

KONSTANTINOS BOURAS

PALMS AND MANDRAKES

(CONSPIRACY IN ALGERIA–MURDER IN TANGER–HECATE)

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CONSPIRACY IN ALGERIA

(A tragic comedy of ethics and customs)

CHARACTERS:

ALEXANDRA, a thirty five year old Greek lawyer

AZIZ, a twenty five year old barber, known under the nick-name Abdelkarim or Abdul

RONY, a French fifty five year old man (gay)

ABDUL, a twenty year old Berber, working for Rony

AISHA, a forty year old house-made working for Rony

GABY, an eighty year old man who used to be Rony's lover

FATIMA, a twenty five year old prostitute

ANDRE, a fifty year old French art collector

ALAIN, a Swiss fifty year old man (gay)

PAOLO, a thirty five year old gynecologist

BENNY, a twenty five year old painter and an amateur male prostitute

RONY'S MOTHER, an eighty year old middle class lady with cultivated manners

SAIDA, a silent role played by the actor playing the role of Alain

GUARD, a life-size doll dressed in a woolen caftan with a hood.

SCENERY

The stage is divided into four levels. The bedroom is in the foreground. Against the left wall there's a king-size bed with painted head panel. A side table on the right and on the left –on the audience's side- there's a closet. A window is suspended by wire from the ceiling through which a garden is visible. On the right side of the foreground and on a lower level there's a telephone booth.

On the second level –slightly elevated- is Rony's courtyard. Some garden furniture and wide sun umbrellas. On the left there's a lounge-dinning room and a palm-tree garden. Farther to the left stands the guard's kiosk and Guby's room. On the right side is the kitchen and the servant's quarters. From the wall hangs a medium size bell.

In the distance there's a two-storey building. On the right side of the ground level is Rony's room. From the open door the air conditioner and a side table with a telephone on it are visible. On the second level there's a verandah and three doors. The middle one opens to a bathroom. On the roof there's a tent and some outdoor furniture. Behind the building the tops of palm trees and Atlanta's ridge are visible.

ACT ONE

RONY: Welcome my dear! Did you have a good trip?

ALEXANDRA: *(weary)* Yes, very good thank you.

RONY: Was there a flight delay?

ALEXANDRA: No. I didn't allow for the time difference and poor Abdul had to wait two hours for me.

RONY: Which Abdul?

(Pause.)

RONY: Will you have something to drink?

ALEXANDRA: Mineral water please.

RONY: Yes at once. *(He calls towards the kitchen.)* Abdul! Run to the grocer's quickly and get a case of mineral water please.

(Abdul appears languishly. Rony is searching thoroughly an inner pocket of his trousers, takes out a money note, rolls it and gives it to Abdul.)

RONY: Here, take this. And don't forget to pay the dept.

(Abdul is about to leave.)

RONY: And don't waste your time playing dice in the street corner. We've already settled that. Forget this game. You've lost all your savings. Well, whatever I'm giving you to budge around here.

ABDUL: What money?.... And I'm not bulging.

RONY: Don't you dare talking back to me. Otherwise I won't give you a reference letter when I'll fire you.

(Enters Gaby. He takes a seat without greeting around.)

GABY: In a society where social rank doesn't count, well, this society is going to the dogs...

(Rony is giving Gaby a sour look, while Abdul exits smiling awkwardly to Alexandra. Gaby is trying to touch Karim but he moves away with a speed of a wild cat.)

RONY: If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll go and see if the room is ready.
(He exits.)

GABY: Aisha! Aisha! Bring me some coffee... She doesn't answer. Lately, she plays deaf. I'll make it myself. *(He exits.)*

ALEXANDRA: Abdul hey? So what's your real name?

KARIM: Every one here is called Abdul or Abdel which means servant. I'm called Abdelkarim and I'm your servant.

ALEXANDRA: Forgive me, I promise not to think of my job and I'll stop interrogating you.

KARIM: Please don't ask my forgiveness. It sounds as if you have done something wrong and it doesn't...

(Aisha enters from the kitchen.)

AISHA: Good evening Karim. *(To Alexandra.)* Good evening.

KARIM: How are you Aisha?

AISHA: *(to Alexandra)* Would you like something to drink? Mint tea? Rony made today a European sweet. It's his mother's recipe.

ALEXANDRA: Thank you very much, but I'm on diet.

AISHA: Diet? Why? Plumpish girls are very popular around here.

RONY: Aisha! Go and clean the bathroom at once! Water is splashed all over the floor.

AISHA: O'key, take it easy. I'm going. Countess has taken her bath again.
(She exits.)

ALEXANDRA: *(to Karim)* Who is she calling Countess?

RONY: Alain. A banker from Vienna. You see my dear, I'm entertaining high society in my house. Once a rather obese theater-critic who lived in Rome stayed here for three months. He had fallen in love. Posting reviews for performances he'd never seen. I don't know; I've never been to the theater myself. You see, I've left Lyon too early. They say however, that I'm a theatrical personality. I came here very young. Almost a child. I was given the sack from the bar that I was working due to a drug charge. I wasn't involved. I

was clean. Just a semi travesty I was, seeking a drink from her clients and getting percentages from the club.

KARIM: Abdul is late. The room is not ready yet and Alexandra is very tired.

RONY: Wait a minute. What's your hurry. You have a week's time. But that's you. *(To Alexandra.)* You'll see my dear, when you get to know him you'll used to him.

(Pause.)

RONY: *(to Karim)* And I advice you to behave yourself. Tomorrow Paolo and Benny are coming.

KARIM: Is Fatima here?

RONY: Why are you asking? What is she to you?

(Enters Abdul carrying a case of mineral water.)

ABDUL: Unfortunately the mineral water is not cold.

ALEXANDRA: It doesn't matter, just put a bottle in the freezer for a few minutes and bring it to my room. What do I owe?

RONY: Nothing my dear.

(Alexandra takes out from her purse a money note, she gives it to Karim with a gesture to pass it to Rony. Karim puts it in his own pocket.)

RONY: *(upset)* At your service! *(To Abdul.)* What took you so long?

ABDUL: It wasn't that long. There was a queue at the grocer's.

RONY: I see, the whole neighborhood run out all at once, to get mineral water! But what can one expect from a cryptoalcoholic? *(To Abdul.)* Off with you. Go and help Aisha to prepare dinner.

(Abdul exits. Gaby enters with a cup of coffee. He sits quietly without looking at any one.)

ALEXANDRA: *(to Karim)* I'm exhausted.

RONY: Dinner is served at eight. I shall ring the bell. *(He rings a fair size bell hanging outside the kitchen wall in the court yard. It makes a piercing sound.)* Breakfast at eight, lunch at one and dinner as I said at eight o'clock precisely.

Mind your personal belongings and don't waist the water. The telephone is for receiving calls only. For making personal calls there's a telephone booth in the corner. I don't want any trouble especially with the police. Thank God up to now we've been able to avoid them. This sums up the house rules.

KARIM: Amen.

RONY: Don't you dare making fun of me. Especially You. Do not provoke me. I'm telling you for your own good.

(Silence. Aisha enters.)

AISHA: Your bath is ready. I've also turned the fan on.

KARIM: It's too noisy.

RONY: Take care of yourself, don't you catch cold. *(To Karim.)* And I hope that you don't stay in the room all day long. You could help in the garden you know.

ALEXANDRA: I don't want him to work.

RONY: As you wish my dear. *(To Karim.)* Why are you standing there like a stone? Take the luggage up to her room.

(Karim exits. The light on the bed brightens.)

ALEXANDRA: Please don't humiliate him, at least while I'm here.

RONY: Beware! Don't spoil him. I know them only too well: he's a barber.

KARIM: The room is cool.

ALEXANDRA: *(stands up and is about to exit when she turns and says to Rony.)* I have a small present for you. I've brought you a painting. I see that you have good taste. You'll like it.

RONY: You shouldn't have my dear.

ALEXANDRA: I'll sent it with Karim. *(She goes into the room.)*

KARIM: *(Is nervously trying to open a small suitcase for several minutes. Then he raises his arms in desperation but he continues.)* Bloody hell!

ALEXANDRA: It has a combination you know.

KARIM: What's the number?

ALEXANDRA: You're in such a hurry. I'll have my shower first.

KARIM: I've hanged your cloths in the closed to be straightened.

(They're both standing one opposite the other motionless gazing at each other.)

RONY: *(Calls from the kitchen door.)* Karim, come over here. I need my injection!

KARIM: Bloody hell!

ALEXANDRA: What injection?

KARIM: Insulin for diabetes. Mind your things. Abdul steals you know. Once in the garden while I was trimming the palm trees, he pinched ten dollars from my trousers.

ALEXANDRA: Were you trimming the palm trees in the nude? *(She laughs.)*

KARIM: No. I was wearing a uniform that Rony had given me. *(With anger.)* Just who do you think you are any way? Always interrogating me. Pardon me but you're too complexed for me and I just don't know how to handle you.

RONY: Karim!

ALEXANDRA: Go. They're calling you.

(Karim exits. Alexandra prepares for her bath. The others are chatting near the kitchen door.)

KARIM: What do you want? It's not yet time for your insulin.

RONY: I had too much to drink today.

KARIM: You're jealous that's why.

RONY: Ha! Don't make me laugh. Nothing is like a glass of liquor. But one can't survive on liquor alone.

KARIM: Please don't spoil it for me.

RONY: Beware. She's very clever. She'll find out you know, even if no one tips her off. She'll pretend ignorance. Listen, you'll have twenty percent each time you bring her here. We'll also rise the prices of drinks and we shall all be happy.

(Abdul enters from the kitchen.)

ABDUL: *(To Karim.)* You owe me five dollars. From the last time we've played dice. Remember?

KARIM: When? I can't remember.

(Abdul is about to go into the bedroom. Alexandra is eavesdropping by the window.)

KARIM: O'key. I'm expecting some payment soon. I might lend you some tomorrow.

RONY: Give him a haircut as well. He's like a Russian Pope.

ALEXANDRA: *(moves from the window towards the door and calls out.)*
Karim!

RONY: Go! She's calling you.

ABDUL: You lucky thing! I'll tell her everything, we shall become lovers and travel around Europe.

GUBY: I'm not sure!

ABDUL: Who asked you?

KARIM: Bloody hell!

(Karim enters the room. Alexandra is standing. They are gazing at each other. Karim kneels in front of her, he leans his head over her knees and begins to cry. She hesitates for a moment. Then she fondles his head cautiously at first as if he is a strange child, then more intensively. In the end she holds him tidily.)

KARIM: Put some perfume on. The water is warm. What's the combination?

ALEXANDRA: Six hundred and ninety six.

(Alexandra takes her bath robe, enters the lift and goes up to the bathroom. Karim opens the suitcase carefully but shuts it again very quickly. The song of Oum Kouloum is rising from the court yard. Then darkness is falling whilst the song continues for a little while.)

ACT TWO

(Next morning in the court yard near the table, Andre and Abdul are having a drink.)

ABDUL: This whisky is excellent.

ANDRE: Ah yes. It's the best.

ABDUL: If you'll promise to take me with you to Frankfurt to work in your gallery, I'll tell you my life story.

ANDRE: I don't know, we'll see. It's Fatima's turn.

ABDUL: Is she still asleep?

ANDRE: Yes.

ABDUL: I'll tell you my life story any way.

RONY: *(passing by.)* Don't listen to him. They all say the same things.

ABDUL: Who asked you? Don't be so mean, your sugar level will rise.

RONY: Are you drinking again? I thought it was against your religion? But that's how you people are. When you start drinking you just can't stop. Always cueing down the liquor store basements and coming out hiding black bags under your cloths full of bomb-like spirits that even a destitute monkey wouldn't touch.

(Rony is moving towards the part of the garden decorated with small flower pots and before Abdul gets a chance to answer.)

ABDUL: Listen to my life story. It'll bring tears to your eyes. My father kicked my mother out of our house when I was eight years of age and brought a whore in. He had a son with her, but he'd never married her because she was a heavy smoker and a drinker. She'd go to bars to meet other men. He was beating her and taking her money. But she loved him and because she didn't want the neighbors to hear, she never complained. My baby brother was growing and father loved only him. One day, he caught me smoking in the nursery and kicked me out of the house. I was staying in the slams for the poor. All kinds of people lived there. The neighborhood's godfather gave me another name and a shoe-shine kit to shine shoes. Obviously in order to pay him off I had to work myself to death. He was so mean. He used to invite

youngsters in his mansion and when they'd come out, their trousers would be stained with blood. He'd never invited me. Those days my cleaning habits were so appalling that I was safe. One day I've met a German lady. An archaeologist. She came for an excavating expedition. I shined her boots because she had an urgent meeting with the mayor. She had no money on her, so she invited me for dinner at the small cottage she was renting. After dinner she put me in the bath tub and scrubbed me so hard that I thought my skin will come off. Then she put me to bed. I lay there on my back waiting. Luckily I didn't have to do much. I asked her to turn the light off because I felt embarrassed. In the morning she brought me breakfast and broke my shoe-shine box. She "didn't like her lover shining other people's shoes" she said. I'd helped her with excavations and I've learned so many things from her. She taught me to read and write in French and German and a bit of English which I have forgotten by now. We've lived together for seven beautiful months. But dreams end some day. The postman delivered a telegram one morning. I so desperately wanted to open it but restrained myself. When she came home I didn't tell her straight away. I let her have her dinner, then we made love. After that I placed the telegram next to her cloths. She opened it, read it and kept motionless. "I must go", she said. "Will you come back?". "I don't know, I hope so", she said and left. She has never returned since. Or maybe, she couldn't find me while I was in prison. You see I've become mixed up in a quarrel involving knives at the port of Tanger. Apparently, one of the injured had died. I served for a few months only, 'cause they couldn't prove that I was carrying a knife. That's where I've met Aziz. He changed his name to Karim later, with the help of his police brother. Every morning Fatima the hawker – the Mayor's daughter- would visit him in jail bringing him food. A sardine sandwich and a bottle of mineral water. He was eating like a king and was feared by every one because he had a dark soul. I 'd ask him why he was in jail. He told me a story relating to a Spaniard, merchant of coch-shells who was hiding drugs in the shells. He was staying at his place and when Aziz tried to leave, the Spaniard accused him of stealing one thousand dollars

from him. Because he was involved with him. Luckily, they couldn't find any proof or witnesses and our friend with the help of his police brother was sentenced only for three months. Feared by every one in jail because he had also developed intimate relations with the prison superintendent and would spend hours in his office doing various jobs for him. He wouldn't talk to any one else about this but me. Don't know why. Some times he'd rest his hand on my shoulder and leave it there for a long time. It was so heavy you wouldn't believe it. When we were both released from prison, we used to cheat playing dice and he'd offer me protection. Later he met a French hotel owner from Avignon and our paths parted ever since. From then on he was called Karim. He became a barber and the Frenchman financed a barber shop for him. He also bought him a motor bike.

