

OUROBOROS
The Nun's Tale

by Tom Jacobson

Playwrights Ink
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

TOR, 30-35, handsome, blond, dresses and whistles well

MARGARET, 40-45, attractive, blonde, repressed, dresses practically

PHILIP, 40-45, nice-looking, dark-haired, polite, gentle

CATHERINE, 40-45, dark-haired, very pretty, very emotional

ITALIANS, 30-40, several roles to be played by one dark, handsome, bearded actor, including:

MILANESE POLICEMAN

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

SIENESE MAN

MAN OF SORROWS

DOMINICAN MONK

MAN IN A TOWEL

PRIEST

BOOKSELLER

TOUR GUIDE

SIGNOR DONNOLA

The action takes place in various locations in five Italian cities. It is October.

SETTING: Upstage, a curved stone wall is interrupted by two archways, one with a modern gate. Other furnishings used as needed include two chairs and a bed. The bed, if possible, should slide in and out of the upstage wall.

COSTUMES: TOR and MARGARET wear warm colors, mostly yellows and golds, the brightest in Milan. PHILIP and CATHERINE wear cool colors, mostly blues and grays, the most somber in Rome.

NOTE: The play's five sections may be performed two ways:

Rome, Siena, Florence, Venice, Milan (The Nun's Tale)

OR

Milan, Venice, Florence, Siena, Rome (The Priest's Tale)

Rome

In the darkness someone is whistling Edvard Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King*, which continues as the lights come up. A dark, handsome BOOKSELLER, 30s, hangs a banner between the two upstage arches. The banner is emblazoned with the insignia of the Roman Empire: SPQR. The BOOKSELLER disappears. MARGARET strides on with her guidebook, stops, turns, and glares behind her.

MARGARET

Tor! Tor!

(Slaps her thigh.)

Come on!

(TOR strolls into view, still whistling.)

Please stop that whistling.

TOR

(In a Peter Lorre voice.)

I can't help myself!

MARGARET

And try to keep up--you have to stride purposefully in Rome or the gypsy children will be all over you.

TOR

I'd pay for that.

MARGARET

Yes, you would. They're either incredibly subtle or incredibly vicious and--

(Pulls a money pouch from within her slacks.)

--If you don't have one of these, they'll pick your pocket in a second.

(Hides the pouch again.)

TOR

I don't wanna rush my first trip to Italy.

MARGARET

That's why we're rushing--there's so much I want you to see. Bury your bitterness in art.

MARGARET (Cont.)

(Looking into her guidebook.)

After Sant' Ignazio and Gesu, which have wonderful ceilings, I'll take you to the Pantheon, the best preserved Roman building--

(Reads from the guidebook.)

“With its roof open to the heaven which gives swing to the whole.”

TOR

I'm not bitter.

TOR

Are we going to spend this whole trip with an illiterate guidebook?

MARGARET

Bad translation, good information. Andiamo! We barely have time to see all three before they close for lunch.

(Slaps her thigh.)

TOR

I'm not your basset hound.

MARGARET

At least Sophie wouldn't hang back to look available.

TOR

I saw four cute priests.

The BOOKSELLER appears in one of the arches, holding a book.

MARGARET

Please. I need to at least look like I have an escort.

TOR

I'm not your eunuch, either!

MARGARET

You're making a spectacle of yourself again.

TOR

Then stop being such a tight-ass. We're on vacation—loosen up!

MARGARET

I'm sorry. Really.

(Sotto voce.)

I'd just appreciate it if you wouldn't run after everything you see in pants.

TOR

Skirts! Some naughty Roman bishop is ordaining priests for their looks.

MARGARET

(Glancing at the BOOKSELLER.)

Not so loud, please.

TOR

You said Italians don't know much English.

BOOKSELLER

I know a priest-a. You want to meet?

TOR

Uh...no...grazie.

BOOKSELLER

A book?

(Opening the one in his hands.)

Past-a--

(Turning a page.)

Present-a.

TOR

Look, Meg, it's Roman ruins with an overlay of how they looked new.

BOOKSELLER

Past-a--present-a!

TOR

Cool!

MARGARET

Tor, we have to hurry. Mi dispiace. [I'm sorry.]

TOR

(As she pulls him offstage.)

Yeah, sorry. Thanks. God, Meg!

BOOKSELLER

(Hopefully.)

Past-a, present-a!

As the BOOKSELLER disappears there is a lighting change. Almost immediately MARGARET and TOR come on, peering at the ceiling.

MARGARET

(Reading from her guidebook.)

