all the philosophy you used to teach at the university has done for you. I see in you a man who wants to undermine the foundations of society.

**MARTHA.** Really Professor!

**CELESTUS.** (*Pacing the floor.*) You don't know about him. You didn't know that he was forced to leave his teaching post because of his so-called advanced thinking. It's all my fault. I should have foreseen all this when I let the mischief-maker share my home. Certainly, the professor wants nothing but peace. But do you know what some of his pupils did? They burned down one of the buildings at the university.

**WOLF.** It was not a building! And it was only one pupil – a demented one.

**CELESTUS.** Be quiet, you revolutionary!

**WOLF.** If I'm as bad as he says, there is only one thing to do. (*He picks up his hat and his Leibnitz.*)

**MARTHA.** What are you doing, Frantz?

**WOLF.** I'm picking up my hat and my Leibnitz.

**MARTHA.** Where are you going?

**WOLF.** I'm going away, that's all. Your brother just opened my eyes. Now that I understand the kind of man I am, I cannot stay here. I try to teach nothing but good, but I bring misfortune wherever I go. Your brother spoke the truth. I was lecturing on innate ideas and preexistent harmony, and unfortunately, I said that nothing happens except what ought to happen. One of my pupils – an imbecile – a rebel –

**CELESTUS.** That was Conrad!

**WOLF.** Yes – Conrad. He threw a lighted match into a haystack, crying, "Professor Wolf said you won't burn less you ought to burn." Naturally, the haystack burned down. Well, it's time to put an end to the disorder I bring with me. Beginning now, I condemn myself to silence and solitude. Then I can do no harm to anyone.

**MARTHA.** Please, Frantz –

**WOLF.** No, I've made up my mind. Be good enough to send my luggage to the Red Lion Hotel. There's nothing but a few shirts, my other suit, and my – (*Embarrassed*) my undergarments. Good-bye, Martha. I leave you with all good wishes. (*He goes toward the door.*)

**MARTHA.** Good-bye, Frantz. Are you really going?

**WOLF.** I'm going. (*He turns to the door.*)

**MARTHA.** But where are you going? Don't go that way!

**WOLF.** (*In a choked voice.*) Which way should I go, then?

**MARTHA.** This way! (*She takes hold of WOLF and swings him around so that he bumps squarely into CELESTUS.*) Good night, gentlemen! (*Laughing merrily, she dashes into her bedroom.*)

**WOLF.** (*Embracing CELESTUS.*) My dear Celestus.

**CELESTUS.** My dear Frantz. Please pardon me.

**WOLF.** Please pardon me!

**CELESTUS.** You are the finest creature God ever made.

**WOLF.** You exaggerate as usual. In my intentions, I am the most honest man I know, but the results never live up to my intentions. Go back to the study of your celestial sphere, my friend, and I'll go back to my divine Leibnitz.

[6] (*They are silent a moment, then WOLF speaks to himself, seriously.*) This system of two clocks is a very ingenious one. One clock is the soul and the other is the body, but there is only one pendulum for the two. Tick-tock, tick-tock. The tick says "never," and the tock says "always."

**CELESTUS.** (*Eye on telescope.*) Jupiter! There it is, a colossal world of turmoil and change – deadly cold and deadly dangerous. With its twelve satellites – imagine – four of them as large as our moon.

**WOLF.** (*He picks up his pipe and prepares it for smoking.*) Satellites! A world! A body! All of it nothing but matter. Man alone possesses the divine spark of intelligence. (*He lights a match and holds it up.*) My reflective will presides over all of my acts. (*He blows out the match, and digs in his pockets for another.*) However, it can happen that one of the clocks gets out of order. Momentarily, it's a distraction. Continually it would be madness. (*He can't find a match.*) I seem to be all out of matches. Do you have one, Celestus? (*CELESTUS, absorbed in his work, doesn't answer.*) My friend, I don't have a match. Do you?