(Enters Gaby. He sits near the table in silence, unfolds the newspaper and starts reading. Rony's coming from the garden with his hands soiled with dirt passes him and makes a gesture of despair.)

RONY: *(to Gaby)* But what can one learn at your age about the course of the world? *(To Abdul)* And you had enough rest. It's time to help Aisha with the house work. Mister Andre will forgive you.

ABDUL: Excuse me Mister Andre. We'll continue some other time.

ANDRE: yes, I didn't mean to interrupt you. I need to ask you a few things though, no matter, perhaps some other time.

(Abdul exits. Rony goes to the kitchen. Karim enters. He is half asleep. He combs his wet hair carefully.)

ANDRE: Where to?

KARIM: I've got to open the barber shop. Today the apprentice has the day off. You see, his mother has passed away. May I have a seep?

ANDRE: Please do. *(He gives him Abdul's glass).*

KARIM: *(drinks it in one go)* Thank you very much, goodbye. *(He exits in a hurry. A few minutes pass. Then the repeated sound of the motorcycle's ignition is heard.)*

ANDRE: What's new Gaby?

GABY: There's no news. Only old ones. Everything is evil. The whole world is coming to an end.

ANDRE: I don't think so Gaby. You're very old and think that the whole world is dying with you. Seriously, how old are you?

GABY: What does it matter?

RONY: *(Passing by)* He's older than Acropolis

GABY: Weren't you saying the same thing when we were together?

RONY: That was in the past. When I was young and had no brain in my head.

GABY: Those days I thought that you were making money, by selling your body.

RONY: Something that you've never managed to do yourself. *(he goes towards the garden)*

ANDRE: Is it true that.....

GABY: We've had a relationship? One day, when I'm up to it I'll show you a photo of Rony dressed as a woman, wearing a blond wig and long eyelashes. Or rather I'll bring it straight away. I'll show him, the insolent. *(He is going to his room).*

AISHA: *(To Andre)* Sir, will you have something for breakfast?

ANDRE: No Aisha, Thank you very much. As you can see I've managed myself.

FATIMA: I'd like some coffee with milk please.

AISHA: You can make it yourself.

FATIMA: You're right. You never wash the glasses properly. Every one is drinking every one else's germs. I'll make my breakfast myself.

AISHA: Aren't you ashamed of yourself saying such things in front of Mr. Andre? You, who are full of germs from top to toe? Shame on you filthy bitch. *(She spits at her.)*

FATIMA: *(moves away quickly to avoid the spit, then she makes a hand gesture to show Andre that she's mad.)*

ANDRE: *(blinks an eye to Fatima.)* Eat well today. You have a lot to do. You must bring me your hairdresser friend whom I met yesterday at the post office. Don't turn your face away. You've promised. Otherwise don't come to my room.

FATIMA: Whatever my master wishes. I'm going to eat something now before I drop.

ANDRE: You have no problems. You're taking enough proteins.

(Fatima goes to the kitchen. Enters Gaby rigorously talking to himself with hand gestures. He stops next to Andre).

ANDRE: What's the matter?

GABY: Five thousand franks have been stolen from my bed-side table.

ANDRE: And I can't find my electric shaver neither. I've left it in the bathroom yesterday and today is gone.

RONY: *(coming from the garden, he is directed towards the kitchen.)* I've told you not to leave anything around. All kinds of people pass through here.

ANDRE: Ok, my loss was small but Gaby has lost ten thousand franks.

RONY: What?

GABY: Five thousand franks.

RONY: You play deaf only when it suit you. When did you lose it?

GABY: This morning. During the few minutes that I was with Andre. I went to my room to get something I wanted to show Andre. I opened the drawer of my side table and the money had vanished.

RONY: Had your friend gone when you were talking to Andre?

GABY: Yes, very early. He's on morning shift at the hotel you see.

RONY: So he's not a suspect. Well, we'll find the end of it and very soon. *(He calls out.)* Abdul! Come here. Abdul, don't play deaf now. Come here at once.

ABDUL: What are you yelling for? I was up to my elbow in water washing the dishes.

RONY: Your mouth wasn't busy though. You could have called out that you were coming. Return the money to Gaby at once. Ten thousand French marks.

ABDUL: So much money? It wasn't me. Aziz –Karim- did it. Or Fatima. She's a compulsory thief. Me and Aisha were in the kitchen washing dishes.

RONY: Aisha! Aisha.

AISHA: What are you screaming for? I'm coming. I've heard every thing.

RONY: I had no doubt. Who has stolen the money?

AISHA: I don't know.

RONY: Was Abdul with you all the time?

AISHA: Let me think... Firstly he was talking and drinking with Andre. Then he went to the kitchen and out through the back door to catch Joe, that was chasing a wild cat in the ruin next door. After a few minutes he came back. That's all I know.

RONY: How long he was gone?

AISHA: Five minutes.

RONY: Could you hear the cat?

AISHA: How do I know? No.

RONY: The accused has not a strong alibi. Where is Karim?

ANDRE: He left while we were talking with Gaby.

RONY: Did you hear the ignition of the motorcycle right after the conversation?

ANDRE: No, after a few minutes. I think that he had problems starting.

(Fatima enters with a large cup of coffee.)

FATIMA: It doesn't start in the mornings because it's cold.

RONY: Your testimony does not count. You know why...Where were you?

FATIMA: In the bathroom. In bed. I don't know. When did it happened?

RONY: You're not in the clear either. So now we have four suspects.

FATIMA: Why? It's unfair, why only us? What about the locals, the natives, the savages. There're others here too you know.

RONY: The others are above suspicion.

FATIMA: Whenever I was done for in my life, it was always by people above suspicion.

RONY: Nevertheless, the investigation shall continue. *(To Gaby.)* And you must take care of your personal belongings in the future. I don't want any trouble in my house. And don't any of you think of calling the police. I bribe them enough to pretend that they're not aware of my business.

GABY: Your brothel you mean.....

RONY: Silence. You're upset and don't know what you're saying. Your cleverness got you into trouble in the first place.

ANDRE: In how many days Ramadan starts?

RONY: In five. Or six? *(He calls out to the guard with the caftan.)* In how many days do we have Ramadan Ahmed? *(He listens to something that only he can hear and then he verifies.)* That's right, in six days from today.

GABY: Then we must lock ourselves indoors and pretend that we're good religious people who don't drink, don't commit adultery, don't invite whores in the house, etc ...

RONY: Don't be so dramatic. We'll simply be more careful than usual. No sunbathing on the roof-top, no screaming and fighting and we must see our visitors only in the night with the gate light switched off. That's all...Only God knows if we'll survive this time.

ANDRE: Isn't during Ramadan that they throw bombs to white people?

RONY: They're throwing bombs continuously. Up to now none has fallen in the neighborhood. All the embassies are here. We're well guarded. It's the best suburb.

(Alexandra enters. She looks quite stunning dressed in a red kimono decorated with birds on golden branches. She poses for a while listening, then she seats quietly by the table. Meanwhile, Aisha appears.)

AISHA: What will you have my dear?

ALEXANDRA: Tea with lemon and toast please.

RONY: Dieting again? I don't think it's necessary. Where's Karim?

ALEXANDRA: I don't know. He has gone long before daybreak. I think that he's gone to open the barber shop. Who is the lady?

FATIMA: (*Purposely gets up turns her back on her and takes her cup to the kitchen.*)

RONY: (*Is about to say something but he stops when Alain makes an impressive appearance from the verandah entrance, with his slender figure dressed in a turquoise dressing gown.*) Countess has awoken! Good morning.

ALAIN: What's all this noise? There's no sleeping in this....

MAX: Brothel you mean. (*To Rony.*) Good morning madam. Good morning dear customers and personnel.

RONY: Don't shout idiot. You'll put a lock to my house. And Ramadan is near. This is a respectable mention where I entertain my friends and their company. That's all. They're my guests.

MAX: You're a brothel keeper and that's your occupation. And this is the most high pay brothel in Algeria. The police has turned a blind eye firstly because you bribe them and secondly because in the past you were the mistress of.....

RONY: Come down at once. Standing in the balcony like a praying imam.

MOTHER RONY: One cannot even read in this place.

RONY: Here's mother with her books. What are you reading now? About feminism or the third sex.

MOTHER RONY: The Second Sex. About the third sex I'm waiting one of you experts to write a book. Forgive me Alain. Forgive me Andre. And forgive me my lady, I don't know your name.

ALEXANDRA: Alexandra.

MAX. Aren't you going to ask my forgiveness?

MOTHER RONY: No. I think that there's no reason for any one to ask your forgiveness. It doesn't apply to you.

GABY: Out come the knives.

MOTHER RONY: Are you here too? I thought that you were dead.

GABY: You would have remembered. Because it would have been the first time in your life that you wouldn't be smiling. Ever since I fell in love with your son you've never forgiven me. And you thought that I wasn't the first one in

the chain. During that time, he already had gone with half the nation. With the other half he went later.

MOTHER RONY: Yes, but you were the first one that I knew. I was forced to cook for you in my house and pretend that I was liberated and above all not prejudice. For this I shall never forgive you.

GABY: You don't have much time to hate. Your husband that you've hated so, died. Soon I'll die too...

RONY: Don't tease him mother. Today they've stolen from him five thousand franks!

MOTHER RONY: Five thousand franks? Where did you keep such amount? Pity I didn't get a chance to steal it myself! Who did it?

ANDRE: We don't know. He went to his room to bring some photographs of Rony dressed as a travesty...

MAX: Where are these photos? I'm dying to see them.

RONY: Mauvaise!

MOTHER RONY: I would like to see them too. To enrich my knowledge on the third sex.

ALAIN: The day of revelations! Allow me to retire in my rooms I can't stand vulgarity.

RONY: At your service Countess. *(He bows.)*

(Alain exits. Pause. Tableau-vivant.)

GABY: I'm going to search again in case I've placed the money somewhere else and can't remember.

ANDRE: Don't forget the photos

RONY: *(to Andre)* When shall we go for those antiquities?

ANDRE: Tomorrow. Today I'm expecting visitors.

RONY: Two again. And women at that! *(To Alexandra.)* Pardon me my dear.

ANDRE: It's a habit from my first wife when we'd spend weekends in the villa of orgies in Switzerland and exchange ten partners in a day.

MOTHER RONY: Was she changing lovers too?

ANDRE: Lovers! Nonsense! She did it once or twice and then she was happy to just watch. She was keeping me company.

MOTHER RONY: You see? Women are superior beings. The man feels incomplete and depends on his dick. The woman is strong because she bears life...

RONY: Get off the balcony Simon de Beauvoir. What's the matter with all of you today, making speeches from the balcony? We're not having presidential elections in "Villa-Algeria!"

GABY: Putain! I've left my electric shaver in the bathroom. *(He rushes to the bathroom.)*

ANDRE: You too? I've lost mine yesterday. Fully automatic it was. I bought it duty-free. I enjoyed it for one day only.

MAX: *(Enters very excited and joyful.)* I've found it!

RONY: You see? The wicket don't loose a thing.

AISHA: *(Also comes out in the balcony with a few clean white towels wrapped around her arms like vestments.)* Two cotton blankets are missing.

RONY: That's all we need now! Try to find them quickly. Otherwise I'll keep it from your wages.

AISHA: *(Breaks out in tears pressing the blankets onto her breasts.)* I have five children to feed. Is it my fault if there're gangs in this place?

ABDUL: Mind your words. I'm warning you!

RONY: Why are you getting upset?

MOTHER RONY: *(Takes Aisha's head in her arms to comfort her.)* Don't you worry my dear, that's how he is. Drinking a lot and doesn't know what he is saying. *(Suddenly she gets angry and screams at her son.)* You idiot! Elle est plus qu'une femme. Search as you may, you'll never find a woman like her.

RONY: I think that my sugar level is rising. I feel dizzy. Where's Karim? I need him to give me my injection?

FATIMA: Karim isn't here. An I don't wish to pierce your old bum. Call Abdul.

(Abdul comes down and helps Rony to his room.)

RONY: *(from inside)* Joe! Joe!

ALEXANDRA: Who is Joe?

MOTHER RONY: *(Who has just come down and is sitting in the dinning room opening a book.)* His cat. It's a male cat but he has given it a girl's name. In primary school my son was always confused about male and female names. The teacher was always giving him bad marks, not only for his mistakes but for every one else's. She confused them all. From that class emerged three homosexuals and five transsexuals.

MAX: *(Who meanwhile had come down.)* Aisha bring me a full breakfast please.

AISHA: You just wait. Coming down in such hour. It's nearly lunch time. We'll have our meal soon if you let me prepare it. For the time being help yourself to a cup of coffee.

GABY: *(Coming down holding a small photo-album.)* You're insolent. Woe to the country that doesn't respect social rank. Sooner or later It will go to ruins. With wars, civil turmoil followed by bankruptcy and economic disaster. *(He gives the album to Andre.)*

GABY: *(Sits next to Andre making loud exclamations.)* Have a look at your son! A perfect woman! No other woman can compete with her.