“The illusionistic decoration of the nave ceiling and dome was addled--” yes, that’s what it says--
addled--“by Il Baciccia in the seventeenth century--”

TOR

Look at all the God rays.

MARGARET

(Reading.)

“Called *The Triumph of the Name of Jesus*, this magnificently creation shows the assumption into heaven of the faithless--”

TOR

Then who are those people falling into hell?

MARGARET

Friends of yours, no doubt. What’s that in your pocket?

TOR

Meg, that’s personal.

MARGARET

No it’s not--it’s an unnatural lump.

(TOR pulls a votive candle from his pocket.)

You’re stealing candles from God.

TOR

No! They’re free.

MARGARET

Did you leave an offering?

TOR

I’m supposed to?

MARGARET

Yes, and you’re supposed to light it for someone’s soul, not just hook it. How ‘bout for Walter?

TOR

He’d like that.

MARGARET

(Takes candle. Gets money from her pouch, gives it to him.)
Put this in that slot over there. Pagan.

TOR

Am I embarrassing you?

MARGARET

No, but I'm going to take you somewhere you'll feel more at home.

TOR

A Greek temple?

MARGARET

We've been staring at ceilings and sky all morning. This afternoon we're going the opposite direction.

TOR

(Excitedly, as he follows her out.)
The catacombs? Or that chapel decorated with monkey bones?

MARGARET

Neither. And it's Capuchin *monks*, not monkeys.

As soon as they are gone, the lighting changes and a DOMINICAN MONK comes out of the gated entrance. CATHERINE drags PHILIP on through the ungated arch. He looks unwell, disheveled.

PHILIP

You don't believe a word I've said, do you?

CATHERINE

I believe every other word. Now we're going to find out about the other half.
(To the DOMINICAN.)
Quanto, per favore? [How much, please?]

PHILIP

If you did, you'd understand why we can't come here--

DOMINICAN

(With an Irish accent.)
Five Euros for the two of you.

PHILIP

Catherine, it's seriously a matter of life and death--

CATHERINE

(Handing the DOMINICAN money.)

Grazie.

(To PHILIP.)

I know that. Better than you, I'm quite certain.

(She drags him out through the gate.)

DOMINICAN

Don't fall on the stairs--they're dampish.

(To TOR and MARGARET, who arrive through the other arch.)

Welcome to San Clemente.

TOR

Thank you, father.

MARGARET

(Handing the DOMINICAN money.)

He's a Dominican monk, Tor, not a priest.

TOR

Oh.

DOMINICAN

(Holding the gate open for them.)

I'm a brother. Be careful on your way down.

TOR

I always am, brother.

Immediate lighting change as the DOMINICAN disappears after them, leaving the gate open. PHILIP and CATHERINE come in through the other archway.

PHILIP

I have to tell you I'm feeling very disoriented right now. I'm cold.

CATHERINE

We're fifteen feet underground. The 12th-century nave is directly above us.

PHILIP

I wish you hadn't thrown away my map.

CATHERINE

Without a map you're less likely to stray. And I'm not afraid to ask for directions. What time is she coming?

PHILIP

She didn't give me an exact time--sometime between four and five, I think. And he's coming with her.

CATHERINE

They must have a very strange relationship.

PHILIP

She's not coming to meet me--she doesn't even know we're here. She doesn't know we exist.

CATHERINE

(In the gated arch.)

Oh, well, I have a surprise for him, too. The lowest level?

PHILIP

(As they disappear through the arch.)

Yes. What? What surprise do you have for him? What do you have for her?

The moment CATHERINE and PHILIP disappear,
TOR and MARGARET come through the other
arch.

MARGARET

(Reading from her guidebook.)

"Around the entrance spring beautiful lovely frescoes discovered by Father Mullooly in his excavation between 1858 and 1870." That's the young boy—

(Reading from her guidebook.)

—Discovered alive in the priest Saint Clement's tomb beneath the Sea of Azov.

TOR

Those priests, I tell you.

MARGARET

The church on this level was built in the fourth century, but these frescoes were added in the ninth when Pope Leo filled in between the columns to add support after the earthquake of 847.

TOR

People worshiped here? It's really creepy.

MARGARET

It wasn't underground then. And you ain't seen creepy yet.

(Pointing to the open gate.)

There's another level below this one.

TOR

What's that? Cretaceous period?

MARGARET

There's a Roman altar to Mithras.

TOR

Who's that?

MARGARET

The god of an all-male religion.

(TOR dashes through the open gate.)

Tor! Oh, for heaven's sake! Tor!

