

ELVINO. Bless my heart, what are you all doing here? How comes it that you have ventured in so large a body so near to the confines of civilization? And by daylight, too! It seems rash.

GIORGIO. Elvino, we are here under circumstances of a romantic and sentimental description. We are all going to be married!

ELVINO. What, all of you?

LUIGI. One each day during the next three weeks. What do you say to that?

ELVINO. Why, that it strikes at the root of your existence as a Secret Society, that's all. And who is to be the first?

GIORGIO. The first is Risotto, who went down to the village this morning, disguised as a stockbroker, to be married to Minestra, and we expect the happy couple back every minute. The next is Giuseppe, he's to be married tomorrow, Luigi on Thursday, and so on until we are all worked off. As we are twenty-four in number, that will occupy twenty-four days, which are to be passed in unceasing revelry — and our captain, Arrostino, intends to confer upon you the benefit of our custom.

ELVINO. There I think he is right. I am out of wine just now, but I have a family prescription for fine old crusted Chianti, which I will send to the nearest chemist to be compounded at once. There's only one thing for which I must stipulate; let these revels be as joyous, as reckless, as rollicking as you please — only, let them be conducted in a whisper.

LUIGI. What, because we are a Secret Society? We are not as secret as all that.

ELVINO. No; but because there is a considerable portion of a poor old Alchemist on the second floor who is extremely unwell. You wouldn't go for to disturb the dying moments of a considerable portion of a poor old Alchemist?

GIORGIO. You are unusually considerate. What's the matter with him?

ELVINO. Why, the poor old boy is continually blowing himself up with dynamite in his researches after the Philosopher's Stone. Well, that's nothing — it's all in the day's work, and he's used to it. But this time he has blown himself up worse than usual, and several of the bits are missing; if you come across anything of the kind they are his, and I'm sure you'll behave honorably, and give them up at once.

GIORGIO. We swear.

ELVINO. Bless you! Now the Alchemist has hitherto paid for his board and lodging in halfpence, with a written undertaking to turn them all into gold as soon as his discovery is completed; consequently the dictates of common humanity prompt us to give him every chance. (*Noise of explosion within.*) Up he goes again! Excuse me one minute, while I go and collect him.

*Exit ELVINO.*

*Enter Chorus of Village Girls, dancing, and heralding the approach of RISOTTO and MINESTRA.*