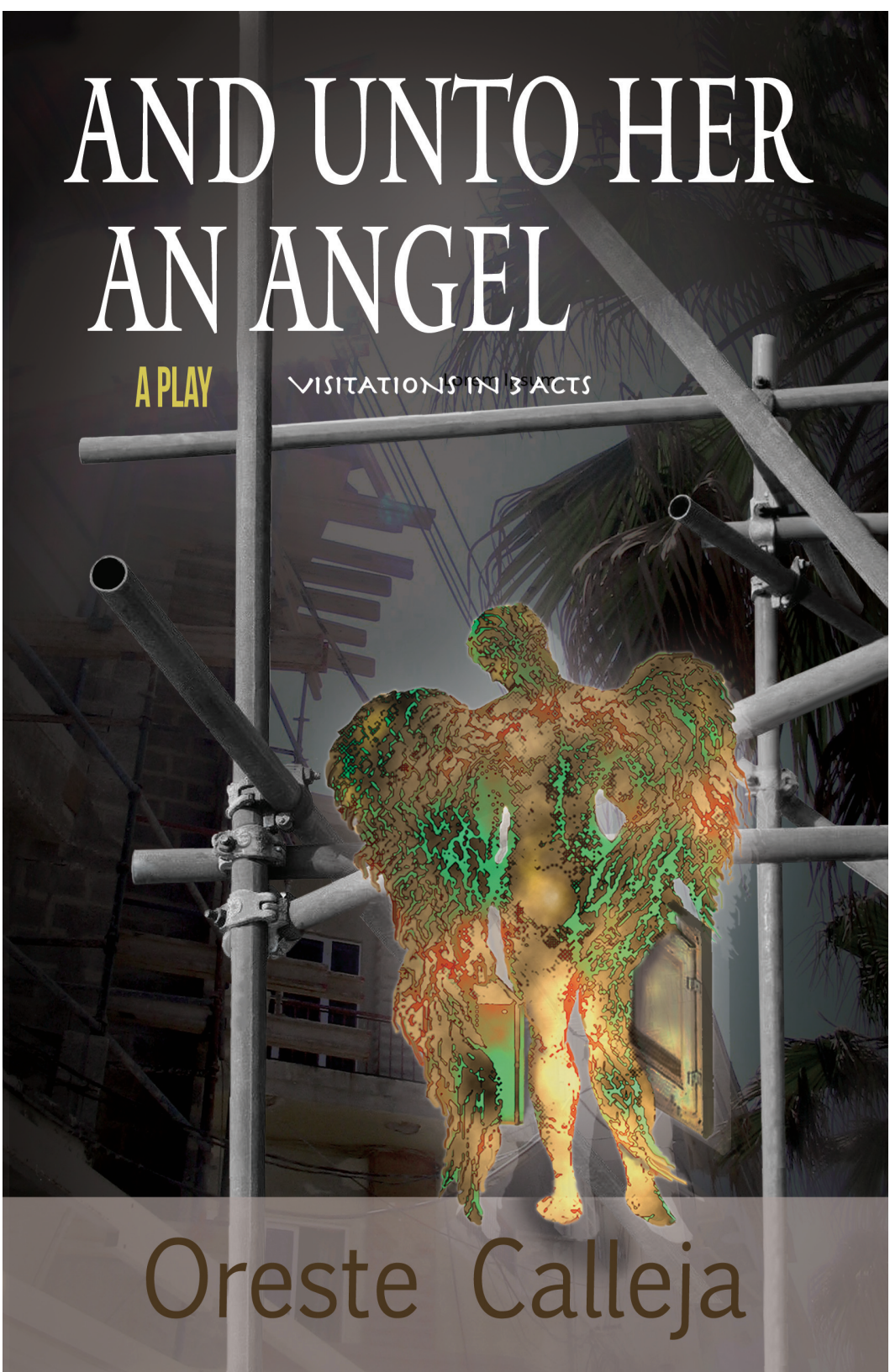
AND UNTO HER AN ANGEL

A PLAY

VISITATIONS IN 3 ACTS



Oreste Calleja

AND UNTO HER AN ANGEL

VISITATIONS IN 3 ACTS

AND UNTO HER AN ANGEL - translated by the author from his original Maltese three-act play *U l-Anġlu Ħabbar*. ORESTE CALLEJA is a veteran playwright with some fifty years experience writing for the Maltese stage, radio and screen.

"Oreste Calleja made his mark with biting satires on modern Maltese society, trapped in its hypocrisies, superstitions, and bureaucratic entanglements."
MARIO AZZOPARDI - A Brief Survey of Theatre in Malta

NATIONAL BOOK AWARDS 2002 and 2004:

Other publications by Oreste Calleja , *IL-FESTA BIL-BANDIERI* (publ. 2002) ***and*** *PAWLU REDUX* (publ. 2004), were both winners of the National Book Award for drama for their respective years of publication.

"Calleja's success as a dramatist is mainly due to his integration of the realistic style with symbolic characteristics that make his plays universal."
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PIN Publications, Malta, 1997.

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ORESTE CALLEJA

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www.orestecalleja.com

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TO

KARLA AND KIRSTEN

CONTENTS

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: *Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore.* 12
SCENE 2: "So what now, oh great master?" 35
SCENE 3: Does Madam mind? 44
SCENE 4: I'm tired... So, so tired. 45
SCENE 5: Making the bed. 47
SCENE 6: I really do have to go now. 49
SCENE 7: One good hand. 50

ACT TWO

SCENE I: *Una Furtiva Lagrima.* *54*
SCENE 2: Equi...Vocations. 80
SCENE 3: *Consumatum Est.* *94*

ACT THREE

SCENE 1: The visitations. 100
SCENE 2: And unto her, an angel. 102
SCENE 3. The snake in the grass. 106
SCENE 4: *Discreto — discreditandum*. 107
SCENE 5: Beware the Angel of Whores. 110
SCENE 6: This little piggy ate the caviare. 112
SCENE 7: Talking turkey. 115
SCENE 8: Betrayal. 120
SCENE 9: Gethsemane. 129
SCENE 10: Mistress, take heed. 131
SCENE 11: *Anġlu Bellu.* 134
SCENE 12: *Che angelo sei?* 138

CHARACTERS

Karen
Aldo
Workman
The Son
The Curator
The Secretary
Jackie Russell
Man In The Balcony
Man In A Green Blazer
A Teenage Couple
Notary & Mrs Sacco
Two Children

THE SCENE

The upper-floor balcony room in a newly-built villa.

Act 1 Mid afternoon.
Act 2 Morning – Some weeks earlier.
Act 3 Follows Act One — Weeks later. Late afternoon.

NOTE:
The use of a slash (/) towards the end of a line of dialogue indicates the start of an overlap of dialogue by the next character.

PRIOR: *I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.*

HANNAH PITT: *Well, that's a stupid thing to do.*

Angels In America: Perestroika. Tony Kushner

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: *Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore.*

The balcony room.

Centre stage, a large balcony with a central door and two side doors. The outside aluminium work of the balcony structure has just been completed, but the inside doors are still missing. Some sheets of plywood and a couple of boards cover the central door opening, while two rather old and battered wooden doors temporarily cover the side-door openings - two doors which appear to have once belonged to some rather prestigious antique palazzo.

The door on the right is covered by large weather-beaten boards full of dried cement and paint - the door on the left is uncovered, exposing a number of graffiti, most prominently the letters PN *painted in blue.*

Downstage left, an elegant polished mahogany handrail coming from downstairs - downstage right, a hallway leading to a larger room and the interior of the house

Outside the balcony can be heard the intermittent sound of machinery - the builders working on the front of the house, polishing the stone masonry.

*Coming in through a half-open window of the balcony there is an electricity extension cord which is plugged into a socket on the right wall. Near the plug, a large sign bearing the legend "*King's Real Estate Development Unlimited*" with a sticker "*SOLD BY*" sprawled across it.*

The room is barely but stylishly furnished - perhaps an attempt at nascent feng shui style: some oriental-style furniture, a cane sofa with flower-patterned silk upholstery,

a coffee table with art books on display, a rug underneath it, and an open silkscreen trifold privacy screen beside it.

The room look like it's being used as an artist's studio. There is a small metal easel with an almost finished painting on it - a still life of a vaseful of lilies, typical of any art student's or amateur's studio. Close by, a spotlight, a stool, a small table with some jars full of kerosene or turpentine, paint tubes, etc. Behind the screen in the right-hand corner, a larger heavy wooden easel, old and shabby, and a table laden with more paint and a small toolbox. On the table and beside it there are a good number of medium-sized paintings, all of them facing the wall.

There is the remnant of some tape stuck to the floor, perhaps marking the placement of some... object?

Hanging on the screen, some items of women's underwear — a lace negligée, corset, camisole etc.

An elegant coat and a suitcase or two lie by the sofa; one of the suitcases is open, beside it a liquor bottle, a cigarette stick and some other packages in a duty-free bag.

ALDO s*its centre stage on a stool, his back to the audience, looking at the side doors of the balcony. He is a 40-something and exudes an air of self-conscious refinement.*

He coughs frequently and takes out an inhaler, spraying and inhaling deeply.

He holds his breath while looking at the left door, the one with PN *graffiti on it, and then looks at the right door.*

Finally, he exhales and stands up. He goes to the left door to observe it more closely, glancing occasionally at the other door. He moves back to look at the painting in the middle of the room. He leans closer to smell the canvas, starts coughing immediately and moves away. Continues coughing and again produces the inhaler from his pocket. Same routine - spraying, holding breath, exhaling.

The noise from outside starts again.

ALDO *turns away and sprays the air around him, a vain attempt to dampen the noise.*

KAREN: *(behind screen)* Still got that cough I see, Aldo! In spite of all the fresh spring air in East Berlin!

ALDO: *(moving towards screen)* It's this oil! Not the Berlin spring — this putrid oil and turpentine!

KAREN: *(a quick look — she is holding a couple of canvases)* No peeping now, Aldo! Plenty of time for that!

ALDO, *the cough showing no signs of abating, is unable to speak.*

KAREN *ducks back behind the screen, rummaging through canvases resting against the wall, unsure which one to choose.*

She's about 30, slim with long straight hair, wearing a pair of shorts and a baggy pullover midway down to her thighs — no outstanding beauty — a nervous temperament, indecisive and suffering from mood swings.

ALDO *goes to the balcony, his attention drawn once more by the two side doors, especially to the graffiti on the left door.*

Looks at it for some time, glancing at the other door once or twice. He is about to wield his spray again, then freezes, tilts his head as if he's just figured something out. He looks more sharply at the covered right door, approaching it in a determined way.

KAREN *comes out from behind the screen, watching closely.*

ALDO *reaches out for one of the boards to move it aside and look behind it, when he starts coughing again.*

ALDO: *(turns back towards the screen, looking for his inhaler)* So Karen, did you miss me?

KAREN, *disappointed, immediately ducks again behind the screen.*

ALDO: *(has seen her - coughs, then)* This paint is suffocating me. Can't we open a window? *(Rushes to the balcony and opens a window - takes a deep breath and turns back in.)* Really can't believe you started with this oil business!

KAREN: Acrylics were getting me nowhere. I had to close the windows. I couldn't stand the bloody noise. And the dust! You saw — they're sanding down the outside walls.

ALDO: Yes, I saw! Finally! — No one uses oil anymore, Karen. Bad for the environment and bad for your health! I had warned you.

KAREN: *(coming out with two canvases)* Oh, Aldo! We're gonna have dust all over the place now!

KAREN l*eaves the canvases leaning against the screen and goes to close the windows again.*

ALDO: Did they have to do this today? Four hours on the plane and this is what I come home to — this madness! I can't even breathe!

KAREN: I know. I'm sorry. But you know they'd been promising for a year now!--

ALDO: I'm suffocating!

KAREN: I didn't dare put them off! And it's coming along beautifully, you must admit.

ALDO: *(dusts the King's Real Estate sign)* You could have let it hang out there a while longer. Think of the publicity. It could be seen right across the valley.

KAREN: And here I thought I was your prize publicity. They finished the well too; did you see? An exact replica of the one at Palazzo Verdagna. They used our drawings too!

ALDO: I remember. But what about this? *(the balcony)* All this aluminium — what a disaster!

KAREN: What?... I know, I'm sorry, I didn't tell you.

ALDO: It's just awful!

KAREN: I know, but I had to do something — I needed to work in here. Couldn't just leave it open any longer. You know how chilly it gets at night!

ALDO: Must have been working really late to need all this light! But why the aluminium, for God's sake!

KAREN: What could I do? I know we wanted it in wood, but it

would have taken at least six months. That aluminium was ready in a week!

ALDO: Amazing! Hooray for progress!

KAREN: I can always have it done in wood when I find the time.

ALDO: ...God forbid the money!

KAREN *shrugs her shoulders - does not want to hear about money.*

ALDO: Guess time's been really important to you. What have you been up to these last two months? *(Anxious, but not wanting to appear so.)* So, did you miss me much?

KAREN: No, I worked. I worked a lot. I mean, I missed you...

ALDO: But not much.

KAREN: ...Of course I missed you! *(She kisses him lightly but moves away before he can hold her. She goes to the corner of the studio and moves the screen hiding the large easel)* Look, Aldo! What do you think?

ALDO: *(draws nearer)* Impressive. Really! You have been taking things seriously! Where did you find this?

KAREN: *(moves back to hide the picture resting against the screen - very nervous, still undecided whether to show it to him or not)* I bought it at an auction. It belonged to Caruana Dingli! Russell told me it's authentic — definitely authentic.

ALDO: Oh, I'm sure! Which Caruana Dingli was it, did he tell you? As far as I know, he's already sold two authentic — all genuine! — having belonged to Caruana Dingli! *(Pulls at the flap of his stained jacket which has brushed against the easel.)* Now see - See? Look what you've done! *(He touches some paint on the easel with his finger.)* And this paint... Authentic Caruana Dingli as well was it? Not frigging likely, is it!

KAREN: *(again leaving the canvas where it was)* Oops! Oh my God! I should have warned you. It's still wet. *(Takes a paint-dabbed clothe from the table and gives it to* ALDO *to wipe his hands.)* I just finished the painting. Hadn't the time to clean up.

ALDO: *(ignoring the cloth - takes out a handkerchief from his pocket.)* Off to a good start, aren't we! How much did you pay for it?

KAREN: What?

ALDO: This authentic Caruana Dingli and all!

KAREN: It wasn't cheap. — OK, look, do you want to see it or don't you?

ALDO: What?

KAREN: ...The painting, the one I just finished.

ALDO: Oh, come on. You've been blubbering since we came in, wanting and not wanting to show it to me! And you still haven't tried on that negligée!

Sits on the stool while KAREN *takes the picture back behind the screen and starts searching again in the stack of paintings.*

KAREN: Now, now! No peeping!

ALDO *shakes his head — pulls out a bottle of liquor and a mug hidden underneath the stool.*

He notices the tape stuck to the floor, at first kicks at it to loosen it, then bends down and pull some off.

ALDO: Still at it I see. Just as well — I brought you some vodka and all the cigarettes you ever wanted.

KAREN: *(slightly guilty but absent-mindedly)* I haven't touched a drop all week. I quit smoking too.

ALDO: Really? How about that! *(Pours some alcohol into the mug, rinses it and throws the drink into a jar near the paints.)*

KAREN: *(coming out with a canvas, the same one she had taken away)* Not there, Aldo! I had mixed my oil in there!

ALDO: Damned oil! You have to drown the stench in something! Wish I knew why you had to start dabbling in oil. It's not as if I didn't offer to show you how to use acrylics! They are more hygienic, you know... / And they don't pollute the air.

KAREN: *(in sync)* ...don't pollute the air! I know, I'm sorry. I'll open the other door. *(Opens the door leading to the right.)*

ALDO: *(pours and drinks from the mug)* And you're telling me you've been dry for a week? Not even a drop?

KAREN: It's true! *Vissi d'arte! Vissi d'amore! (Finally, her mind made up, picks up the canvas and places it on the easel. A fanfare:)* Tat-tarat-tatà! There! What do you think?

Pause.

ALDO *looks, and is struck speechless — then drinks.*

ALDO: *(still no reaction)* Interesting.

KAREN: Interesting!

ALDO: And... since when did you start painting nudes?

KAREN: Come closer, look! *(Turns on the lamp so that he can see better.)*

ALDO: A male nude...

KAREN: What do you think?

ALDO: No, really, it's... good. *(Feigned enthusiasm - puts on spectacles.)* It's really good. *Prosit*.

KAREN: Isn't it! Would you believe six months ago I didn't even know what oils were! Much less turpentine! And this, here... I did this with the palette knife — could you tell?

ALDO: The palette knife. Where?... Yes. Very effective. Really effective. Considering a year ago you didn't even know what pastels were either...

KAREN: Oh, bollocks! Pastels are lifeless, only good for someone with no blood in his veins! Bright colours — intense colours — that's what really moves me... colours you can touch!

ALDO *directs the light of the lampstand from one corner of the canvas to another, touching it with the tips of his fingers again, raising his spectacles to peer closer from underneath them.*

KAREN: It's true, isn't it? Almost invites you to reach out and touch him — to make sure he's not alive?

ALDO: It's really good ...So what's this texture? It looks like there's gauze wire underneath...

KAREN: *(none too pleased that he's figured it out so fast)* But it isn't!

ALDO: Hmm?

KAREN: It's not gauze wire! Not exactly. Something else. Guess!

ALDO: Guess what?

KAREN: What I put there! Underneath... Guess!

ALDO: So, you did put something?

KAREN: Of course, I did. But you'll never guess...

ALDO: How should I know? Couldn't have been like that in the original, that's for sure.

KAREN: *(beat)* What original?

ALDO: Where you copied it from.

KAREN: Copied what?

ALDO: This. The picture...

KAREN: What picture?

ALDO: This painting! Surely you don't want me to believe... No, wait... It must be some German expressionist! And that nude, that owes something to Blake, though it reminds me of some of Kahlil Gibran's illustrations... That book I gave you!

KAREN *is speechless.*

ALDO: ...The Prophet!

A long pause.

KAREN: *(pale)* What are you saying?

ALDO: What's the matter?

KAREN: The matter? What's the matter with you? What are you saying? What copied picture? What German expressionist? WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

ALDO: How would I know? So, he's not German — or whatever, jeez!... You tell me!

KAREN: Tell you what? What are you saying?... Are you saying that I copied this? Is that what you're saying?

ALDO: Why? You mean it isn't a copy?... That it's an original? *(Turns back to the painting.)*

KAREN *opens her mouth but stops. She cannot decide whether he's doing it on purpose or not.*

Pause.

ALDO *returns her gaze for a moment and then put his spectacles back on. He moves towards the picture — raises his hands as if to touch it like he did before. Stops.*

ALDO: (*a new tone of voice, expressionless, without looking at her)* So, what is it supposed to be exactly — a man or a bird?

KAREN: An angel.

ALDO: An angel. Ah. And the net?

KAREN: He's caught in it — an abandoned trapping net...

ALDO: I see. And he got caught in it...

KAREN: ...Helplessly — an innocent soul. And he was left there, alone, to die slowly, to starve, to freeze to death, in the bareness – the barrenness of a strange season...

ALDO: Oh, all that aye? / And how long were you at this?

KAREN: ...An alien season. At it? *(Sullen — a hint of guilt.)* Three sessions. During the first two I hardly finished anything... The third session then, the moment I took up the brush, I just couldn't stop...

ALDO: (*harshly)* But how long? Eight, six hours?... How long?

KAREN: About three hours.

ALDO: How many times?...

KAREN: I told you. Three, four hours... Maybe a bit more. Why? I didn't keep time.

ALDO: Three hours. *(more to himself)* Incredible. Four hours... maybe a bit more!

KAREN: You don't believe me?

ALDO: Oh, I have to believe you.

KAREN: And... do you like it?

ALDO: Do I like it? Do I have to like it?...

KAREN: Yes, do you?

ALDO: Yes, I like it... And you — do you like it?

KAREN: Me?

ALDO: Yes. Do you?

KAREN: Do you have to ask?

ALDO: Well, as long as you like it...

KAREN: I told you! For me it's a masterpiece. *(Pause)* Yes, I like it! The best work of the century! Better than a fucking Picasso! Burn the Guernica for all I care! Stuff Gaughin! Kokoschka! *(Sweeping the art books off the coffee table.)* Who gives a damn about Van Gogh! Van Klee — Van Bastard!... What gives you the right to ask me if I like it?... Do you have to ask me? Yes, I like it! *(Gives the picture a passionate kiss.)* I like it.

ALDO: *(recovering slowly)* Yes — I see. And I don't blame you. *(He stands up. Feigning indifference.)* And, who was this model then?

KAREN: The model?

ALDO: Yes. Someone had to pose for you, no?

KAREN: Duh! And someone did! Why not?...

ALDO: Right — why not. Without a model you certainly wouldn't

have been able to produce such a... such a...

KAREN: Such a what?

ALDO: Such work. — Who was he?

KAREN: Does it matter who he was? What matters is who's on the canvas, not who he was!

ALDO: Of course. Still — who was he? You left out his face.

KAREN: No, I didn't!... *(An enigmatic smile.)*

ALDO: You're messing with me now?...

KAREN: I'm sorry. Private joke.

ALDO: Right. Who was he?

KAREN: Can't tell you.

ALDO: Why not?

KAREN: It's a secret — a professional secret!

ALDO: Really?

KAREN: Really. You know how hard it is to find good models these days to pose in the nude.

ALDO: And lucky you, you found one. And you want to keep him for yourself. I see. What's this then — trying to compete with me already?

KAREN: Compete! With you! I know I'm good — but not that good, Aldo. In spite of everything, certainly not that good...

ALDO *moves away abruptly from the picture — turns towards the sofa. Starts putting things back into the open suitcase.*

KAREN *watches — understanding the signs.*

ALDO: *(without turning around)* Only you can say...

KAREN: Say? Say what?

ALDO: How good you are... or aren't.

KAREN: Really? So — you really think I'm that good?

