

Synopsis

Act One

On the estate of the mansion of Don Anchise, Podestà of Lagonero, love touches the hearts of all the characters, albeit in very different ways. Cavalier Ramiro continues to love the Podestà's niece, Arminda, who has rejected him and is now betrothed to the young Count Belfiore. The Marchioness, Violante Onesti, the "pretend garden-girl" with the assumed name of Sandrina, together with her servant, Roberto, also under the false name of Nardo, is searching for Belfiore, who the year before had stabbed her out of jealousy and left her for dead. The Podestà is in love with Sandrina, while Nardo courts the maid, Serpetta, who in turn hopes to marry the Podestà himself. On Belfiore's arrival, Sandrina faints when she discovers that he is promised to Arminda. Belfiore, on the other hand, is almost certain that he can see the Marchioness Violante in Sandrina, but she denies her true identity claiming that Violante is dead. The Act concludes in the general confusion caused by the unexpected meeting between Sandrina and Belfiore: Ramiro is pleased, Nardo concerned, Arminda and Serpetta are both jealous, Sandrina is upset, young Count Belfiore does not know what to do and the Podestà is particularly irritated by the unforeseen situation.

Act Two

Inside the Podestà's mansion, the courting continues. Arminda expresses her love for Belfiore, while Nardo turns his attentions to Serpetta. When Sandrina and Belfiore meet, she gives him a detailed account of her supposed death, after which she is forced to reject the Podestà's pressing suit with disdain and determination. Ramiro then arrives with an order for the arrest of Belfiore for the murder of Violante. Ramiro hopes to eliminate his rival as the Podestà can hardly allow his daughter to marry a murderer.

Even so, to everyone's amazement, Sandrina defends Belfiore: no murder has been committed since she is the Marchioness, Violante. The others, however, do not believe her completely, since Sandrina, when pressed by Belfiore, denies that she really is Violante and tells him that she has only made such a claim in order to save him from the accusation of murder. Out of jealousy, Arminda has ordered that Sandrina be abandoned in a dark, lonely forest, and the Podestà and Ramiro, soon followed by the others, set out in search of her.

Terrified, Sandrina has taken shelter in a cave. She is found thanks to the light of the torches and all the characters come together in a series of mistaken and exchanged identities, aided by the cover of the darkness. It is in this situation that Sandrina and Belfiore find understanding, complicity and harmony, and in the apparent madness that surrounds them, they believe themselves to be mythological characters.

Act Three

Sandrina and Belfiore still appear to be in the grip of madness: each of them mistakes Nardo as their lover. In the meantime, the Podestà, who is still intent on marrying Sandrina, is embarrassed and cannot believe the situation that has been created. Arminda is determined to marry Belfiore, causing Ramiro to despair.

Sandrina and Belfiore fall asleep in the garden. When they awake, cured of the apparent state of madness, they finally recognise one another and they swear never to be separated again. Violante reveals her true identity to everyone and says that she had taken the name and social rank of Sandrina, and had ordered her servant, Roberto, to assume the name of Nardo, only to be able to have revenge on Belfiore. At this point, Arminda can be reconciled with Ramiro, while Serpetta, realising that the Podestà is still in love with the "pretend garden-girl", accepts Roberto as her future husband.

(Traduzione di Chris Owen)