As soon as MARGARET disappears after TOR, the lights change (becoming even spookier), and CATHERINE and PHILIP come through the un gated arch. Sounds of rushing water.

CATHERINE

Where are they? You didn't make this up did you?

PHILIP

No.

CATHERINE

You're going to meet her later and this is some kind of dodge.

PHILIP

We probably beat them down here. Or they're somewhere off in this maze. We should leave.

CATHERINE

Let's split up--I'll go this way--

(She points.)

And you'd best call me when you find her.

PHILIP

What do you plan to do?

CATHERINE

Inspiration will strike.

PHILIP

Be careful what strikes you. You could very well lose me here.

CATHERINE

(Just before she disappears through the gated arch.)

I've lost you already.

She leaves, and PHILIP disappears the other way. TOR is heard whistling the song of the Wicked Witch of the West's soldiers from *The Wizard of Oz*. MARGARET and TOR come into view. MARGARET tries to sing along with TOR'S whistling, but her voice cracks and sounds terrible.

MARGARET

Oh, dear. Even the low register.

TOR

Still gone, huh?

MARGARET

I'd hoped the trip would relax me, maybe bring it back. Oh, well.

(Reading from the guidebook, pointing.)

"In the triclinium thrusts the Mithraic altar, of which around the banquet would eat to celebrate the victory of Apollo and Mithras before they ascended to heaven."

TOR

So here's where they had all-male rituals? Two stories underground?

MARGARET

Mithraism--which was really Persian, I think--valued honor and loyalty--something quite foreign to the all-male rituals you have in mind.

TOR

(Pointing to the gated arch, which is still open.)

Are those stairs?

(Peers in.)

MARGARET

That's the unexcavated fourth level.

TOR

Do they know what's down there?

MARGARET

Probably the remains of buildings burned in Nero's fire in 64 A.D. But it could be Etruscan, even older.

TOR

I can't believe they haven't dug it up.

MARGARET

Probably not enough money.

TOR

The Catholic Church? More likely something they don't want people to see.

TOR examines the gated arch more closely.
Suddenly PHILIP appears in the other archway. He
and MARGARET see each other.

PHILIP

Oh.

MARGARET

Oh.

CATHERINE appears in the gated archway, almost
running into TOR.

CATHERINE

Well, hello. So nice to see you both again.

TOR

Uh...nice to meet you, but--

MARGARET

I don't believe we've met. You're American?

PHILIP

(As CATHERINE laughs.)

I told you they don't know us.

(To MARGARET.)

Margaret, I know this sounds completely nuts, but you have to listen to me--

CATHERINE

No, listen to me this time--

MARGARET

How do you know my name?

PHILIP

Don't go to Milan! Promise me you won't go there.

TOR

Uh...listen--mister--you're freaking us out. At least you're freaking me out--Meg, is he freaking you out?

PHILIP

Tor, look, there's not much time, and if you care about Margaret--

TOR

Now he's really freaking me out—

MARGARET

Yes, freaking out is a pretty good description--who are you?

CATHERINE

As if you don't know! You lying cunt!

PHILIP

Catherine, shut the hell up!

MARGARET

Tor, I think--

TOR

Okay, that's enough--let's come back another time--

CATHERINE

(Throwing herself in the archway, preventing their escape.)
No! You put me through hell--!

MARGARET

I don't know you!

CATHERINE

--So it's my turn to play Virgil!

TOR

(Starts to pull CATHERINE out of the way.)
Out of the way, lady--

PHILIP

(Pulling TOR away from CATHERINE.)
Let go of my wife!

MARGARET

Tor!

PHILIP

I'm sorry--I'm a little desperate--we just don't have time--

TOR

What's going on?!

CATHERINE

(To TOR.)
You started it with your stigmata!

TOR

Stigmata!?

PHILIP

Catherine, he hasn't done that yet!

TOR

You mean like bloody palms and feet?

PHILIP

I really can't explain any of this--it's not rational--

TOR

You'd better try--

MARGARET

Tor, he's not the problem.

CATHERINE

Oh, I'm the problem? I don't think so, sister.

PHILIP

Just don't go to Milan, please!

MARGARET

But that's the whole purpose of our trip--so I can see La Scala.

It's sort of a pilgrimage--

TOR

It's suicide. And a sin.

PHILIP

Opera is a sin?

MARGARET

It depends on the production.

TOR

Don't listen to him. Go to Milan. Jump off the Duomo.

CATHERINE

What?

MARGARET

Catherine, she doesn't know what you're talking about. She's innocent. I'm the guilty one. The one who should be punished--

PHILIP

Do you love my husband?