ALDO: That good?--

KAREN: Or have I been a bad girl, Aldo? Tell me. Is that it?

ALDO: What does "that good" mean anyway? By whose standards?

KAREN: Mine! Yours! I don't know! But if someone was to tell me I was as good as you--

ALDO: As good as me!

KAREN: ...If you told me then--

ALDO: Ah, flattery now!

KAREN: ...If I could be perhaps not quite as good as you, but close, like you used to paint — that would be enough for me.

ALDO: At least you said "used to paint."

KAREN: When you used to do oils... Not that your acrylics weren't good.

ALDO: Thank you!

KAREN: *(the enthusiasm quashed)* This isn't flattery. You know me better than that. And you don't need me to flatter you. You never did. You know it's not my style...

ALDO: *(closing the suitcase)* Yes. That I do.

KAREN: Right, that's why; when I ask you if my work — not me — if this work is good or not, I ask because you are an authority. Because you're a real artist--

ALDO: Ah, a real artist! But no more than you are though now it seems.

KAREN: Always more than me...

ALDO: You're not listening, Karen. Not more than you, no. Are you listening?

KAREN: Are you serious?

ALDO: Serious, and with authority too. *(almost harshly)* I will only say this once, Karen, so listen carefully... and believe me, in this environment — in this little town of ours — in this rarefied air where those chosen by the Muses roam — the apple of the eyes of the jealous gods of the arts! — you won't find another person who will sincerely tell you this. So you listen carefully. Yes, seriously, your work — at least this work is — *(trying to get the better of himself)* — amazing. What's the expression? *Tal-ġenn!* Awesome! And I wish it were mine! I haven't seen work like this in years... ages. Not anybody's — and certainly not mine. Neither the oils I used to do — and certainly not the acrylics. I wish it were mine, Karen. Do you hear me, Karen? That better? Is that a good enough authority for you?

KAREN: Stop. Why are you doing this!...

ALDO: I'm doing nothing, Karen. *(Distressed — suddenly weary.)* I mean it, Karen. I just mean it, OK?

KAREN: Stop. You really mean it? You'll make me cry... I haven't cried for weeks. I don't want to start again...

ALDO: Karen... Karen, Karen.

He moves towards her. She moves towards him — falls in his arms. They kiss — a passionate kiss for several seconds.

ALDO *tries to hold on to her and lead her to the sofa. They half tumble onto it, but* KAREN *immediately struggles to break free.*

KAREN: *(stands up)* No. Not now, Aldo! I'm calling Russell.

ALDO: Calling whom?

KAREN: Jackie! Russell.

ALDO: Why?...

KAREN: To ask his opinion!

ALDO: What opinion? Russell!

KAREN: He can be more objective, more critical--

ALDO: Jackie!

KAREN: Nobody can be as bitchy as him — he'll tell me for sure what he really thinks!

ALDO: About what? About the painting? Are you mad?

KAREN: It's his profession!...

ALDO: It's his business — just business! It's not art!

KAREN: He has an art gallery, doesn't he? Two, for that matter! If he doesn't know what this is worth, who does?

ALDO: You are mad! How can you be so naive! ...And you believe that because he has a gallery he knows anything about art?

KAREN: He must know something!

ALDO: The only thing he would know is how much he could sell it for — and what his commission would be! That's what he knows. And I can tell you what he'll say: "Three hundred Euros — Three fifty tops! Three fifty tops!" And that's if I'd come with you and tell him this is good work — excellent work! Otherwise he won't even come look at it!

KAREN: What do you mean he won't even look at it? You just told me...

ALDO: Listen to me, Karen. What do you really want to know? Is it how much money you can make from the picture?

KAREN: I'm not interested in money!

ALDO: Of course not. Then there's no need to talk to Russell.

KAREN: I only want his opinion...

ALDO: Money is his opinion. I know! Count on it.

KAREN: But if he can't evaluate a work seriously, who can?

ALDO: Evaluate — you mean critique?... You mean a write-up? Oh, Karen darling, that's totally another thing — why didn't you tell me before? Totally! I can find you as many critics as you want! And if you really want a good evaluation, I'll take you to Walter D'Anastasi. Trust me. For my last expo he came up with a masterpiece of criticism. True, it's been some time now,

but we can go to him whenever you want... Better still, I'll ask him to come here, to your... studio! Right? That's how it's done. And I'll take the photographs myself. Of course, if you really want him to give you a proper critique you need to have some more finished work ready first... /

KAREN: I have finished work.

ALDO: ...*Les chefs-d'œuvre*! — What work?

KAREN: The ones I finished. I showed you some of them before.

ALDO: Before? You mean before this?

KAREN: Before this one. Before you went abroad.

ALDO: *(trying to remember)* Were those originals too?

KAREN: Yes! Don't tell me you didn't realise.

ALDO *shakes his head.*

KAREN: Why am I not surprised? After all, those last weeks you didn't come here just to see me paint, did you?

ALDO: Karen, that's not fair.

KAREN: No? You did come for me, didn't you? Not for my paintings, right? Why isn't that fair? And we always got around to showing you the paintings, no? *(Walks away towards her paintings.)* You even managed to tell me how good they were and how well I was doing. Always. You can't expect much more than that after all in an hour or two. When we did get around to it...

ALDO: I'm sorry, OK?

KAREN: OK, why not? I wasn't accusing you of anything. Naturally, you assumed that I couldn't create anything that's original — nothing of my own... *(Flipping through the canvases against the wall.)* I don't even remember exactly which ones you have seen...

ALDO*: (using his inhaler)* It doesn't matter now. Let me see what you have.

KAREN: *(holding up a couple of pictures closely to her breast)* Do you

really want to see what I've got?

ALDO: Yes--

KAREN: *(a quick movement with one hand — exposing her breast)* You mean these?

ALDO: *(none too displeased)* Oh, Karen!

KAREN: Right! *(Turning around abruptly.)* Than no.

ALDO: No? No what?

KAREN: No, I don't want to show them to you... The pictures!

ALDO: And why not?

KAREN: You had your chance!

ALDO: Come on, Karen. I told you I'm sorry...

KAREN: I know. Anyway, that's not the reason. Not the only reason. To be honest, I don't know if I'm ready to let anyone see them yet.

ALDO: Why not?

KAREN: Stop saying why not! I don't know why not. I'm afraid... No, I'm not afraid. I don't know! You've told me yourself — does it really matter what other people say? It's enough that I think that they're beautiful! Right? What about you Aldo? Do you enjoy — did you use to enjoy it when other people looked at your work? Isn't it better to keep it to yourself? Without anyone ruining it with their praise...

ALDO: Or their spit.

KAREN: That's it! No! No one will see them.

ALDO: Come on, I was only joking. Karen! I assure you there'll be nothing but praise.

KAREN: Oh, goodie!... No.

ALDO: I was joking!

KAREN: You weren't joking. The fact is, Aldo, you don't know what

a joke is. I read the criticism of your paintings, your work – "The artist who best represents a generation that never learnt to joke! The betrayed, humourless generation!"

ALDO: Cliché, Karen! Clichés. Even the critics talk rubbish sometimes. You shouldn't take them too seriously.

KAREN: You don't have to worry about that.

ALDO: But you still don't intend to show me anything else, right?

KAREN: Not yet.

ALDO: When then?

KAREN: When I have time to think it over, calm down a bit. I'll choose the best works first...

ALDO: The best? That much to choose from then, is there?

KAREN: I never said they were all good.

ALDO: So how many do you have?

KAREN: Oh, just the two, that's for sure!... Oh, you mean paintings! Paintings, well, including the previous ones?...

ALDO: Including the previous ones, the new ones, how many?

KAREN: Including the ones before I started this... *(Pauses.)* ...Including the ones I had shown you before, about ten. But those you had seen, no?

ALDO: And the ones you did later, after you started this, how many?

KAREN: It's your fault if you didn't see them. You should have taken a better look.

ALDO: How many, Karen?

KAREN: I don't know! Another five or six.

ALDO: And all of them like that one. All of them this... good?

KAREN: *(wanting to say yes, but uncertain)* Why not?

ALDO: And all of them with the same model?

KAREN: Yes, all of them! And all nude! There! All the same subject, yes. A whole series! And all of them starting slowly — you have to caress them, fondle them slowly, tease them out of their shells — you have to try once or twice! Struggle... Until finally, a whole orgy on canvas lasting two, three hours! Until finally you're free! And there you are: another masterpiece! Another wretched Guernica! Mona Lisa smiling mysteriously — smiling stupidly — an enigma defying meaning! Except for the meaning contrived by an obsessive man's mind — a jealous man! — looking at her! But I won't show it to them! To no one! Not even to you! It's mine! And mine alone!

ALDO: *(sarcastically) Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore!...*

Pause.

KAREN: Go, Aldo.

Pause.

ALDO: So you won't tell me who the model was?

KAREN *stands up — goes to the easel where she left her glass and liquor bottle. Pours a stiff measure and drinks.*

KAREN: *(without looking at him)* Please, go.

ALDO: So... you didn't t miss me, after all, did you? Here you are sending me away already. *(Stands up to look for his suitcases and coat. Turns around.)* It seems we're stuck where we were. In fact, worse off than where we were. I needn't have bothered bringing my luggage upstairs... did I? I MIGHT AS WELL NOT HAVE MADE ANY TRIP! ...Did I? YOU COULD AT LEAST HAVE SAVED ME THIS EXPENSE! Couldn't you?... *(*KAREN *doesn't answer.)* You could at least — you could have spared me the stairs, at least, and told me before I came up!

KAREN: I didn't know before you came up.

Pause.

AL DO: Oh, you did. *(Pause.)* Fine. OK. I'm going. *(Takes a suitcase and carries it to the top of the stairs. Stops, undecided what to do next.)* I'm going, Karen, but I'll still talk to Walter if you want.

KAREN: Don't.

ALDO: I'll just tell him--

KAREN: Don't do me any favours.

ALDO: When shall I ask him to come?

KAREN: Never.

ALDO: *(moving towards her)* Goodbye, Karen. Call me.

KAREN: Don't you dare tell him anything.

ALDO: We'll talk about it tomorrow--

KAREN: We won't talk about it tomorrow! And I don't want you to speak to him, do you hear?

ALDO: *(not convincingly enough)* OK. I'll call you...

KAREN: It's not OK, Aldo! *(Grabs him by the lapel — she has a palette knife in her hand.)* I don't want you to talk to him! I don't want you to say a word to him, do you hear?

ALDO: OK! OK!

KAREN: Do you see this? *(brandishing the knife)* If you talk to him — if you say one word... *(She has turned towards the painting, raising the knife as if to slash the canvas.)* One word... and there'll be nothing left of it. Do you hear me? Promise me! Promise you won't speak to him.

ALDO: I told you, OK! I promise you! If that's what you want. I promise!

> ALDO *sees that* KAREN*, unconvinced, is still holding high the knife. He pretends to turn around, then turns back suddenly and grabs her from behind, struggling to take the knife.*

ALDO: Who was he? Tell me! Who was he?

KAREN: Leave me alone!

ALDO: WHO?

They struggle for a second or two — KAREN *screams. The knife falls to the floor.*

ALDO *lets go of* KAREN. *Looks at his right hand and sees that it is bleeding.*

ALDO: Jesus Christ!

KAREN: Aldo!

ALDO: Jesus!...

KAREN: Oh my God!

ALDO: You'd better find some antiseptic. Jesus!

KAREN: I'm sorry! Let me have a look...

ALDO: Leave it! What do you want to look at? Get the antiseptic and some gauze, or a bandage, whatever!

KAREN: OK. Come, sit here... *(Draws him to the sofa.)* You have to stop the bleeding. Try to hold your wrist — hold it tight...

As ALDO *sits, she moves the rug out of the way with her feet.*

ALDO: Why are you moving it? Afraid I'll stain it? /

KAREN: No. Just so...

ALDO: You worry about the rug?!

KAREN: I'm sorry!

ALDO: Get me a band-aid or something!

KAREN: OK. OK, yes, wait... *(Walks towards right exit but turns back.)* Maybe it's better if you go to the bathroom...

ALDO: *(pressing some paper tissues against his hand)* Why?

KAREN: The medicine chest is in there. And you could hold it under running water. Come!...

ALDO: *(standing up)* I just didn't need this!

KAREN: I'm sorry.

ALDO: *(walks past* KAREN *who tries to get a closer look at his hand)* Just leave it! It's my fault, it's all my fault!... What was I thinking!

KAREN: *(walking behind him)* I'm sorry, Aldo! I didn't mean to hurt you — believe me!

KAREN *follows him out into the corridor as he exits.*

A door opens and slams shut in the corridor.

KAREN *comes back in.*

The noise of the builders outside seems louder now.

KAREN: *(alone)* I'm sorry...

She walks towards the easel and picks up the knife. See sees some drops of blood on the floor, takes a cloth from the easel and wipes them up.

She moves towards the sofa, wiping up the odd bloodstain, picking art books off the floor.

KAREN: *(calling)* Are you alright, Aldo? Did you find them?

ALDO*'s answer off-stage, incomprehensible.*

KAREN: Aldo! Is everything alright?...

Pause.

KAREN *puts away the bloodied cloth - turns to neatening up the room. She takes the negligée off the screen. Almost instinctively she puts it up to her breast to try it for size.*

KAREN: Wishful thinking, Aldo! Pity this is all where you see big...

ALDO: *(off-stage)* What are you saying? Could you please ask them to stop that racket out there?

KAREN *comes across the suitcase at the top of the stairs.*

KAREN: *(even more agitated on seeing it*) I said did you need anything? If you want... if you want I'll take your suitcases in, OK Aldo? *(She lowers her voice — resigned?)* You can stay here if you wish. *(Starts to put the rug back in its original place, almost automatically.)* If you still wish...

ALDO *appears at the door, bandaging his hand.*

ALDO: Thanks a lot! No, I don't need anything! — If I wish what?...

KAREN: If you wish...if you wish I could drive you to the clinic. *(Hastily drops the negligée on a suitcase.)* When did you have your last tetanus shot?

ALDO: Tetanus! There's no way I'm not going to any clinic, you can be sure of that!

KAREN: You're bleeding again...

ALDO: What the hell! It won't stop! It's all your fault! You and your crazy head! *(Turns back to the bathroom.)*

KAREN: *(following him)* Me! It's you – you and your green-eyed jealousy! It's all your fault!

Turns back as he exits.

KAREN: *(shouting above the noise from the workers outside)* It's your fault! Are you listening?...

A door slamming shut.

Exasperated, she goes to the balcony and leans out.

KAREN: You're still here? You've been here all morning — you haven't done five minutes' worth of work! Go away! No more work! Take a holiday!... Are you listening? — I told you to stop! STOP! *(She realises they're not hearing her or are pretending not to hear. Turns back in.)* You bastard! We'll see about that...

KAREN *takes the cable coming through the balcony and follows it to where it's plugged in the wall. Jerks the plug off. Perfect silence.*

KAREN: You can work now... Let me see you work now!

Drops the plug and walks to the easel. She takes the bottle and mug and pours a drink. She drinks it while looking at the canvas. Observes it for several seconds.

ALDO: *(off-stage)* Karen!

KAREN *does not move.*

KAREN: *(to herself)* I'm sorry...

ALDO: Karen!

KAREN: *(in a low voice)* I'm coming! *(But she's still absorbed by the picture.)* I'm coming.

She leans down to pick up the palette. Then she takes the knife in her hand. She remains standing in front of the easel, palette in one hand, knife clutched in the other.

ALDO *comes in, his hand bandaged tight now.*

ALDO: Are you deaf? Have they stopped? See if you can tie these ends, please...

KAREN *turns to face him, slowly puts the palette near the easel, and then lets the knife fall slowly.*

Stares mesmerised at the palm of her hand, which is bleeding.

She moves towards ALDO*, wanting to help him tie up his bandage, but seems to be fascinated by the blood trickling from her own hand.*

ALDO: Oh my God, Karen! What have you done?

KAREN: I'm sorry, Aldo...

Lights slowly fade.

KAREN: I'm sorry.

SCENE 2: So what now, oh great master?

Lights up.

Some time later. The WORKMAN *comes up the stairs. Covered in dust, he wears a handkerchief round his head, a dingy under-vest and torn shorts. He follows the extension cord coming in through the balcony towards the electricity socket and plugs it back in.*

He sees the mug and the bottle close by, takes the bottle and goes to the balcony.

WORKMAN: *(to someone outside)* All right! Start it up!

A few seconds later the noise from the machinery starts again.

WORKMAN: OK! Turn it off! *(Beat.)* Turn it off, dumbass!

The noise stops.

The WORKMAN *turns back in, takes a sip from the bottle and sits on the sofa. He removes the dusty handkerchief from his head.*

His SON *comes cautiously up the stairs. He is very thin, hair shaven short making him look younger than he is, and wears an earring. His clothes and shoes are dusty, but not exactly workman attire.*

He walks in slowly, looking around with curious interest.

The WORKMAN *offers him the bottle, but the* SON *ignores him.*

SON: So this is how hard it gets for you, is it? Are we going to start work, or what?

WORKMAN: What's the hurry? When they return, we start. They won't be anymore grateful if we work our asses off.

SON: How long will they be?

WORKMAN: I don't know. You in a hurry? They should be back soon. Unless they find a long queue at the clinic.

SON: I'm hungry – haven't had a bite since morning.

WORKMAN: We'll soon be going.

The WORKMAN *goes to look at the painting on the large easel. No reaction.*

The SON *stops to look at the still life on the small easel.*

SON: But I'm hungry.

WORKMAN: Go then, and get me a couple of rolls too.

SON: What are we doing up here? We're gonna be long?...

WORKMAN: Will you shut up. Is that why you came — to piss the shit out of me all day!

SON: I came because she made me...

WORKMAN: And I told you, they'll soon be here. Go.

The SON *puts his hand into his pocket.*

SON: I don't have enough money.

WORKMAN: What did you do with the fiver your mother gave you yesterday?

SON: I don't have enough money!

WORKMAN: Damn money! Always money...

SON: I need money!

WORKMAN: Fine — I'll give you money. *(He drinks.)*

The SON *comes closer to the large easel.*

WORKMAN: Go and see if there's something in the fridge.

SON: What fridge?

WORKMAN: *(indicating the entrance to the right)* In there. They got beer in there. And goodies.

SON: You expect me to go in there — go through their stuff?

WORKMAN: Stupid cunt! And they say like father like son...

SON: So, he paints nudes then this guy?

WORKMAN: Nah — a horse's ass. That's what he paints.

SON: Is he famous or what?

WORKMAN: What do you think?

SON: Dunno. He sure does like men, that's for sure.

WORKMAN: Go get me a bite. And leave well alone! I thought you were hungry. *(Pushes* SON *away from the easel.)*

SON: Ain't had anything since morning. I told you.

WORKMAN: And I told you leave this shit alone! That's why I don't

want you here — with me. All you do is gripe! Gripe, complain and eat!

SON: I wish. *(Turns away — suddenly uneasy — takes out a packet of cigarettes and goes to the balcony.)* Fine, you tell me when you want to start work. You tell me. Do you see me griping? Fine! *(Lights up and sits down in the balcony.)* Think I can't be a useless fuckoff same as you? Just watch me. *(Offers.)* Smoke?

WORKMAN: Piss off.

SON: Likewise. *(inhales - tears in his eyes)* Piss off yourself. — They sure are loaded that's for sure. Rollin' in it.

WORKMAN: Nuts — that's what they are. Cracked.

SON: And with a house like this. If this was my house — I tell you, if I were to build a house...

WORKMAN: Yea — what? Why? What do you think we have at home? A pigsty?

SON: I'm saying, if I were to build a house, for me, I would build it just like this.

WORKMAN: *(puts his feet on the coffee table - drinks)* Oh, you would, would you?

SON: Why not?

WORKMAN: Why, your mother's house not good enough for you now?

SON: I'm saying, for me...

WORKMAN: You — always you. And what do you perchance like about this house?...

SON: Everything. /

WORKMAN: A genius — my son the genius!

SON: ...Everything / The rooms for one thing...

WORKMAN: You don't know jack shit!

SON: ...The size of the rooms — I like big spaces — the space in here. And out there — the scenery... Look out there.

WORKMAN: Why — what do you see out there? The swimming pool, that topless babe perchance?

SON: Perchance she's gone back inside now.

WORKMAN: Must have missed you, don't tell me.

SON: Or you. Your strutting brawny backside. Or the smell of cow dung from the farm. That's enough to scare anyone off.

WORKMAN: I thought you like it out here.

SON: I do. Just look at that scenery. Forget the palm trees behind the farm — they just stuck them there after they chopped up the quarry. But look at the sea, way behind the farm, down there... Eh! Did you see that angel over here?

WORKMAN: Angel? What angel?

SON: Down in that courtyard, just above the orange trees.

WORKMAN: Carob trees. There are no orange trees down there. What angel?

SON: Nah — you wouldn't see it, would you? Not unless it was topless.

WORKMAN: What angel? Are you dreaming?

SON: The neighbour, down there in the yard. Bet he's a sculptor — A big guy too. He's working on a large stone, there, in the shade of the vines. And behind him, looking at us from behind the wall, a big angel — looks like papier-mâché. Or maybe wood. Must have just made it for the feast. I tell you he's big — looks just like St. Joseph — with that angel on top of him and all!

WORKMAN: St. Joseph wasn't a sculptor, you dope.

SON: Pardon me — I forgot you're the Bible expert too. The expert in everything for that matter. Pity they stuck that electric bracket in his hand. A little anachronism and it spoils all. I said, anachronism — I suppose you understand what that

means too? Naturally!

WORKMAN: Fool.

SON: Naturally. *(Comes away from the balcony.)* Boy this place is nice! And that scenery — they can see the whole village down there. How much do you think it's worth? *(No answer.)* If I had the money!... There's nothing more beautiful than a newly built house!

WORKMAN: And that explains why you won't work! Cut the crap. If you wanted to work, there's plenty of work with me...

SON: I didn't say I liked to build them — I like them like this — when they're just finished...