**CELESTUS.** No, you'll find some in the kitchen. (*WOLF goes out. The entrance door opens very quietly and a masked young man peers in. CELESTUS does not see him. The man remains motionless.*)

**WOLF.** (*Calling from kitchen.*) I can't find them.

**CELESTUS.** All right – I'll show you where they are. (*He goes out. The masked man quickly opens the door, enters and places a large basket on the c. table. He runs quickly out the same door. CELESTUS and WOLF enter. WOLF is lighting his pipe.*) Now, do me the favor of forgetting about your two clocks. For half an hour you've been babbling out loud, while I've been like a stone so as not to disturb you.

**WOLF.** Excuse me, my friend. It's nature's fault. I talk when I'm awake, and I snore when I'm asleep. But I'll be careful not to bother you again. (*A baby's cry comes from the basket.*)

[7] **CELESTUS.** What was that?

**WOLF.** What?

**CELESTUS.** Didn't you hear?

**WOLF.** I did hear something.

**CELESTUS.** A strange cry.

**WOLF.** It sounded like-

**CELESTUS.** Sh-

**WOLF.** Do you hear it again?

**CELESTUS.** No. But I'm sure I heard it before.

**WOLF.** So am I.

**CELESTUS.** Let's investigate. (*Each looks to R. and L. They move in an arc which brings them to opposite sides of the c. table at the same time.*) What is that?

**WOLF.** A basket.

**CELESTUS.** I can see that! But how did it get there?

**WOLF.** I didn't see anyone.

**CELESTUS.** Neither did I.

**WOLF.** Weren't you expecting a new telescope?

**CELESTUS.** Yes.

**WOLF.** Well, that's probably what it is.

**CELESTUS.** But someone had to put it on the table. It couldn't have come here by itself. Let's look into this. (*He lifts cover of basket and gives a cry.*) Oh!

**WOLF.** (*Looking into the basket.*) Oh! It looks like a baby!

**CELESTUS.** It is a baby! (*They look at each other, petrified.*) A baby in my house? I don't like it!

**WOLF.** Be careful! If you wake it up, it will cry.

**CELESTUS.** But where did that brat come from? That's what I want to know.

**WOLF.** (*Inspecting the basket.*) Here's a note that will tell us.

**CELESTUS.** A note?

**WOLF.** Read it.

**CELESTUS.** (*Takes the note from Wolf and opens it.*) "My dear Celestus – ". That's me, all right. "I confide this innocent baby to you. Be his good angel. Teach him to have pity for his miserable father who will probably never come to reclaim the precious deposit he places in your hands." Signed, three stars. Three Stars! That's not a name!

**WOLF.** He thought of stars when he thought of you.

**CELESTUS.** Joke about it, Wolf – be clever. You would act differently if the baby had been sent to you.

**WOLF.** If it were sent to me, I would welcome it as a guest that God had sent to me.

**CELESTUS.** You say that now. (*Picks up the basket.*) I just noticed the curtains are moving slightly. That means the wind is from the north. And when the wind is from the north, I can see Orion. My friend, do me the favor of being this boy's father while the wind is from the north. (*Hands basket to WOLF and dashes to his telescope.*)

**WOLF.** Sleep, little boy, sleep while your fate is decided. Sleep the precious sleep which only babies know. (*With his usual distraction he begins to shake the basket vigorously, in cadence with the poetry he recites.*) "How many of my poorest subjects are asleep at this hour. Oh sleep, oh gentle sleep. Nature's soft nurse." That was Shakespeare, my little urchin. (*The baby is crying loudly.*) (*MARTHA enters.*)

**[8] MARTHA.** What's going on? I hear a baby crying. (*Looking in the basket.*) Oh, what a precious baby. Where did it come from?

**CELESTUS.** It's not an "it," it's a "him," and he came from Hell.

**MARTHA.** From Hell?

**WOLF.** Martha, that's a figure of speech. But we're not sure where he came from. We found him here on this table. There was this message, that's all.

**MARTHA.** (*She gives an exclamation and a look that makes it clear she recognizes the writing.*) Oh- (*To CELESTUS*) Well, brother, what have you decided to do with the little foundling?