CATHERINE

I don't know your husband.

MARGARET

Philip, do you love her?

CATHERINE

(After a moment.)

Yes. Yes, I have to say I do.

PHILIP

Oh, Philip.

CATHERINE

But I've never met you before.

MARGARET

You were right, Meg. Italy is romantic.

TOR

PHILIP

I'm sorry, Catherine, but I do love her. I love you too, but...I love her.

(To MARGARET.)

Your thoughtfulness in Florence, your kindness to Catherine in Siena--

TOR

We haven't been to Florence or Siena!

PHILIP

But I need to know—does salvation require a leap of faith?

MARGARET

It's the grace of God, but, yes, you have to leap, I think.

PHILIP

Of course!

(Suddenly he kisses her.)

TOR

(Pulling them apart.)

I'm gonna call a cop--if I knew Italian--

(MARGARET is left gasping, but not particularly upset.)

CATHERINE

Right in *front* of me!

PHILIP

Thank you, Margaret. You convinced me. The choice is mine, but it's the opposite of yours.

We can't be together—I can't stop you from going to Milan—

CATHERINE

Thank you, Philip, for finally being honest with me.

(Starting to open her blouse.)

It makes this a lot easier.

MARGARET

Excuse me, but what is easier? Nothing easy--or even comprehensible--is going on here.

CATHERINE

Look what you've done to me in the last two weeks.

PHILIP

(Trying to stop her, but she pushes him away.)

Catherine, don't show them--

CATHERINE
I'm showing you, too, Philip.

PHILIP
I deserve it, but not Margaret--

TOR
Um...lady...I'm actually mammophobic--

MARGARET
I really don't want to see--

PHILIP
Where's the light?

CATHERINE
Light, yes, that's what we need!

PHILIP
(Stepping into one of the archways.)
No, we don't! I've decided-- No light!

CATHERINE
These are my wounds--but they're your scars!

CATHERINE tears open her blouse, revealing many small scabs and wounds on her chest. Almost immediately, there is a crash from the arch where PHILIP has gone, and the lights go out completely. There is silence for a moment.

CATHERINE
Philip? Where are you?

TOR
Meg, are you all right?

PHILIP
Catherine, give me your hand.

MARGARET
Tor, where are you?

PHILIP
Margaret, hold onto me.

CATHERINE

Philip! I feel him! He's here!

TOR

That's just me!

CATHERINE

It's him! In the dark--where he always is! I need your hand! Philip?!

PHILIP

I'm sorry, Catherine. I can't change it. There has to be a sacrifice--

CATHERINE

You can't just *decide*--

PHILIP

No greater love has any man than to lay his life down for his friends.

(There is a groaning sound from the earth, like an earthquake but somehow sentient.)

CATHERINE

Philip! No, no, please don't leave me!

TOR

Was that an earthquake?

MARGARET

Maybe, but it didn't feel exactly--

A flashlight plays across the walls of the room from one of the archways.

DOMINICAN

Signora e signori! Ladies and gentlemen! Mesdames et monsieurs! E un terremoto piccolo. Only a small earthquake! Uno momento! Luce! Licht! Light!

The lights come back on, revealing TOR holding MARGARET by one hand and CATHERINE by the other. PHILIP is nowhere to be found. The DOMINICAN MONK comes into the room through one of the archways holding a broken light bulb.

DOMINICAN

Is everyone all right?

CATHERINE

(Pulling her hand from TOR'S and hastily buttoning her blouse.)
Where's my husband?

TOR

(To MARGARET.)
You okay?

MARGARET

Fine.

DOMINICAN

This level is a labyrinth. Perhaps you can call him?

CATHERINE

Philip!

TOR

Shall we go?

MARGARET

Let's wait till she finds him. I feel somehow--

TOR

Responsible? No way!

CATHERINE

(Disappearing into an archway.)
Philip! I'm sorry! Philip!

MARGARET

Philip!
(Peering into the gated archway.)
Philip!

TOR

Oh, for God's sakes, Margaret! Let's not get involved in a manhunt!

DOMINICAN

Philip!
(Disappears through an arch.)

MARGARET

(In the gated archway.)
What's this?
(Kneels, picks something up.)

TOR

And don't get all archeological when we should be leaving.

MARGARET

Catherine!

TOR

Quiet!

MARGARET

That is her name, isn't it?

CATHERINE and the DOMINICAN come back
through the ungated archway.

CATHERINE

Philip?

MARGARET

Did Philip...uh...your husband--does he have an unusual wedding ring?