WORKMAN: There's a good one!

SON: I like new houses — when there's no one living in them. People spoil everything. They infect everything. No matter how much I hate buildings, there's nothing more beautiful than entering a new house for the first time — light coming in through new windows — walls as white as paper, unspoilt by fancy drapes or horrible pictures — like that one. *(Indicates painting on the small easel.)*

WORKMAN: Just shows how much you know.

SON: There's nothing more beautiful than white walls, crystal clear glass and shining floor tiles, cool and fresh under your bare feet — the smell of lime wash and fresh cement still setting.

WORKMAN: What the fuck are you on about?

SON: *(carried away - knows he's bugging his father)* ...The echoes of empty halls with no furniture, wide staircases leading to rooms still unopened, the promise of a future...

WORKMAN: Blah blah blah! The smell of cement! Blah blah! Echoes in empty halls... Crap! What, now you're a poet too? Another Dun Karm, like as not. A poet of blah blah cement!

SON: And papier-mâché angels--

WORKMAN: Angels my ass.

SON: ...Angels with electricity wires drilled in their arms--

WORKMAN: Just cut the crap, will you! What do you know, you? All they ever taught you was words. Blah blah blah. Why the hell did we send you to a Church school — a private bloody school!... Schools, all the fucking private lessons your mother ever wanted, and look at you — Beg, beg beg! That's all you're good for. If you had to go through what I went through, God forbid! If you had to suffer the hunger we suffered — the fights we had to fight...

SON: Fight yes, that I believe — but hunger? What hunger? When did you ever go hungry?

WORKMAN: I tell you when! They really learned you nothing, did they! You really know nothing! Zilch! Money down the drain!... And you can tell that to your mother too! You were just there to keep the benches warm... And your arse!

SON: Fuck you.

WORKMAN: One thing I will tell you, just one thing — and I warn you — don't let me ever catch you with Silfi /

SON: Oh, Silfi, here we go!!

WORKMAN: ...don't let me ever see you use needles, because that would be the end! That would really be the end.

SON: When did I ever use needles?

WORKMAN: Don't let me catch you. I'm warning you. Silfi's got it coming anyway, he'll soon do something to screw himself — or else they'll screw him!...

SON: Who'll screw him?

WORKMAN: ...Don't let me catch you, that's all I'm saying. He's asking for it, but don't let me catch you. Because that would really be the end.

SON: Catch me doing what? *(He goes towards him — brushing the dust from his bare arms and showing them to him.)* Look — see anything there? Can you see anything? *(He takes the lit cigarette in his hand, and slowly, deliberately, puts out the*

cigarette on his arm.)

WORKMAN: You'll kill your mother with grief. That's what you'll do. One of these days...

SON: Me? Right — me! Come on, gimme some money for the food.

WORKMAN: Gimme — always gimme! Look at you, always begging...

SON: Fuck off! Stop the begging shit, will you!

He kicks away the stool.

WORKMAN: And watch what you're doing! This ain't your mother's house, dumbass!

SON: Well — that's what you expect, no? That's why you're always picking on me! Are you happy now? Are you?

WORKMAN: Me pick on you? You're the one who wanted to come--

SON: I didn't want anything!

WORKMAN:. I didn't ask you to come. Why didn't you bring food? Did you expect me or your mother to prepare you lunch? What are you, still in school?

SON: And cut the school crap, will you! Please!

WORKMAN: Sure! That's cos the screw-up is still fresh, isn't it!... Where are you going?

SON: Home.

WORKMAN: No, you're not. That's all your mother needs — to see you go back alone. That will really make my day when I get home. Just what she'd be waiting for.

SON: I'm not staying here. Go pick on someone else. You don't need me here...

WORKMAN: If you go home, I'll grab you by your damn earring...

The WORKMAN *grabs him by the neck and turns him back in.*

SON: *(struggling)* Let go!

WORKMAN: Get in there!

SON: In where? Let go!

WORKMAN: *(pushing him back)* In there! Wash your face and fix your clothes at least.

A car approaching and then stopping.

WORKMAN: Is that them?

Both go look out of the balcony.

SON: It's them alright.

Car doors opening and closing.

SON: So what now, oh great master?

WORKMAN: *(a beat)* Go — you go.

SON: Go? Go where?

WORKMAN: Wherever. But not home.

SON: Where do you want me to go? I wasn't going out before seven tonight.

WORKMAN: I'll phone your mother. I'll tell her you're with me.

SON: And where will you be?

WORKMAN: *(kicks him)* Shut up! Don't go home before me, that's all I'm telling you. We'll walk in together. Same as we walked out.

Front door opening. Footsteps up the stairs.

SON: How long will you be?

WORKMAN: As long as it takes. Wait for me at the Lido, whatever time it is.

SON: At the Lido there'll be Silfi. He might corrupt me — remember?

WORKMAN: I said wait for me at the Lido.

SON: If it gets late I'll go to Uncle Abram. I'll get washed and eat there.

WORKMAN: Don't go anywhere! *(Takes a bundle of notes from his pocket and gives one to the* SON.) Eat at the Lido. And stay there.

SON: As if I could go to Paceville with this.

WORKMAN: Git, or I'll kick you out! And do as I tell you...

SCENE 3: Does Madam mind?

KAREN *and* ALDO *enter.*

KAREN *has a bandaged hand and* ALDO *has his right hand in his coat pocket.* WORKMAN *and* SON *draw close to each other and face them together.*

KAREN: What are you doing up here?

WORKMAN: Nothing, Ma'am. We thought the electricity was out. Came up to check.

SON: It was the plug — it came loose.

The WORKMAN *pushes his* SON *towards the stairs.*

WORKMAN: We'll get back to work then.

ALDO: Get back? You're going to be much longer then?

WORKMAN: I guess. Got to move the scaffolding first. Still got to do beneath the balcony, if you don't mind, Ma'am.

He waits for an answer, but KAREN *turns to exit right.*

WORKMAN: *(loudly, brazen)* I said – do you want us to continue, Ma'am?

KAREN: *(never looking back)* Do as you please.

The WORKMAN *follows her with his eyes for a while, and then pushes his* SON *again towards the stairs.*

They exit.

SCENE 4: I'm tired... So, so tired.

ALDO: What cheek! After a whole day doing nothing!

KAREN: How do you know what they did? Were you with them?

ALDO: And there you go defending them!

KAREN: Defend them from what? From you?

She's stopped at the door. Turns back around, not knowing what to do next.

She goes to the balcony and is about to look out but changes her mind.

She goes to canvases at the corner of the room. Undecided, then, as if in a fit, pulls out one of them with her good hand and drags it to the centre of the room.

ALDO: What are you going to do?

He hurries over to help her — takes his hand out of his pocket. It too is bandaged, but more neatly, less visibly, than KAREN's.

ALDO: What are you doing?

KAREN *lays the canvas face up on the floor and goes to get a large brush and a pot of paint from the workbench.*

ALDO: Are you going to chalk it?

KAREN: (*kneeling near the canvas*) As you can see.

ALDO: Now? With that hand?

KAREN: At least I'll chalk it, OK? That much I can manage, do you mind?

ALDO: As you wish.

KAREN *using a screwdriver, barely manages to open the*

pot. She dabs the brush in white paint.

ALDO: If I were you, I'd tighten it up a bit there.

KAREN: What?

ALDO: Here. *(Touching the canvas slightly with his foot.)* It's a bit loose. Needs tightening before chalking.

KAREN *realises he's right. She tries to remove the staples with her left hand but it's clear she can't do it.* ALDO *kneels down beside her.*

ALDO: Here, let me.

KAREN: *(angrily)* Leave it!

KAREN *tries again, almost instinctively using her right hand. Recoils immediately, wincing in pain. Though almost in tears, she is unwilling to stop trying.*

ALDO, *gently, almost fearfully, puts his hand on her shoulder.*

ALDO: Karen...

She freezes.

ALDO: Forgive me, Karen. I'm sorry.

KAREN: *(exhales — without raising her head)* I'm sorry too, Aldo.

ALDO: Let me help you sometimes, Karen. You... need me, Karen. Just like I need you...

The WORKMAN *comes up again quietly, stopping at the top of the stairs.*

KAREN: *(resting her head on* ALDO's *shoulder)* I'm tired... So, so tired, Aldo.

Pause

ALDO: I went away, Karen. I kept my end of the bargain. I gave you all the time you wanted.

KAREN: It's not a question of time, Aldo. I know now. I'm so very

tired...

ALDO: You need me, Karen. *(Barely touching her bandaged hand — kissing it lightly.)* You... You and me, Karen. One injured hand, yours Karen, and mine, the other hand...

KAREN: I beg you, Aldo.

ALDO: ...But we can't give up, Karen *(lame as it may sound*) With one good hand each, we might stand a chance — together. Together, Karen. Might we not? Say yes, Karen...

KAREN: *(giving up — too tired)* Yes, Aldo. Yes, yes... *(Rests her head on his chest, almost more to comfort him than because she needs to.)*

Then suddenly, with an effort, she stands up, dropping the screwdriver by the canvas.

ALDO: *(picking up the screwdriver)* Leave it to me. I'll do it.

KAREN: Yes, Aldo. OK. You do that.

KAREN *slowly walks out from the door on the right.*

SCENE 5: Making the bed.

ALDO *watches her go.*

He turns back to the task of pulling out the staples from the canvas without much success.

The WORKMAN *comes in and without a word goes to the balcony and pulls out the extension wire from the wall socket.*

ALDO *stops, following him with his eyes. The* WORKMAN *takes the cable to the balcony and throws it down. He turns around.* ALDO *turns back to the canvas.*

The WORKMAN *silently observes* ALDO *at work.*

ALDO, *increasingly uneasy at being watched, does not seem to be getting anywhere with his job.*

Finally, he gives up and drops the screwdriver.

ALDO: *(a half grin, half grimace at his injured hand)* Damned stupid hand!

Still silent the WORKMAN *moves closer until he is right above him*

Pause.

WORKMAN: Get up.

ALDO: Excuse me?

WORKMAN: I said, get up!

Taken aback, ALDO *stands up. The* WORKMAN *brushes him aside and kneels down by the canvas. He holds on to one side of the canvas frame against his thighs and jams another side against the workbench.*

WORKMAN: Stapler.

ALDO *looks around him helplessly.*

WORKMAN: There, on the bench. In the toolbox!

ALDO *looks around, finds a stapler and hands it to him.*

The WORKMAN *starts to remove the staples with the back end of the tool.*

ALDO: You seem to know what you're doing.

WORKMAN: You got to be good with your hands. Takes practice — Got to try your hand at everything. *(working)* It's like making a bed. Used to make insect screens — much the same thing as this... Can't pull too much all at once though, or over-tighten one end only. That'll only make it come apart at the edges.

ALDO: What comes apart?

WORKMAN: The nylon mesh. The screen. Same with this.

ALDO *moves away. He turns towards the painting on the easel. Watches the* WORKMAN*, now stapling the canvas back in place, from time to time moving his hand across the face of the canvas to check if it's smooth enough.*

As if mimicking him, ALDO *does the same across the face of*

the painting on the easel.

WORKMAN: There you are. Ready to go!

SCENE 6: I really do have to go now.

KAREN *enters wearing a dressing gown. She sees the* WORKMAN *by the canvas on the floor.*

KAREN: What are you doing! (*Looks around.*) Where is Aldo?

ALDO *appears from behind the easel.*

ALDO: Here. Still here, Karen. Forgive me, I'll be going now. You were right, it really does get chilly up here. At this time.

KAREN *does not answer — she wraps the dressing gown closer to her body.*

ALDO *picks at the edge of the nylon screen on the side of the painting. The* WORKMAN *stands up.*

ALDO: Though... I did discover your little secret by the way. Nylon netting. *Prosit*, Karen. You just have to watch it doesn't start unravelling... at least, that's what I'm told. As I am sure you too have been told. Yes, quite... the craftsman, Karen. I can see. Well, congratulations, once more.

Pause.

KAREN*, eyes on the* WORKMAN*, walks over to the settee and sits down.*

ALDO: Yes, well... *Prosit*. I really do have to go now, don't I?

KAREN: Aldo...

ALDO: Yes?

But the eyes of the WORKMAN*, arms straight by his side, are steadfast on* KAREN.

Pause.

ALDO: Well, ah yes... the luggage. *(Stops by the luggage at the head*

of the stairs.) I'm taking the big one. The other one is for you anyway. Just some souvenirs. I'll pick it up some other time. When you're done.

KAREN: Thank you...

Stops as the WORKMAN *with a sudden movement picks up the canvas and places it on the easel, covering the painting on it.*

ALDO: *(starting down the stairs)* You never did tell me – should I talk to Jackie after all?... /

KAREN: Yes.

ALDO. ...Shall I give him a call?

KAREN: ...No!

ALDO: No? Yes?... *(Pause.)* Well, it's up to you. When you decide give me a call. *(Exit.)*

SCENE 7: One good hand.

The WORKMAN *starts the apparently familiar routine of setting up around the easel: he pulls up the lampstand and turns on the light, moves the screen into position, fixes the curtains, turning the easel to face the balcony.*

He pulls over the pot of chalk paint, picks up a wide paintbrush and starts working on the fresh canvas.

WORKMAN: Wind has turned — no humidity. It should dry in minutes.

Pause.

WORKMAN: What do you say — we need the stool?

KAREN: What do you think you're doing?

WORKMAN: There's still a couple of hours of daylight left.

KAREN: *(approaches)* Go.

WORKMAN: Time enough to finish a first sketch at least.

Puts down the brush just as she is near. Takes off the under vest. She backs away immediately.

KAREN: I said go. Get out.

WORKMAN *laughs — picks up the brush again.*

KAREN: I can't do any work today. Can't you see? I hurt my hand. Couldn't pick up a brush if I wanted to...

WORKMAN: Hurt? How? Let me see. — He did this?

KAREN: It's none of your business.

WORKMAN: So? You had a fight, then? That's why his hand was bandaged too? Maybe he popped you... he hit you, didn't he? After being away from you all this time, he jumped you...

KAREN: There was no reason to fight. Why should we?

WORKMAN: Really! *(shrugs)* He's jealous, like as not.

KAREN: Like as not... it's not your business!

WORKMAN: He's an artist, no? A crackpot! / He saw your work...

KAREN: Go.

WORKMAN: ...Crazy as a shithouse rat! Saw how good it is and got jealous. Right?

KAREN: I told you to go.

WORKMAN: Or was it envy?

KAREN: Get out. It's none of your business.

WORKMAN: *(still whitening the canvas)* If I were you, I would go to the cops. File a complaint. Official like. That's what I'd do. I'd call the police, wouldn't you?

KAREN: Go.

WORKMAN: Call the police, go on. If someone done somethin' to you — somethin' you don't want him to do — wouldn't you

call the police? I wouldn't let him get away with it, would you? Eh? Would you? Not even if he was your husband. I could be your witness if you want... your number one witness, eh?

KAREN: Go! I don't need witnesses. I don't need you.

WORKMAN: Really? Is that right? Well then, it's your fault, isn't it? Eh?

KAREN: My fault!...

WORKMAN: Like I always say, it's all your fault, you women. /

KAREN: My fault!

WORKMAN: ...Bring it on yourself you do, yes siree. If you let a man do with you what he wants, why bitch afterwards? See — you don't have the guts! You got to have guts! Why bellyache you are hurt... afterwards! *(Puts down the brushe — touches the canvas.)* And there you go! A touch damp, but ready to go!

KAREN: You go. *(Approaches and puts out the lamp.)* I told you, not today.

WORKMAN: Or, like I say, maybe it's because you don't really mean "no". When you say no. Or when you say go. I am right, am I not? *(Turns the light back on.)* Come closer. After all, you only pretend to say no. 'Cos you have to say no, before you can say yes. *(Sits down on the stool.)* I said, come over here!... Now!

KAREN: *(a step closer)* Not today...

WORKMAN *puts out his hand — reaching out for hers.*

KAREN: Not today. Look — I can't even hold a brush.

WORKMAN: *(takes her hand in his — brings it to his lips gently)* There. *(Starts undoing the bandage.)* Come on — let's see the boo-boo!

KAREN: Please, Lou...

WORKMAN: *(mimicking* ALDO*)* You, you and me, Karen. One injured hand, yours Karen, and mine, the other hand...

KAREN *tries to pull away but he grabs her, pulls her back*

by her hand — she screams with the pain.

WORKMAN: *(holding her from behind — twisting one arm behind her back)* Shush! Now, now, *ħanini*. I'll take care of your hand for you, never fear. There, I'll tie it up for you... You want me to tie it up, don't you? Make your boo-boo go away, no? Yes... I'll even tie both your hands for you, how would you like that?... Tell me, don't you like that?

KAREN *tries in vain to get away. He covers her mouth with his hand.*

WORKMAN: No noise now. Now, now... *(He begins tying her injured hand, then her other hand too.)* There. How do you like this? There, *ħanini.* You will get a chance to use your hand, never you mind. Or perhaps you'll use your left hand, for a change, why not? Wouldn't that be another genius of an idea! Just like the nylon netting on the canvas! Trust me and you won't regret it either. You'll show them what you can really do, then! And with your left hand, too! Why not — once a genius!... And what a gorgeous genius! They say great composers were deaf too, after all! So why not a blind painter! Why not?... *(Blindfolds her with his handkerchief.)* Who knows what you can do, *ħanini,* with your hand behind your back, in the dark, with me... *(mimicking)* But with one good hand each, we might stand a chance, together... Together, Karen. Might we not? Say yes, Karen. Say yes!

He turns off the light by the easel.

Lights fade.

KAREN, *sobbing, coming in gasps.*

Curtain

End of Act One

ACT TWO

SCENE I: *Una Furtiva Lagrima.*

Some weeks earlier — a beautiful June morning.

Same scene but more scantily furnished – the old big wooden easel, the lamp light, screen and carpet are not there. The aluminium balcony structure is not yet in place and its central doorway is uncovered. The plywood sheets seen in the first act are on top of the two antique doors covering the lateral doorways. This time it is the door on the left which is covered with plywood, while the one on the right is clear and displays the graffiti sprayed on it, MLP No 1, *in bold red lettering.*

At the top of the stairs lie parts of the aluminium structure of the balcony yet to be fitted – some aluminium strips, window glass frames, screen netting, etc.

On the workbench on the left there are just a few paintings on canvas, most of them small, as well as two bigger canvases already prepared with white under-painting.

Near the small easel there is a decorative small table balanced on one central leg with a rather oversized vase full of lilies on it - the subject of the acrylic painting on the easel.

From outside comes the blaring sound of pop music on radio. Occasionally, some noise of the work going on outside, the odd hammering, clanking of steel bars, etc.

KAREN, *wearing ostentatiously artsy indoor clothes sits at the easel, painstakingly working on the painting. After a moment of intense work, she gets up nervously and walks to the balcony where the noise is coming from.*

A sudden burst of birdsong from outside.

KAREN *quickly bends down and picks up a video camera from the ground, next to its case. Eyes stuck to the*

viewfinder, she swoops the sky with the camera, following the flight of birds. Eventually she stops and lets the camera pan the landscape outside.

The noise from the radio blares even louder.

KAREN *pulls back immediately, taking cover behind the plywood so as not to be seen, but keeps her eye glued to the camera viewfinder and slowly focusing down to the ground below.*

A telephone rings from inside the house.

Startled, KAREN *puts down the camera. She notices wet paint on her hand, quickly wipes it with a rag, making sure the camera is clean, and puts it back down by the balcony. She hurries out to answer the insistent ringing of the phone.*

The ringing stops.

A pause.

Then, in the silence, the noise of hammering just outside the balcony, a wrenching of wood, thumps, etc. One of the plywood sheets is slowly pulled off outwards until it rips loose and is dropped down to the ground below.

The head of the WORKMAN *pops up in sight in the clear blue sky revealed by the newly-open balcony doorway.*

He is standing on a lower rung of the scaffolding running the length of the balcony, in his hand a large hammer and crowbar with which he proceeds to thump and pull off more of its temporary wooden covering.

Stuck to the scaffolding is a large, weather-beaten but legible sign: "W G & Sons, Contractors".

The WORKMAN *puts another board one step up across the scaffolding and climbs up on it. Stops for a second to wipe his face from dust, then peers into the room. The first thing he sees is the camera at the edge of the balcony floor.*

WORKMAN: *(sticking his head in)* 'Ello!

Without waiting too long for an answer, he pulls himself up onto the concrete floor of the balcony and sits down, feet dangling outside.

His eyes are drawn down below to his left.

The sound of gay laughter and then the splash of a body

hitting water, followed immediately by two other splashes. More laughter.

He picks up the video camera from the balcony floor, fiddles with the buttons but quickly brings it up to his eyes and focuses down below. Not quite satisfied with what he sees, he first stands up, then climbs up to a higher rung of the scaffolding. He perches up there, dangling in the open doorway of the balcony, camera to his eye.

His climbing has dishevelled the scanty clothing he is wearing: just a sleeveless under vest and shorts, which now hang well low, baring his backside and exposing his underwear.

KAREN *enters heading for the easel. Sees the* WORKMAN *dangling on the scaffolding and stops speechless. Approaches, ready to say something but stops herself again, staring dumbfounded at his half-naked body.*

KAREN: *(finally, as calm and controlled as she can)* And what might I ask, are you doing up there?...

Startled, the WORKMAN *turns suddenly and loses his grip on the scaffolding. He half swings backwards and forward, trying to keep his balance.*

KAREN *instinctively reaches out to steady him but sees he's about to fall on top of her. Instead, she tries to catch the falling camera just as he finally manages to swing himself around and jump, as much as fall, into the room, trying to hold on to* KAREN *as he does so. The two of them end up sprawled on the floor.*

Close physical contact between the two for a while.

WORKMAN: *(springing back to his feet)* What the goddamn hell! What the fuck do you think you're doing! Are you crazy, woman! You damn stupid bitch! You could have killed me!...

KAREN: Don't you... Don't you dare shout at me! You idiot! You stupid idiot!...