**CELESTUS.** What have I decided? I've decided to call Babenhausen and turn over the baby to him. He's the mayor, and he can worry about it.

**MARTHA.** I don't think you could be so cruel. You couldn't abandon a baby that's been placed in your hands by a desperate mother and father, and probably because they knew you would make a better father than most men.

**CELESTUS.** Fine words, my sister. Fine words.

**MARTHA.** I hope they will lead you to do a good deed.

**CELESTUS.** Not that kind of good deed.

**MARTHA.** Can you imagine how the father and mother must have suffered when they gave their baby to a stranger?

**CELESTUS.** Will you please tell me why a stranger should do for him what his own father and mother refuse to do? Besides, there are institutions to take care of little waifs.

**MARTHA.** You're not speaking from the heart. You're not even speaking like yourself. I know you'll take care of him for me.

**CELESTUS.** Very well, since you wish it. I agree to take care of the baby. We'll send him to some village – not too far away from here. I'll pay all his expenses, no matter how much money it takes.

**MARTHA.** Money! No one is talking about money. If that baby could speak, he would say, "I don't want your money. I want your love. I want your heart."

**CELESTUS.** (*Sighing.*) Oh, sister.

**[9] WOLF.** Martha, I have no home except this one, and I have no worldly goods except my books. But perhaps I could sell them, and then I could take care of the baby.

**MARTHA.** Did you hear that, Celestus? Doesn't that make you feel ashamed? (*Goes to basket.*) Poor little infant, your life has started so sadly. I wonder whose arms will finally accept you and give you love.

**WOLF.** Mine! (*He moves to take the basket.*)

**CELESTUS.** (*Pushing WOLF aside.*) The package was addressed to me! The baby belongs to me. It's the judgment of Solomon!

(*He leans over the basket.*) Kitchy-koo. Go to sleep, baby, and don't worry about a thing. From this moment you have a brand new father.

**MARTHA.** Thank you, brother.

**WOLF.** Oh, thank you, my good friend!

**MARTHA.** Look, Celestus, the baby is thanking you with a smile.

**CELESTUS.** He's cute.

**MARTHA.** And so quiet.

**CELESTUS.** In fact he doesn't say a word. (*WOLF and MARTHA both lean over the basket and find their heads very close. They raise up, confused.*)

**WOLF.** Poor little angel.

**CELESTUS.** I don't know why, but I have a feeling that this rascal is going to make a big noise in the world.

**WOLF.** It's a known fact that many children who were foundlings had great destinies. Look at Cyrus.

**CELESTUS.** And Hercules.

**WOLF.** And Romulus!

**MARTHA.** I believe our Romulus is crying.

**CELESTUS.** Did I say something wrong? Why is he crying?

**MARTHA.** Because he's hungry. We don't have a she-wolf to feed this Romulus. He needs a wet-nurse. We'll call Edith Rembach. She's looking for a new hungry customer. Her house is just down the street. If one of you bachelors would bring her to my room, I'll have little Romulus ready and waiting.

**CELESTUS.** My friend, will you do me the favor of going to her house and bringing her here? You can let her in by the private door to Martha's room.

**WOLF.** I'll have her here as soon as possible. Romulus must be served! (*He puts on his hat and is about to open the door when the MAYOR enters.*)

**[10] MAYOR.** Stop where you are!

**CELESTUS.** The mayor!

**MAYOR.** I have two men outside. No one can leave. Names, addresses, and occupations, please. (*Simmering down, he recognizes WOLF.*) Oh, pardon me, it's Professor Wolf. You can leave, sir.

**CELESTUS.** Mayor Babenhausen, what is the meaning of this?

**MAYOR.** Celestus, I want to wish you a good evening, or should I say a good night, since it's rather late – hmmm (*Looks to R., and L.*)

**CELESTUS.** It's so late, neighbor, that I'd like to know the reason for this visit.

**MAYOR.** Well...I'll tell you...that I have very serious orders. (*He continues looking around the room.*) I am looking for a man. I have an order for his arrest, and I believe he is hiding in this house. He has been seen, sir. Recognized sir, here, in spite of his mask.