CATHERINE

(Takes the ring from MARGARET.)
Aah--this!
(Throws it to the floor.)
Where'd you find it?

MARGARET

(Picking it up.)
Is it his?

CATHERINE

It's yours. Where was it?

MARGARET

(Points.)
Mine?

TOR whistles the *Twilight Zone* theme.

CATHERINE

You gave it to him. What's under here?

DOMINICAN

We haven't excavated the fourth level.
(As CATHERINE starts to dig with her hands.)
Ma'am, you can't do that.

CATHERINE

He's down there.

MARGARET

It's just rocks and packed debris--

CATHERINE

I heard the ground open!

TOR

That was an earthquake--we have them all the time in L.A.--

MARGARET

The ground doesn't just open and close without a trace--

CATHERINE

(In tears but still digging.)
Then where is he?

DOMINICAN

Perhaps it's best if you leave her with me.

MARGARET

But--her husband--can't we help--?

CATHERINE

No!

MARGARET

I don't even know her and she's breaking my heart.

CATHERINE

Leave me alone!

TOR

Meg, you can't help everybody. Sometimes you lose a round.

DOMINICAN

This level is closed.

CATHERINE

He's just lost.

Lights down slowly as CATHERINE digs and cries softly while the DOMINICAN watches.

CATHERINE

Very, very lost.

Blackout.

Siena

Offstage, TOR whistles *That's Amore*. A SIENESE MAN appears and replaces the previous banner with a Sieneese Palio (a banner awarded the winner of a bareback horse race). As the SIENESE MAN leaves, MARGARET and TOR appear. MARGARET wears a white alb and a wooden cross, the habit of her order, and carries her guidebook.

Listen. MARGARET

What? TOR

No cars. MARGARET

TOR
Very nice after Rome. The streets are too narrow in Siena--?

MARGARET
How could they anticipate cars would be invented six hundred years later?

TOR
Couldn't Saint Catherine have predicted it?

MARGARET
She was a saint, not a prophet.
(Points out over audience.)
See, she was holy even as a young girl.

TOR
Is that her floating up the stairs?

MARGARET
(Pointing, then reading from her guidebook.)
And here she is--"receiving the gift of the stigmata from the crucifix at Santa Cristina in Pisa."

TOR
Holy laser beams, Batman.

TOR makes phaser noises while holding up his hands to receive the stigmata

MARGARET

You shouldn't make fun--she's Italy's patron saint.

TOR

So she could ruin our whole trip?

MARGARET

If we can survive Rome, we can survive anything.

TOR

That poor woman's probably still down there digging.

MARGARET

It's sad to think our trip was just beginning when theirs was ending so badly.

(Examining the ring.)

I wonder what happened to him, really.

TOR

Most likely he just left her--I would if I was married to Saint Scabby.

MARGARET

Fortunately for her, I don't think he's like you.

TOR

You're hot for him!

MARGARET

He's *married*! But do you know how long it's been since a man--an attractive man--kissed me?

TOR

I imagine your habit puts them off a bit. Or is that why you're wearing it, to catch a priest?

MARGARET

The Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory isn't celibate, just chaste, my effervescent sweetness, so I'm still more likely to get married than you are.

TOR

You Episcopalians find a way around anything.

MARGARET

It's my vocation!

TOR

Not an excuse?

MARGARET

For what?

TOR

Nothing. Never mind. You've always been religious—I just didn't realized you could get—*nunned*—so quickly.

MARGARET

So I'm a hypocrite?

TOR

Don't ask me--I worship all 128 Egyptian gods.

MARGARET

And your gods tell you to sleep with priests? Or are you just proving all religion a fraud?

TOR

So far this trip is a great disappointment. Just a couple of pathetic wanks in the train station men's room. And these priests--oh, so attractive, and oh, so aloof.

MARGARET

Perhaps they're sincere in their vows. Imagine that.

TOR

Nah. They're definitely hypocrites--like Father Cestaro.

MARGARET

You made that up just to irritate me. There's no way he came on to you.

TOR

He did! He did!

MARGARET

Right after preaching about immorality at Walter's memorial? Not even a Jesuit is that ballsy.

TOR

"The wages of sin is death," then his hand on my ass.

MARGARET

You wish he put his hand on your ass. He's so handsome.

TOR

Did they make you vow to defend all clerics, no matter how vile?

MARGARET

What he said was reprehensible, of course—

TOR

Why else would I hate him so?

MARGARET

And if he truly touched you, you know I'd be furious—

TOR

The word of any priest over that of your erstwhile best friend—

MARGARET

Erstwhile?