WORKMAN: ...Stupid bitch! You could have killed me! Don't you know you could've killed me! Goddamn! That's a three goddamn stories drop down there, that's what there is down there! You could've killed me!

KAREN: Don't you dare shout at me! Help me up, you fool!

WORKMAN: You're crazy — you're fucking crazy! I could've broken my neck!...

KAREN: Shut up! Don't you dare talk to me like that! It's all your fault — you know it's your fault! What the!... What where you doing up there? And with my camera!

WORKMAN: Fuck the camera!

KAREN: Well you certainly did! Look, it's broken!

WORKMAN: What the hell — better than my fuckin' broken neck!

KAREN: It's broken! Do you know how much that's worth? Do you?

WORKMAN: Not as much as my fuckin' neck, I can tell you! And don't you shout at me!

KAREN: Who's shouting! You're the one swearing and yelling, not me!

WORKMAN: I'll cuss if I want to, thank you very much. Ma'am!

KAREN: Not in this house you won't!

WORKMAN: Well, fact is, you can bloody well buy yourself another camera — I can't buy myself another neck, can I, Ma'am?

KAREN: As if it's worth it!...

WORKMAN: What?

KAREN: Damn!

WORKMAN: I said what?...

KAREN: Oh, shut up! It's broken! There! Are you happy! Are you happy, you... fool! *(Stops — dumps the camera on the workbench.)* Damn!

The WORKMAN *picks it up.*

WORKMAN: It can be fixed.

KAREN: It's broken! It's fu...! *(Stops.)*

WORKMAN: It's not fucked up! I can fix it... Or give it to me if you don't want it!...

KAREN: *(grabs it from him)* As if! Leave it alone! Just leave it. Look — get back to work and be done with! You've already wasted all day!

WORKMAN: Wasted nothing! I've been working, that's what I've been doing. I have been working! I have been out there under that blazing sun... all morning! That's where I have been! I didn't see you out there putting up the scaffolding, did I?

KAREN: That's what I pay you for. And those other two with you too...

WORKMAN: There are no other two. They just came to drop off the stuff.

KAREN: Well I'm sure I'll be paying for that too!

WORKMAN: You pay what was agreed upon, that's what! No more, no less!

KAREN: Right! Definitely no less, I'm sure!

The WORKMAN *turns to the balcony — hammers and bangs at the plywood.*

KAREN: And who told you to take off that plywood?

WORKMAN: It has to be done today — I told you.

KAREN: And the balcony — will it be done today too?

WORKMAN: *(climbing out onto the plank)* Tomorrow.

KAREN: Right — of course, tomorrow!

WORKMAN: They're coming with the rest of it tomorrow,

KAREN: Of course — tomorrow! *Mañana*!

WORKMAN: Yes, tomorrow. One day — that's all it will take. Nothing to it.

KAREN: And that's what I'm paying for — nothing!

The WORKMAN *pulls up the King's Real Estate sign from outside the balcony and dumps it inside onto the floor in front of* KAREN.

WORKMAN: You don't pay me for nothing. HE pays.

KAREN: *(picks up the sign)* It's none of your business who pays! You just do the work. It's none of your business who pays what!

WORKMAN: Well, stop yapping at me then! That's all I ask! Goddamn!

Pause.

KAREN: You aren't leaving the scaffolding out there all night then, are you?

WORKMAN: Yes. Don't worry; I'll take off the lower bars. If that's what you're worrying about. Nobody will be able to climb up.

KAREN: That's what you say.

WORKMAN: There's nothing in here anyway! What's there to steal? This place is empty isn't it!

KAREN: None of your business what there is.

WORKMAN: Won't there be someone here tonight anyway? Or don't you two sleep here?...

KAREN: I said it's none of your business!

WORKMAN: OK, fine! Damn! What the!... That's all I needed today — it really takes a woman. Damn damn damn! Bloody women!

KAREN: Oh, right! Blame it on women now! Shows that you are married, doesn't it!... You are married aren't you?

WORKMAN: Yea, for my sins! I'm married alright! So?

KAREN: Nothing. I pity the woman.

WORKMAN: *Xi l-ostra!* So bloody what? The devil himself couldn't put up with a woman!

KAREN: The devil... An acquaintance I gather!

WORKMAN: / Who needs them — that's what I ask! Who!

KAREN: Not you, perhaps... No. *(Looks past him at the sign hanging outside.)* That is yours I gather, isn't it? That sign there?...

WORKMAN: What? Where?...

KAREN: The sign – W G ...and Sons! Contractors!

WORKMAN: 'Course it's mine! I'm working here, ain't I?

KAREN: WG? I wonder? What could that stand for, now?...

WORKMAN: Ta' Wiġi they call me — that's what it stands for.

KAREN: But why WG? Never mind — don't bother! I'd rather guess — or leave it to my imagination.

WORKMAN: What imagination?

KAREN: Precisely. And the rest of that — the "And Sons" bit? / I wonder...

WORKMAN: What *enzans*? What are you on about now?

KAREN: There, on the sign too! WG — and sons!

WORKMAN: Oh, that.

KAREN: Yes, that. You said you're alone. What happened to the "and sons"? Or should I perhaps use my imagination there too? Same as you seem to have done?

WORKMAN: What the hell are you talking about! Why don't you stop yapping and get me a soda!

KAREN: Ooh!... And should I get them one too, perhaps, your "and sons"? Are they thirsty too? I bet you there are no "and sons" are there?

WORKMAN: What? You mean?... You're talking about my kids? My boys?

KAREN: Yes. Fancy a Seven-Up too, do they?

WORKMAN: Oh, my Lord, give me goddamn patience...

KAREN: Bet you anything there is no sons. Or daughters — or what have you! It's there just for show, isn't it! No such thing as Wiġi and Sons, is there! Just looks good and makes you feel good, doesn't it!

WORKMAN: What are you, barmy?

KAREN: ...Doesn't it?

WORKMAN: What? You want to make a bet? Really make a bet?

KAREN: Doesn't it?...

WORKMAN: I said — do you want to make a bet or don't you?

KAREN: A bet? And what shall we bet for, pray tell?...

WORKMAN: Anything! Wanna bet?

KAREN: Sure. Why not? Within limits, of course. No excessive demands, naturally!...

WORKMAN: Oh, naturally!

KAREN: ...Nothing *très risqué*! Of course!

WORKMAN: Riskè! No risk! Not with you, Ma'am! Dammed if I will! Just get me a pint, that's all I ask if I win! How about that?

KAREN: A pint be it! And... should I win, you will do me a favour and put on something decent... ehmm, shall we say, around your butt! And when I'm talking to you, spare me having to look away every time you bend over and expose yourself to the world! Would you mind doing that please?

WORKMAN: *(laughs)* Ah — you prefer my face to my ass, I see! Tre riskè I am, am I not!

KAREN: You do it on purpose, don't you, Mr. Wiġi and sons? You know you're doing it and you do it on purpose — tell me it's not true, if you dare.

WORKMAN: *(laughs)*

KAREN: *(suddenly infuriated)* Oh, cut it out and go back to work!

WORKMAN: Oh, no I won't — not now I won't! *(He delves into his shorts pocket, but to reach his wallet he needs to loosen the waist, unbutton his belt.)* Just wait a sec!

Exasperated, KAREN *turns away and walks towards the easel. She grabs the first brush at hand starts daubing at the painting.*

The WORKMAN *manages to quickly pull out his wallet. Hastily pulls his clothes together and follows her to the easel.*

KAREN: Just get back out there and get on with it!

WORKMAN: Here! *(Opens his wallet.)* Look! *(Pulls out a picture.)* Have a look!

KAREN: What?

WORKMAN: That's them. My boys!

KAREN *looks. Silence.*

WORKMAN: There — that's George. And that's Alex. See? I took that picture!

KAREN: I see. *(Pause.)* And the girl? Isn't she yours too?

WORKMAN: Not mine? Rolanda? Of course she's mine!

KAREN: Ah.

WORKMAN: She's a nun now.

KAREN: A nun!

WORKMAN: Sor Maria.

KAREN: Go figure! The Lord works in mysterious ways! But I guess see you don't believe in predestination either. You could have called her Madonna!

WORKMAN: What are you saying?... Look, that's George, the oldest.

KAREN: The one on the bike?

WORKMAN: He's older now. But you can see he's a hunk!

KAREN: Another little angel! With wings!

WORKMAN: What? No. He's in medicine now!

KAREN: Go figure!

WORKMAN: He had the brains, that one!

KAREN: Had? And then what happened?

WORKMAN: Nothing happened! A doctor happened! One more year and he'll specialise!

KAREN: Really? Gynaecology perhaps?

WORKMAN: What?... I tell you, one more year! Don't you believe me?

KAREN: *(picture now in hand)* And the younger now? A nurse perhaps?

WORKMAN: Nurse? What nurse? What do you take him for? One of those!

KAREN: Those? Those who?

WORKMAN: Why don't you ask your boyfriend?

KAREN: ...Who might "those" be?

WORKMAN: Pansies! Puftas!... I bet you he sees quite a few of them... in his line of business!

KAREN: You always have to hit below the belt, don't you! Always bring everything down to your level?

WORKMAN: My level! You started it! *(Grabs the picture from her hand.)* Here, give it back!

KAREN: Take it! You gave it to me, remember?

WORKMAN: It was a bet, remember? And I won... remember? So go fetch that pint now! Remember?

KAREN: Go fetch! What do you take me for, your servant?

WORKMAN: ...No. I took you for a woman of your word!

KAREN: ...Or perhaps your wife?

WORKMAN: That you ain't for sure! My wife would keep her word! Now she is a woman! *(Turns away towards the balcony.)* But why should I expect any better from you... Forget the beer.

KAREN *stands up straight.*

KAREN: Stop! Come back!

The WORKMAN*, in spite of himself, is stopped in his tracks.*

KAREN: Just stop. Sit down! *(Walks towards the right exit.)* Wait here. I'll get you your beer. But then get back to work. And I don't want to see your face in here anymore!

WORKMAN: And which face might you not want to see?

KAREN: *(exiting)* Just take your drink and get out.

WORKMAN: Yes, Ma'am! Thank you very much, Ma'am!

He comes back in and lights a cigarette. Goes to the sofa, a perfunctory swipe on his shorts to dust off, then plops down on it.

Opera music from somewhere inside: Una Furtiva Lagrima (L'Elisir d'Amore).

WORKMAN *listens, shakes his head, then mimics soprano gestures.*

KAREN *enters with a bottle of beer.*

Goes towards him but will not give it to him right away.

KAREN: Do you mind getting off that sofa?

WORKMAN: Why? Afraid I'll muck it up for you?

KAREN: Yes. If you don't mind.

WORKMAN: If you don't mind! *(Pause — but then gets up.)* Oh alright! *(Grabs the bottle.)* Yesiree, thank you very much, Ma'am! *(Walks to the stool by the easel and sits down.)* No glass I see?

KAREN: There are no glasses. We're still moving in.

WORKMAN: *(disbelief)* Yea, sure!

KAREN *decides to ignore. Picks up some cigarette ash from the sofa and dusts around. Straightens the rug underneath.*

WORKMAN: *(drinking — looking at the painting)* So you did this?

KAREN: Yes.

WORKMAN: All your own your work...

KAREN: All my own work.

WORKMAN: Well, work, *insomma... (A sneer.)* Still — Nice work.

KAREN: Work yes.

WORKMAN: Nice work... I guess. Better than climbing scaffolding and getting half-blinded by dust and sun, I give you that much.

KAREN: It still is work.

WORKMAN: I bet. Of course, but no danger money in it, is there?

He looks around to put down the beer bottle - settles for the round table with the flower vase.

KAREN: No — not there!

Too late. The table tips over, the vase shatters on the floor, scattering water and flowers all around.

KAREN: Look what you've done! Just look!...

WORKMAN: God, how was I supposed to know? *(Promptly picks up the bottle of beer which did not break.)*

KAREN: Oh, great! You managed to save your beer. Fantastic!

WORKMAN: You bet! As if you'd give me another! *(Drinks.)*

KAREN: *(down on the floor picking up the pieces)* All you do is break and ruin everything! That's all you're good for!

WORKMAN: *(almost an apology)* Well, isn't this *(the painting)* ready anyway?

KAREN: Almost!

WORKMAN: Looks finished to me. What do you do now — sell it?

KAREN *ignores him.*

WORKMAN: I'd start something else if I were you. Something a bit more... real.

KAREN: Real! The cheek! It's a still life. What do you expect it to do — dance!

WORKMAN: Nah. I'd try something else... I'd pose for you if you like.

KAREN: *(hasn't even heard him)* Right!

WORKMAN: I mean it. Anytime you want.

KAREN: *(as before)* And here I was thinking you were sooo busy!

WORKMAN: So? I'll keep up — always do! Always have done. / Always give to Caesar!...

KAREN: I can imagine — with a bit on the side for the devil too, I bet!

Exits with the broken glass, door right.

WORKMAN: Always!

KAREN: *(off-stage, but close) And the wife? What about the wife? A bit on the side for her too?*

WORKMAN: What about the wife?

KAREN: *(closer) You have a wife, I gather. You just showed me the kids. Isn't she waiting for you at home?*

WORKMAN: *(beat)* I had a wife.

KAREN: *Had? (Reappears at the doorway, broom and dustpan in hand.)* Did you say had? Ooh! And you don't anymore? My, I am so sorry! What we have here then is... a widower, I suppose?

WORKMEN: Widower my ass!

KAREN: *(cleaning up the mess by the easel)* Ooh! Oh, then perhaps the wife is sick — is that it? Stuck in some clinic, the poor dear! An incurable disease! And no one to take care of her — to find her a miraculous cure — no one but your son — the doctor! But first he has to specialise, of course, what am I saying!...

WORKMAN: Oh, shuttup!

KAREN: Just think – just one more year to go and then...

WORKMAN: Just shuttup, will ya!

KAREN: *(totally unruffled)* Alrightee!

KAREN *finishes the clean-up.*

The WORKMAN*, trying to come up with something, takes a couple of gulps of his beer.*

WORKMAN: *(bottle at mouth)* We're separated.

KAREN: *(has heard)* Pardon?

WORKMAN: We're separated. No longer together anyway.

KAREN: An annulment then!

WORKMAN: Annulment, separation... Same difference.

KAREN: Same difference, right, for the sake of argument, for the sake of this particular moment in time — convenient as it might be. Let's say same difference.

WORKMAN: What are you ranting about?

KAREN: Me? Ranting? Just making conversation — isn't that what we are doing?

WORKMAN: Nothing in common!

KAREN: Who? Oh! Really — you and her?

WORKMAN: Zero! And the jealousy! Let's not talk about the jealousy!

KAREN: Oh, please, let's!

WORKMAN: Once she concocts something — once it sticks in her puny little brain! God forbid!

KAREN: God forbid! And the devil as well, why not!

WORKMAN: Just like a woman!

KAREN: Or a she-devil!

WORKMAN: Nah, just like a woman! And once she's got something on her mind... She's just like you!

KAREN: Me?!

WORKMAN: Your fixation about the house! About a spot of dust in the house! We didn't have a house — we had a doll's house! / Touch nothing! Drop nothing!...

KAREN: A doll's house! Now we are getting somewhere.

WORKMAN: ... Nothing on a chair! Nothing on the table! God forbid the piano! And then in and out — in and out! She hears the baker!... Out she goes! Hears the vegetable gink... Out again! Then *tal-pitrolju*![Out! Out! Out! In with the bread, in with veggies! In with *pitrolju*! Good heavens! You'd would think we drank the stuff! All she does is wait for *tal-pitrolju*! When she's not rushing in and out! God knows where else she disappears to! And me! Go there — do this — do that! Take the garbage out! Take the washing to the roof! Take the washing down now, quick, it's going to rain!... Don't walk on the wet floor! Close that window! Don't open the door!... She drove me nuts! Nuts, I tell you.

KAREN: Poor, poor dear. And so then, after all that... After how many years, actually? Eighteen years, perhaps? After eighteen years of marriage you just couldn't take it anymore, right! Snap! And hey presto — separation!

WORKMAN: Nineteen.

KAREN: Nineteen, eighteen — same difference! Separation!

WORKMAN: *(snap)* How do you how many years? *(Catches on.)* Oh.

KAREN: The kids. The oldest looked about eighteen...

WORKMAN: Just about.

KAREN: And soo — eighteen years — and snap! *Finita la commedia! Non ne posso più! Annullamento — o la morte! Consumatum est! Est* or not *est!*[12]

WORKMAN: Yes, an annulment — why not? You think it was easy! You bet it wasn't easy!

KAREN: I can imagine! Pretty hard in fact not to consume a marriage after eighteen years! Especially with three kids dangling on your breeches!

WORKMAN: You don't believe me, do you?

KAREN: Why shouldn't I? Happens every day! Read the news — listen to the radio — or on television! Don't forget Cable, either!

KAREN *takes the painting off the easel and replaces it with a fresh canvas.*

The WORKMAN *decides to take this as a signal for him to pick up the stool and walk over to her.*

WORKMAN: How about some light? *(Sits down, ready to assume a sitter's pose.)* Here OK with you?

KAREN: What do you think you're doing?

WORKMAN: Posing. I told you.

KAREN: You're joking.

WORKMAN: No, I'm not.

KAREN: Posing? You! I wouldn't dream of it! Besides — how about the work out there? Who's going to do that?

WORKMAN: That's it for today.

KAREN: That's it?

WORKMAN: *(rubbing his back)* Pulled a muscle more than likely...

KAREN: That's it!

WORKMAN: ...When I fell, there. Just now. Felt it when I bent over to pick that bottle...

KAREN: *(laughs — amused in spite of herself)* Pulled a muscle! I know what you're trying to pull! And it's no muscle! So stop screwing around and get back to work.

WORKMAN: I mean it.

KAREN: So do I!

WORKMAN: I can't anyway. Even if I wanted to. One of the boys was supposed to be here. Over an hour ago! And if he hasn't shown up yet, *Alla m'għamlu!*

KAREN: And who is this now — the doctor or the nurse?

WORKMAN: I mean it. I can't do it all by myself. Not today. I'm sorry, but there you are. That's why I'm offering. To make up. I really won't get anywhere by myself. Still, if you can't appreciate the gesture. If you can't accept this kind of apology — if you'd rather see someone grovel and beg your forgiveness...

KAREN: Don't be a fool. You know that's not why.

WORKMAN: How do I know? After all, what else do you have to do? Going anywhere?

KAREN: No.

WORKMAN: Or perhaps you're waiting for *tal-pitrolju* too? Are you? And three's a crowd? Is that it? Or perhaps you need to go on the roof to hang up the washing? To be honest, I can't see you doing that, but still, I'll wait, if you want me to.

KAREN: You don't have to wait. For nothing.

WORKMAN: *Allura*! Give it a try. Don't tell me you never done figure painting?

KAREN: I have!

WORKMAN: So! *(Poses.)* Look what you've got! Or perhaps you never painted a male figure, is that it?

KAREN: Poppycock!

WORKMAN: Ah! So! Shall I?

KAREN: What?

WORKMAN: ...Choose the pose.

KAREN: Oh, you have your own preferences, do you?

WORKMAN: I sure do. My son, he's full of books. Been through them all...

KAREN: I bet you have!

WORKMAN: I got the hang of it...

KAREN: Right. All those anatomy books must help I suppose!

WORKMAN: Yes — and photography too. I was into that too, when I was younger!

KAREN: I bet you were! So, you are an artist after all!

WORKMAN: Kind of! Work is art too!

KAREN: Art *and* design too then. Quite a dilettante, I see!

WORKMAN: *Dilettant*! I'm an expert!

KAREN: You too! An art expert! OK. OK then... *(Looks around — then points to the old doors by the balcony.)* Right, tell me then — what do you think of that? The door.

WORKMAN: What door? *(Looks.)* What's that got to do with it?

KAREN: It's work. And it's art. With a capital A. Used to be one of the doors on Villa Verdagna. The one by the bastions that was vandalized... You remember?

WORKMAN: Yes. Seem to remember something...

KAREN: Doing good! Everybody seems to remember something... for a while. Alright. Now, do you see any artistic value in it? Forget the historic value... everyone else does.

WORKMAN: What? Of course it has artistic value.

KAREN: Jolly good. Now look for meaning! Ok, a hint. Guess where

I found it. Dumped in a barn. In a pig farm.

WORKMAN: I see.

KAREN: What else do you see?

WORKMAN: There — those letters. All that writing was there too?

KAREN: There, and all over the barn.

WORKMAN: And you didn't think of removing that paint — those letters? MLP! Don't tell me it's because you're one of them! ...One of us!

KAREN: Oh, them, us, the others...

WORKMAN: Of course not. You tried! But you just couldn't remove it, right! 'Cos it would spoil your masterpiece!

KAREN: I don't have to remove it. It speaks for itself.

WORKMAN: You could have painted over it, of course...

KAREN: ...Nah! It's just a conversation piece now. Aside from its intrinsic value, naturally. There is no need to remove the letters.

The WORKMAN *has turned his gaze to the other door.*

WORKMAN: How about that one?

KAREN: Ah. What about that one?

WORKMAN, *steady look, then gets off the stool and walks over to it.*

WORKMAN: I betcha...

With a flourish he pulls back the planks half covering the door.

The letters PN, *bold and blue are uncovered.*

WORKMAN: What did I say!... There! Am I good, or what! I knew it!

KAREN: So did I. *(She is pleased — extremely pleased, but with herself. Laughs delightedly.)*

WORKMAN: *(threatened — is she laughing at him?)* It's not that funny. What are you laughing at?

KAREN: No, I'm sorry. It's just a private joke.

WORKMAN: A joke? What joke?

KAREN: No, really. Anyway, you wouldn't understand. Let's just leave it at that. A conversation piece, pure and simple.

WORKMAN: Who sez I wouldn't understand? *(Grabs her arm.)* Try me!

KAREN *recoils immediately. Moves away.*

KAREN: No. Someday perhaps you will understand...

WORKMAN: *(tries again to grab her arm)* I said try me!