**CELESTUS.** I don't understand.

**MAYOR.** You know very well I am talking about the pupil of your friend Professor Wolf – that scoundrel Conrad, burner of cities.

**CELESTUS.** I give you my word. I haven't seen Conrad, and I have no idea where he is.

**MAYOR.** As a man, I believe you, but as a magistrate, I must continue my search and inquiry. He's not in this room, therefore, if he is in this house, he must be in another room, don't you agree? *(He starts towards MARTHA'S room.)*

**CELESTUS.** Where are you going? That's my sister's bedroom. If Conrad were in this house, he certainly wouldn't be hiding in my sister's bedroom.

**MAYOR.** How do you expect me to know where Conrad would hide? If I knew, I would go there at once. I have my duties, and I carry them out. Please open the door to your sister's bedroom.

**[11]** *(He opens the door and they both go in the room. Just as the door closes, the masked man enters cautiously from door, R. He listens a moment at the bedroom door, also at the kitchen door. He looks around, undecided what to do. At last he crawls out the window and disappears from sight. The MAYOR and CELESTUS enter. CELESTUS enters first and sits down at R.)* A thousand pardons. Believe me, if I could have guessed your meaning in not wishing me to enter your sister's room, I would not have insisted as I did. I never knew you took in babies for weaning. I thought you hated children.

**CELESTUS.** I don't know what dark thought is behind what you just said, but there is nothing more to tell you about the baby. I told you the whole story when we were in the other room.

**MAYOR.** And it's a very strange story, don't you agree? The room is empty for a moment. A baby falls from heaven. No name, just a mysterious note. It appears between you and Professor Wolf, and you find it there on that table. No other clues?

**CELESTUS.** Only this note. *(Hands the note to MAYOR.)*

**MAYOR.** *(He reads to himself.)* Three stars! It's very clear.

**CELESTUS.** It's clear? Do you think you can help me trace its parents?

**MAYOR.** Nothing easier.

**CELESTUS.** Do you know them?

**MAYOR.** Yes.

**CELESTUS.** The father?

**MAYOR.** The father.

**CELESTUS.** And me, do I know him?

**MAYOR.** Undoubtedly, since he addresses you as "My dear Celestus." You don't have to go far to find the answer.

**CELESTUS.** You believe he is somewhere in this house?

**MAYOR.** Yes!

**CELESTUS.** But besides me, there is only one man in this house, and that's Wolf.

**MAYOR.** See! You named him yourself.

**[12] CELESTUS.** I named him, yes. But what proof is there?

**MAYOR.** What proof? First of all, the baby is in his very image.

**CELESTUS.** Come, now, you know very well that babies of that age look alike.

**MAYOR.** But that's not all. *(WOLF enters.)*

**MAYOR.** Celestus, tell me who was here when the mysterious baby appeared.

**WOLF.** Only Celestus and I.

**MAYOR.** Well, since the baby was sent to Celestus, he certainly didn't bring it in by himself. Somebody had to bring it in. Let's go to another point. Celestus, didn't you at first say you would not keep the baby?

**CELESTUS.** That's true. But when Wolf insisted...

**WOLF.** And with your big heart I didn't have to insist very strenuously.

**CELESTUS.** I simply say you insisted a great deal. You even went so far as to say that if I didn't take care of the baby, you would sell your books and take care of it yourself.

**MAYOR.** *(To WOLF.)* Sell your books? For a child you know nothing about? I must say that's a noble gesture. Those sound like the words of a devoted father.