TOR

Meg, why would I lie to you, of all the people in the world?

MARGARET

(After a moment.)

What a bastard!

TOR

Thank you. He said I had no appreciation for dichotomy.

MARGARET

Dichotomy? I'm so sorry, Tor. But we know he's wrong about the wages of sin.

TOR

How?

MARGARET

Walter told me.

TOR

He...you mean his...ghost?

MARGARET

No. I just didn't think you were ready to hear—

TOR

Don't protect me!

MARGARET

On his deathbed--I felt horrible being there without you--

TOR

What did he say?

MARGARET

He saw heaven. He was going there, describing it with his last breaths.

TOR

Like...what?

MARGARET

Very Hollywood, actually--clouds, God rays, the throne of judgment. I don't remember. But my point is he got there.

TOR

Meg, the nurse told me he went out screaming.

(She looks away.)

What did he see?

MARGARET

Nothing.

TOR

That's why you stopped singing.

MARGARET

Tor, please. I know you're trying to be a good friend, but I don't need adult supervision.

TOR

(Trying to change the tone.)

You did when I pried that Philip guy off you after he started haunching on your leg.

MARGARET

(Laughing and looking at the ring on her finger.)

It was a very nice kiss. Here's what came with it.

TOR

(Looking at it.)

A snake swallowing its own tail. And why are we wearing it?

MARGARET

(Shrugs.)

I know. A Bride of Christ shouldn't be thinking about other men.

TOR

Another romance with a dead man.

MARGARET

That's about my speed. Shall we float up the street to see St. Catherine's relics?

TOR puts his arm around her and whistles *Some Enchanted Evening* as they leave. Lighting change as CATHERINE and PHILIP enter with a map. He looks somewhat disheveled.

PHILIP

I just don't get this map. I can't find north.

CATHERINE

Perhaps, darling, you're insufficiently medieval.

PHILIP

Or perhaps it's because I didn't want to come here. I didn't get lost in Venice, and that was much more complicated.

(CATHERINE snorts.)

What? I didn't.

CATHERINE

Didn't what?

PHILIP

Get lost. This is the first time this vacation my sense of direction's failed me.

CATHERINE

You seemed to have some difficulty finding your way back to our hotel the night you chased after the ghost woman.

PHILIP

You sent me after her! We had a very long, very heated conversation. I told you that.

CATHERINE

Heat!

PHILIP

She had some strange ideas.

CATHERINE

Did you sleep with her?

(He just stares at her. She pulls out a ring)

Why did you keep her ring?

PHILIP

I threw that away this morning in Florence! Get rid of it!

CATHERINE

I found it in the wastebasket in our hotel. Did you sleep with her?

PHILIP

Yes.

CATHERINE

Whose strange idea was that?

PHILIP

Catherine, I'm really, really sorry. I've been so anxious, I'm practically sick. I didn't intend to tell you like this—wait till the trip was over so you wouldn't get--so it wouldn't--

CATHERINE

Wouldn't get what? Dangerous? Unstable? But then I just wouldn't be me, would I?

PHILIP

I've never done anything like this before and I never will again. I'm supposed to protect you, not—but I've never lied to you. I could have lied just now—

CATHERINE

I'm sorry, I'm not giving out extra credit points. Who is she and why did you do it? Why this time and never before? I've been worse before--I've driven you away before--why now?

PHILIP

She told me something.

CATHERINE

She loves you. She said that in Milan when we first saw her.

PHILIP

Yes--

(CATHERINE snorts.)

--But that's not the extraordinary part. She told me I loved her. I don't, of course, but she says I told her that in Rome.

CATHERINE

You've never been to Rome. You won't be in Rome until the day after tomorrow.

PHILIP

Exactly.

CATHERINE

Are you always attracted to women with mental problems?

PHILIP

She had this theory. It's alchemy. And it has to do with this ring.

(He takes the ring.)

CATHERINE

That's why you kept it?

PHILIP

It's the symbol for this alchemical process--and we're stuck in it. It's circular, goes backwards and forwards at the same time, always striving for balance. Maybe this is my punishment, my judgment--maybe some kind of sacrifice is required to offset--

CATHERINE

You're leaving me!

PHILIP

No! You know I can't!

CATHERINE

She's more interestingly insane than I am! You have this urge to nurture--

PHILIP

I'd never want to leave you!

CATHERINE

You did that night!

PHILIP

And if I did, it wouldn't be for someone else! Only if I thought it best for you. Maybe I'm your problem.