MOTHER RONY: No man is able to mimic a woman in the least. Poor creatures! I pity you. *(To Alexandra.)* What are you doing here? Get away from this house, quickly, or you'll catch his sickness. And then you shall remain here in hell. Mind my words. You're still young, beautiful and wealthy. What can you possibly see in a...

ALEXANDRA: *(Interrupts her.)* It's being said that eunuch mothers bear homosexual children-either boys and girls.

MOTHER RONY: Are you a homosexual?

ALEXANDRA: I didn't mean my own mother.

(Fatima enters dragging behind her a rather tall woman. She's dressed in black from top to toe, wearing a traditional Muslim dress, with only her eyes showing. She has heavy eye make-up on and false black eye-lashes. This role is played by the same actor who plays Alain.)

FATIMA: Here's Saida. *(To Andre.)* Hurry up. She has just finished her job at the hairdresser's and her parents 'll be waiting for her to have lunch.

Max: *(to Andre.)* Don't worry. No one is waiting for her. They all know too well what kind of work she's doing. All the whores say the same thing.

(Saida silent attempts to leave. Fatima whispers something in her ear and she makes hand gestures meaning that she'll get money.)

AISHA: Did you call me?

ANDRE: No. Bring me a bottle of whisky. And a hand basin with warm water. And clean white towels.

AISHA: But it's lunch time...At once, as you wish. *(She exits quickly and is about to go up stairs when she calls out.)* Gaby's money. Five hundred franks.

MAX: *(Searching his pocket.)* It's mine you idiot! It must have fallen from my pocket.

AISHA: I found it. You've got to give me fifty franks.

GABY: I'll give you fifty with my belt if you insist.

MOTHER RONY: This costs more.

MAX: Who's talking to you? Old hag: Putain!

MOTHER RONY: Stop swearing!

ANDRE: Okay, be quiet then!

MAX: Sorry! We didn't wish to ruin your bridal chamber.

(Andre followed by Fatima and silent Saida goes to the upper level. In a little while Aisha goes up too with the whisky bottle and three water glasses. Then she comes out of the bathroom with a hand basin and white towels and comes down to the kitchen. Meanwhile Alexandra is browsing through the photo album, Guby is having a silent argument with hand gestures as if he is in conference with himself and Mother Rony is reading a leather bounded book.)

AISHA: The food is burnt. Abdul! Abdul! He must be playing dice in the corner again. My God what a house. What a house! Now I have to produce a miracle to keep my job.

RONY: *(From inside.)* Karim! Karim!

ACT THREE

(The evening of the same day. Rony's mother is reading the same book in the court yard. Alexandra is sitting in the arm chair with her legs crossed. Next to her there's a glass with fizzy water and a slice of lemon. Max who is passing, rings the bell.)

ALEXANDRA: Please don't. Don't ring it. It reminds me of my childhood when I was going to the evening mass each Saturday.

(Max breaks a flower pot by accident and is sweeping it away with his leg. Rony furiously comes out of his room and when he sees what had happened extends his hand. Max puts a money note on it and Rony leaves without saying a word.)

MOTHER RONY: Money loving creature. Or rather not creature but phantom.

MAX: Phantom of himself. It's all your fault.

MOTHER RONY: How can you say that? What do you know about hatred?

MAX: Nothing, that's true. I was always good with people. That's the reason why I opened the bar. I just love people. I wanted to become their mother. And I've succeeded. They love me too. In every corner of the world there's someone waiting for me.

MOTHER RONY: So what are you doing here?

MAX: I keep company to Alain. Ever since his separation from Benny he's acting crazy. I'm afraid that he might do something silly.

MOTHER RONY: Nonsense! All the years that I've known him he's acting crazy.

(Alain comes out in the balcony.)

ALAIN: Max, come in please, I need a massage. I feel Just dreadful. Don't be late. *(He goes back to his room.)*

MAX: Wright away Countess. Putain! *(Tediously he goes up stairs.)*

(The two women are left on their own. Pause.)

ALEXANDRA: I don't know why I'm telling you this. Perhaps it's the right time. Or it might be the French. A language that I've learned very young at the Nun's school. Or perhaps because your soul is also laden with guilt. I'll tell you my life story from the beginning...I was born in a small island of Peloponnese. My father was a public school teacher and was often transferred from town to town. My elder sister was following him while I was brought up by my grandmother. I was a disobedient and foul mouth child. When I was eight I used to search my father's pockets to steal a coin. One day I found a letter, with nice small writing. I was always last in calligraphy lessons, I'd smudge my fingers, the color of my uniform with the nibs. It was a love letter. Signed with the given name. But my sister and I, soon found out who she was. A girl from my class. An eight year old child. My age. She was telling him to stop bothering her with his letters and his filthy touches –that's what she wrote- and to stop their secret meetings after the lessons in his office.

MOTHER RONY: Men are pigs.

ALEXANDRA: Not all of them. Perhaps you're right...I don't know. I soon fell in love with a boy from my class and we'd spend days and nights at his aunt's place who was a blind old spinster. But not deaf. She could smell you miles away. I think that she knew all about us but would never give us away. The neighborhood however, was strange and gossipy. A small village you see...They sent me to Athens and locked me in a catholic school for girls with nuns. In my outings I used to go to my aunt's place to have my cloths washed and to sleep now and then. Soon, I developed a love affair with a taxi-driver. We've lived together for a few years. He was very jealous. Giving me money so I wouldn't go with others as he was saying. With this money I'd buy books. That's how I developed my personal library. I've left him because he insisted on marrying me. At eighteen I was first to enter Law school with honors -after examinations-. During that period, I had a love affair with a first year student who was writing verses. A pale boy with a curious illness that I can't recall its name. He was dragging one leg...A Turkish fellow student was flirting with me

then. He was very handsome, a bit like Karim...One day that I had a fight with the pale boy who was dragging his leg, I said to him: "Get lost you cripple, I don't want to see you again...That was it. The next day they found him down a cliff. He had committed suicide they said ...I fell in love with the Turk. When he graduated I run after him to Istanbul until his parents announced to me that they were marrying him off with a Muslim girl. I finished law school. I became a celebrity in penal law. With post graduate studies in Paris. I was a criminalist specializing in repulsive crimes. I'd work like a dog. I've made a name for myself and became wealthy. All my colleagues were envious. However, I was very unhappy. A total failure in my personal life. An unsuccessful architect divorced his wife hoping that I'll support him. An actor drug user hang me naked with a bed sheet from a verandah during an erotic frenzy. A scandal. I had no lover for five years. Last Christmas I came here and met Abdul, Karim or whatever else he's called... I fell in love with him. When I returned to Athens I couldn't work. My body was protesting. Every day I'd write a letter to him. The first ones were gentle but the rest were full of passionate love words. Some times he used to ring me in the night. From hotel rooms I assume. He'd sent me a letter. A post-card, with a white horse and a black horse-because I used to call him "my black stallion"... I framed the post-card and hanged it over my bed like an icon...

MOTHER RONY: Beware! Beware! You don't know where you have fallen... Have you been analyzed?

ALEXANDRA: For a little while, but it didn't help. My best clients, I mean the worst criminals had undergone ten years of psychoanalysis. But it didn't seem to help them either...

GABY: *(Coming out from the kitchen.)* I agree. It's a dated method. I've read many articles in newspapers ...

RONY: *(Coming out from his room going to the kitchen. He hasn't shaved and is in a bed way.)* For you, until you die, even excursions in space will be dated.

MOTHER RONY: Stop fighting you two, you're both acting as if you were married.

(Alain appears in the balcony wobbling. He rests on the balcony rail. He is drunk).

RONY: Careful you'll fall. Come down at once. Max! Max! Why did you let him drink so much? Why specifically tonight?

ALAIN: What time does Paolo arrives?

RONY: After dinner. With Benny. Please don't drink any more. I don't want you to ruin my house

ALAIN: I shall be dignified. I promise you. We'll enjoy ourselves. Where's Karim?

ALEXANDRA: At the barber shop I suppose.

RONY: This time he usually plays football with the gang down the park. Karim loves it.

ALAIN: My hair is getting too long. I need him to give me a haircut.

ALEXANDRA: I don't think so. You look fine to me.

(The sound of a motor bike is heard. Enters Karim.)

KARIM: *(Kisses Alexandra on the chic. He is carrying a white parcel.)* Sorry I'm late. At the last minute a client walked in. I couldn't say no to him. Please don't be angry with me. I've brought you a present. I'll show you, let's go.

(He pulls her and Alexandra follows him willingly in the bedroom. Karim unfolds the parcel and gets out an exquisite white caftan with Alexandra's name embroidered on the back. She grabs it and holds it tight against her body. Then she hangs it carefully in the closet. She turns and looks at him. Pause. They both stand for a few minutes motionless.)

KARIM: I'll bring two glasses of pastis to celebrate.

ALEXANDRA: One is enough. I'll have a seep from yours.

(Alexandra perfumes herself and makes the bed.)

KARIM: What are you doing? Come here.

ALEXANDRA: *(Gets out of her suitcase a pocket camera and takes a few snap shots of him.)* You have a strange childish glow in your eyes.

KARIM: I was late tonight because I had an argument with my mother. She doesn't want me to sleep else where. Only whores do things like that she says.

ALEXANDRA: What do you mean? You won't sleep here any more? Be careful or I'll go to the cafe and hook two a day. I've already seen a few that I like.

KARIM: Here I am with serious problems and you're teasing me. Please let's not eat with the rest tonight.

ALEXANDRA: Why? Is there some one you want to avoid? Perhaps this Paolo who's coming tonight with his painter friend Benny?

KARIM: Please, forget your job for a minute. You're asking too many questions. And stop taking photos of me. I'm not a corps in a mortuary.

ALEXANDRA: forgive me. *(She puts the camera back in her suitcase. She searches slowly at first then more intensively.)* Some money is missing. Have you taking it?

KARIM: Yes, I needed to get some things for the barber shop and a bit of material for my mother.

ALEXANDRA: Okay, I forgive you. Only next time please let me know. *(She's standing on top of the bed with folded arms in front of her breasts watching him.)*

KARIM: Turn the light off and lay next to me.

ALEXANDRA: Yes. *(Turns the light off.)*

(From the court yard the song of Um Kulsum is played on the record player. Andre comes from outside. Abdul is carrying for him some wrapped paintings. Rony goes out to welcome them.)

RONY: Did you get some nice things?

ANDRE: Yes. I've found some very rare pieces.

RONY: From my friend I presume. The one I've sent you to.

ABDUL: Yes. He said he'll drop by one of these days.

GABY: How are things outside?

ANDRE: Quiet. Only a few gun shots were heard in the suburbs. That's all. Where's Fatima?

RONY: She isn't back yet.

ANDRE: And Aziz?

RONY: Inside sleeping with the Countess.

ANDRE: With Alain?

RONY: No. This moment -if I'm not mistaken- he sleeps with the Greek lady lawyer. I'm sick and tired of you and your love affairs. I want to leave this place and to lock myself in a monastery.

MAX: *(Coming down the stairs.)* I'd like to see that. I'd give half my property for this.

RONY: Take it easy, you'll get bankrupt. What Alain is doing?

MAX: He perfumes himself and is combing his hair. He'll be down for dinner.

RONY: Dinner, ah yes dinner. *(He calls out.)* Aisha! Careful don't burn my tart. We're have many guests tonight. All good society will be here. And please keep some food for Paolo and Benny. They'll be arriving after dinner.

ANDRE: And that Italian who participated in the Greek-Italian war in Albania and speaks a bit of Greek?

GABY: Yes, "good morning, good evening" and "from the back"...

RONY: Who asked your opinion? I hope that you behave yourself tonight and don't fondle Karim under the table. Every one knows about it. And the Greek lady lawyer doesn't joke.

MOTHER RONY: What's all this commotion? Can't one read in this place?

RONY: If you want to read stay in your room. But I know that you're getting nourished by all this. And I'll bet that tonight you'll be the first one to seat near the table and the last one to leave. You won't miss a thing from what it would be said and done.

(Alain comes down with very neat appearance and cultivated manners. He kisses Mother Rony's hand, then he kisses Max on the chic and

greet Rony with a head bow.)

ABDUL: What will you have Countess?

ALAIN: Mineral water please. And I am Mr. Alain to you.

GABY: It appears that we'll have a show tonight.

RONY: Wouldn't be better if you went out for dinner?

MAX: And then we can go to a bar...

ALAIN: This would have been a good idea for after dinner. I'm not moving an inch from this place tonight. I won't miss this party for anything.

RONY: Neither will I...The only thing I hope for, is for my house to be still standing in the morning.

MAX: And why not? We're grown people. Mature. Really, how's the Greek lady? Does she still spend fortunes on her sweetheart?

ANDRE: Yes, someone ought to tell her that the tariff for this sort of thing here is a lot cheaper.

(Alexandra gets up from bed and goes to the window to listen.)

MAX: With whom? With Aziz who has been with half the world for a few dollars?

GABY: The other half is either incompetent or unable to pay.

ANDRE: He was a handsome young man in his youth.

MAX: I would love to see the son he has with Fatima.

ANDRE: He is in an orphanage.

ALAIN: Call him on the phone at once. Ask him to come here tonight.

RONY: You just be quiet. We've said...Oh my, we'll have trouble tonight, that's for sure.

(Enters Fatima.)

FATIMA: *(To Andre.)* Sorry, I'm late. I went for a walk to the place with the palm trees. Then I heard some shooting. A bomb exploded amongst some rubbish on the street, it could have been a mine, I don't know...Is Karim here?

RONY: He's here. Don't worry for any thing. As long as you're here you're safe.

MAX: Mother hen. Pull-pull- pull. Pull-pull- pull.

RONY: I hope that you're not implying anything. Misogynist!

ALAIN: *(To Max.)* Tonight you seem to me bolder than usual.

GABY: It's the electrifying atmosphere.

RONY: Lucky we have you, otherwise we wouldn't know what to do.

AISHA: Dinner is ready.

RONY: *(Rings the bell.)* The sooner this evening is over, the better.