**WOLF.** I feel like a father to Romulus.

**MAYOR.** I'm sure you do. *(WOLF goes to door, the MAYOR follows.)*

**CELESTUS.** You're leaving us without telling us the name of the baby's mother?

**MAYOR.** Later, later, when there is no shadow of a doubt. *(CELESTUS goes near fireplace and sits. MAYOR comes close to WOLF by the door.)* I couldn't talk in front of him. Since you pretend to be so innocent, I'll tell you that I know the mother is Martha. *(WOLF is stunned. MAYOR goes out.)*

**CELESTUS.** I heard him whispering. Did he tell you?

**WOLF.** He told you too?

**CELESTUS.** Yes.

**WOLF.** Celestus, Edith Rembach is in your sister's room now, and Romulus will be well fed. Now let's forget all this and go back to work. The wind is still from the North.

**CELESTUS.** *(Not too interested.)* Yes, from the North.

**WOLF.** You can see Orion. But what's the matter?

**CELESTUS.** Wolf, look at me. What do you see?

**WOLF.** I see a fine man who has just done a good deed for which heaven will reward him.

**CELESTUS.** You're mistaken, you see an imbecile. A man whose confidence is being abused.

**WOLF.** Who is the person taking advantage of you?

**CELESTUS.** The baby's father.

**WOLF.** Do you know him?

**CELESTUS.** Don't you? You don't know the baby's father? (*Grabs his coat.*) Well, the baby's father is you!

**WOLF.** Me? Listen to me, Celestus. Nature has endowed me with all the patience of which a man is capable. I can't remember being really angry even once in my life. But, even if I were a saint, and someone damned me by a single word, I would finally lose my temper. Celestus! (*Ready to flare up, he approaches CELESTUS, but the steam goes out of him and he says meekly:*) You annoy me! You couldn't mean it. Me, the father of that baby?

**CELESTUS.** You're so absent-minded, I thought that maybe –

**WOLF.** I'm not that absent-minded.

**CELESTUS.** I'm sorry.

**WOLF.** The accusation you're making is not your own, Celestus. Your heart isn't capable of suspecting a friend of such a thing. The idea wasn't yours, it was Babenhausen's.

**CELESTUS.** The scoundrel!

**WOLF.** I imagined as much. He told you that I was the father, didn't he? Well, do you know what he told me in the doorway, when he was whispering? Do you know whom he accused of being the baby's mother? Your sister, my friend.

**CELESTUS.** Martha?

**WOLF.** Yes, Martha.

**[13] CELESTUS.** Damn him! (*Goes to window and calls.*) Mayor Babenhausen! There's still time to get things in order. (*Confronts WOLF squarely.*) The baby is nothing to you?

**WOLF.** Absolutely nothing. I saw him for the first time tonight.

**CELESTUS.** That's good enough for me. (*He opens the door and sticks his head in just as MARTHA enters from her room.*) Mayor Babenhausen!

**MARTHA.** What's all the noise about?

**CELESTUS.** I'm going to teach the Mayor a lesson. That little package that someone dumped in my lap is now going to be dumped in his. The town can take care of it.

**MARTHA.** The town?

**CELESTUS.** Yes! It's a matter for the town to take care of. Let me go find the bandit. (*He dashes out.*)

**MARTHA.** I hope he wasn't talking about Romulus.

**WOLF.** He most certainly was talking about Romulus.

**MARTHA.** After promising to be a father to him?

**WOLF.** There are circumstances that sometimes alter things.

**MARTHA.** There are never circumstances that warrant mistreating a child. (*To WOLF.*) Frantz, I hold you responsible for everything. (*She goes to her room. CELESTUS and MAYOR enter.*)

**MAYOR.** (*To CELESTUS.*) What was it you wanted to tell me?

**CELESTUS.** (*Angry, he stalks up to the MAYOR who backs away.*) I want to tell you that you are going to draw up a legal paper this very night, declaring that the baby, meaning nothing to us, will be turned over to proper authorities in the town.

**MAYOR.** That can't be. It's too late. Just as the law says, those who wish to keep a child must prove it belongs to them. Likewise, the law says: those who wish to get rid of a child must prove it does not belong to them. No one knows how the child came here. In all probability the child belongs to you more than you'd like to admit. Besides, it's not all up to me. I've called a special night session at the Town Hall, tonight. I'll give all the evidence for and against.