KAREN: No! Ask your son to explain it, why don't you! He's the genius of the family.

The WORKMAN *is frustrated but won't give up. Looks hard at the door.* KAREN *sits down by the easel. Watches him.*

The WORKMAN *eventually reaches out and touches the blue painted letters.*

WORKMAN: It's fresh. Fresh paint. You did this yourself!

KAREN: *Prosit*! That deserves half a point at least!

WORKMAN: *(Eureka!)* That's it! It's about prularity! That's it, isn't it — I got it, didn't I? Prularity!

KAREN: *(quite impressed, but)* PLUrality!

WORKMAN: What?... What did I say!

KAREN: PRUlarity! Not plurality!

WORKMAN: What did I say! Plural. *(in English, the way he learnt it in kindergarten.)* Singular...Plural! *Plural-ità!* PLU-RA-LI-TY!

KAREN: But that's not how you said it...

WORKMAN: That's exactly what I said!

KAREN: And besides you're wrong.

WORKMAN: Wrong? I said plurality!

KAREN: O well, fine... That's not the point, anyway.

WORKMAN: What point!

KAREN: Right!...

WORKMAN: Fuck!

KAREN: The point...

WORKMAN: Fuck the fucking point!...

KAREN: The point... was predictability! PRE DIC TA BI LI TY!

WORKMAN: ...Who's keeping points anyway?

KAREN: Can you say that — predictability? Give it a try, come on? Predictability.

WORKMAN: *(in spite of himself)* Pre dick... dick... Fuck! *(laughs)* Predick! How's that! Predick!

KAREN: Oh well, fine *(Can't keep back a hint of a smile.)* We'll leave it that!

WORKMAN: No. Pre... *(supreme effort)* Predick-tability! Right?

KAREN: Right. Well then, that's what it is — a political statement, yes. About the predictability of local politics. Of our people.

WORKMAN: Our people... Which "our" people?

KAREN: There's only one people! OUR people! Not to be confused with "The People" — the paper.

WORKMAN: What paper?

KAREN: The Church paper — The People.

WORKMAN: *(contemptuous)* Oh, that! So we're going to start with the Church now too?

KAREN: What do you expect! I bet you forgot there is also a Church

paper! A weekly paper!

WORKMAN: Forgot my ass! My daughter buys it! Only yesterday!...

KAREN: Yesterday was Tuesday.

WORKMAN: So! And today is Wednesday!

KAREN: Yesterday was...

WORKMAN: ...and then Thursday!

KAREN: The paper does not...

WORKMAN: ...and the day after, Friday!

KAREN: Exactly!

WORKMAN: Exactly!

KAREN: Fine!

KAREN *shakes her head and walks over to the two doors, putting the planks back to cover the graffiti on the* MLP *door.*

WORKMAN: Why cover those now?

KAREN: That's how it goes.

WORKMAN: What? You got visitors coming by any chance? Or you got the priest coming to the bless the house perhaps, and you don't want him to see that? You're ashamed he might think you're Labour!

KAREN: Shuttup. Shut up and listen for once. I call that a "Reaction Painting".

WORKMAN: Re...

KAREN: Listen! It tries to anticipate — predict! — got it? It tries to anticipate the predictable actions of those who see it the first time – see both those doors, together. Some just look and see what they see. Accept it for what it is. But the others — I bet you most of the others — just like you! — immediately want to see what's written on the other door! Under that wood!...

WORKMAN: Why should a house have two doors anyway?

KAREN:...Just like you did.

WORKMAN: Two doors don't make sense.

KAREN: Well, it could be a question of symmetry. Or perhaps, metaphorically, it's a question of plularity. You do need two doors perhaps.

WORKMAN: But right next to each other? Nah. Never.

KAREN: Well if one expects two doors, you give him two doors. Look at it. Some just look at it and that's all they see. Others are immediately suspicious: What's behind the other door? They just can't help it. They have to go and see. The fanatical ones – especially the ones who can't bear to see those letters.

WORKMAN: Anyway... *(Pause — has been trying to follow.)* Anyway, that's wrong.

KAREN: I know it's wrong.

WORKMAN: I mean the doors — they're wrong. Wrong place for them.

KAREN: Why wrong place?

WORKMAN: Well that has to be there. And the other one there. Trade places.

KAREN: Why? No, let me guess. You mean because of the hinges...

WORKMAN: What hinges! No — that one, the MLP one goes there — on the left! The left, get it? And the other *(spits)* – the PN – goes there! Damned right-wing fascists! Left wing, right wing politics!

KAREN: *Prosit*! *(Claps.)* Bravo! You did manage to learn something after all from the good old Brigata days! And I don't mean the spitting! At least you do accept what you stand for! You still believe in Left and Right! Bravo!

WORKMAN: And why not! I'm not afraid to say who I am! What's there to be ashamed of?

KAREN: Absolutely! Ah, but there are those who would rather not admit to being right or left!

WORKMAN: Why not? You got to be — either one, or the other! Unless you're just an opportunist!

KAREN: An opportunist! Oh, how disappointing!! Still the same preconceived ideas. How terribly disappointing, I must say! I just have to take back that half point!

WORKMAN: What? What did I say? You got to be — either right or left!

KAREN: Not necessarily!

WORKMAN: Oh, come on! Or you're just an opportunist — or a *gakbin*! A brown-nosing son of a bitch, sticking your face up...

KAREN: *(covering her ears)* Please! I understand! I got the picture. No. Definitely. That picture, those doors, they'll just have to stay as they are now. Adds another dimension — if nothing else, to see if anyone else comes up with the same argument! The same preconceived garbage!

She takes the finished painting off the easel and dumps it on the workbench, evidently not at all pleased with it. She comes back to the easel to find the WORKMAN *waiting for her, stool in hand.*

WORKMAN: Well — where do I sit? Where do you want me?... In front of the PN or the MLP? Your choice to predick!

KAREN: *(stalling)* Which would you prefer? Where do you feel more comfortable — politically speaking?

WORKMAN: I don't care. Wherever you want.

KAREN: So docile, and yet so... nasty. You surprise me. *(Rinsing some brushes and wiping them.)* In any case, it makes no difference. I'm not painting any doors.

WORKMAN: Fine with me.

Looks around and sets down the stool. Sits down, looks at her to see if she's going to be any help, but she's obviously

not. He changes positions a few times, legs, arms, etc. until he decides on a particularly inoffensive pose.

WORKMAN: *(working on the pose)* You know, I really don't mind whether you think I'm stupid or whatever. I'd rather you tell me I don't understand nothing. Better then when they come along and tell me "You understand after all, my friend, don't you?" That's when I know I'm getting screwed. *(Settles on the pose.)* How about this?

KAREN: *(as she looks up)* No, no good... *(But surprisingly his pose is not that bad after all. More surprising, she realises that he seems to be a natural.)*

WORKMAN: *(changing position)* Or how about like this?...

KAREN: No. *(Pause — then truthfully.)* The other one. Assuming you remember how?...

WORKMAN: *(hardly letting her finish)* Like this? *(Eyes turned away focusing on some distant point - motionless.)*

Pause.

KAREN: *(fiddles with some chalk)* Besides... Don't expect me to tell you how very intelligent you are. It'd be a cold day in hell before I do that.

KAREN *studies his pose, chalk in hand. Looks at the easel. A couple of hesitant, sizing strokes.*

KAREN: How long do you expect to hold that pose?

WORKMAN: As long as it takes. Don't blame me if you muck it up.

KAREN: Really! *(Immediately returns chalk to easel - picking up the challenge.)* After all, you must be used to it, with your arms crossed, doing nothing.

The WORKMAN *does not take the bait. Stares motionless.* KAREN *looks, waiting... then returns to the canvas.*

Stops after a while and walks over to the workbench.

WORKMAN: *(motionless)* Done? Already?

KAREN: Stay!

WORKMAN, *a twitch of a wry smile, but obeys.*

KAREN *comes back with a jar of turpentine, some brushes and colours.*

WORKMAN: New pose?

KAREN: No. Don't move.

WORKMAN: Not to worry. Solid as a rock.

KAREN *starts sketching lightly with the brush.*

WORKMAN: ...A rod of steel. Erect!

KAREN *continues sketching, controlling signs of fluster. Picks up a rag and wipes off what she's done.*

WORKMAN: You can time me if you want. Betcha anything you won't see a muscle move.

KAREN: Except your mouth.

WORKMAN: What?

KAREN: Your mouth — your biggest muscle.

WORKMAN: Nah! I got bigger!

KAREN: And it's wasted on you...

WORKMAN: That's what you think.

KAREN: ...Good for nothing but to...

WORKMAN: Anytime you want to, I can show you what it's good for. Anytime!...

KAREN: Just don't move.

WORKMAN: Whenever you're ready...

KAREN: And no talking!... Can't we have some peace! For one lousy minute!

WORKMAN: *(through closed lips)* Time me. Fifteen minutes —

straight!

KAREN: ...God!

Silence.

KAREN *shakes her head, and then tries to concentrate. Works for a while. Stops and stares at her sitter. Slightly hesitant, approaches him, picks up his left hand and places it on his knee. Motionless, he follows her every move with his eyes.*

KAREN *looks him straight in the face, puts her hand to his chin and fixes the tilt.*

Emboldened, she gingerly brushes some dust from his eyes.

WORKMAN: *(face to face with her)* Whenever you're ready.

KAREN: *(not listening now — intent on her work)* Quiet. *(Again moves the hand.)* Don't move now. And no talking. Please?

One last look at his face — in his eyes.

She backs away and walks to the easel, eyes still sizing up the pose. She picks up the brushes with more confidence and starts painting.

Slowly the lights dim.

SCENE 2: Equi...Vocations.

Lights up.

The ringing of a chapel bell from the valley — the "Ave Maria"

A red sunset through the balcony. Outside, a chorus of birds chirping loudly, gathering under the trees at evening-song.

The passage of time is indeterminate — could be a few hours later, could be another day altogether.

The WORKMAN *is still sitting in front of the easel, but in a different pose - same clothes, though perhaps more scanty - two beer bottles and a mug at his feet. There is a roll of wide tape by his feet, and tape has been stuck to the floor to mark out the model's position.*

KAREN *is out in the balcony, ostensibly observing her artwork from a distance, once in a while however she keeps glancing outside.*

WORKMAN: That's it then?

No answer.

WORKMAN: *(daring to turn to look at her)* What are you looking at?

KAREN: An angel. A white angel.

WORKMAN: Sure!

KAREN: It's true.

WORKMAN: Right.

KAREN: Sticking out from behind the rubble walls, out there, sword in hand against the sun. Well... I guess it's a sword... under the carob trees. A fiery blazing sword, yes. I wish I had my camera.

WORKMAN: *(starts to massage his neck)* Sure, sure...

KAREN: It's true. There's someone down below him too. *(Shields her eyes from the blinding sunset.)* He's moving...

WORKMAN: Wouldn't you know? Good old St Joseph, perhaps, aye? *(Getting off the stool.)* So, can I take a peek — at this angel of yours?

KAREN: No! Stay! I'm almost finished...

Too late. The WORKMAN *walks over stiffly, loosening joints.*

KAREN: I didn't tell you to move. I was almost done!

WORKMAN: Well, too late now.

KAREN: You spoil everything...

WORKMAN: Spoil shpoil! *(At the balcony.)* We'll continue tomorrow.

KAREN: Tomorrow?

WORKMAN: If you want to. You want me to come up tomorrow,

no?

KAREN: It's up to you.

WORKMAN: *(pleased - looking out)* So... where's your little fairy?

KAREN: Sun's set. And it's not a fairy. / There!

WORKMAN: Right — an angel!

KAREN: / There, by the carob trees.

KAREN *comes in from the balcony and starts examining her work on the easel.*

WORKMAN: Can't see nothing. No angel out there! *(Turns to look in another direction.)*

KAREN: *(dissatisfied with the work)* You don't know where to look, that's why. Forget that swimming pool.

WORKMAN: Well, see, those are my kind of angels.

KAREN: That I would have guessed.

WORKMAN: And I suppose you never sneak a peak do you — you and your camera? Not your kind of bird, are they?

KAREN: Too dark to see anything there now.

WORKMAN: Not for me it ain't.

KAREN: You're all the same, you men. Got a hunch it wasn't all her fault after all, was it, with the wife?

WORKMAN: The wife?

KAREN: Your wife.

WORKMAN: My wife? What do you know about my wife, you? What do you think you know?

KAREN: Oh, some. I know for example that you still wear the ring, in spite of everything.

WORKMAN: So? Why shouldn't I wear it?

KAREN: Oh, I figure, perhaps you still care for her. You... love her still, perhaps. Or it would be long gone.

WORKMAN: Well, why shouldn't I? What if I still do?

KAREN: What if! What if!

WORKMAN: And anyway; what have you got to say about her?

KAREN: I'm saying nothing about her. You said enough already!

WORKMAN: What? Oh, you!... She's a woman, I can tell you — a real woman. You on the other hand!...

KAREN: Ooh! So it's me now...

WORKMAN: Yea — You. If you only were half the woman she is — you with your artsy fartsy painting and all. And your high-faluting English!

KAREN: And there we go again! It's my turn to be insulted now, I see. First her — now me! But then, that's how you treat your women... *(Catches herself.)*

WORKMAN: You started it! Just leave her out of it between us.

KAREN: *(recovering)* Between... us? And what gave you the idea there is an us? That there is such a thing as... us? What makes you think there could ever be any US! That even if the world lasts another millennium — even if you pose naked — stark naked! — twenty zillion times more — there would ever be anything in common between... us!

WORKMAN: You don't think so?

KAREN: I know so! And you want to know why? Because for one thing — for one thing which is obvious as the ring on your finger — you are still married, aren't you! There's no such thing as a... separation!

WORKMAN: Oh, no? Why not?...

KAREN: Because I know!

WORKMAN: How do you know? What?...

KAREN: Because... she told me herself.

Pause.

WORKMAN: Who?

Pause.

KAREN: Connie. *(Beat.)* Your wife.

WORKMAN: What... did you say?

KAREN: I said Connie. Your wife.

WORKMAN: I... Don't mention that name.

KAREN: Her name?...

WORKMAN: Don't!

KAREN: Oh? Fine. My lips are sealed. See?

Pause.

WORKMAN: How did you know her name?

Pause.

WORKMAN: How do you know her?

KAREN: Who? You mean Connie?

WORKMAN: I said don't you mention her name!

WORKMAN *grabs her by the arm, shakes her and pushes her back.*

KAREN *falls to the ground.*

KAREN: You are mad! What do you think you're doing? What's wrong with you?

WORKMAN: I'm... I'm sorry. *(Reaches out to help her up.)* But it's your fault.

KAREN: *(standing up without his help)* Get out!

WORKMAN: I didn't mean to! But it is your fault! *(Angry again.)*

Why did you have to mention her name? Spoil everything? How do you know her? What did you do — have me followed? Why? Are you're spying on me?...

KAREN: Oh, shut up! Spying! On you? ...Me!

WORKMAN: So how did you know her name? I didn't tell you her name!

KAREN: No. But she did! *(Pause.)* She did. She called, earlier this morning. She wanted to know if you got here. To make sure that you were here. Because she does not trust you! Because she knows you too well. And if you must know, she had been calling earlier too. To find out when you'd get here. I suppose she wanted to make sure that you did go where you told her you were going. And she told me — after I told her that you weren't here — she said, "Can't you speak in Maltese, you?" And then, in English "Tell him to phone me when he comes... *jekk jogħġbok*, Miss!" Oh, soo polite: "*Jekk jogħġbok,* Miss!" And she slammed down the phone. And that is how I know her name, your wife.

WORKMAN: What time was it?

KAREN: About eight — five past perhaps. What time did you leave home then?

WORKMAN: At six! Six in the bloody morning! And what do you mean? What business is it of yours, what time was it?...

KAREN: She said you usually leave at seven. Where did you go — before coming here, that is?

WORKMAN: Where did I go? Where did I go! Mind your own business! Where did I go!... Minding my own fucking business that's where I went! – I went to the garage! That's where I went! To load the van! The scaffolding! The tools!

KAREN: So it took from six to eight thirty to get here.

WORKMAN: Six to eight thirty, yes!

KAREN: Two and a half hours...

WORKMAN: Two and a half fucking hours! So what!

KAREN: From Kalkara, which is where you live, I gather — from there to here — two and a half...

WORKMAN: ...Fucking hours! Yeah!

KAREN: So... you came by camel or the Transit van?

WORKMAN: Oh! You're good! You're so good!... OK, OK! You want to know then?... You really want to know? OK, then. You're not his mother after all. You don't really give a fuck... And you have no right to know! That you do not! But I will tell you where I went. I'll tell you, why not?.. Though I wouldn't even tell his mother! I'll tell you. I took my kid, the young one, I went with him, the younger one.

KAREN: The boy. Took him where?

WORKMAN: I'm telling you! I took him... to see someone. So they can tell if he's on drugs or not. That's where I took him. So they can tell me why he does the crazy — the bloody stupid insane mad things he does. I... I had to take him early. We pretended he's coming to work with me. I had to wait till they admitted him. For the tests. I had to make sure he got in. They gave him an early appointment. So his mother wouldn't know...

KAREN: Why shouldn't she know?

WORKMAN: Because I don't want her to know! Because if he's not on drugs — if he's not been on somethin' — than that boy... that... boy is not my son! He's not my son! Do you hear! My son would'nt ruin his life the way he does! After all we did for him! We gave him everything! Everything we gave him!.. And that's why! Because otherwise, otherwise he would listen to his mother. He would listen to me!

KAREN: *(faintly)* I'm sorry.

WORKMAN: Really? You're really sorry? Yea, well, if you had a son, maybe you'd be ...if you had a kid.

KAREN: *(stiff again)* Well, anyway, you shouldn't be so surprised he does not listen to you, should you? With your good example and all.

WORKMAN: Like I said — maybe if you had children, if you had a

mother's heart. You have no idea what it means to have kids.

KAREN: And I'm not eager to find out either. Not until I find out what the father is like.

WORKMAN: They ruin you, that's what they do. They ruin you these days. You're one of them, aren't you? One of them... I can smell one of yous a mile away.

KAREN: And who is them this time? Women, perhaps?

WORKMAN: Women! As if there are women these days! Feminists! That's what you prefer, right! Or worse, kikes!

KAREN: You mean dykes.

WORKMAN: Dykes, kikes, kooks!... Bloody feminists kooks!

KAREN: Well, let's settle for feminist! You're right there. And I'm not ashamed of it either. With someone like you around, what do you expect? Pity your wife doesn't seem to have yet understood...

WORKMAN: I said leave her out of this!

KAREN: And I will — I will leave her out! And how about you — how do you prefer to leave her? Trapped at home — barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen — even, better, in the bedroom, in her doll's house!

WORKMAN: Oh, there you go! You think you know everything! Just because we're not like you, you don't think we're not people too? I gave her the house, furniture and all, yes, a fitted kitchen that wouldn't fit in this room! — and bedrooms, built-in cupboards, walls covered with dresses! And shoes! I gave her everything!

KAREN: And of course, you also gave her a son...

WORKMAN: Yes, I did!...

KAREN: So, you gave her a son...

WORKMAN: Yes, I did. – Don't say it like that. He is my son!

KAREN: Like what? If you gave her a son...

WORKMAN: *I* gave her a son... who else? Your lover boy would give her a son like that? That pissant wimp!

KAREN: ...If you gave her a son, you gave him to her imperfections and all! So he's as much your fault as anybody's. Don't go blaming drugs or what have you! And even if it's drugs, it's not necessarily your fault or her fault. Maybe not even his. Does it have to be somebody's fault? Might as well blame his guardian angel! Though God knows it probably isn't his fault either!

WORKMAN: You've lost it!

KAREN: Maybe it's not his fault, no. Not even his. He's given up on us, you know. All of us. And you can't blame him, either, can you?

WORKMAN: No?... And what about yours? Where did your guardian angel go to now?

KAREN: You saw him. Out there...

WORKMAN: Not him... Not that fairy. Your guardian angel. Haven't seen him around in a while. Gone somewhere has he?

KAREN: Whom are you talking about?

WORKMAN: You know. Told me he was going on vacation. When he gave me the job. Where did he go? Back to Libya?

KAREN: Germany...

WORKMAN: And he left you here.

KAREN: ...East Germany.

WORKMAN: Communists and all! Who would have guessed! And just a couple of years ago...

KAREN: It's a working holiday!

WORKMAN: Oh, bully for him! Him holidaying there, you working here! *Working!*

KAREN: They're setting up a subsidiary branch over there if you must know. Got stocks quoted in half the world's stock exchanges...

WORKMAN: Bully for some! Guess the Iron Curtain's turned into a gold curtain, after all, has it not? A gold rush! A flood of rubies or rubins, or whatever they call their bloody money there.

KAREN: Roubles. And that's in Russia. Not Germany.

WORKMAN: Roubles? Aren't those jewels or whatever...

KAREN: That's rubies. Not roubles. Though they prefer dollars there now, of course.

WORKMAN: Fantastic! The almighty bloody dollar! Bloody fantastic! Everything's turned arsie-varsie. First they're on our side and against you people and then – Upsy daisy! Addios! Everybody buggers off! Gone! First it's us and them, blood brothers — then... /

KAREN: What are you on about!...

WORKMAN: / then — piss off! It's them and us now, mate! Bugger off! Them and you! You and them — thick as thieves! And we're left out in the cold! No more them — just us! Alone... Oh, and him too, your lover boy, he's a proper one too! Used to be with us, him too, once, did you know? Did you?

KAREN: I did. But he was a kid then!...

WORKMAN: Yea, that's a good one.

KAREN: You're thinking about his father...

WORKMAN: Yeah! Sins of the father! Good one that! And he was just a kid! What else?...

KAREN: Some people grow up, that's what! They start thinking with their brains!

WORKMAN: And a big fat pocket book helps too! Right?

KAREN: And you, what do you think with? Or isn't that why you keep your hands in your pocket!

WORKMAN: Ho, ho! Good one! I see after all, that you and me do think about some things the same way! That's what I think!