ALEXANDRA: *(Goes back to bed. She caresses Karim's forehead who's still asleep.)* My sweet little boy. I'll protect you from people's malice as much as I can and as long as I'm able. I don't wish to go to their dinner tonight. I despise this brothel for the white and the wealthy. I have never stayed in a place like this before in my life.

RONY: *(Rings the bell again.)* A table!

KARIM: I must get ready. It's time for dinner.

ALEXANDRA: Let's eat out tonight.

KARIM: There's shooting outside tonight. We'd better stay indoors.

ALEXANDRA: You were the one who asked for it. Don't you remember?

KARIM: Yes, but now I'm hungry. Whatever it will be done will be done.

(He takes a towel and goes up to the bathroom to have a wash. On the stairs he bumps onto Alain who is going up to his room. Alain's guile little chuckles are heard.)

RONY: Control yourself, please!

GABY: We shall have a storm tonight.

MOTHER RONY: I love rain. I'll stay up all night to watch the thunder over the palm trees. Last time it dug out some mandrakes. I could hear their cries all night long. When we went out with our calèche the next day, we found them in an embrace two by two, three by three, in fantastic shapes like paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. *(To Gaby.)* Do you remember when we went to the Escorial and saw "The Garden of Desires".

GABY: Yes and Rony yelled out: "mum-mum, uncle Gaby, come and see the dreams of the damned".

ALEXANDRA: *(From inside combing her hair.)* Karim! Karim!

MAX: He's coming, he's combing Alain's hair.

ABDUL: But his hair was already combed.

RONY: You just keep quiet. Not a word out from your mouth tonight.

ALEXANDRA: *(hysterically)* Karim! Karim!

ANDRE: Aziz! They're calling you.

FATIMA: You're horrible! Why do you get mixed up in other's affairs.

GABY: Storm is coming tonight.

MOTHER RONY: When will you marry Fatima?

ANDRE: Never.

(Fatima starts crying.)

ANDRE: *(Attempts to comfort her.)* I was only joking. I don't know. We'll see.

MAX: A wonderful bride. Educated and virgin. With French and piano studies. Learning French and piano. That's how she was brought up.

RONY: Putain! Whore! You love to torture people. What do you know about pain? Only to my enemies I'd wish to be born here.

MOTHER RONY: You'll come to France newlyweds in a plane dragging a small flag with married written on it. You'll stay at the Opera in a room full of orchids. Then you shall take the T.G.V. and you'll come to Avignon where I shall invite you for dinner.

GABY: Mixed weddings...are a major social problem. They're rarely successful. I've read the thesis of a Moroccan lawyer who was married to a French woman and they've divorced recently. With three children. She was given custody. She was a banker's daughter. Now he Manages a hotel in Casablanca. I forget his name.

ALEXANDRA: *(Is now dressed and perfumed.)* Karim, Karim!

KARIM: *(Appears with his hair tangled.)*

ALEXANDRA: When I call you, you must come. Your hair is in a mess. *(She seats him on the bed and combs his hair...He obeys like a child.)*

ALAIN: *(From the balcony.)* Is dinner ready?

RONY: For some time now. But no one is interested. You've promised me something tonight. Remember?

ALAIN: I won't have a drop of alcohol tonight.

RONY: And you shall behave. That's a good boy.

GABY: We think that we are growing. But some of us never pass the age of eight. Some lucky ones might reach ten.

MOTHER RONY: Men are always big babies.

RONY: We've seen women too.

ANDRE: Are we going to eat tonight? Abdul please go and light the fire place. *(He gets a drum and starts playing. In a minute the sounds of a second and a third drum are heard. These drums are used as decorative pieces around the fire place in the dining room.)*

(Max brings in the dining room from the court yard the cassette player, while Abdul lits the fire in the fire place. Aisha is going inn and out setting the table. Mother Rony brings the large platters with food, Gaby the drinks and Rony the crystal glasses. He draws the curtains of the dining-sitting room. His mother opens them again. Andre goes up to change.)

MOTHER RONY: I want to watch the rain.

RONY: But it's not raining yet.

MOTHER RONY: It will. I know. It will rain.

(Rony rings the bell... Alexandra and Karim are received with exclamations. They're obliged to dance a waltz chic to chic. So is Andre and Fatima who is dressed provocatively with a most revealing neckline. Last comes down Max with Alain who gives a grant entrance as if he was a Marquees receiving her audience in her castle, or a Queen entertaining her ladies in waiting and the whole Royal Court. Max puts on a tape "Don't cry for me Argentina", from the musical "Evita". Alain ties a silk turban around his head, pretending that he's holding a microphone while descending an imaginary staircase

singing. Abdull brings him a white bison belonging to Rony. Alain throws it with a pose over his shoulder. Rony kindly protests. The song ends. Alain grubs Alexandra to dance Charleston. She follows him willingly or rather she tries to compete but she often loses her step because Alain is dancing in a frenzy. Max uses two lemons for breasts and with Karim he gets involved in the parody of a passionate tango. Fatima uncovers her breasts and does belly dancing on a low table while Andre plays the drums. Suddenly Karim stops dancing and returns to the bedroom upset. He falls face down on the bed. Alexandra pretends that she doesn't understand and continues dancing. In a little while she drops exhausted on the sofa. Abdul gives her a glass of mineral water. Alexandra takes a book from her bag and reads a poem of Cavafis in French. After she is teased and criticized closes the book, puts it in her bag as if she had read a prayer. The others start eating while she's going to the bedroom.)

ALEXANDRA: *(Seats at the edge of the bed. She attempts to stroke Karim's head but he jumps.)* Why are you behaving like a baby? Sometimes you seem to be a grown man, more mature than I am. You know about people and life. You know how to handle them, I might even say that you're taking advantage of them. And then you behave like a small child. Who are you then. What are you?

KARIM: Why are you dancing with them? What business do you have with these people? They're whores. This house is a brothel. I want to get away from here.

ALEXANDRA: You've brought me here remember? Last Christmas. The hotel security wouldn't let you in, the second evening. Really, how did you get in that night?

KARIM: From the swimming pool entrance at the discotheque, then I bribed the porter to let me go to the lifts leading up to the rooms. I took a risk for you. Some times bribing works. But not always. We could have spent a month

in jail. You and me. The law is severe. And the guards full of sicknesses. If all the inmates don't do it to you, for sure all the guards will...But I knew that I'll spent a life time with you. And that near you I'm in no danger. I gave you my body, my soul. Don't ever leave me.

ALEXANDRA: *(Stands up and begins to unbutton her dress, then she changes her mind and buttons it again.)* Let's go. Every one will be waiting for us. And promise me, that you won't do another silly thing tonight.

KARIM: *(Gets up combs his hair. Straightens his clothes and kisses her gently on the chic.)* I promise you. And tonight I don't want us to make love. We shall sleep like brother and sister.

(They come out. Rony is serving desert. Orange slices sprinkled with cinnamon.)

RONY: You're late...You'll eat with the second group now. With Paolo and Benny.

KARIM: What time are they coming? *(He sits next to Gaby opposite to Alexandra who is sitting next to Fatima and Andre.)*

RONY: I see that you're hungry. As soon as we finish our desert, we'll go with Andre and Abdul to the airport. You'll come to help us with the luggage.

ALEXANDRA: No. He'll stay here with me.

(Gaby touches Karim's leg under the table. He jumps. Alexandra takes Karim by the hand and sits him next to her without saying a word.)

MOTHER RONY: It's going to pour tonight. The atmosphere is electrifying.

RONY: Lucky we have you to keep up with the weather report. Andre we must hurry. If it rains the roads will be muddy and we'll have problems coming back with a car loaded with luggage.

KARIM: And Paolo always brings lots of luggage.

FATIMA: You ought to know...

KARIM: I wouldn't say a word if I were you. Especially tonight...

RONY: Taisez-vous! Il vaut mieux!

(Pause. Andre, Abdul and Rony get up and leave. The sound of a car

ignition is heard. Rony's mother goes to the window and looks at the sky above the garden. Lightning and thunder is heard. Alain invites Karim to dance. He follows excited. They're dancing something between disco and African traditional dances. Fatima beats the drums. But when Alexandra gets up to dance Fatima stops at once. Max however, puts on a waltz tape and the four of them dance. Alain with Karim and Alexandra with Max. But when Alain holds Karim too tight, she quickly changes partner. Now she dances with Karim and Max with Alain. After a little while Alexandra gets tired.)

ALEXANDRA: *(Winks to Karim to go up in their room.)*

KARIM: You go, I'll come later. After all we haven't eaten yet.

ALEXANDRA: I'm not hungry.

KARIM: But I've danced and I'm very hungry. Go, bring the camera and the video to pass the time.

ALEXANDRA: Give me the key of the suitcase.

KARIM: *(Very quickly takes out the key from a tiny pocket within the main pocket of his trousers.)* There you are!

(Alexandra exits. The others are silent staring at the flames in the fire place...Alain pours himself a double whisky and drinks it in one go. He's about to pour another one when Max stops him.)

MAX: We've said that you won't drink tonight.

ALAIN: Yes, you're right.

MAX: If you're a good boy I'll take you to the corner bar and we shall buy ourselves...

ALAIN: Two heavenly handsome boys and we'll make love with them in the mud under the palm trees.

(The rain falls suddenly.)

MOTHER RONY: See? What did I say? It's raining!

(Alexandra quickly runs across the court yard trying to protect the camera and the video from the rain. Karim takes the video camera

from her hands and starts filming. Alexandra takes a photo of Rony's mother who poses against the lightning as if she has created it.)

GUBY: Lets all take a family photo.

ALEXANDRA: Later, when every one comes from the airport.

GUBY: They'll be late and some of us won't be here. And then we may not all wish to take a family photograph.

ALAIN: What are you insinuating? I'm sick of you and your philosophies!

MAX: *(To Alain.)* Doucement! *(To the others.)* Don't pay any attention to him, he had a lot to drink.

FATIMA: There's no such a thing as a lot for drunkards.

(Karim slaps Fatima across the face. Alexandra takes a photo of them, while Max grubs the abandoned video camera and films them.)

MAX: At last, this boring night is becoming very interesting.

FATIMA: You'll pay for this dearly. You took advantage of Andre's absence, otherwise you wouldn't dare to raise a hand on me. You're a coward. A zero in comparison with the loaded Europeans who come here to buy you for a few dollars. And then she...

KARIM: You'll be sorry if you don't stop. I promise you.

(Pause. Repeated thunders are heard. Alexandra pours herself a glass of whisky without ice and drinks it in one go. Across the court yard Rony and Abdul are running with luggage followed by Paolo and Benny and lastly Andre with a large suitcase. They take the luggage up to the first level.)

PAOLO: *(From the court yard.)* I hope that you've kept me the same room.

RONY: You know my dear that no one else sleeps in this room. Obviously while you're here...The best friend of the house.

MAX: A regular customer of either Aziz or Benny.

(Alain puts on "Don't cry for me Argentina", takes Karim in his arms and they dance. Benny enters first, followed by Paolo.)

PAOLO: Good evening every one. Please forgive my delay. All the airports in Italy were closed due to a strike and I had to take the train to Switzerland and from there I came here. Good evening Alain, I wasn't aware that you were here.

ALAIN: Good evening. What's the name of your young escort?

(Pause. Rony who at that moment was coming from the kitchen freezes).

ALAIN: Is he deaf? Doesn't he know his name? Doesn't he speak French? *(He offers his hand to Benny.)* Does he at least dance or dance hasn't yet been discovered by the natives.

(Max films the scene with the video camera and Alexandra breaks the tension by taking a photograph.)

ALEXANDRA: I think it's time for that family photograph we were talking about. Rony, Andre, Abdul come! We're taking a photo.

(They all gathered together and had their photograph taken. All except Alexandra, then Abdul takes a snap shot, then Rony and Karim. The wood in the fire place creaks loudly.)

KARIM: We must bring Joe in.

RONY: He has run away since yesterday. Who knows where he's wondering. He has taken advantage of me been unwell.

(They all start eating in silence.)

BENNY: Rony, where's that red wine?

RONY: Finished. There's none left. When you Arabs start drinking you never stop. There's no wine this time. That's it. For no one.

ALAIN: Don't look at me. I'm having whisky.

RONY: Putain!

ALAIN: Don't be upset, when every one goes to bed I'll invite you to my room and we'll open a bottle of Moët Champaign, to drink just the two of us.

RONY: For whom this invitation is really directed? Because I don't really think it's for me. *(To Max.)* For your own good take him to a bar and find three boys for both of you tonight otherwise we all have a bad night.

MAX: Rony is right. Let's go. Soon all the bars will be closed. If there's a soul left in them in this rain.

ALAIN: Wait, I'll put something better on.

MAX: You're fine. We'll be late. Let's go.

(Max and Alain go out without saying good night.)

RONY: Did you have a good trip?

PAOLO: Yes, wonderful.

RONY: You don't eat much.

PAOLO: So I won't get a heavy stomach.

RONY: I understand. Sly little boy! I didn't get a chance to introduce you. This is Alexandra, a Greek lawyer and a new friend of the house. PAOLO is a gynecologist. He has his own clinic in Rome.

(When Benny hears the word "gynecologist" he laughs. Alexandra and Paolo greet each other with a head bow.)

RONY: And Benny is a painter. He does fantastic portraits. You may order something from him.

ALEXANDRA: Yes I'd like you to paint Karim's portrait. From a photograph I took yesterday. I'll take the film to be developed tomorrow.

(Pause. From the distance Oum Kouloum's song is heard.)

GABY: There's too much electricity in the air tonight!

MOTHER RONY: I kept telling you since this morning! We shall have a long and difficult night. As for me, I won't sleep at all.

RONY: I think that you won't be the only one. Joe is not sleeping tonight either. Who knows where he's wondering.

ALEXANDRA: I think I should go to bed. I'll see you tomorrow PAOLO. I'm very pleased to have met you.

(When Alexandra reaches the door turns around and looks at Karim.