**CELESTUS.** You're going to repeat all those ridiculous accusations you've made?

**MAYOR.** My duty comes before everything. Come to the Town Hall both of you, tonight! (*He storms out of the room.*)

**CELESTUS.** The traitor! The miserable wretch!

**WOLF.** Keep calm, Celestus, keep calm.

**CELESTUS.** Keep calm? When I see them about to drag my sister's reputation through the streets?

**WOLF.** My friend...

**CELESTUS.** I'm calm. (*He paces nervously.*)

**WOLF.** Perhaps we can think of a way out.

**CELESTUS.** A way to stamp out lies? There is no way.

**WOLF.** But let's look for one. (*An idea strikes him.*) Ah! There is a way. Yes. I just thought of it. Listen to me, Celestus. It is my long stay under your roof that has prompted all the lies against your sister, and against me. Suppose that in spite of my well-known repugnance for marriage, I would consent to marry your sister?

**CELESTUS.** Marry Martha?

**WOLF.** Yes.

**CELESTUS.** You? Is that so?

**WOLF.** Is that so hard to accept?

**CELESTUS.** No – I mean, would you contradict all your principles with such a rash decision?

**WOLF.** I would, since it would bring happiness to both of us.

**CELESTUS.** Wolf, my true friend! I thank you for your devotion. But no, it's useless. People will say it was only to repair her fault.

**WOLF.** Oh, no! Because the day after our marriage, we will turn the child over to the town. People will not possibly believe we would do such a thing if the child were really ours.

**CELESTUS.** But what about Martha? She doesn't want to get married. She expressed her ideas on the subject while we were eating supper tonight.

**WOLF.** We must convince her that she should not refuse.

**CELESTUS.** Will it work?

**WOLF.** Thank you, Celestus.

**CELESTUS.** You thank me? What a heart of gold. (*Calls:*) Martha! You're willing to make a great sacrifice and you thank me.

[14] **MARTHA.** (*Enters.*) What is it now?

**CELESTUS.** Look at Wolf! Kiss me! Wolf is saving our lives. He's a saint. (*Goes out in a rush.*)

**MARTHA.** A saint? What does he mean? Did you persuade him to let us keep Romulus?

**WOLF.** I found a way, but I must see if it's acceptable to you.

**MARTHA.** It's acceptable to me, provided that no one tries to take Romulus away from me.

**WOLF.** Maybe when you know, you won't – you will... This is embarrassing.

**MARTHA.** If it's so difficult, maybe you can find a detour.

**WOLF.** A detour? Yes, a detour. Martha, would it be repugnant to you to be my wife?

**MARTHA.** Your wife?

**WOLF.** Yes.

**MARTHA.** Why do you ask me such a thing?

**WOLF.** Because of Romulus.

**MARTHA.** Because of Romulus? I don't understand.

**WOLF.** That's because you don't know what's been going on.

**MARTHA.** What's been going on? You're frightening me.

**WOLF.** You don't know what they've accused me of.

**MARTHA.** What have they accused you of?

**WOLF.** Of being Romulus' father. And they have accused you too – of being Romulus' mother.

**MARTHA.** I see. And since I was being accused, you decided to save my reputation.

**WOLF.** I would never have dared to ask you to marry me.

**MARTHA.** So you were willing to renounce your beloved celibacy?

**WOLF.** It was the only way to save your reputation.

**MARTHA.** And if I hadn't been accused?

**WOLF.** I would never have dared to ask you to marry me.

**MARTHA.** Never? Thank you, Frantz. I appreciate your great sacrifice, but I can't accept it.

**WOLF.** Then you refuse me?

**MARTHA.** I couldn't take advantage of your generosity.

**WOLF.** Then I must leave this house. If I don't leave this house, people will say you were my mistress – and it's probable that every year someone will bring your brother another baby in a basket. (*Picks up his hat and his book.*)

**MARTHA.** Frantz, are you really determined to leave? You won't have any regrets?

**WOLF.** Oh, yes. I'll sincerely regret my good friend Celestus.

**MARTHA.** Only him?

**WOLF.** My regrets will be for all that I leave behind, Martha.

[15] (*Embarrassed, he fumbles with his book. He drops it and some dried rose leaves drop out.*) Pardon me, Martha. I'm not kneeling. I'm trying to pick up...