CATHERINE

I need to pray. I'm feeling rather vengeful right now.

PHILIP

I'll pray with you.

(Kneels.)

We can do it right here.

CATHERINE

No, we're trying to find San Domenico--we might as well--

(A SIENESE MAN walks by.)

Scusi, Signore. Dov'e la chiesa di San Domenico? [Where is the church of Saint Domenic?]

SIENESE MAN

(Points through archway.)

Eccola, Signora! Eccola qua! [There it is, Signora! It's there!]

CATHERINE

Mille grazie. [A thousand thanks.]

(The SIENESE MAN leaves.)

It's right there. Maybe St. Catherine can help.

PHILIP and CATHERINE leave through the archway. Lighting change as the SIENESE MAN sets two chairs upstage between the arches, then disappears as MARGARET and TOR appear. They stare at something out over the audience.

TOR

Now that's barbaric.

MARGARET

It's a great honor. Preserved relics have tremendous spiritual power.

TOR

Good thing I'll never be a saint.

MARGARET

Did I ever tell you my favorite story about St. Catherine?

TOR

We didn't get to that chapter of Martyrdom Bedtime Tales.

MARGARET

She was nursing wounded soldiers and found herself nauseated by the blood and suffering. So to overcome her disgust, she drank a bowl of cancerous pus.

TOR

They didn't have Alka-Seltzer in those days?

MARGARET

She was extreme, but that's how you end up with an altar dedicated to your memory.

TOR

(Referring to the altar.)

It's so ghoulish. Do you think the gift shop has a postcard of this?

MARGARET

I'm sure they do.

MARGARET and TOR exit. CATHERINE drags PHILIP on.

CATHERINE

Her altar should be right over here.

PHILIP

Catherine, please--

CATHERINE

This is why we had to come to Siena instead of Arezzo--

(They look where TOR and MARGARET had been looking.)

It's...my head!

PHILIP

It's St. Catherine's head.

CATHERINE

I'm Catherine.

PHILIP

You're not a saint.

CATHERINE

I'm looking into my own face!

PHILIP

Sweetheart, that head's been dead 600 years. See, it's all dried up, yellow--

CATHERINE

It's like a mirror!

PHILIP

Catherine, please. It's just a relic--

CATHERINE

It means I'm going to lose my head!

PHILIP

(Leading her to the chairs.)

You lose your head every day. You always get it back.

CATHERINE

Philip, I feel it--I'm going to--

PHILIP

(Setting her down.)

No. No, don't start--

(She scratches furiously at her chest and arms.)

--No! No scratching!

(He grabs her hands. She pulls free and keeps scratching.)

Catherine, stop it!

CATHERINE

I can't stop! That's my head!

PHILIP

Okay. That's it. I'm calling a cab and we're going back to the hotel. Can you wait here for a minute?

CATHERINE

They took my head!

PHILIP

I'll just be gone a second. Try to relax, calm down. Do your--I know!--do your visualization exercise.

CATHERINE

I can't visualize without my head!

PHILIP

(Holding her.)

Think of Jesus. Come on, you know this works. The Good Shepherd who loves you.

CATHERINE

(Stops scratching.)
Jesus...

PHILIP

(Kissing and stroking her.)
Close your eyes and think of Jesus. He's coming to comfort you. Everything will be all right.

CATHERINE

(Relaxing somewhat, her eyes closed.)
Jesus...yes...I'm trying.

PHILIP

Good. Jesus will be here with you while I go get a cab. Then we'll go back to the hotel and watch CNN.

CATHERINE

Jesus. I think He's coming.

PHILIP

(Stepping away from her.)
Just relax and think of Him and I'll be back before you know it.

CATHERINE

Please, Jesus...

PHILIP dashes out. Almost immediately, the MAN OF SORROWS appears, the crucified Christ, with bloody hands, feet and side. He wears only a loin cloth and crown of thorns.

CATHERINE

I know you love me. Your sufferings were for me. Please come. Let me see you. Oh, Lord, please.

(She opens her eyes and sees him. She gasps.)
Thank you. I knew you'd come. But you're not the Good Shepherd. You're the Man of Sorrows. Why are you so sad? Is it sin? The sins of the world you sacrificed your life to save? Or is it me? Are you sad for me?

(MAN OF SORROWS nods, sadly.)
You *are* sad for me! You know--of course, you know! You know more than I do! It's my sin that makes you sad? My husband's sin? Or both?

(MAN OF SORROWS smiles, suddenly looking devilish rather than holy.)
It is! It's our sin! But why are you smiling? You're smiling at our sin! Only the Devil smiles at sin!