KAREN: Is that what you think?

WORKMAN: Yea. That's what I think alright. I also think that your lover boy perhaps does not quite see it that way, eh? Am I right? Too prissy innocent, like; what do you say? A bit of a nellie, am I right?

KAREN: Stoppit!

WORKMAN: He did not grow up as much as you would like to make believe, is that right? Not as much as you wanted him to grow up... What do you say?

Pause.

KAREN: You are a cheap... vulgar...

WORKMAN: Oh, I know...

KAREN: ...Low-class piece of scum.

WORKMAN: Right. And rotten to the core. I know. Still — what do you care? He left you here, didn't he, sitting all neat and pretty in your little castle. Your doll's house! / A proper little Queen of Sheba.

KAREN: Don't say that!

WORKMAN: How can you stand it is what I'd like to know. This prissiness, this fanatic cleanliness, everything smooth and dainty... *(Stares at the picture she's just finished.)* This flatness!

KAREN: Oh, so this is... flat? An art critic as well, I see. Nothing but criticism!...

WORKMAN: Flat, yessiree! Look at it. Prissy little dabs with the brush, prick, prick, prick! Colours wishy-washying into each other, one pissing over the next one! But all huddled together, tight-assed and frightened little poops. You know what I'd do with that, don't you... Guess what I would do?

KAREN: I'm sure you're about to tell me!

WORKMAN: I'd do something else. With that one. That's what I'd do.

KAREN: What something else?

WORKMAN: Well, for starters, I'd rather paint on a sackcloth than that...

KAREN: Oh, really! A sackcloth. Surprise you to know it's been done!

WORKMAN: Has it?...

KAREN: Yepp!

WORKMAN: On sackcloth? Oil on sackcloth?... *(Still, not too displeased.)* See! Told you! I'm a natural!

KAREN: Oh, good God!

WORKMAN: Wait, wait wait!... Now, how about if we try?... *(Reaches out for the canvas.)*

KAREN: Try nothing! *(takes it away from him)* It's too late! It's almost finished anyway.

WORKMAN: Yes. But you don't like it, do you?

KAREN: Who sez?

WORKMAN: Well, do you?...

KAREN: Yes... I don't know. *(Puts it back on the easel.)*

WORKMAN: Tell you what... Can I? *(Reaches out for the canvas — she does not stop him this time.)* Look, I got an idea... Just let me show you, will you? I'll show you.

Canvas in hand, he goes to the balcony assembly parts and pulls out a framed nylon screen. Takes a penknife out of his pocket and cuts out the nylon netting.

KAREN: What are you doing? You ruined that screen!

WORKMAN: It's alright!

KAREN: Ruined it!

WORKMAN: How about fucked it up! Could you say that? Bet you could if you tried!...

KAREN: You fucked it up!

WORKMAN: See! Not so hard was it? *(Putting down the canvas face-up on the floor and kneeling down beside it.)*

KAREN: What are you doing! Don't touch that!

WORKMAN: *(holds her off)* Don't worry! I won't fuck this up, promise! *(Gets up and walks over to the workbench and comes back with the staple gun.)* Fuck — go on, say it again, It's really nothing. Everybody does it! Even your fuddy duddy little gentleman! But only amongst friends, intimate friends! Not at home, of course, not in front of the kids! Unless it's in English, of course! That's another story! Bet you used to say 'bloody' when you were young. Or maybe just 'hell' or 'damn'? Godammit!

KAREN: Leave that canvas alone!

WORKMAN: How about 'shit'? Did Mummy and Daddy use to say shit?

KAREN: What are you going to do?

WORKMAN: Never you mind. I won't lay a finger on it — promise!

KAREN: It's still dripping wet!

WORKMAN: Right - that's why! Trust me!

He jams the flat canvas against a side of the bench, then takes and unrolls the nylon netting. Holding one edge against the side of the wooden frame of the canvas, he gives it one quick staple at the edge. KAREN *jumps at the sharp noise.*

WORKMAN: *(holding up the opposite end of the nylon netting to* KAREN*)* Here, hold it up well clear of the paint.

KAREN: *(hardly daring to take the netting)* No! Don't!

WORKMAN: Take it! *(He stretches out the other edge of the netting against the frame of the canvas and fastens the second corner.)* Just don't let go!

The WORKMAN *finishes stapling the edge with two more staples, then slides out the canvas clear of the bench while*

KAREN *holds on to the free end of the nylon netting for dear life, trying to avoid having it touch the painted surface.*

WORKMAN: Now — don't let go. Hold on tight and come down slowly.

Terrified, KAREN *does as he says, while the delicate process of spreading the taut nylon netting across the painted surface begins.*

WORKMAN: Easy does it — but hold tight. It's got to be tight! Pull!

KAREN: You're ruining it!

WORKMAN: No! Hold on!

KAREN: Ruined!

WORKMAN: If you let go now then it's ruined. Slowly. Easy does it.

The netting is at last flat and held tight against the edge of the canvas and KAREN *can let go. Quickly the* WORKMAN *shoots in one staple at each end.*

WORKMAN: There! Let go now.

KAREN *stands up, horrified.*

WORKMAN: Now, a couple more staples around the other two sides...

KAREN: No. Stop...

WORKMAN: It won't take a second...

KAREN: *(grabs his arm)* No! Don't!

WORKMAN: Let go!

The WORKMAN *tries to push her away. In a panic she grabs at the staple gun. They struggle and she topples over him – eventually onto the canvas. They struggle on; he ends up on top of her. It takes a while before they realise what has happened.*

WORKMAN: *(heaving — eyes on the canvas)* You did it! You! I told

you!

KAREN: Let me go!

WORKMAN: What did I tell you? You're going to blame me now, right?

KAREN: Let...me...go.

WORKMAN: Go on. Blame me.

Pause. Both of them stock-still.

KAREN: *(quietly)* Let me go.

WORKMAN: Shall I? *(Slowly bends down toward her face.)* Shall I let you go?

KAREN: Let... me...

WORKMAN: *(closer — slowly)* Should I?

KAREN: ...go. *(or is it No?)*

KAREN *turns her face away. He does not move – does not let her go. Slowly she turns her face back to his.*

KAREN: *(softly)* Let me go.

Pause. He bends over closer. Kisses her.
Lights dim slowly.

SCENE 3: Consumatum Est.

Lights up slowly. Same scene but much later.
It is a dark moonless night outside.
Chirping of crickets.
KAREN *and the* WORKMAN *are kneeling by the canvas, one at each end.*
KAREN *stares down at the ruined painting.*

KAREN: It wasn't all his fault. There was no other way. I knew that

it had to end like this — that I had to do what had to be done — happen what may. Because it had to happen. To prove that she was the fool... not me. She, and her husband... because she had a husband! Proud because she had a husband! And proud because she had kids! Not one... but three! Proud of her house full of furniture — full of everything — everything that HE had given her! Proud of her servitude — her servility in spite of everything — in the face of everything! In spite that she hated me but didn't even know me. Hating me with all her hidden hate. And my hate for her too. But not just my hate! — her hidden, hate-ridden servitude — her hate for anyone she thought could be better than her — or even for anyone whom she thought might even imagine was better than her! And so I said... She deserves it! She deserves the man she has ...if this is the man she has! She deserves it. She deserves that I let him — this man of hers! — that I let him do whatever he wants with me! Just as he does with her! Just as he does with her. — You see, she knew. She knew, and yet, she told me... *(turns to* WORKMAN*)* And she told me — after I told her that you weren't here — she told me, "Can't you speak in Maltese, you?"– "Can't you speak in Maltese?" *(Beat.)* So, you see, I had to show her that I too could... I too can speak Maltese. It isn't really all my fault. And it isn't his fault, either...

WORKMAN: *(putting on his vest — looking at the painting)* Well, what do you think?

KAREN: *(no regrets*) Ruined. Fucked up. I don't blame you.

WORKMAN: I fucked up nothing...

KAREN: *(looks at him).*

WORKMAN: There's nothing wrong with it! See, the paint is coming through already. As it dries, it shows better. You won't even see the netting underneath. Won't even show.

KAREN: It will show. To me. To me it will always show.

WORKMAN: That netting will disappear. Paint a bit over, and it will disappear. Will come out even better, I tell you! There's a surface you can work on now! Look, turn on the light. It's...

KAREN: ...Fucked up. It's all... fucked up.

WORKMAN: Fucked up nothing I tell you. Look! Are you looking? It's even better now. That's... That's because you didn't know what to expect. Look. Where is the light?

KAREN: Fucked. Fucked. Fucked. I'm all fucked...up.

WORKMAN: Alright, fuck! All right! Fine. I screwed it up — is that it? I screwed it up! You're happy? Go on — go tell the whole fucking wide world... I screwed you up! Go tell 'em: I FUCKED YOU!

Pause.

KAREN *and* WORKMAN *— a silhouette against the open balcony window — the painting cradled between them.*

Then, slowly drifting upwards from outside the balcony, an angel appears: a big papier-mâché or perhaps wooden angel, the kind you find on a feast day on a pedestal in front of the church. It is perhaps an even bigger angel.

Aware or not of its presence, KAREN *and* WORKMAN *remain motionless as it rises higher and stops at the centre of the balcony opening.*

A spotlight picks it out, hanging there staring into the room, slowly rocking to a standstill.

Then gently, the lights fade until just as it is almost dark, a garland of coloured bulbs light up, festooning the angel in the balcony in best festa tradition.

Lights out.

Curtain.

End of Act 2

Since angels are men and live together in society like men on earth, therefore they have garments, houses and other things familiar to those which exist on earth, but of course infinitely more beautiful and perfect.

The garments of the angels correspond to their intelligence. The garments of some glitter as with flame, and those of others are resplendent as with light, others are of various colours, and some white and opaque.

The angels of the inmost heaven are naked, because they are in innocence and nakedness corresponds to innocence. It is because garments represent states of wisdom that they are so much spoken of in the Word, in relation to the Church and good men."

"The Heavenly Arcana"
Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772)

ACT THREE

Background music before curtain up — a Gregorian chant.
A smell of incense and burning candles.

Curtain opens.
Continues from end of Act 1. Weeks later.

Early fall — late afternoon.

Same scene as Act One.

The angel, precariously dangling by a chain, is still in place outside the balcony, the windows wide open to better display it in its full glory.

Open floor-length red damask curtains on either side of the balcony.

Close by againt the back wall, a harp, half covered by a protective white sheet.

The two old doors seen in the previous scenes are still in place, the one on the left with "PN" on it is uncovered, the other still hidden by planks.

Other damask curtains hang at the doorway leading to the down staircase and at the right doorway to KAREN*'s art exhibition rooms.*

A big painting stands on an easel beside the doorway next to a small table with the exhibition catalogues on it.

At the top of the staircase there is the visitors' book – a luxurious leather-bound tome displayed on a grand lectern, two big unlit Gandlora-like candles on either side.

The workbench is gone, replaced by a long reception table, profusely decorated with flowers laid out amid hors

d'oeuvres, sweets, prosecco bottles, flutes, a punchbowl, etc.

SCENE 1: The visitations.

KAREN, *in a red seductive evening dress and drink in hand is in the balcony beside* ALDO. *Wearing a tux, he has just stepped out to talk on his mobile phone, but* KAREN *is more interested in the goings-on, or lack thereof, in the reception area.*

A MAN IN A GREEN BLAZER *is at the table, glass in hand, reading the catalogue.*

The **CURATOR** *and his* **SECRETARY**, *dressed in non-clerical attire, are sitting by the staircase on two comfortable chairs, strategically placed to observe anybody coming up. They sit quietly and motionless, with but the odd word now and then. Between their two chairs is a small black briefcase.*

A MAN who had been outside **ON THE BALCONY** *comes in from one of the side doors and approaches the reception table. He is in his early twenties, fairly well-dressed but not strictly up to dress code.*

From some distance he lingers to observe with mild interest the two antique wooden doors, occasionally sneaking a look at KAREN, *waiting for the right time to approach her.*

Two teenagers, a **BOY** *and his* **GIRLFRIEND** *come up the stairs timidly. They're not opening-night material and their clothes, more suitable for a night out on the town, belie the fact that this is a cultural venture of some import to them.*

Once upstairs, the GIRLFRIEND *appears to hold back, awed by the occasion they have walked into; she tries to turn back but the* BOY *holds on to her and drags her straight to the first canvas. With an intriguing, almost licentious gesture he draws her attention to something in the picture.*

The GIRLFRIEND*'s eyes pop out, then she covers her mouth to stifle a cry.*

SECRETARY: That's the second time — first he came alone, now with her.

CURATOR: *(aware that* KAREN *is watching them)* What can I do? Throw them out?

Before anyone tries to stop them, the BOY *grabs a program and drags the* GIRLFRIEND *into the exhibition room.*

The SECRETARY *purses her lips, extremely unhappy.*

KAREN *smiles wryly, turns on* ALDO *who has just put away his mobile phone.*

KAREN: So?

ALDO: Not good. Not good at all. *(Moves away before she can grill him and walks to the table.)*

KAREN: *(following)* What? Jerry? He isn't coming? Not even he?

ALDO: No, it's not Jerry!

KAREN: Who then?

ALDO: *(has tasted an hors d'oeuvres)* This was a waste! Told you not to leave them out all night.

KAREN: I'll put them away!

ALDO: ...And that caviare has had it. It should have been refrigerated.

KAREN: I will! – Who was on the phone then?

ALDO: Nobody. Just the parish priest.

The MAN IN THE GREEN BLAZER *has approached the* MAN *who came in from the* BALCONY *and, perfect strangers as they appear to be, gets involved in conversation over the two antique doors, with the* MAN IN THE GREEN BLAZER *apparently speaking knowledgeably, whilst the other is content to mostly listen.*

KAREN: The parish priest? Again? Doesn't he ever give up?

ALDO: We should remove it, Karen.

KAREN: *(assumes he's still on about the caviare)* And I will! It hasn't poisoned anyone yet! And it won't today either! Not if we have as many people as we had yesterday!

ALDO: I'm not talking about the caviare.

KAREN: What then?

ALDO: The Angel. It would be wise to take it down, Karen. Very wise. The parish priest...

KAREN: Damn the parish priest!

ALDO: If we don't take it down, they'll send someone to do it. I'm telling you, they will.

KAREN: Let them! Let them send someone! But if I see them out there, under the balcony, I'll go out there... I'll go out there and God knows what I throw down at them. But it won't be a bowl of punch, I can tell you. I'll baptise the whole bloody lot of them!...

> KAREN *turns away and pours herself some punch. Drinks it and refills immediately.*
>
> ALDO *shakes his head and walks over to the two sitting guests. They promptly stand up expectantly. A tense conversation follows, sober and quiet.*

SCENE 2: And unto her, an angel.

> *The* MAN IN THE BALCONY *finally gets away from the* MAN IN THE GREEN BLAZER *and sidles off again to the balcony. Still intent on* KAREN*, he will keep on looking in every once in a while.*
>
> *The* MAN IN THE GREEN BLAZER *lingers a moment by the two antique doors and then turns to the reception table. He reaches out for the punchbowl, just as* KAREN *turns around for another refill.*

MAN GB: Some punch?

KAREN: *(hardly seeing him - hands him the glass)* Yes, please.

MAN GB: *(pours) Prosit*, by the way!

KAREN: Pardon?

MAN GB: I said, *prosit*!

KAREN: Ooh, thanks! Thank you very much.

MAN GB *raises his glass, expecting her to do likewise: a toast.*

KAREN: Thanks!

MAN GB: And a big *prosit* for that too! *(Indicating the paintings with glass.) Prosit*!

KAREN: *(a toast) Prosit*!

MAN GB: *(turning glass towards the antique doors by the balcony.)* We mustn't forget those either!

KAREN: Oh, thank you! Really! *(Sips her drink, embarrassed.)* Really — look at me, what a fool! *(Trying to shape up.)* So. You figured it out.

MAN GB: I suppose so. Very intriguing. Still — I didn't touch those planks. I give you my word. I did not give in to temptation.

KAREN: You really did figure it out.

MAN GB: Not that resisting temptation is my forte.

KAREN: Your guardian angel does it for you, right? He's got his wits about him, yours, does he? Not pissing around wandering who's wearing what. *(A jibe in the direction of the* CURATOR *and the* SECRETARY.*)*

MAN GB: Well, I don't know about yours, but mine does have to pull up his breeches, once in a while!

KAREN: How did you recognise me? The picture in that program was horrendous!

MAN GB: Yes. Pity. It doesn't do you justice.

KAREN: *(gratified)* Those damned printers. Always an excuse! But really, how did you know?

MAN GB: That you were the artist? I knew. A little bird told me about you.

KAREN: Really? *(Suspicious.)* And what do they say about me... the little birds?

MAN GB: *(shrugs his shoulders)* Enough. I like your foreword — the intro in the program — what you describe as your inspiration. *(Picks up program.)* To tell you the truth, without that quotation from Swedenborg, you could have lost me. Have you read him a lot?

KAREN: Can't say I did. Just some. How about you?

MAN GB: Can't say I did, either. The intro was more than enough though.

KAREN: Thank God one thing did turn out well.

MAN GB: Oh, I wouldn't say just one. Doesn't pay to underestimate oneself.

> ALDO *appears to have reached the end of his discussion with the* CURATOR *and the* SECRETARY. *He turns away from them and hurries down the stairs, as if set on some urgent course of action.*

KAREN: Thanks. *(Watching* ALDO *go.)* Still. I don't. Not that it stops others from putting a spoke in the wheel.

MAN GB: Ah. This *(the program)* is good though. Except for the picture. It explains quite well the way you categorised your angels. If you can call them that — not exactly the way Swedenborg would have imagined I must say.

KAREN: No? You wouldn't say they were angels then?

MAN GB: Well — not the conventional type — in spite of this little set-up here. You do say here that there are four series of angels...

KAREN: *(not that she enjoys talking about her work)* Yes. Four. The beauty of angels... more a question of intelligence than physical beauty, "garments glittering as with flame, resplendent with light, others of various colours, and other still, white and opaque."

MAN GB: Ah, but... "The angels of the innermost heaven are naked".

The bigger part of your paintings, in fact... are naked.

KAREN: "...because they are in innocence, and nakedness corresponds to innocence." The naked, the closer ones to God. In spite of their nakedness.

MAN GB: And they are the wise ones, because they know they are naked.

KAREN: And are not ashamed of it.

MAN GB. And... they are all men. You can hardly miss that.

KAREN: It is obvious.

MAN GB: It... definitely is. One would say, in truth, men who are not that innocent, it would appear.

KAREN: More so because painted by a woman? It is easy of course to forget that men paint naked women — have always painted naked women.

MAN GB: Granted. But one would argue it is the pose that can make a difference.

KAREN: Granted. But no apology is forthcoming as far as that is concerned.

MAN GB: This one here in particular, "Unto Her an Angel", apparently a hybrid, half man, half bird, right? And he's caught in a net, is that correct?

KAREN: A trappers' net...

MAN GB: Quite a horrible ending. Still, you leave no doubt he is a man, even in the throes of death...

KAREN: Should I have scruples about showing him — his manhood? Nakedness and sin — as if it is the only sin! Can't believe anybody still believes that crap. In European Malta!

MAN GB: And yet, I gather there have been problems.

KAREN: *(grim)* Problems, yes. A small misunderstanding with the *Arċipriet*.

MAIN GB: Because of that angel out there.

KAREN: Naturally. Nothing to do with the naked angels in here, of course. Can't afford to appear like there is some kind of censorship intended, God forbid! At the cost that such transparency politics will end up rendering us all naked to the bone!

MAN GB: I gather the opening yesterday was not much of a success.

KAREN: That is an understatement. No. No it wasn't.

SCENE 3. The snake in the grass.

JACKIE, *doing most of the talking, agitated and a cellphone to his ear, comes briskly up the stairs in earnest conversation with* ALDO, *his inhaler in hand at the ready.*

JACKIE, *sophisticated and complacent, is forty-something, dressed for the occasion, hair in a neat ponytail. Once upstairs they head straight for the exhibition entrance.*

JACKIE *(spotting* KAREN *— waves at her with his pipe, but no intention of stopping)* Karen, darling!

KAREN: *(forced big smile)* Jackie, hi!

JACKIE: Hi! Don't worry; carry on! I'll be with you shortly! Nobody's running away!

KAREN: Great! Great, Jackie!

JACKIE *stops a moment to look at the painting in the doorway and moves on.* ALDO *hands him the program.* JACKIE *glances at it a bit more closely. Clearly not impressed, he takes off again into the exhibition area.*

KAREN *shakes her head.* ALDO *notices, shrugs unhappily. (What can I do?) and follows* JACKIE.

MAN GB: I don't want to keep you.

KAREN: What?...

MAN GB: I said, I don't want... Am I holding you up?

KAREN: Oh. No, please do. If it weren't for you, today...

MAN GB: Was that Jack Russell of the Apollyon Galleries? I gather he could be your number one nemesis.

KAREN: Perhaps not number one. Number one has yet to come... As you can see.

The CURATOR *and* SECRETARY *have stood up from their chairs and are approaching with a purpose.*

MAN GB: Ah, in that case, *con permesso*!

KAREN: You don't have to go. I've got nothing to hide.

MAN GB: Yes — and I really do appreciate it all. Still, I'll admire from a distance. *À bientòt!*

He puts down his glass, turns and heads for the exhibition area, a nod and a smile at the CURATOR *and* SECRETARY *as they approach.*

As the MAN IN THE GREEN BLAZER *enters exhibition area, the* BOY *and* GIRLFRIEND *come bursting out, trying hard to stop the sniggering, especially the* GIRLFRIEND.

They bump into the CURATOR *and his* SECRETARY*, whose look of disapproval does not seem to have any effect except to finally release the laughter.*

They escape down the stairs, the GIRLFRIEND *screaming with laughter.*

SCENE 4: *Discreto — discreditandum*

KAREN: *(a grip on herself — hiding the upset)* So, my dear Curator! Everything alright? And you, Miss?...