He pretends that he doesn't understand. Abdul and Rony pick up the plates. Gaby gives them a hand.)

RONY: *(To Gaby.)* You go to bed. There's no need for you to help. You'll fall, break your neck and you'll destroy my good set!

MOTHER RONY: Good night. I'm going to bed too. We've had a lovely time tonight.

ANDRE: A lovely unforgettable night.

ALEXANDRA: *(Is ready for bed. She goes to the kitchen and fills a glass with pastis. Then she stands by the kitchen door and calls out.) Karim! (There's no answer. She goes to the room. Takes a seep and calls out.) Karim! (She drinks the rest in one go). Karim! (She throws the glass on the floor and breaks it.)*

(A few endless seconds pass in silence. Alexandra takes out of her hand bag a knife. Karim comes and stands with his back resting on the door. She approaches him slowly. With a quick movement she slashes his chic. He puts his hand over it and it gets covered with blood. Rony brings a wet towel and the portable first aid kit from the bathroom. Cleans the wound with mentholated spirit, puts on antiseptic and a band aid. No one is saying a word. The rest in the sitting-dinning room whisper and their whispers sounds like a shot in the silence of the night. Then, Karim lays on his back next to Alexandra. The rest leave. From the distance the song of Um Kulsum is heard as if the rain brings it closer and then takes it away. Some time passes. Alexandra falls asleep. The gate opens. It's Max and Alain. In a little while Karim gets up carefully not to wake Alexandra and tiptoes out of the room. He goes to the upper level. Alain's door opens and Karim slides quietly inside.)

ACT FOUR

(The next morning. Karim gives a hair-cut to Alain who's sitting on a chair in the courtyard. The others are watching. A tape of Manos Hatzidakis playing the song "It was a misunderstanding that was never cleared out" was on. Alexandra wakes up and goes to the window to see what is going on. She's eavesdropping.)

ABDUL: Get on with it. You have to do mine as well. It's nearly lunch time.

RONY: Countess is not up yet?

ALAIN: Do you suppose that I'm having a hair-cut in my sleep?

RONY: Who Knows. Who knows? A lot of things are happening in this house while one is asleep...

KARIM: Don't wake her up. She had a lot to drink last night and she's not used to it.

MAX: Yes. She's just out of the girls school!

MOTHER RONY: Mind your words when you're talking about women!

GABY: Here come the feminist's troops.

ANDRE: *(From the balcony.)* Quiet! We're trying to sleep in this house.

MAX: That's funny! I thought that it was for something else.

RONY: You hag, be quiet! And come down from that balcony at once. The whole neighborhood will hear you. And you, hurry up with the hair dressing. You've been at it for an hour. A whole night is not enough for you?

KARIM: Stop she'll hear you.

RONY: You just said that she's sleeping and very deeply at that.

(Alexandra takes a flat shaped gun out of her bag. She loads it and goes out to the court yard. She shoots Alain. Screams, blood, panic everywhere. She stands still watching Karim who also stands petrified looking at her. Mother Rony and Abdul give first aid to the

wounded. Rony who by now feels dizzy sits on a chair. Andre with Fatima and Paolo with Benny come out in the balcony. Max runs to get Rony's insulin. Fatima brings a saucepan with boiling water and white towels.)

GABY: It's been a long time since I've seen blood.
(Alexandra collapses. She faints and falls on the ground. Karim and Abdul carry her to her room. The tape with the song "Love you've become a double bladed dagger" is on.)

FATIMA: For heaven's sake stop that music.

RONY: No. We don't want the neighbors to hear.

ALEXANDRA: (She is in bed delirious.) We shall go for a walk in the place with ten thousand palm trees. I'll buy you a golden ring similar to mine with your name engraved on it. I'll engrave your name on my ring too. We shall take photographs on calèche. The blind driver shall help us. Then I'll let you play football on the field and I shall go to see the sunset...

KARIM: (Interrupts.) And I shall invite you to my house to eat cuss-cuss and introduce you to my mother. And we shall go to your country to live happily away from this hell.

ALEXANDRA: No, no it's impossible. They're wild beasts over there. They'll eat you alive.

KARIM: (Sits up on the bed.) I can't continue with you here. I won't come back to this house again. There'll be trouble. Soon they'll close down this place and lock everyone in jail.

ALEXANDRA: Okay then. I'll take you with me. But you must promise me that you won't have eyes for another woman, for no one else but me.

KARIM: I promise you. I must go now, I have to open the shop. I'll pass by this afternoon to take you for a walk to the place with the palm trees. And in the evening you're invited to my house to eat cuss-cuss.

(Karim comes out and bumps onto Fatima who was eavesdropping. He nods asking her to follow him.)

FATIMA: Andre, I'm leaving now. Going to work. I'll be back this afternoon.

ABDUL: *(To Karim.)* You haven't given me a hair cut yet.

KARIM: Tomorrow morning. *(He exits. The ignition sound of the motor bike is heard.)*

RONY: If he gives you the same haircut as the other one, you'd better forget it.

MAX: *(To Rony.)* How are you? Do you feel any better?

RONY: Lucky that we have some one here with real maternal feelings.

MOTHER RONY: *(Reading jauntily her book.)* What are you insinuating? I'm sick and tired of mothering you. You're a grown man now.

GABY: Poor old lady. She doesn't know whether she's coming or going.

ANDRE: *(Sits by the table.)* I would married her with pleasure.

MAX: Whom? Her? We're talking about the Greek lawyer.

ANDRE: So do I. Alexandra. You don't find people like her every day.

RONY: That's true.

PAOLO: *(Appears with Benny on the verandah.)* Good morning every one.

RONY: Well, even gun shots can't wake you up;!

BENNY: Who shot whom?

MAX: Alexandra shot Alain.

BENNY: This I'd love to have seen.

PAOLO: Not me. I detest blood.

MAX: Look who's talking;! The great gynecologist!

PAOLO: I detest the blood that brings death. When is about life my concern is to hear the infant's cry. I don't see blood then. How is Alain?

MAX: Resting in his room. It was only a scratch. Fortunately she missed him.

ANDRE: She doesn't know a thing about guns. Where did she find it? It's impossible to have brought it with her from Greece. She would have been caught at the airport.

RONY: You may buy them here by the kilo. All you have to do is to take a walk down the kiosk.

GABY: But she didn't go out at all.

MOTHER RONY: Perhaps she gave money to Karim to get it for her.

MAX: What an idea! And why Karim would do a thing like that?

ANDRE: To protect her in case someone attacks her.

RONY: Who else carries guns? I'm asking you: who else is carrying guns around here? Lucky that shooting is heard all over Algeria at the moment, otherwise you crazy gays would have closed my place down.

ALAIN: *(Comes out on the verandah. His left shoulder wrapped in bandages.)*

Please take me! Take me away from here!

MAX: Calm down. I'm coming. Don't move. I'll give you your tranquilizers to make you sleep.

(By the base of the stair case there's a small table with a telephone. It rings. Rony runs and picks up the receiver.)

RONY: Hello. Yes. Please wait a minute, I'll see if she can talk to you now.

(He goes to Alexandra's room.)

RONY: You are wanted on the phone. Can you talk now or shall I ask them to call later?

(Alexandra jumps out of bed and runs to the phone.)

ALEXANDRA: Yes. I'm fine. I am happy here. C'est mon paradis! Close it now. I'll call you from the booth so that we can talk privately.

ANDRE: Who was he?

ALEXANDRA: A friend of mine. A doctor. I'll call him back on the card phone.

RONY: Be careful! You're not dressed to go out.

ALEXANDRA: It doesn't matter. The card phone is right next door. *(She runs out to the telephone booth. She's talking fast and with excitement but we can't hear a word from what she is saying.)*

GABY: She's calling her psychiatrist.

MOTHER RONY: If you weren't an old man, you'd be unbearably bad;

RONY: *(To Paolo.)* Did you have a good time?

PAOLO: *(With meaning.)* Very good thank you.

RONY: That's lovely. I'm happy that some one is having a good time in this house.

BENNY: I must go to the gallery. Rony, when are you going to send me those customers you were talking about?

RONY: Here's the first one! Andre, when shall you visit Benny's gallery to see his work?

BENNY: You may give him an order to paint something for you.

ANDRE: Let's go right now. I'm not doing any thing at the moment anyway.

GABY: I wonder what has been happening in town today. It's much too quiet for my liking.

RONY: I do like it, quiet a lot.

(Benny and Andre exit. Alexandra is still talking on the phone.)

MAX: *(To Rony.)* Is Countess number two still on the phone? What is she saying all this time? She'll pay a fortune.

GABY: She is been psychoanalyzed through the telephone. It's the latest trend. Instead of laying on the couch in a room, they get in a phone booth and don't come out for anything. Too bad if you have to make an urgent phone call.

RONY: Do you have to make an urgent call?

GABY: No. I was speaking theoretically.

RONY: What am I saying? Your urgent matters have ended twenty years ago, at least. Really, when is this friend of yours who's working in a hotel, going to visit you?

GABY: He should have come today. What day is it?

(Alexandra is rushing inn and shuts herself in her room. Rony takes a bottle of pastis, two water glasses and follows her. He seats at the edge of her bed while she lays down. He fills both glasses. Gives her one. There's pause for a few minutes, then Rony starts talking.)

RONY: Don't take him to Greece. He'll leave you. It's the sun...They're making love everywhere. Like flies. You're young, beautiful and you're rich. Come here whenever you wish. Have anyone you like...Don't look at me like that. When I see people like you and Max, I gain strength to go on. Andre said today that he could have married you. Go if you like him. I want to help you.

ALEXANDRA: *(Gets up and take his head in her arms.)* You're a good person. You love people...Otherwise you wouldn't be able to keep up. I feel for you as if you were my father.

RONY: Thank you.

PAOLO: *(From his room.)* Whore! I've hired a detective and found out everything. You can't fool me.

BENNY: I'll go to my sister's husband in a village sixty kilometers from Algeria. They're celebrating Mohammed's circumcision. Her son's.

PAOLO: Yes, and twice a day you leave your wife, your father and your children and go to "Renaissance" café to buy a lover. And if you can't do it in the hotel, you'll do it in the park, behind the bushes, like dogs...The detective show me some photos with you running and children chasing you. You even did it with the detective.

BENNY: Why not? He pays well with your money.

(They're chasing each other down the stairs. Benny runs to hide in the kitchen. Paolo grabs a Mauritanian sword -decorating the wall against the stair case- and runs after him.)

RONY: I can't tolerate any more blood in my house today. This day must be jinxed. I've got to run. excuse me.

ALEXANDRA: Don't be afraid, they'll scream and then they'll stop. PAOLO shan't find any one better than Benny: well, he's a painter, he speaks five languages and recites beautiful poems in classic Arabic.

(Rony rushes out of the room. Paolo is trying to break down the kitchen door. Rony holds him from the shoulder.)

RONY: That's enough. I don't need any more trouble in my house. And you, put down this sword. You look ridiculous, it's bigger than your. That's a good boy. Give it to me. Abdul come here. Hung this somewhere that no one can reach. Or rather hide it in my trunk. Here's the key. And you innocent little pigeon, come out. Pour me something to drink.

(Benny fills a water glass with pastis.)

RONY: Have a drink too.

(Benny happily pours a large glass of the same for himself.)

RONY: *(To Paolo.)* So What did he do? The same as every one else. The same thing you're doing when you're alone in Rome. What's the matter with everyone? Where do you think you are? In a Medieval castle full of romantic maidens playing a medieval musical instrument or painting on silk shawls waiting for your return?

(Paolo is about to say something but is interrupted.)

RONY: I don't want a word. You either behave like respectable human beings or get out of here. I'm tired...

(Enters Andre.)

ANDRE: They've erected a banner outside with "SHUT THIS BROTHEL" written on it. The taxi driver refused to bring me here after he heard that I wanted to come to "Villa Algeria".

GABY: We should start packing. I smell trouble.

RONY: Perhaps not yet. We'll see.

ANDRE: I think I'll pack my things and go now. Where's Alexandra?

RONY: In her room resting. In the afternoon she'll go with Karim to the place with the ten thousand palm trees, with a horse and carriage. And then they'll have cuss- cuss at his house. His mother has invited them both to meet her.

ANDRE: All these things seem too idyllic to me, to be romantic.

MOTHER RONY: And why not?

RONY: You just keep quiet, what do you know about life?

MOTHER RONY: You know all about it yourself and look where it got you.

MAX: Does any one have pain killers? Alain has a headache.

RONY: Is his arm okay?

MAX: Yes, it doesn't hurt any more.

RONY: Max, take a box of aspirins to Alain. Give it to him personally.

(Enters Fatima dressed in a traditional black Muslim dress. Only her eyes are free warring false long eye-lashes).

FATIMA: What's going on outside? What has happened here today? Why all these people in the neighborhood? What are they waiting for?

RONY: They must have heard the shooting and now are protesting. They want to get rid of me. Don't worry though. They won't succeed. I have high protection.

(Alain comes out in the balcony in a state of hysteria. Max is trying to stop him from falling).

ALAIN: I want to get out of here. Now.

GABY: Bring him a helicopter.

(Alexandra comes out dressed in a silk dressing gown.)

ALAIN: And the Countess is strolling about as if she is in a Tennessee Williams's play. But I, know what you are. I've seen you on television. You've tried to bribe a senior judge to pronounce not guilty one of your clients. An atrocious crime. He had killed seven of his female lovers.

ALEXANDRA: You're hysteric. You don't know what you're saying. The judge accused me for publicity. To escape from the misery of his clerical life. Because I was young, beautiful and successful. Because he flung himself at me and I refused him. There was a court case and I was declared innocent. They had no proof... I want to get out of here, too. I shall call my office in Greece to book me a seat on the next flight.

RONY: You may call from here. Don't go outside.

ALEXANDRA: Never mind, it's a good chance to get some fresh air.

KARIM: Please take me with you.

ALEXANDRA: No. It's an unknown jangle to you. You'll be eaten alive by the wolves over there.

