

SYNOPSIS

Act I

In a theatre, rehearsals are underway for the opera *Romolo ed Ersilia*, which the impresario intends to stage. The text is by the grocer and poet Cesare Salzapariglia, the music by the maestro Biscroma Strappaviscere. The performers arrive: the prima donna Corilla Scortichini, accompanied by her husband Procolo Cornacchia; the seconda donna Luigia Scannagalli with her overbearing mother Agata; the leading German tenor Guglielmo; and the *primo musicista* Pippetto.

Rehearsals prove chaotic. Pippetto, offended because he has been given only “*partichini*” (minor lines), is the first to abandon the production in order to depart for the more prestigious theatres of Milan. His role is assigned to Mamma Agata, but after a disastrous duet rehearsal, the German tenor – equally indignant – also walks out. Procolo then puts himself forward for the male lead, naturally supported by his wife. However, the prima donna Corilla refuses to sing with either Luigia or Agata; faced with the forced interruption of rehearsals, the impresario is compelled to call in the police, and an inspector threatens to arrest everyone.

Act II

The performance of *Romolo ed Ersilia* begins to take shape on stage, unfolding through a succession of arias by the various performers, punctuated by mishaps and confusion. Suddenly, however, the verdict arrives: the opera cannot go on. Quietly and without drawing attention, everyone slips away from the theatre to avoid being forced to pay the debts.