**MARTHA.** Why, those are rose petals.

**WOLF.** Don't pay any attention to them.

**MARTHA.** But I want you to tell me about them.

**WOLF.** Those are from other days, from days before you were sad. You have been sad of late, Martha. You used to open your window right above mine. Every morning you would sing. And your song made me feel full of joy – as if the sun had risen for the second time. Then I would lean out my window until I could see your hand. Sometimes I would see you picking the petals from wilted roses, and the breeze would carry the petals into my room. I would pick them up. It was childish, I know, but it gave me great pleasure – more than pleasure – it gave me great happiness.

**MARTHA.** You picked up my wilted roses? That's a story you're telling me.

**WOLF.** But it's not a story. I still have the petals, you see, here in the pages of my Leibnitz.

**MARTHA.** Then if things hadn't turned out the way they did tonight, you would not have left us?

**WOLF.** No, Martha, I could never leave here unless I was forced to.

**MARTHA.** Then if I consented to marry you – ?

**WOLF.** Everything could go on as before, except we would all be much happier than before.

**MARTHA.** (*Taking his hand.*) I'll marry you. Put your Leibnitz and your rose petals on the table.

**CELESTUS.** (*Runs in.*) Good news! Everything has turned out fine. No need for sacrifices, no need for a marriage. We found the father and mother of Romulus.

**WOLF.** What do you mean?

**CELESTUS.** I mean that Gertrude, the Mayor's own daughter, confessed to everything when she heard that Martha was being accused.

**MARTHA.** Really? (*The MAYOR opens the door slowly.*)

**CELESTUS.** Quiet! It's the Mayor.

[16] (*The MAYOR enters, a very confused and different man than before. He goes straight to CELESTUS and appears to be about to speak to him but no words will come out. He goes to MARTHA but still no words will come from his mouth. He takes her hand and kisses it. Then he goes to WOLF and gives him a warm embrace which embarrasses WOLF. At last he comes back to CELESTUS and makes a sign to keep things quiet, holding his index finger to his lips. Then with a muffled groan he stumbles out.*)

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**MARTHA.** Good Gertrude, she told him everything. She really was my good friend, you see. I knew the baby was hers, but I promised to keep it a secret. Romulus is the son of Gertrude and Conrad, your arsonist student. He's been hiding in the Mayor's house a long time.

**CELESTUS.** But the Mayor has forgiven him since he has promised to marry Gertrude tomorrow. They'll be married at the very same place and time that we had set for you.

**WOLF.** They will marry in our place?

**CELESTUS.** Aren't you lucky, Wolf? Now we can be like always – carefree bachelors.

**WOLF.** Yes, carefree bachelors.

**CELESTUS.** But, Martha, what the devil are you crying about?

**MARTHA.** You wouldn't understand.

**CELESTUS.** (*Looking at WOLF and back to MARTHA.*) What an idiot I am! But where are you going, Frantz? Don't go that way. (*He swings him around so that he bumps squarely into MARTHA.*) This way.

**WOLF.** (*Overcome with joy.*) Oh, Martha – (*He throws his arms around her.*)

**CELESTUS.** Everything turned out fine. There'll be no change in the program, except there will be two weddings instead of one. (*To WOLF.*) Unless –

**WOLF.** Unless what?

**CELESTUS.** Unless you forget about it.

**MARTHA.** (*Laughing.*) You will remember it tomorrow, won't you, Frantz?

**WOLF.** Of course I will. I'll put a note in my Leibnitz.

#### **CURTAIN**

*Romulus is adapted by the composer from the English translation of the play, by Barnett Shaw. It is used with permission of the translator.*