ANDRE: Please merry me. I would like to live with you.

MAX: *(To Karim.)* Don't be so excited. He gets easily bored. Doesn't stay with anyone for long. Benny's stay at his Geneva house lasted only a month. He was kicked out before his three month visa expired.

PAOLO: *(To Benny.)* Is that true?

KARIM: *(To Fatima.)* Go quickly to my house...I need you to help my mother with the meal. We're having cuss-cuss tonight.

(Alexandra goes out of the gate dressed the way she was, making a

round at the foreground and then going to the telephone booth. Before she gets a chance to lift the receiver, shooting is heard. Everyone in the court yard freezes. Alain faints. Andre is trying to stand but he drops on a seat. Karim frightened runs outside the gate to the telephone booth, grabs Alexandra who has frizzed and drugs her in the court yard. He sits her on a chair and brings her a water glass filled with pastis. Pause. Benny brings his easel from inside and starts painting.)

GABY: I think that no one will leave now. Here is heaven and hell.

ALEXANDRA: *(Caresses Karim's hand.)* Happy and miserable. Nonetheless, I'm here and now. For the first time in my life. A life full of lies, guilt, and borrowed behavior. *(She opens her dressing gown. Takes it off and throws it on the ground.)* Even the way I seat, the way I open my dressing gown is not mine. *(She stands behind Karim and embraces him with pathos.)* Benny, please put me in the frame too. Paint all of us, the way we are at this moment. *(Tableau-vivant. The lights go out while the sorrowful and happy song of Um Kulsum is heard.)*

THE END

MURDER IN TANGER

(short story for a scenario of a film-noir in Tanger, Maroc)

He woke in a high class hotel in Tanger. By the gray sun coming through a bleared window dew to the rain. The body next to him was black and cold. He stretched his arm. No breathing. It took him some time to gather his fragments. His head vacant dew to alcohol consumption. Unable to recall what had happened the previous night. Only that he was drinking pastis around sunset. A litre of Marseilles pastis. Then there was a knock on the locked door. He remembered that he had hidden his passport and a large leather wallet under the mattress. Then nothing...The body strangely soft. Perspiration had dried on its pores. The black has now taken bluish hues. "The dark blue of the sea. One moonlit night when we were swimming naked together. With whom, I can't recall". One night he was knocking on the window to come inn. He opened it. He walked in and sat on the floor. He went to bathroom, letting the hot water running on his body for a long time. Realizing only then that he was naked. He observed his face in the mirror. Not even a small blemish. "Nothing!". Nevertheless, he put on moisturizer and a thin layer of make-up. It hadn't been used ever since he was playing in the theatre. Then, suddenly an inheritance: the death of a wealthy aunt. Didn't know what to do with so much money and decided to make the tour around the world. He put on his greenish-gray sports-coat and a purple blue-dotted tie. Opened the door. The plumbing noise had stopped. The plumbers had left from the room next door, and the door was shut.

He called the lift. He run and just made it to his door before it closed. He was perspiring. His make-up melting. He went to the bathroom and powdered his face with a short thick brush. He felt like sneezing but he managed to hold it. Then went back to the door. Opened it. Searched for the key in his pocked. He went to the lift. It was still there. He drugged the body slowly and methodically. Wiped his finger prints with a bed-sheet. Then pressed the "R-reception" button and came out of the lift. He walked down slowly onto the mid-level. He heard knives and forks clicking and felt nauseous. He hold himself. He ate yogurt with honey and drunk orange juice. He heard the police patrol, their conversation. People running everywhere. The cooks came out of the kitchen.

A customer in the restaurant called out.

There's no more croissants!

And then nothing. He came down to the sitting room and red a French newspaper.

He even gave a ten dollar note to the boy who brought it to him.

He said good morning to the receptionist and quietly walked out to the street.

It was sprinkling. A short dark Berber squeezed under his umbrella. He pushed him away.

-Doucement! Protested the other. His voice resembled the hissing sound of a snake.

He was walking for some time. The sky ash-gray above Tanger port. And the heavy clouds threatening. He caressed a machine gun and a palm tree greeted him with a head bow and a street photographer offered to immortalize him. He nodded “no” with his head and gave him a dollar. He slowly returned to the corner café and saw him: he was squashed in the cavity of a door he, looked vague. As if he had just lost something precious. He stood at the opposite side of the street and observed him. Then he quickly entered the café and went up the attic.

He ordered mint tea...

He opened his note book and started writing.

He raised his eyes. The youth was there. But now he was gazing at him. Through the street noise and the dusty glass. He felt his body shivering. As if an electric current penetrated it, from his toe nails to the edge of his long hair. “I must have a hair-cut, it’s getting too long”.

The rain had calmed down. He got up, paid and walked out. He opened his umbrella and was directed towards the port. In the square he stopped for a moment and caressed the machine gun. A palm tree greeted him with a head bow and a street photographer offered to take his photograph. He politely refused giving him a dollar. The other gave him a strange look, laughed and said something in Arabic making hand gestures. He walked down a narrow lane. In a bar, a small boy –not over eight- was making a living doing acrobatics. He was unbelievably pale and tall. Doing a somersault he saw him through the window with the soiled little curtains and the thick bronze rings.

He continue his walk. In the corner he quickly glanced back. The dark Arab was still following him. He reduced his pace and walked trough quiet streets. Into a lane so narrow where only a few sunrays could pass through. In the houses without doors, some dark people were making something with their hands. "Something like home-made cigarettes". One spat so hard that he soiled his right shoe. From an inner pocket he took out his dark sun glasses and put them on. Behind him from the right he heard noises. Three female's voices and a male's. He did not turn around. He walked slowly but steadily until he reached the port.

Next to a colourful mixed business shop, was a traditional café. The electric stove was attracting flies and the atmosphere was heavy from the narghiles. He ordered mint tea and a narghile. Took a Spanish newspaper that was left on a cane chair and opened it –only to show that he was doing something.

The smoke penetrated his body and calmed him down. Outside, the dark Arab who was following him passed across the open door. He quickly looked at him, made sure that he was sitting down and smoking peacefully and decided to do other things.

He paid quickly and walked out. His shadow made some negotiations in the grocery store. He took the first taxi to escape. On a steep hill they met the little pale boy who was doing the acrobatics and took him along. They were silent.

The young boy made himself comfortable on the cheap leather seat as if he was in a child's room with toys.

They stopped at the hotel. He paid and got out. The young boy was looking at him with large eyes like sunflowers. He escorted him to the foyer, gave them a ten dollar note and asked them to allow the little boy to do his acrobatic acts in the restaurant. They agreed. He stood by the door watching. The applause were storming. The old wise author whose novel was made a film was also there. He must have been over ninety. Sitting like royalty on the red velvet of his throne smoking with slow rhythmic breaths. He sat across him. The other was gazing at him through the smoke rings and his pupils changing size from small to large and shades from sky blue to anemone's purple. The rain was striking the palm trees and he saw the huge pendulum stopping over the boat while it was entering the port. He knew that the boat will sink with all its passengers and its crew, in a night with full moon, outside Hawaii coast and the sharks will have a feast.

The small boy gathered lots of coins in his cup and brought them to him to count. He threw the money in front of him and watched him with his wide trustful eyes. He called the waiter. He counted the money, said something to him, took some more change out of his pocket and added to the amount. The slender young man's body seemed even darker in the white suit. He gathered the change in his palms with a graceful movement of a magician. Walked to the cashier and brought back a money-note...

The old author had gone. Like a hallucination. A smoke hallucination. He returned to his room. Hang a "Do not disturb" note and after turning the key twice he slept deeply.

That evening they were celebrating New Year. The hotel's folkloric program was boring and he was about to leave, when opposite him sat a rather darkish

gentleman around thirty five, in a large suit revealing the graceful body line of a gazelle. A strong male gazelle that smelt jungle and perspiration full of adrenaline. They gazed at each other. Like two beasts that haven't yet made up their minds whether to fight or to turn their backs and quickly run away. He took out his note book and started writing feverishly. When he raised his head, the other was still there and no one could take him away.

The whole evening passed gazing at each other. He got up to leave. He didn't turn back to look. But when he reached the lift, the other was already behind him. He felt his breath on the collar of his coat. They both entered the lift and when he was turning they bump onto each other. He was so disturbed that he couldn't even ask forgiveness. They both came out on the same floor. The other walked towards the room next door and when he turned the key he looked at him. Again he felt the same electric current running through his body. He unlocked his own door and left it open. He went under the shower. He came out wearing a silk dressing gown. The other was laying on the bed resting his back on the pillow, smoking. They were motionless for a few minutes. The door was now shut and the television was on. He laid next to him. The other made a movement as if the back of his neck ached. He stretched his arms- one by one- and gave him a gentle massage. The other reached for the light and turned it off.

The sky was engraved with fireworks. The small child who was doing acrobatics passed across the window doing a somersault in the air. His large eyes looked trough the window smiling.

The water was running in the darkness. The room was filled with smoke. The other came out of the bathroom. He slowly put on his large suit. Then got out of his pocket a well crafted burgundy wallet, took a one hundred dollar note

and left it on the television set. He walked out closing the door behind him without looking back.

He got up, took the money note and examined it. He looked at the full length mirror across him. The dark dead body was also holding a one hundred dollar note and was looking at him. He entered the mirror with a decisive movement, the way we fall into an unknown sea in the night, to catch something precious that had fallen in it. He stood facing him. He placed his forehead onto the corpses forehead. The money notes fell. The hands jointed palm to palm. The legs perfectly fitted one against the other. On their chests grew cyclamens. The sea was beating against the rocks and their genitals. And when an open trunk with a lost treasure from the time of the pirates emerged, it glittered on their feet. Colours, colours, colours.

HECATE

A play in five acts

Characters:

M.: A thirty five year old politician

F.: A thirty year old female Andalousian hairdresser

A.: Twenty year old Berber

BOY: A room-service boy working in a hotel

ACTE ONE

SCENE A

(A hotel room. F. wrapped in a Chinese Kimono opens the door. M. enters dressed in a casual afternoon suit. He is hesitant. He curiously examines the mess in the room. Clothes are thrown everywhere. For a few moments they are both standing looking at each other.)

M.: I've come for a cup of coffee.

F.: There's no coffee maker in the room. We can go downstairs to the bar.

(They are both standing still.)

F.: *(Sits on the edge of the bed.)* Your profession makes you suspicious. Your career is far more important to you than a little love in a hotel room.

M.: When are you leaving?

F.: Tomorrow.

M.: Where to?

F.: Madrid.

M.: Do you have a Spanish passport?

F.: Yes I do. I was married to Jose ever since I was eighteen.

M.: And now, are you divorced?

F.: Yes.

M.: And do you speak English, French and Spanish?

F.: And some Italian.

M.: What kind of work are you doing?

F.: I've told you. Hairdressing. I've got a small hairdressing salon in Madrid and there's someone working for me. She is a blond German girl married to a Spaniard.

M.: So what are you doing to Casablanca?

F.: Well, I'm not spying, if that's what you think. I've come to see my home town where I grew up.

M.: Just that?

F.: The rest is none of your business.

(Silence. M. is still standing).

F.: Is the interrogation over?

M.: I've come because yesterday at dinner you couldn't take your eyes off of me and you were sketching something in your diary. I've come because I was afraid that you were making a sketch of me.

F.: You've come because you've followed your desire. You'll come to see me many times.

M.: How do you possibly know what I'll do. You're leaving tomorrow and may not see you again.

(Silence).

M.: I'm a normal man. Religious. A family man with five children. I'm also a member of parliament representing the Coalition Party. Also participating in the Peace Conference that is held here.

F.: A full biography. And what I do care for all this?

M.: You don't care? Indeed you seemed well informed. I was observing you very closely. The pupils in your eyes never changed.

F.: You're a clever man. Let's say that my hobby is to observe people. To sketch in my diary people's poses, movements, expressions and to draw conclusions on their lives, their thoughts, their past, and some times to read their future...

M.: What are you really? You are not a mere hairdresser.

F.: No, I am not. I'm really a witch. I know how to read minds. And how to seduce people that I desire, in a way that they should hunt me for the rest of their lives.

M.: I'm not especially clever. I went through university with great effort. But I believe in people. And I want to help them. What makes you think know that I'll be looking for you? That I'll phone you when you go back home?

F.: Yesterday I've given you my personal phone number. And it'll ring many times in the future. And it'll be you. Sometimes you'll speak and sometimes

you won't... Listen to me. You're not especially clever but you know to listen. You'll go places. It's written on the lines of your forehead. *(She stands up and tries to touch him but he moves back.)* Beware my politician. Not everyone wants to be saved. And perhaps doesn't deserve to. And you, in your need to save them in the name of your ideology or your religion, may arm the hand that will throw bombs -because I just don't believe that you're capable of doing such a thing- to kill women and innocent children, or whores waiting for their lovers in claustrophobic hotel rooms.

M.: Are the curtains drawn tightly?

F.: Don't be alarmed. No one will take your photo. And no one is taping our conversation.

M.: What are you? Are you a human or a demon?

F.: I'll be whatever you want me to. This is my art. Hairdressing is my living.

M.: I'm a good man. I'll tell you one thing. Don't you ever hurt any one.

F.: It sounds like a threat.

M.: Advice I would say.

(Embarrassment).

F.: You look as if your back is aching.

M.: Lately I've suffered much pain beginning from the coccyx up to the back of my neck. It feels like stabbings.

F.: You've neglected your body my saviour. *(She gets up and kisses his forehead. He doesn't refuse. Then she goes behind him.)* Let me give you a massage.

M.: Better turn off the lights.

(F. switches off the lights and turns on the radio. The voice of Oum Koulsoum is heard. After a little while in the dark, M.'s frightened voice is heard, then nothing. In a few minutes the table lamp is switched on again. Both of them are lying on the bed covered with their kimonos and looking at the opposite wall).

M.: Pardon me. I'm embarrassed. I'm a religious man. Forgive me if I've hurt you.