CURATOR *(soft, calm)* You know it is not.

KAREN: Oh, I'm sorry, is it the Curator bit? Would you rather I call you Father? I thought perhaps the word was more appropriate — less obtrusive, more discreet, under the circumstances. I

assumed discretion is your mission here today, no? *Discreto — discreditandum*!

CURATOR: I really regret you are taking this so badly. I wish you would understand that there are no ulterior motives — no malicious intent, *Sinjura*.

KAREN: You know I am no *Sinjura*.

CURATOR: I'm sorry. No offence intended.

KAREN: None taken. And neither did I — I never intended offending anybody. This here *(the exhibition)* was not meant to offend anybody. But, as far as I am concerned, if they had sent someone else, with all due respect to you, *Sinjorina*...

SECRETARY: Sister. Sister Carmelina.

KAREN: Yes, of course, Sister. Should have known. Still, as far as I am concerned, had they sent anyone else but you, personally, things would be different...

CURATOR: I appreciate your kindness...

KAREN: Still — I do not understand why you are here.

CURATOR: But, permit me to say, you do know why. That little incident yesterday at the opening, with our College students... You appreciate it could have been quite... dare I say, scandalous. If someone didn't handle it the way it was handled. You saw those two young ones just now...

KAREN: And that's why they sent you. To discreetly weed out anyone who might not be so refined culturally. Or appreciative enough to see what I have to exhibit!

CURATOR: I wouldn't put it quite that way. Believe me, Miss Karen, I would rather be standing guard at the gates of purgatory!

KAREN: Pity purgatory has been lost lately in the heavenly arcana! Possibly dropped through some hole in the ozone layer – some not so tight cosmological little black hole!

CURATOR: Perhaps... time permitting one could do some better publicity. One could try and make sure that one knows what

to expect when they walk in here. You have to admit that that angel out there does tend to give the wrong impression. A very misleading impression I might add, especially now during these Centenary festivities. It can be quite traumatic...

SECRETARY: I think, given an educated, knowledgeable audience, one that comes in here without any preconceived ideas about what's in here...

KAREN: Precisely! I would have wished that preconceived ideas were left outside my doorstep. Preconceived ideas would have made good old St Joseph himself think twice and send his messenger angel packing if he were to worry about people and their preconceived ideas, wouldn't you say? And then there would have been no belfries, no angels and no *arċiprieti* to worry about.

CURATOR: One cannot presume to justify all by a simplistic syllogism, an expedient...

KAREN: You read the program didn't you? And you saw the paintings...

CURATOR: I did. And personally, I would not object to any of this. But we do have a responsibility to others.

KAREN: Oh, the others!

SECRETARY: It's not as if Emanuel Swedenborg is an acknowledged Father of the Church, you must realise? By any means!...

KAREN: Really? Have you even read Swedenborg at least?

SECRETARY: I am reading him... (*Produces the book.*)

KAREN: You are?

SECRETARY: *(lying?)* I had read him, during my studies...

KAREN: In any case — forget the apologetics! As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter whether you do or don't. Don't be so surprised... it's all rubbish anyway! You didn't take me for a theology or philosophy student, did you? — After all, being a woman and all that! All I need is the inspiration! And to paint! As far as all this *(the program)* blah blah blah here... as someone

once used to say — before he took off, after he used me... Blah blah blah!

SECRETARY: I'm sorry.

KAREN: Don't be. I used him too. To fill a void. Nothing but a temporary arrangement.

At the top of the stairs appears the NOTARY SACCO *and* MRS SACCO *with their* TWO CHILDREN *in their Sunday best in tow, two ten/eleven-year olds - two juvenile high fashion statements.*

CURATOR: *(the first to see them)* Good Lord — the Notary Sacco!

The SECRETARY, *alarmed, immediately whispers something in his ears — "Those children!"*

CURATOR: *(duly agrees)* If you will pardon me!

KAREN: Here goes! Diplomacy in action!

SCENE 5: Beware the Angel of Whores

The CURATOR *goes to greet the* NOTARY SACCO *who introduces his wife. She promptly pushes the kids forward. The* CURATOR *gently greets them, then discreetly manages to take the* NOTARY SACCO *aside, whilst the* SECRETARY *distracts the Misses and the kids, stiffly handing them some sweets off the reception table.* MRS SACCO *takes an hors d'oeuvres but quickly spits it out into a napkin.*

As the NOTARY *listens to the* CURATOR, *he appears to stiffen. Worried, he peers short-sightedly at the picture on the easel. He listens on, getting thoroughly upset. He happens to catch a look at* KAREN *who promptly waves at him. He is dumbfounded, yet still manages a sick smile which is immediately squashed by a look from his wife — she too has managed to hear something of what the* CURATOR *is saying.*

Motioning her to stay back, the NOTARY *together with the* CURATOR *moves closer to the painting. He turns*

around, not quite sure what is expected of him, peers into the exhibition hall, turns around again and quickly hurries back to his wife and kids. Pushing them towards the staircase, he hastily gives a grateful handshake to the CURATOR *and makes to exit.*

KAREN: *(quickly catching up)* Oh, my dear Notary, going already?

NOTARY: Ah, yes... Have an appointment at six! It slipped my mind!

KAREN: But you have hardly seen anything yet!

NOTARY: ...Completely slipped my mind!

KAREN: Couldn't I tempt you with a quick tour? I'll show you everything I've got!...

NOTARY: ...I'm terribly, terribly sorry. Got to go!

KAREN: Oh, but at least won't you sign the visitors' book!

NOTARY: Well... I guess yes, why not! *(Quickly scribbles.) Prosit*! Goodbye now. Thank you so much!

MRS SACCO *grabs the pen from his hand. One dour look at* KAREN *and she scribbles something too. Drops the pen in* KAREN*'s hand and sails out, shooing her brood down the stairs.*

KAREN *looks at what has been written.*

KAREN: *(shouts down the stairs after them)* And the same to you, Mrs. Sacco! The very same to you too!

The SECRETARY *and the* CURATOR *draw closer.*

KAREN: Such a sweet character, don't you think! Read! They just couldn't stay either, could they — such a pity!

The SECRETARY *and the* CURATOR *bend over the visitors' book.*

CURATOR: *(reads)* Pity Yes. One does have to pity some poor creatures like her. They never learn, it seems...

KAREN: Not unless someone teaches them! Still, calling me the Angel of Whores shows some insight, doesn't it? I can

understand that. What I don't stomach is the hypocrisy of her husband! Can you make out whatever he has scribbled? Is that a *"prosit"*! He actually wrote "*Prosit*"!

KAREN *walks away to the reception table and venges her frustration on the vittles and drinks, discarding spoilt food, knocking glasses about and generally arranging and rearranging the table.*

The SECRETARY *returns with the* CURATOR *to her perch by the stairs. She pulls up the black briefcase from under the chairs and opens a laptop. Starts typing on it with grim determination. The* CURATOR *shakes his head in disapproval, but says nothing. He opens the Swedenborg book and feigns to read.*

KAREN *alternates between banging about glasses and trays, drinking and scowling at them.*

SCENE 6: This little piggy ate the caviare.

JACKIE, *cellphone in hand, comes out of the exhibition room with* ALDO *in tow and stops by the canvas at the doorway.*

JACKIE: Two hundred... three hundred tops! *(Makes a notation on his cellphone.)* But we'll have time to talk, Aldo. Can't be helped today! It's just not a good day today, *(a reproach)* as you know! Anyway, just don't forget what I said!...

KAREN *has a plate with hors d'oeuvres and caviare in her hands. Takes a quick taste — spits it out immediately.*

KAREN: *(half to herself)* Ah, the angel of whores!

JACKIE: Ah, Karen, darling!

KAREN: Darling Jackie!

JACKIE *goes to her. Two trays in hand,* KAREN *leans forward slightly to let him kiss her on both cheeks.*

KAREN: Would you excuse me a minute — I'm told I should put

these away.

JACKIE: Why, certainly! — Is that caviare, I see? Honest to goodness caviare?

KAREN: *Mais oui!* Aldo brought it on his last trip from Moscow. Do you remember the brand, Aldo?

ALDO: Cossack Royal Black. Perhaps however...

JACKIE: He didn't bring ME anything, Karen, you know that, dont'you? Only you!...

KAREN: Oh, pity! Would you like a taste?

JACKIE: ...Goes to show you! Nothing for poor Jackie! Zilch!

KAREN: Come, help yourself, please!

JACKIE: ...I absolutely adore caviare! I could eat it all night long!

He takes a bite — then another. KAREN *smiles at* ALDO, *disconcerted and getting more upset by the minute.*

KAREN *gives* JACKIE *one of the dishes.*

KAREN: Keep it, Jackie! But don't be a little piggy now, eh! Leave some for the Curator!

JACKIE: The Curator?... Who? Where?

KAREN: There, by the stairs. I bet you'll find plenty in common to talk about!

She sails out.

The CURATOR *and the* SECRETARY *stand up and meet* JACKIE *halfway as he approaches them.*

CURATOR: Hello, good evening...

JACKIE: The Curator, right? Karen has been telling me — so pleased to meet you at last! I don't believe we've met before... did we?

CURATOR: No, I'm afraid not. I'm...

JACKIE: And the Missus?...

CURATOR: ...She's my secretary.

JACKIE: Really! *(impressed — caviare in hand and mouth)* Ah, so nice to meet you. I couldn't bring mine here tonight, I'm afraid. She's at the galleries, waiting for the Minister. We have another opening today — Peacock Brown's!

CURATOR: Yes, I did read.

JACKIE: You will come over, of course! You know the place... *(Gives him a card.)*

CURATOR: Yes, thank you.

JACKIE: Caviare?

CURATOR: No, thank you.

JACKIE: *(eating)* Were you here for the opening?

CURATOR: No, regrettably I came late.

JACKIE: Me too. Barely managed to trot over. In any case, since they're not for sale yet... Would you believe it? Still, you know what I mean. There's always time. Can't have missed much!... Mind you, some of those pictures, that one perhaps, I wouldn't mind seeing it hanging over my bed, what do you say? And neither would the young lady, I bet, eh, would you not now!

SECRETARY: I doubt it!

JACKIE: *(no more caviare left)* Well listen, it's been great. Tell me, do you buy?

CURATOR: Paintings? Well, sometimes...

SECRETARY: Rarely. If something really impresses him...

CURATOR: Very rarely actually.

JACKIE: *(not seeing much prospects)* Ah, well. Me too, of course. It's been great. Come over anyway. Once you're done with this.

SCENE 7: Talking turkey.

KAREN *hurries back in, followed closely by* ALDO — *she's trying to get away from some argument they've just been having.*

KAREN: Ah, Jackie — still here! I'm so glad you two met! I would have liked so much to introduce you, Father.

JACKIE: Father?

KAREN: Father Borg. From the Curia!

JACKIE: The Curia? I thought you said!... *(to the CURATOR)* I'm so sorry — terribly, terribly sorry, Father! I'm sure she said you were... a curator!

KAREN: Well, if he's from Curia... of course he's a curator! Isn't that what you call him too? Anyway, my Maltese is not so hot, you know. I find it so difficult sometimes! You don't always find the right word — the *mot juste!* — as would you find in other languages! Don't you agree?

JACKIE: *Mais oui!* Of course! Anyway! *(shakes her hand) Bravo*, Karen! You do have a couple of excellent jewels hanging there! *Eċċellenti!* One of these days why don't you swing them by? Or bring the slides, if you will! I tell you, we'll make a deal, you and I! Right! Really excellent!

KAREN: Oh, Jackie you overwhelm me!

JACKIE: Not at all. You deserve it! / And I tell you again...

KAREN: Really!

JACKIE: ...don't let go of any of them from under your hand! I would venture to say... *(lowers his voice)* Actually, perhaps a little *tète à tète*, me and you, eh? *(To the* CURATOR*, as he leads* KAREN *aside by the elbow.)* Could you excuse us for a moment?

CURATOR: Certainly. It's been a pleasure.

JACKIE: Likewise.

JACKIE *takes* KAREN *by the reception table.*

JACKIE: Now, just hear me out...

But ALDO *has come over too and* JACKIE *is none too pleased.*

JACKIE: *(gives* ALDO *the empty tray he's still carrying)* That was excellent, Aldo. Excellent. You don't mind, do you?... *(and he moves* KAREN *further away down the table toward the harp by the balcony).*

ALDO, *empty tray in his hand, goes out again in disgust.*

JACKIE: Now, Karen! Just listen...

KAREN: You didn't tell me what you think of that, Jackie! *(Indicating the door with the* PN *graffiti.)*

JACKIE: Where? What?

KAREN: The door. With the PN on it!

JACKIE: *(nonplussed for a second)* Yes?... I... Well, I think if I were you I wouldn't have left it there! It's a bit bold, don't you think! Yes, bold! A bit obvious too, even if the Minister is coming!... It's TOO obvious!

KAREN: You think? What about the other door? Did you see that one?

JACKIE: Yes, yes!.. But, just listen now, bear with me...

KAREN: Do you know what's under those planks?

JACKIE: What?... I don't know, what?

KAREN: MLP. Number one.

JACKIE: Really?

KAREN: Kind of Pop Art... *(Beat.)* Actually, I call it Reaction Painting, what do you think?

JACKIE: Hmm. No — Action... Action Painting! *(ponders further)* Nah. Too gimmicky! That's the word — gimmicky! Pop Art,

after all, has had it! Pity really — but there you are! But listen...

KAREN: But doesn't it make you think? Look again...

JACKIE: *(a groan)* I'm looking...

KAREN: How about Co-Op Art? Conceptual and Op Art! What do you think?

JACKIE: Aha...Yes, I get it... CO-OP! Although, better yet, CO-Operational Art. Cooperation Art! CO-Operational art! One has to co-operate — co-operation is the key to progress! The hidden meaning — Deep! — That's it! A call for cooperation! Unity! You have to cooperate.

KAREN: Or collaborate!

JACKIE: Even better! You got it! Collaborate! Prosit! NOW... listen to me! Listen! Let's talk turkey! / Those... those in there

KAREN: Turkeys?... Oh, the pictures! In there...

JACKIE: The pictures! I have some advice for you... actually no, three pieces of advice. Number One...

KAREN: Three!

JACKIE: Yes, three. Number one...

KAREN: ...Must be my lucky day!

JACKIE: Just listen!... One, if I were you, if the journalists come – the photographers! – don't let the photographers take a single shot!

JACKIE: Why not?

JACKIE: Not one! *(pulling the sheet further down to cover the harp)* Listen to me! Because if you happen to have one friend in here, it is me!

KAREN: Lucky me!

JACKIE: Number one — no pictures! And two — close this place. Today.

KAREN: Close this place? The exhibition?...

JACKIE: The exhibition. Today. Now — the sooner the better.

KAREN: But we only just opened yesterday! If you can call it an opening!

JACKIE: OK... OK, tell me. OK, how long is this going to be on? One week?

KAREN: Hopefully!

JACKIE: Right. OK. I understand, mind you — your first show, the excitement, your picture in the papers, the controversy!... I know what it's like. Do I know! OK, fine. Leave it open! /

KAREN: Oh, thanks!

JACKIE: / Let it run. But that — that angel outside — he has to go!

KAREN: The Angel! Again! What's with the bloody Angel!

JACKIE: I'm telling you! Brilliant idea, granted! First class gimmick! Ingenious! Whoever came up with that is a publicity genius!

KAREN: You think? You two should meet. He's responsible for all the modelling for these paintings, did you know that?

JACKIE: Really! Great!... But get rid of the angel!

KAREN: Get rid of it — the Angel?

JACKIE: *Vamoose*! It has to go... *Pronto!* And I tell you why! You don't need the controversy — the hullabaloo. Not now.

KAREN: Not now? Later perhaps?

JACKIE: Later. You got it. And I'll take care of it — personally.

KAREN: Personally...

JACKIE: Trust me, Karen. In three months time — three months — and I'll put on an exhibition that will do you proud. You'll see.

KAREN: Proud... of what?

JACKIE: Really do you proud! / You'll see.

KAREN: See what, Jackie?

JACKIE: I'll tell you. Later. One thing I will tell you *(great big secret)* I have this old chapel — a Lutheran chapel — used to be Lutheran — in Floriana. And there — in three months' time — and you'll have your première there. Can you see it? There! With the Angel and all, hanging over the entrance?

KAREN: Over the entrance...

JACKIE; Can you see it?

KAREN: Hanging... by the neck.

JACKIE: By the neck. By the hair! Or by his whatever! Just hanging! Mind, can't overdo it! Keep in mind there's St. Publius right across, of course.

KAREN: Well, thank you, Jackie. I'll try not to — I promise — I'll try not to let my imagination run wild.

JACKIE: Okay! So, we have a deal?

KAREN: I'll have to let you know.

JACKIE: But it's okay, right? — Anyway, you sleep on it! Seriously!

KAREN: I'll be serious. I'll try. I have to go now and put some more punch in that bowl. Jerry Rundell is supposed to be here soon. And that guy from The Republic, what's his name?

JACKIE: *(surprised, if not impressed)* Jerry? He's coming here? Well, well!

KAREN: Please excuse me...

JACKIE *is about to say something else, but thinks better of it.*

KAREN: What's the matter? He is coming here. They both are. Does it surprise you?

JACKIE: Oh, who, Jerry? No, no. Not at all... Except, well I know Jerry is supposed to be at OUR opening, right now. Actually, both of them, to tell you the truth, should have been there, *(looks at the time)* — Oh my God! — fifteen minutes ago! Of

course, they'd probably toddle over here too, after the speech by the Minister. Peacock Brown's supposed to have a few words too... They might not stay for the reception I suppose. Well, actually, now that it has come up, I must say, Karen, that was another unfortunate mistake.

KAREN: What mistake?

JACKIE: Seriously. A big no-no! The dates, of course! The way they clashed with mine! Ours have been public for months now! You got to consider everything — a bit of consideration wouldn't hurt — professionally speaking! See, what you need is someone with experience, Karen, someone to lead you. Someone in the business. Aldo is alright, mind you! But still, you know Aldo...

KAREN: What's Aldo got to do with it? This is my exhibition. Not Aldo's.

JACKIE: But of course!... Anyway, look at the time. I have to go! Just keep in mind what I said, Karen. And don't get me wrong, about Aldo...

ALDO *enters.*

JACKIE: Well, anyway... Good night. *(Gives her a quick embrace.)* And best of luck!

Waving at ALDO, JACKIE *hurries out, past the* CURATOR *and the* SECRETARY.

JACKIE: Goodbye, Father! Sister!

SCENE 8: Betrayal.

ALDO: *(approaching)* What now?

KAREN: Another angel. Another guardian angel!

ALDO: What happened? What did he say?

KAREN: I get the distinct impression he's trying to... mess with me! To use a not so vulgar euphimism! Not to be vulgar! *(Pours*

herself another drink.) Thank God the bar's still open!

ALDO: Listen, Karen.

KAREN: Nobody is coming tonight, Aldo, are they? Tell me the truth. Go on. I can take it.

ALDO: Listen...

KAREN: I'm listening. I always listen, Aldo.

ALDO: Did he say something about the angel?

KAREN: I don't want to hear another damned word about the fucking angel! Can't you understand that!

The CURATOR *and the* SECRETARY *stand up hurriedly. Perhaps to avoid the scene they expect to follow, perhaps because they have indeed decided on a course of action, they head towards the gallery for one last look, the* SECRETARY *leading the way, the* CURATOR *dragging along somewhat reluctantly.*

ALDO: Listen to me, Karen. They just called again from the Parish Centre. They are coming to take it down.

KAREN: Fine. Let them! Let them take him!

ALDO: Look, there's nothing we can do. No point in making a bigger fuss. It won't help. Try to understand their point of view. They didn't know what you were going to do with it.

KAREN: Do! I wanted it for the Exhibition — that's all I wanted it for...

ALDO: Yes. But they didn't know. They thought it was just a cultural activity...

KAREN: And what is this? A bordello? It was you, wasn't it? You told them to come and take it away, didn't you?

ALDO: You must understand. Culture or not, they can't get involved in the controversy that is bound to...

KAREN *lashes out furiously at the table, sweeping a plate of hors d'oeuvres to the floor.*

ALDO: Karen! Please listen!...

KAREN: No. No, I won't listen! No, I won't! *(Stops. Pause. White as a sheet.)* I won't listen anymore. I know what you are going to say. I always know. If they want their effing angel, they can have him. I don't want them to think I might do him! God forbid they think I might rape him!

ALDO: They just didn't know, Karen. Look, you don't have to worry about the money. / I know you don't!

KAREN: And I'm so grateful!...

ALDO: / ...It's free. They'll even pay for the crane and the crew.

KAREN: When are they coming?

ALDO: Today...

KAREN: After we close up I hope.

ALDO: Tonight. They didn't give a time — you know how these people are.

KAREN: These people? What people?

ALDO: The crew with the crane. The Wiġi lot.

KAREN: The Wiġi... Them?

ALDO: They put it up there...

KAREN: I know!... So, it's them again. Why am I not surprised! I should have known. It must be fate! OK, let them take it down. Thy will be done!

ALDO: Thank you! *(looking around)* What a waste. After all the work... They ruined that balcony, you know. Couldn't hang that thing out there without making a bigger mess.

KAREN: Don't blame them. I wanted him there — in full view.

ALDO: They ruined it — those sucking trash!

KAREN: Ooh — trash! Sucking trash! Such language, Aldo! Such... balls! Let them ruin it. You said you found someone to do it in

wood, didn't you? Let him do it. Just like you always wanted. A true craftsman!

ALDO: Yes, and he's coming — as soon as this mess is over and done with.

KAREN: So that's what this is... a mess? *(Pause.)* You did send those invitations to the press, didn't you, Aldo?

ALDO: The press? ...To the papers, of course.

KAREN: ...and radio and television too, right?

ALDO: Yes. Everybody.

KAREN: Everybody. Why do you think nobody showed up then yesterday?

ALDO: Not nobody...

KAREN: Why, Aldo?

ALDO; I don't know. Perhaps this Peacock Brown business...