F.: Love never hurts people. It cannot harm anyone. And love making for me is a token of love for humanity.

M.: Please turn the light off. I need to go to the bathroom.

F.: At your commands. I'm here only to serve you.

(She turns the light off. After a while she turns it on again, M. is back. Now it's F.'turn. She gets up wrapped in her kimono and languidly walks towards the bathroom. She seems contented. M. is rummaging through her bag, purse, passport and then through the opened suitcase containing her clothes. He doesn't go through the small album with the photographs. Then he takes a one hundred dollar note from the inner pocket of his jacket and leaves it on the top of the suitcase. F. who had just come out of the bathroom is watching him. She wraps herself in her kimono and without a word lies on the bed.)

M.: May I go to the bathroom to get dressed?

F.: Naturally. As long as you're not late for dinner. Your colleagues will be waiting and might be concerned... Tomorrow morning I'm flying to Madrid. I'll be at Barajas airport at eight. I'll be waiting for your call.

M.: *(Comes out of the bathroom. He is looking at her.)* Have a good life. Don't harm anyone. Forgive me if we did something bad. I'm a normal man. *(He exits.)*

F.: *(Shuts her eyes and increases the volume of the radio. Oum Koulsoum is still on, She gets up languidly, picks up the one hundred dollar note and places it in her purse. She looks in the mirror over the desk. The lights are turned off.)*

SCENE B

(The same room. F. is lying on the bed in her kimono watching T.V. Enters Aziz dressed in a green suit. He is an athletic young man with short well groomed hair styled towards the back of his head. He stands against the wall next to the bed, picks up the remote control and finds a channel showing a football game. F. doesn't even turn her head to look at him. A few minutes pass.)

A.: *(In a low voice.)* Merde!

F.: How did you get in?

A.: Through the swimming pool entrance. Like always. A dollar was enough.

F.: And how did you find out about the room?

A.: I've rung in the afternoon.

F.: Are they still after you?

A.:

F.: What name are you using now?

A.:

F.: I mean what's in your passport.

A.:

F.: I don't know what to call you. Aziz is easier for me.

A.: *(Following the football match on T.V.)* Merde!

F.: Stop swearing! You're getting on my nerves. *(She gets up and approaches him, thus obstructing his view. He gives her a push so he can see the screen.)* What's this silver ring on your little finger? Give it to me. *(He gives her the golden ring from the other hand.)* Not this one. This has my name on it. The other one. I want to see the inscription.

A.: *(Calmly)* It's only a cheap one. It's something inscribed in Arabic.

F.: Who gave it to you?

A.: My Mother. *(He gets angry.)* Why are you asking? Did I ask who gave you the gold watch and the new suitcase?

F.: No one did. I bought them myself, I work. I don't need anything from anyone.

(There's silence.)

F.: Let's not argue. How long has it been since we've seen each other?

A.:

F.: Two three months. And not even a letter nor a phone call. Sometimes there's a call after midnight but no one talks. Is it you?

A.:

F.: It's you. I know.... What's her name?

A.: Why do you ask? Did I ask who gives you presents?

F.: There's no one else. Only you.... I was always straight with you. Why can't you be straight with me?

A.: *(He is getting ready to leave.)* Goodbye.

F.: Don't go. *(She takes the small bottle of brandy from the side table and takes a swig.)*

A.: Don't drink. I don't want to be married to an alcoholic.

F.: I'm not an alcoholic.

A.: And you're smoking a lot. The ashtray is full of buds. When did you start smoking again?

F.: They're not mine.

A.: Who was here then?

F.: *(Lifts her shoulders indifferently.)* Did I ask who gave you the cheap ring?

A.: *(Exits.)*

(In a few minutes.)

F.: Aziz! Aziz! Aziz!

A.: *(Reappears alluring like a panther.)* Did you call?

F.: No.

A.: I've come back only to avoid a scandal in the hotel.

F.: And not to get caught.....

A.: *(He is looking at her begging. His eyes filled with tears.)* There's no one else. Only you. I swear. On my mother's head....

F.: You swear so beautifully Aziz. And you betray your oath even more beautifully! But it's impossible to be mad at you. You're just like a grown child. Irresponsible. You've never asked about our son. I bet you don't even remember how old he is. He is eight. I've passed him in a boarding school in the south of France. Expensive. During the summer he'll spend his holidays with me in Madrid.

A.: Ah! That's fine.

F.: I call him Constantine. After my father. And I gave him my ex-husband's surname. Poor Jose. He loves him like a son. And you beast, not even a penny.

A.: He doesn't look like me at all. He's blond with blue eyes.

F.: So is your father and your brothers, except you.

(Silence.)

F.: I'm crazy to be running after you. And you've never given a damn. Always in and out of prisons, from bed to bed and from hospital to hospital. It's all my fault. I'm going to harden my heart so I can stop loving you. And I'll stop chasing you from town to town and visiting all the mediums on earth.

A.: I've come because I knew that you were here for me. Yesterday I saw you on the street, at the square near the metro. You were absent-minded. I thought that you'd pass through me. I followed you here.

F.: Then you must have seen the young student talking to me.

A.: You sat on a bench in the park. You were talking and looking the other way. After you'd left him cold and walked away.

F.: He asked me out and I refused. He was far too young and innocent. Why didn't you speak to me?

A.: I just wanted to see what you were up to when you were alone. I wanted to find out if you're seducing men on the streets.

F.: I'm still young and beautiful. I know the art of loving. And I'm available. Men glue on to me like flies on honey. *(She throws at him the other kimono.)* Go in and change.

A.: Who is he?

F.: There's no one but you. Only you. And you know it. And taking advantage of it.

A.: *(Still watching the game.)....*

F.: If I had met you in your teens, before you've had met her and before you get astray.

A.: Don't you talk about her....

F.: Are you still seeing her?

A.: *(He goes to the bathroom.)....*

F.: Do you love her?

A.: *(The sound of running water is heard.)....*

F.: *(She changes channel and is now watching a bad musical.)*

A.: *(Enters the room fresh in his kimono.)* I'm here. What else do you want?

F.: Nothing. Only you. Turn off the light.

A.: Why?

F.: I just don't want you to see me crying.

(They switch off the lights. F.'s heart-rending cry is heard, then silence. The lights are turned on again. Sound of running water is heard. F. is in the bathroom. Aziz is rummaging through her bag. He grabs a wad of money from her wallet, snatches some notes and hides them in his pocket then he places the rest back. Enters F. in her Kimono.)

F.: When will you come back?

A.: I don't know.

F.: I'm flying for Madrid the day after tomorrow.

A. Adiós.

F.: *(Lays on the bed and picks up the bottle. The lights go off.)*

ACT TWO

SCENE A'

(The same hotel room. Three months later. M. and F. are lying on the bed wearing their kimonos and watching T.V. Between them there's a painting of washed out pink tulips with orange reflections. On M's right there's a bottle of brandy and a glass. On F's left there's a fruit basket.)

F.: You're drinking a lot. It's really bad for your liver...

M.: My liver is quite strong after its ordeal caused by the disease that you gave me, as a gift.

F.: Hepatitis. I've never had it.

M.: You're a carrier and you don't know it.

(Silence.)

M.: *(Throws the glass over his right side gently. The glass rolls on the carpet.)* You've bonded me with your magic and I'm dragging behind you. What do you want in this country? Whom are you after? Why do you always stay in this hotel? I've left my job, my family for your sake. There could be a scandal and my political career at risk. I've sent you ninety two letters. One each day. All signed and with my photographs. Did you get them? Where are they? Give'em to me. I want to burn them.

F.: Give me your new suitcase with the combination to keep them all in.

M.: Take it. Take the scarlet bathrobe. And the new silk shirts. And the tie. Make a gift of it to your lover.

F.: Stop. That's nonsense. There's no body else.

M.: Don't lie to me. I've seen his photograph in your bag.

F.: Do you go through my stuff while I'm in the bathroom?

M.: I have hired a detective to follow you around. He has been asking questions and has found out things about you. He has been making inquiries into your past. He is here now.

F.: *(She jumped as if she was hit by live wires.)* How do you know? When is he coming?

M.: After he finish with his customers. As usual.

F.: *(She gets up, folding her arms in front of her breasts pacing up and down the room like a caged animal.)*

M.: Give back my heart you bitch. Let me go.

F.: *(Kneels on the side of the bed and wraps her hair around his legs.)* Please don't leave me. I shall die.

M.: We can't continue like this. We'll both be ruined. You already are.

F.: *(As if hypnotized)* I'll keep you for ever within me. I'll have your child. Then you may go. And one day he'll be proud of his father.

M.: How do you know it'll be a boy?

F.: I only give birth to boys.

M.: My wife has only girls.

F.: And the last one is not yours. Forgive me, I speak in riddles. Sometimes I say things without knowing why I said them.

(Silence.)

M.: *(Gets up ready to go.)*

F.: When you'll return you won't find me here.

(They move towards each other. F. turns the light off. M's heart-rending cry is heard.)

SCENE B'

(A. is lying on the bed in a similar room to the previous scene watching T.V. M's wearing a different kimono. He is pacing up and down the room thinking.)

A.: You're abstracting my view.

M.: Excuse me. *(Suddenly he gets upset.)* But how can you watch T.V. all day long? You're like a small child who needs a father to look after it.

A.: It's not true. Now and then I misbehave 'cause I've lost my father when I was very young.

M.: That's all we need now, at thirty for you to play the role of an orphan.

A.: Twenty eight.

M.: Your passport says thirty two.

A.: Do you go through my things when I'm in the bathroom? Listen, I need an Egyptian passport and Egyptian citizenship.

M.: What have you done now, are they chasing you? I hope that you haven't robbed a bank this time, have you?

A.: It's the usual nonsense. A customer with some weird tastes accused me of stealing two thousand dollars from him.

M.: My God, what a mess I'm in! For goodness sake when you are going to grow up?

A.: Never. Don't be upset.

M.: My God, I've ended up with a son I've never had.

A.: Shall I turn the light off or will you?

M.: The game is not over yet.

A.: Never mind.

(M. turns the light off. Wrestling noises are heard and A.'s heart-rending cry. Then water running. The television is turned on again. A. is searching M.'s trousers and gets a wad of dollar-notes out of a pocket and with pompousness he puts them in his. Meanwhile M's head appears through the bathroom door watching him.)

A.: What you've done here costs quite a lot. *(He comes out.)*

(The television is showing the football game. There's darkness.)

SCENE C'

(The same room, A. and F. are lying on the bed wearing their kimonos. A is drinking brandy and the television is on.)

F.: You're late.

A.: I was with a customer. What should I do? Leave him?

(Silence.)

F.: What's wrong? You're drinking. You never used to drink before. You're not even watching the game on T.V.!... Isn't business going well? *(She gets up and goes to his trousers. takes from the pocket a wad of dollar notes and counts them.)* Are you working for nothing now? Are you in love? *(Suddenly she raises the tone of her voice.)* I've asked you if you're in love. Say it?

A.: Don't scream. You're piercing my ears.

F.: I'll scream as much as I like. I'm paying for this room. And I've traveled all the way from Spain on the boat through rough seas, cause I couldn't get a plane ticket and I just felt that you needed me and bad dreams disturbed my nights...

A.: That's enough. You're not my mother. After all I must be free.

F.: Free? Who's free? Doesn't my freedom count?

A.: *(Gets up staggering, ready to leave.)*

F.: Are you going to switch the light off or shall I?

(A. stands in the middle of the room. F. switches off the light. There's wrestling noise. Then F.'s heart-rending cry followed by stillness. Then water running. The T.V. is switched on again. F. gets the dollar notes from A.'s pocket, keeps most of them and puts the rest back. A.'s head appears through the bathroom door.)

F.: You'll pay for what you've done.

ACT THREE

SCENE A'

(Three months later. The same hotel room. Exactly the same furnishings except for a glass wall erected vertically in the middle of the room through the bed dividing the room in half. On the right side near the window F. is standing in her kimono holding a dagger upwards. She is looking through the window. M. enters wobbling. He's wearing a suit with his tie undone.)

F.: *(Without turning around)* You came?... Drunken blind. Like a grown baby tottering around without direction. *(She turns to face him.)* That's enough. That's it. I'm releasing you. I can't be married to an alcoholic anymore.

M.: *(Walks unsteadily bumps onto the glass wall and falls.)* I've come from the end of the world so that we can make love. Tomorrow I'm leaving.

F.: Never again. Forget it.

M.: *(Takes out of his trousers a wad of dollar-notes and throws it up towards the ceiling.)* Here I've got money!

F.: *(mimicking his movements)* Your money doesn't count. I have money too. In fact, more than you.

M.: Whore! Woman of a male prostitute!

F.: A whore's customer! And a customer of a male prostitute!

M.: *(Collapses.)* Forgive me. It wasn't me. It was the drink.

F.: It was you alright. Silly little man. You want to rule the world when you're incapable of controlling the feebleness of your existence. I pity you. Coming here to pay handsomely for something that was already given to you as a gift. But love is a pearl. And the oyster of love opens up like magic. It cannot be forced open with a knife.

M.: Great Goddess, I see you double. One side of you is gentle. The other is wild holding a raised dagger.

F.: Blind! You've just begun to see. You've got the double vision of the abusers. When you'll be sacrificed, when you'll have paid for your insults with your bleeding soul, only then you'll see who I really am. Then you'll see for the first time yourself. And you'll be shocked by your pettiness and by your greatness.

M.: Great Mother, receive me in your arms. To be rescued for ever from the world's tribulation.

F.: Who are you? Trying to refuse struggle, to escape life. If I hated you I would've accepted your plea and I'd have sheltered you in my bosom for ever. But now because I love you, I'll cut this biblical cord uniting us. We'll feel pain. We'll bleed. We'll cry out. And your lamentation shall heat steaming sulfur, we'll be together and we'll be apart, thrown on the prows of two ships and we'll sail and blown by different winds. And I'll tie a red scarf to the top of the mast. And you'll greet me with your eyes. Then you'll find me again and you'll be everything to me. Son, father and mother, brother and my equal. Now go.

M.: Tell me that you've never loved me. Tell me that I was just a customer.

F.: I will no give you this pleasure. Not because my lips cannot lie but because you must pay. You must pity yourself and punish yourself. You must shed tears and feel pain in order to find yourself. Then you'll be strong enough to reach your goal. Go now. Disappear. *(She raises and lowers her dagger. Suddenly the lights go off. M.'s heart-rending cry is heard. Then a baby's cry. And sea-sounds alternating with the sounds of a flute.)*

SCENE B'

(The same scenery. On the right hand side towards the window is standing A. looking outside. He's wearing a kimono holding a Mauritanian sword raised between his eye-brows. Enters M. crawling on his knees and drunk.)

A.: You're ten years older than I am. And there are moments that I see in you my dead father who left us when I was eight years of age. And my eldest brother who raised me. Also I found in you the prison warden who visited me often. But you're the baby now because you're afraid to fight and you don't want to struggle. Because you see life as a horrid battlefield covered with fragmented bodies and you're desperately wanting to escape.

M.: When I phoned you I needed you to be there, waiting for me.

A.: You're calling much too often.

M.: Twenty times a day. *(He gets a wad of dollar-notes out of his pocket and throws it up in the air.)* Because I'm paying.

A.: Only that there're some things you can't buy. Like freedom. Listen. A person who has done time in prison and is a true human being can't be slaved for all the riches in the world. Wherever he sees a mountain with waterfalls and melting snow he'll climb it. And wherever there's sea and boys playing a football game on the sand he'll run. And wherever he finds a fresh kiss he shall harvest it.

M.: Love is slavery.

A.: Love is a bird.

M.: But birds fly away never to return.

A.: They do return when the cage door is kept open and there's water in their tray and full of seeds in their painful gaze.

M.: Where are you off to at nights?

A.: I just like to go out. To walk around.

M.: *(Ironically)* Always entering expensive hotels through the back door, tipping the porter.

A.: Now you're insulting me. And you shall be punished. Go and never come back. I won't be here. You won't find me.

M.: I see you double. The way you usually are in your kimono and as a beast with a sword. A beast with a lion's body, a lizard's back, a monkey's scull and a dog's snout, a green frog's neck and a black breast like a cockroach.

A.: Now you have the double vision of an insulter. You'll pay with body and soul. You'll cry and you'll suffer. Then you'll realize whom I really am. Pick up the dollar notes from the floor. Place them on the side table. Then uncover your thigh so that I can incise with my sword the scar of initiation.

M.: I'm afraid.

A.: Don't say a word. I know. I was frightened too... Then I'll give you the armour of the warrior and you'll merge into the battlefield with yourself. You shall win just before exhaustion and after forty days and forty nights in a duel. you'll throw the swords away and you shall kiss through the mirror that separates you.

M.: *(Kneels on the one knee.)* I'm ready.

A.: *(Lowers the sword while the lights go down.)* You're my son and my father. My brother, my stepfather and my nephew. You're my son and I'm your father, your brother, your nephew and your stepfather.

(The lights go out. The sound of M's heart-rending cry is heard.)

SCENE C'

(The same room. F. wearing a kimono is standing near the window. A dagger is hanging on the wall. On the left wall near the door from where A. enters wearing a kimono is hanging a sword.)

A.: I've come because I've missed you. I've come because I was tired of living away from you. I didn't know that I existed only for you. I was leaving running away but you've always pulled me near you, like a magnet in the entrails of a volcano, where one finds comfort from the snow that weighs the heart down.

F.: You came because you've followed your desire. Because desire is a magnet which unmistakably draws your compass towards my body. I'm tired of running after you. Like the baby lion which nails have not yet harden and is conspiring against the young of a roe-deer while grazing in salty waters.

A.: *(Takes a passport out of his pocket. Lifts it high so she can see it.)* My name now is Juan. With residential address in Seville. I've bought a small barber's shop there from an old man who just got his pension. Madrid is not far away. You won't need to leave your job to look for me at the sinful streets of Casablanca...

F.: I just don't believe my ears. You've grown up so. You're not my little boy any more. What ever has changed you? The love of that man?

A.: There comes a time when one sees himself reflected in the mirror of the soul of another. And the beast which comforts him takes his speech away. And the commotion of the horses riding over the lake's waters take all his courage away.

F.: I can't believe the miracle. Although I've seen it a few times before. This won't last long either. As soon as you've stopped for a while and regained strength, your Berber blood will call you for new adventures. Then again, I don't know. A person changes. Once in a hundred years. Once in ten thousands. When he gazes at his soul straight in the eye and doesn't fear and doesn't turn into a column of salt. Then he may change and with him the human race shall be elevated. This is the only revolution possible.

A.: How old is our son?

F.: Thirty five. The boy who just left. Who's going to combat with the ghosts of his soul. The politician.

A.: I mean the other son in the orphanage.

F.: He came out of my body, but he wasn't born from my soul. He was a child of need not love. He'll grow well. He'll have everything. And one day he shall become a poet to sing the vastness of the lands and the meaning of the soul that is thirsty for love. The other is the one who arouses all my concerns. Because his soul is Berber and coarse. Because it brings all the wild human beasts to battle with him in the name of all of us. Hercules Labours are minimized before the race course of his soul. Even the courage of Ulysses is not enough to dissuade him from the delusions that the Sirens will be dripping in his ear with their soothing voices. But we shall be together, you with the sword and me with the dagger, head of the invisible theatre of the dead who would be chanting the hymn of joy to him and peaceful songs of victory shall lull him in our arms for ever, a three-mast ship with yellow sails and a scarlet rose on the stern.

A.: I want to see him again.

F.: We shall see him again. For one hundred years we shall be his guardian angels. Then he shall take our place, the dagger and the sword shall become a guide to the son of the poet, our grandson, who'll fight for peace in the world, when the war drums would have been melted and the red sea would have washed the battlefields and the wind would have cleared the smell of gunpowder spreading all over the heavy scent of chrysanthemum.

A.: The politician is our son. And our love will be with him to soften his thoughts when his hearing is deceived by the war sirens, by devastation and disaster. For love you give, love you shall receive.

F.: You've learned to love. You know it all. From a child you have become a man. Now we shall advance together in one body. Man and wife. And our child the politician, shall guide the tomorrow, a huge cerulean blue ship

cleaved on the yellow desert and on its stern shall be written with capital Greek letters «ΕΥΔΟΚΙΑ».

ACT FOUR

SCENE A'

(The same hotel room with the glass wall dividing the room. On the right side near the window A. and F. are standing dressed in their kimonos with arms folded in front of their chest. A.'s sword and F's dagger are hanging on the wall by their sides. Through the door on the left of the room enters M. dressed in a slick suit. He carries a leather black suitcase with airport labels on it. He rests the suitcase on the floor. On his left hand carries his folded raincoat. They look at each other no one speaks. He puts his right hand in the pocket of his trousers. Takes out a black flat pistol. He fires repeatedly but steadily until he runs out of bullets. A. and F. are still standing but they're petrified. The lights go off.)

SCENE B'

(The same scenery in the place of A. and F. stand two life-size wax replicas of them with their hands tied up in front of their breasts. They're wearing the same kimonos. The sword and dagger are still hanging on the wall.)

M.: I've come to settle our affairs. To heal the open wounds of the past. I shall become a Minister. My career above all. I cannot endure my past. My love affair with a whore who can at any time blackmail me, who may run after me, who holds on to my signed love letters, who perhaps has taped our erotic conversations or have nude photographs of me. *(He's rummaging desperately through A.'s and F.'s open suitcases. Throws on the floor wigs, vestments, ceremonial costumes, period costumes of stage repertoire, make-up instruments, weapons of various times and types, cassettes, photo-albums. He browses nervously through the albums.)* I'm not to be found anywhere. As if I've never existed. I cannot recognize myself anywhere. But what if someone else recognizes me in a period costume? *(Nervously, he puts a cassette in the cassette recorder over the side table. But the setting is on fast forward and it's impossible to recognize any voice.)* I'm not here either. There's no trace of me anywhere, not even my voice. And the corpses are standing upright watching me with wide opened eyes, almost invisible. *(He panics.)* I'll call the room service, I'll give him a heavy tip and he won't say a word. I want to know if I can see them. *(He picks up the phone receiver.)* Room service? Clean towels in room 402 please. *(He puts the receiver down. Some anxious moments pass. A young boy in uniform enters. He walks steadily and places the towels in the bathroom.)*

BOY: Do you need anything else Sir?

M.: Yes. Can you shut the window please?

BOY: Certainly Sir. *(He passes through the glass wall and between the wax figures without giving any sign that he acknowledges their presence. He shuts*

the window, returns the same way passing M. and stands by the door.) Do you need anything else Sir?

M.: No thank you. Good night! Or rather bring me a bottle of whisky. *(He waits till the door closes behind him.)* A murder without bodies. I cannot confess anything. What if he was pretending that he didn't see so he wouldn't miss out on the tip? The customer is always right. If I call the police and they don't see the bodies either, they'll lock me in a mental asylum. And I suffer from claustrophobia. My career will be destroyed. *(He turns towards the replicas.)* And they are not about to speak to me. Go on! What do you have to say? *(Silence.)* Nothing. The dead never speak. Only the living are trying to fill the gap with words. *(There's a knock on the door. He panics. He moves around the space as if he is trapped.)* The boy has called the police. What am I to do? I'm gone... It'd be better if I go to jail. To pay and to be freed. Come in!

BOY: *(Enters carrying a silver tray with a bottle of drink and a crystal glass on it.)* Your whisky Sir. *(He places the bottle and the glass on the table.)* Do you need anything else Sir?....

M.:

BOY: Sir?!?!

M.: *(Takes out of his trousers a wand of one hundred dollar notes and gives it to the boy.)*

BOY: *(dumfounded)* But Sir!...

M.: Take it and go. *(He puts the money in the boy's pocket.)*

BOY: Thank you very much Sir! *(He exits with an indescribably surprised expression on his face.)*

M.: *(Sits on the floor next to his suitcase. He opens the bottle and fills the glass. Before he drinks he raises the glass towards the dead. He drinks. The same movement is repeated as long as the director or the audience desire. Then the lights go off.)*

ACT FIVE

SCENE A'

(The same hotel room with the glass wall in the middle and the wax replicas of A. and F. Enters M. carrying on his right hand a suitcase and on his left a raincoat. He looks old and tired. He puts the suitcase on the floor, hangs the raincoat in the wardrobe and sits at the edge of the bed with his back turned towards the wax figures. His head's buried in the palms of his hands with elbows resting on his knees. There's silence. Then slowly as if he was talking to himself.)

M.: Initially I was possessed by a fury. A mania to excel in my job. But I began making mistakes because my mind was trapped in this room with the wax replicas of the people I've loved most. I've been had by my implacable friends. They've trapped me and they referred me to an examining committee in Parliament for a supposed scandal. I didn't even have the courage to defend myself. The guilt for your murders weighs heavily on my soul. They understood and left me be. You just don't beat a soaked dog that's trembling. However, my career now is irretrievably destroyed. I've started painting again. I hadn't touched a brush since I've left University. But I began to paint horrid mythological creatures. With a lion's body, a lizard's neck, a monkey's skull, a dog's snout and the chest of a black cockroach. I freaked out and threw pencils and brushes away. I went to Tibet seeking to enter monastic life. They didn't accept me. I've returned here to either redeem myself or die. (He faces the wax figures, standing right across them). You, that I've loved so. You, that your love weighed on my heart and I've killed you. You, that have knowledge of my existence, appear here tonight and give me death or peace. I've paid with my soul for my sin. If I still owe you something I'm ready to pay the price. But let's get it over with, here and now.

(The lights change and the replicas come to life. F. unhooks the dagger of the wall and raises it high. A. also unhooks the sword of the wall, pulls it out of its sheath and raises it above his head threatening as if he was riding a horse. Lights change once more and supernal music is heard. Then the barking of a dog. M. jumps up as if he was bitten on his calf.)

F.: You were always impatient. But for us any time will do.

A.: You've come as always uninvited and impudent. This time however, humiliated. What do you want?

M.: Now I'm seeing you as you really are. And I shiver. A cold hand is spreading on my spine depilated cyclamen calyces. I don't know what I want any more. Who I am. I don't know what I'm doing in this room which seems to me as if I've spent all my life.

F.: You've lost in the first round because you were unwise and foolish. Because you were impatient like a frightened little man. However, you still have one more chance. If you miss out on this one as well you shall pass onto our side agonizing for the living, who day and night, struggle with their ghosts.

A.: You still have one more chance. Beware to learn from your experience. Because each time a living being makes the same error the dead become disturbed and suffer in their milky serenity.

M.: What must I do? My weary childish soul flatters on the call of hope.

F.: No one is asleep when the angel of Erebus is blowing the thousand year old trumpet.

M.: What if I don't answer the call?

F.: You will because the chain would break. And we all three shall sink into darkness for another eternity.

M.: And will he not sink with me?

F.: He has more circles to turn. Only that we shall be much too far away to protect him.

M.: I'm frightened.

A.: You mustn't be. What's needed is modesty and wisdom.

M.: And if I'm not too careful and give an ounce more love than needed.

A.: The glass of his life's water shall freeze.

M.: And if I'm not too careful and give an ounce less love than needed.

A.: His life's water shall evaporate.

M.: It's time for you to go. Move back. I must not be distracted in this battle.

F.: You're arrogant. You're unable to fight without our counsel.

A.: But we shall withdraw to leave the field clear.

(The lights on the right side of the room go off. There's silence. A knock on the door. M. does not answer. The door opens and the boy enters dressed in travelling gear carrying a suitcase.)

BOY: Have you asked for me Sir?

M.: *(Turns around and looks at him. Moments seeming like an eternity. The lights slowly go off.)*

THE END

INDEX

CONSPIRACY IN ALGERIA.....	2
MURDER IN TANGER.....	49
HECATE.....	55