KAREN: But that's today!

ALDO: Yes, but with two openings, one on top of the other...

KAREN: Didn't you know that Jackie was having his today?

ALDO: Me?

KAREN: His opening — today!

ALDO: You know I've been away. I don't read papers much anymore, anyway.

KAREN: Is it possible that Jackie never mentioned it to you? Or Jerry. Or Walter?

ALDO: Fact is, there've been too many exhibitions these days. The market is flooded.

KAREN: Flooded! The market! Who came up with that? Jackie?

ALDO: Well it's true! The island is swamped with exhibitions! Everybody does it! Two or three — every single bloody

month!...

KAREN: And mine just had to be the one over the top! Oh, spare me please!

The CURATOR *comes out of the exhibition hall. He's anxious to be out of there but seeing them still arguing goes to wait it out in the balcony.*

KAREN: *(watching him come and go, continues regardless)* Do you think?... Is it possible that Jackie had something to do with this?

ALDO: Jackie? With what?

KAREN: That he stuck his dirty little pinky in this? That he's been going around whispering in their ears?

ALDO: Whose ears? Why?

KAREN: How do I know whose ears! I don't have their sneaky little minds! The newspaper — television — radio! The whole bloody lot! Walter, Jerry... your friends! That's who! The *Arċipriet* and his crusade to kidnap my Angel! That's why!

ALDO: *(shaking his head)* Karen...

KAREN: Karen, Karen!... Karen what? You don't think he would?

ALDO: Who? And why?

KAREN: WHY! To boycott me, that's why! To have it all for himself! To have this one too! To fuck me!... That's why! *(trying to take a grip on herself)* I know. I know — you think this is a persecution mania... Fine. Maybe you're right. Maybe it's me...

ALDO: I'm not trying to be right...

KAREN: Fine. Forget it. But Walter... Walter is still coming, right?

ALDO: *(a beat)* Right.

KAREN: Right!

ALDO: Yes, of course! I showed him the slides already.

KAREN: I know. But is he coming? The slides show nothing. You have to see, you have to touch and see, with your own hands.

ALDO: With your own hands...

KAREN: And... And those too — the doors *(the antique doors installation)* He has to see that too. Even more than the others, he has to see that.

ALDO: *(not convincingly)* That too. I told him.

KAREN: You told him.

ALDO: Yes!

KAREN: About that too... You told him about that?

ALDO: Yes — I told him! *(Realises his mistake.)* I told him — but not really...

KAREN: Not really... You told him. But not really.

ALDO: Yes. I told him to watch out for something in the foyer. To keep his eyes open.

KAREN: In the foyer?... You probably shouldn't have said that.

ALDO: Probably? I shouldn't have said that? Do you know what you're saying?

KAREN: Do you? *I told him... but not really*! Do you?

ALDO: Yes, I do!

KAREN: If you said that, he's going to come in all keyed up — knowing what to look for. And if it doesn't just happen, there'll be no point to it!

ALDO: Don't you think you're making too much of it? *(Wrong again.)* Honestly, you don't have to worry. He will give you a fair appraisement. I can guarantee that!

KAREN: You can, eh.

ALDO: Yes, I can.

The SECRETARY *comes out of the exhibition area and*

walks to her chair. Sits down, takes out her laptop again and bends over it.

KAREN: And the pictures... What did you tell him about the pictures?

ALDO: Not much. It's up to him now.

KAREN: You told him you liked them then.

ALDO: Well, should I have? *(No answer.)* I certainly shouldn't go leading him to expect they are all masterpieces.

KAREN: Aren't they?

ALDO: Oh, well, to you, of course! Of course, they are!

KAREN: And to you, are they still?

ALDO: ...Why shouldn't they be?

KAREN: To you — they still are? They are excellent, aren't they? What happened between you and me... the circumstances, that didn't change anything, did it? You remember what you said when you first saw them.

ALDO: I remember.

KAREN: And that's what you told D'Anastasi, what you told me that first time...

ALDO: More or less. You have to understand, what I said then, in the heat of the moment...

KAREN: I understand. *(A beat.)* Yes — the heat of the moment... *(Drinks.)* That I understand. You let the heat of the moment interfere with you refined sense of judgment — blind your sacred artistic integrity. Did Walter himself ask you if you liked them, I'm curious?

ALDO: He did.

KAREN: ...and, naturally, you did not tell him. And he, naturally would be pardoned if he assumed that you did not like them. Or he sensed you did not like ...something about them! Which is tantamount to admitting they are not good — not good

enough.

ALDO: No. He assumed I was trying to be discreet — impartial — whatever our personal relations might be.

KAREN: Does he think there is a personal relationship between us? You never did tell him really, did you? About us. How things really are between us.

ALDO: No. Never. You can count on that...

KAREN: Oh, I know I can. You always make sure not to commit yourself... personally, one way or another.

ALDO: You don't have to say it that way.

KAREN: Is there a better way?

ALDO: I just...

KAREN: Just... can't make up your mind? To lean one way, or the other? Personally? How about the paintings? You can tell him about those, at least, can't you? – Will you?

ALDO: You don't have... He is an expert. Best there is! His integrity is beyond... You can trust him!

KAREN: Why not! I'll trust him too! Why not! Another guardian angel. No thank you! Better the devil I know! Fact is, Aldo, you know that if you don't tell him anything he will write nothing!

ALDO: That's what you think...

KAREN: ...Or he'll write the usual mixture of *belle lettere* and erudite bullshit that are his specialty — which says a lot and says nothing! — but he will not dare commit himself! He might as well not write... anything!

ALDO: He will not do that. I promise.

KAREN: You promise?...

ALDO: Yes. I'll tell him. I'll find a way...

KAREN: Yes. You do that. You find a way. You people — you and your integrity — you manage quite nicely to always find a

way, regardless. To say what you have to say... without saying anything.

ALDO: Not everybody can afford to be as straight *(beat)* — in your face — as you are...

KAREN: I prefer straight.

ALDO: ...As straight forward...

KAREN: Or as indiscreet... even vulgar. But that's me.

ALDO: I didn't say that.

KAREN: No — I did. Because I am the problem, after all, am I not? Not you — none of you all — not them *(people in the balcony)* Or them. *(the audience)* Not Mrs. Sacco! Not the Notary... or Wiġi Endsans! Not even Connie... /

ALDO: Who the hell is Connie?

KAREN: / You don't know her. And it's obviously, definitely, absolutely not the fault of my poor Guardian Angel, hanging out there. So it has to be my fault.

The MAN IN THE BALCONY *happens to peak out just in time to find* KAREN *and* ALDO *both looking in his direction. He withdraws promptly.*

KAREN: Who is that?!

ALDO: I don't know. *(Takes a step towards the balcony.)* Looks familiar...

The MAN IN THE GREEN BLAZER *appears for a moment in the doorway of the exhibition area, looks at* KAREN, *smiles but disappears again.*

KAREN: And that?... Who is that? Do you know that guy?

ALDO: *(has turned around but just misses him)* Who?

KAREN: There... He's gone.

ALDO: Where?

KAREN: There. Angel face. Angel, angel, oh so pretty. Where did you go now?... *(calling softly) Anġlu,Anġlu Bellu!... (a sing-song) Anġlu Bellu! Saqajh tal-fildiferru!...*

ALDO: Don't you think you've had enough for today, Karen.

SCENE 9: Gethsemane.

The SON *appears as if from nowhere at the top of the stairs. He too is dressed for a night out on the town. Looks around uneasily until he recognises* KAREN.

KAREN: *(still to herself) Anġlu Bellu!... Anġlu Bellu (humming it, trying to remember the tune. Got it!)*

Anġlu Bellu, Anġlu Bellu
Saqajh tal-fildiferru
Sormu...

ALDO: Stop it, Karen!

KAREN: *(louder) Anġlu Bellu, Anġlu Bellu, Saqajh tal-fildiferru...* Go on, Aldo! You remember it! Don't be shy! You do remember, don't you?

ALDO: Yes.

KAREN: Ah, so. Must be a question of integrity then! Why should I stop? There's nobody here! Nobody — this is a bloody cemetery not an art exhibition — the garden of Gethsemane! A cemetery is what it is, Aldo! Are you happy now? Are you?

ALDO: Karen, please!

The SON *has approached* KAREN.

SON: Excuse me, Miss.

KAREN: *(turns on him — still agitated)* Yes, what do you want!

Startled, the SON *backs off. Looks at* ALDO. *He has a calling card in his hand — not certain who to give it to.*

ALDO: What is it? Who are you?

KAREN: Are you sure you should be here! Aren't you lost or... *(Stops.)* Do I know you?...

SON: Yes, Miss. It's me--

KAREN: You! The younger son.

SON: That's me.

KAREN: What do you want?

SON: We came... we came for it. For the angel, Miss.

KAREN: The Angel? You?

SON: Yes, they told us to come.

KAREN: And they had to send you... Of course!

SON: Yes... *(What to do next? He gives the card to her.)* Here.

The MAN IN THE BALCONY *has appeared at the entrance.*

KAREN: *(looks at the card)* Wiġi and Sons! So... that's your good news! They had to send you... What happened to your father? Didn't he have the guts to come himself? Why didn't he come himself to get his angel?

ALDO: Karen...

The MAN IN THE BALCONY *comes closer.*

ALDO: *(surly - to the* SON*)* OK, go ahead. Take it. And take down that sign too. Nobody told you to put that up there!

SON: Hey, why are you telling me? I didn't have anything to do with that, moron! *(Stops — sees the* MAN IN THE BALCONY.) George!

ALDO: What's this now!

SON: Tell him, George! You tell him!

A pause, as the MAN IN THE BALCONY *comes up.*

MAN IN BALCONY: *(to the* SON*)* It's alright, go. Go, Alex! Get on with it.

SON: I'm going, I'm going. You could lend a hand too, you know!

MAN IN BALCONY: I'll be down in a minute. Go.

The SON *goes. The* SECRETARY *has been listening — goes out into the balcony looking for the* CURATOR.

KAREN: Ah. So. You're George. The older boy.

ALDO: Who is he?

KAREN: You don't know? You should. The Wigi and Sons doctor!

ALDO: What doctor? You're a doctor?

MAN IN BALCONY: Not quite--

KAREN: Really! So, you're not a doctor after all! Perhaps a doctor of law!... *(*MAN IN BALCONY *shakes his head.)* Well, I'll be!... He's not a doctor after all, Aldo! What a pity...

MAN IN BALCONY: Soon though. One more year to go. An internship in Glasgow, New Victoria Hospital... *(Stops.)*

KAREN *is suddenly deflated. Speechless, for once.*

KAREN: *(turns away)* I'm sorry. If you'll excuse me. I think... I think I must have had a bit too much punch.

THE MAN IN THE BALCONY *takes a step towards her.*

MAN IN BALCONY: *(politely)* Could I have a word with you, Miss?

KAREN: Me? I'm sorry...

MAN IN BALCONY: Please? In private.

SCENE 10: Mistress, take heed.

The CURATOR *and the* SECRETARY *come in from the balcony.*

CURATOR: We shall be going down then.

ALDO: Right! They came to take the angel.

CURATOR: Yes, I know. That's why. Actually, we'll be leaving soon too.

The SECRETARY *has closed her laptop and is already heading out.*

CURATOR: In any case, our presence here is perhaps superfluous now. Not too many people coming apparently. Regrettably... *(a hint of embarrassment)* Well, yes... quite superfluous. Goodbye then... Goodnight. *(Leaves.)*

ALDO, *alone with* KAREN *and* MAN IN THE BALCONY. *An awkward pause as* ALDO *realises his presence is not welcome, and he goes out into the balcony.*

MAN IN BALCONY: I know this is awkward--

KAREN: You don't say. That's alright. Go ahead.

MAN IN BALCONY: Yes... First of all, Miss, I am to tell you that I came of my own will. Nobody sent me.

KAREN: Ah, for a change...

MAN IN BALCONY: Pardon?

KAREN: Nothing. Go on.

MAN IN BALCONY: Nobody sent me — not my father, not my brother... and not my mother. Nobody. I would have preferred not seeing my brother here, either.

KAREN: You would have preferred to be invisible. Quite appropriate. Another miraculous visitation perhaps.

MAN IN BALCONY: Meaning?... I'm sorry, I'm not understanding.

KAREN: No, please... Please excuse me. I'm the one who should be sorry. Sometimes I just can't help myself. Please — please go on. What was the big secret?

MAN IN BALCONY: It's my father... Please leave my father alone.

Pause.

KAREN: Is that your message?

MAN IN BALCONY: Just leave him be, please. Don't... don't get involved with him anymore.

KAREN: And you mean to tell me your mother did not have anything to do with this?...

MAN IN BALCONY: *(embarrassed)* OK... My mother says — leave him alone. Just leave him be... — I'm sorry! But she was going to come here herself today. To tell you leave him be – to give her some peace! (*can't stop now - but still pleading)* And probably to scratch your eyes out and tear all your paintings to shreds. And she would have done it too, if I hadn't stopped her, if I didn't tell her I was coming myself. She could have done a lot worse than that.

KAREN: Is that a threat?

MAN IN BALCONY: No. Just the truth. Please believe me.

Pause.

KAREN: I do. I do believe you, yes. And you can tell her, you can tell your mother, I am sorry. I truly am.

MAN IN BALCONY: Thank you, Miss.

KAREN: *(turning away)* You don't know how sorry I am.

MAN IN THE BALCONY: I know after all that my father is no--

KAREN: Shush! Don't. I know you know. Just tell your Mum... you do call her Mum, right?...

MAN IN BALCONY: Ma. We call her Ma.

KAREN: Well, then you tell your Ma... that I am truly sorry. I will not bother your father anymore. She can rest assured. Never again. And if you want to, you can tell her, yes, it was all my fault.

MAN IN BALCONY: There's no need. I know it's not true.

KAREN: That's alright — you can lie for my sake. And for your Ma's.

MAN IN BALCONY: No. My mother knows, Miss. My mother — she does not need lies.

KAREN: Then she's truly blessed.

MAN IN BALCONY: And you too, Miss. Don't you too prefer to do without the lies?

KAREN: Me too, yes... *(A step closer — as if to touch him.)* Thank you. Thank you, George. *(She stops herself, turns around and sits on the first chair she finds. On the verge of tears.)* Go now. Please. Just tell her...

MAN IN BALCONY: Good night, Miss. I'm sorry if I--

KAREN: Go, please. Goodnight. And good luck. When you graduate, perhaps... maybe if I could... *(She buries her face — softly crying.)*

The MAN IN THE BALCONY *hesitates a moment, puts his hand lightly on her shoulder for a second, then walks away without looking back. Exit.*

SCENE 11: *Anġlu Bellu.*

The MAN IN A GREEN BLAZER *comes out of the exhibition area and goes to the reception table.*

Outside, the noise of heavy machinery — a crane drawing near — a shout or two.

The Angel in the balcony starts to swing about, a heavy jolt, then swings even more. Noise of scaffolding pipes being dumped on the pavement below.

ALDO: *(outside, in the balcony)* Hey, you! Watch out for those cars! What do you think you're doing!

A shout from outside.

ALDO: Shall I move the white one!... Watch out, I said! Jesus!

Another shout or two. More pipes raining down.

ALDO: No! I said!... Just be careful will you!

He appears at the balcony door, still agitated and looking back.

More shouting. The Angel shudders and sways.

ALDO: Damn! I'll break their necks if they scratch that car! *(Goes back out into the balcony.)*

The MAN IN THE GREEN BLAZER *approaches* KAREN, *still in her chair, head down. He hands her a glass of water.*

KAREN: *(takes it, without looking up - thinking it is* ALDO*)* Let them scratch it. What does it matter?

MAN GB: They can't scratch mine. I walked here.

KAREN: *(looks up)* Oh. So. It's you.

MAN GB: I'm surprised you didn't recognise me.

KAREN: I... I'm supposed to? You look familiar.

MAN GB: I should. You must have seen me dozens of times. My workshop is round the alley, by the carob tree patch. Your balcony is right above--

KAREN: Oh yes! Yes! So that's you...

MAN GB: That's me.

KAREN: *(a ghost of a smile)* ...The good Saint Joseph.

MAN GB: Pardon? Ah, a nickname, perhaps?

KAREN: I'm sorry. Aldo tells me I have a tendency to label people.

MAN GB: That's OK. Could have been worse. The name.

KAREN: A lot of things could have been worse. Fact is, I'm not sorry about what happened *(here)*. All this... You saw, right?... You heard! *(shaken)* Do you really think I'm such a bad person?

MAN GB: If I were to give advice... my only advice would be regret

eases no pain.

ALDO *come back in, still very agitated.*

ALDO: Damned fools. And who might this be now?

KAREN: *(with an effort — standing up)* Aldo, this is... /

MAN GB: Hello, Aldo. Didn't have the time to talk today. You seemed so busy.

ALDO: Eh?... Hello! So, it was you! *(Shakes hands.)* Couldn't tell under that blazer!

MAN GB: I know. You're more used to see me in my overhauls, covered in paint and sawdust! Still, I can tidy up sometimes.

ALDO: You sure can! So, did you tell Karen? I see you've met. Karen, this is...

MAN GB: *(a smile at* KAREN*)* The good St Joseph. We've met.

KAREN's *smile wanes - a bit suspicious now.*

MAN GB: I gather you haven't told her yet...

ALDO: No... Oh, yes! This is the guy, Karen — he's going to do the new balcony. I already told him what you have in mind. I showed him the drawing of Villa Verdagna. *(To* MAN GB*.)* What do you think, now that you've seen the place? Did you take any measurements?

MAN GB: I was about to.

ALDO: In any case, I've got all you need to start. Here *(his jacket pocket).* But first, do you have an idea about how much you have in mind?

The ruckus from outside keeps distracting ALDO.

MAN GB: How much time? Or how much money?

KAREN: Time.

ALDO: Time... No, money, of course!

KAREN: Money, yes.

MAN GB: Perhaps you, Miss... Mind if I call you Karen?

KAREN: *(shakes her head)*.

MAN GB: ...Perhaps Karen would first like to decide for herself about the final design. Are we sure we want a replica?

KAREN: You don't think it's a good idea?

MAN GB: What I think is not that important, is it? What would you prefer?

ALDO: Here, look at these designs. *(Takes out papers from jacket inside pocket.)* Just look. I had them done by a graphic artist on computer in AutoCAD 3D. Exact measurements and to scale! There's the CD there too. They say you're good — I'm sure you'll do great! You wouldn't be able to tell it from the original!

MAN GB: *(takes the papers and passes them on to* KAREN*)* I wouldn't doubt it. Of course, that is, if Karen does want a replica. I could do something original if you like. Either in stone or wood.

ALDO: Are we talking the same price?

KAREN: ...Or the same time?

Uproar outside.

The Angel is on the move, shaking precariously.

"Wow, easy does it! "Bring it down. Silfi!" "Watch out for the white one!" Mocking laughter, etc.

ALDO: Excuse me a minute! *(Runs to the balcony.)* Eh, you! Oh my God! Stop! Move it back! Back! Watch out for the sunroof! Stop! Hold everything! I'm coming — hold everything! I'll come down and move it! Wait!

ALDO *runs back into the room.*

ALDO: I have to go! Go to move the car. They're going to hit it! Look, you two take care of it! Just decide and let me know! Ciao! (*Quick handshake with* MAN GB *and heads down the stairs.)* Just keep me in the loop! (*Exit.)*

SCENE 12: *Che angelo sei?*

The noise outside at its peak. The Angel swings some more, then abruptly starts going down. A couple of sharp jolts, then steadily, almost floating, it disappears slowly from sight. Great jubilation outside and honking of horns!

KAREN: All gone. All my angels. Except for those in there. *(the exhibition)* I guess some ghosts stay with you all your life.

MAN GB: They don't have to. Not if you know how to let go.

KAREN: It's not easy.

MAN GB: No. It's not.

KAREN: Where were we? *(The design papers in her hand.)* About the balcony then... Would you like to go over these?

MAN GB: Do we have to today? I thought you might have some ideas of your own? How you would have liked it?

KAREN: I had done some sketches. I have them somewhere in there. Could you wait a moment?

KAREN *turns towards the exhibition area but stops to listen to the noise coming from outside.*

MAN GB: I believe they are done. (*Looks out the balcony.)* They're going.

From outside the balcony one sees the last vertical scaffolding pipes coming down. Last to go is the builders' sign bearing the legend "WG & Sons".

A great honking of horns, giving way to a sing-song chant of "Olè, Olè" intermixed with the taunting singing of "Anġlu Bellu":

Anġlu Bellu, Anġlu Bellu
saqajh tal-fildiferru
sormu tar-rix
meta jkakki ma jbatix.

The "Olè, Olè" starts fading away.

KAREN: Olè, Olè... And down comes the flag over the empire of WG and Sons. The end of an era.

KAREN *and* MAN GB *look at each, and slowly join in the fading chant of "Olè, Olè,", slipping into the "Anġlu Bellu" sing-song medley which goes on for a while in the silence, even after the last honking of horns and singing has died down.*

Silence.

KAREN *goes over to the exhibition area and turns off the inside lights at the doorway. She closes the damask curtains while the* MAN GB *goes to the balcony and closes the curtains there. As he goes by the harp, he removes the sheet covering it.*

They come back, meeting centre stage.

KAREN: *(sitting down - a sudden shiver)* So. How about you? You too have your own flag – your own little sign? If you do come working here, you too will hang it out there, in front of my balcony?

MAN GB *takes off his blazer.*

MAN GB: I'll leave that up to you. Only if you feel the need – so no one else might get the idea that he should.

KAREN: And suppose I object?

MAN GB: Your choice. You decide.

KAREN: How long should I expect you to be here?

MAN GB *holds the blazer by the shoulders, ready to drape it over* KAREN*'s bare arms.*

MAN GB: As long as you need me. You tell me when.

KAREN *turns, contrapposto position, reaches out as if to accept the coat. .*

MAN GB *remains motionless over her to her left, offering blazer.*

Hold tableau.

Lights fade to black.

Curtain.

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