(Gasps.)

CATHERINE (Cont.)

You're not Christ at all! You're him--you're Evil! Disguised as Jesus! Are you here to take me away? To take my husband? Go away! Get thee behind me!

(MAN OF SORROWS starts to laugh, cruelly.)

Oh, Jesus--the real Jesus!--save me!

(Buries her face in her hands.)

Help!

MARGARET and TOR appear but cannot see the MAN OF SORROWS. MARGARET hands postcards and a votive candle to TOR and goes to CATHERINE, putting her arm around her.

CATHERINE

Oh, Jesus, help me, please!

MARGARET

Shhh! It's all right. It's all right. Jesus is here. He's always here.

CATHERINE

(Trembling violently.)

Satan is here!

MARGARET

This is a church. A holy place.

CATHERINE

He's everywhere.

MAN OF SORROWS kisses TOR on the cheek (which TOR does not notice) and leaves.

MARGARET

But so is God. And God's more powerful.

CATHERINE

How do you know?

MARGARET

I have special connections.

CATHERINE

Who are you?

MARGARET

I'm Sister Margaret Mary.

CATHERINE looks up for the first time. All three of them gasp.

TOR

Meg, it's Saint Scabby!

CATHERINE

My husband is fucking *a nun!*

TOR

No, he's not. She's only a postulant. And he's not fucking her. She decided to be a nun right after she read the letters of Abelard and Heloise. Of course, Heloise was a nun who has an affair with a priest, but that's *not* why Meg became a nun, cause the priest ended up castrated as punishment--

MARGARET

Tor, those aren't exactly words of comfort--

TOR

And anyway your husband's dead or sucked down to hell or something--

PHILIP comes in. MARGARET and TOR both gasp.

PHILIP

I got the cab--

(Sees MARGARET with her arm around CATHERINE, comforting her.)

CATHERINE

My husband is a minister.

PHILIP

Margaret.

CATHERINE

A Lutheran minister. Which is why you'd think he'd feel more guilt.

MARGARET

Guilt, for what?

PHILIP

Lutheran guilt is very bad.

TOR

Worse than Catholic guilt? Or Jewish guilt?

PHILIP

Yes, because we also feel guilty for not being Jewish or Catholic.

CATHERINE

No one's laughing, Philip.

(To the others.)

I'm Catholic.

TOR

Quel surprise.

PHILIP

We weren't gonna come to Siena. Couldn't talk her out of it--Catherine wanted to see her saint.

(To MARGARET.)

And I'm glad to see you. I shouldn't be, but I am. I can't help it.

MARGARET

Why?

PHILIP

Margaret, she knows. I told her.

MARGARET

I don't know.

PHILIP

But I can't leave her. She needs me.

CATHERINE

And I'm Catholic. Don't forget that, Philip. No divorce!

PHILIP

I thought I could fix things if I never saw you again, get our life back to normal--but now that we're here maybe I can warn you, convince you--

TOR

Don't start with that "Beware the Ides of Milan" shit again.

MARGARET

Tor.

(To PHILIP.)

I just want to go to La Scala. I used to be a singer—

TOR

And I conduct—
 (Conducts.)
 —She’s in my choir—

MARGARET

Was. But I’m becoming a teacher
 and this is kind of my farewell to
 performing—

TOR

She’s retiring, to put it bluntly.

PHILIP

You’re performing at La Scala? You didn’t tell me that.

MARGARET

Oh, no.

CATHERINE

My husband is fucking the Singing Nun.

MARGARET

I can’t sing any more.

TOR

She lost her voice. Post-traumatic whatchamacallit. We’re in Italy to bury ourselves in culture before she abandons Los Angeles for Pennsylvania—she’s a little depressed and can’t forgive God—

CATHERINE

God can’t forgive *her*.

TOR

But he ought to ‘cause he needs forgiveness, too. It’s reciprocal, don’tcha think?

MARGARET

Tor! Please don’t babble.

TOR

Sorry.

PHILIP

Unless we do something, you’ll die, too, just like Signor Donnola in Florence--

MARGARET

Die, how?

CATHERINE

Suicide! I recommend it. Although I've never been able to get it right.

TOR

You're the one who died or disappeared or whatever.

CATHERINE

Where?

MARGARET AND TOR

In Rome.

CATHERINE

We haven't been to Rome.

MARGARET

Yes, you have. Three days ago.

PHILIP

What was the date?

TOR

The twelfth of October.

MARGARET

No, I think it was the thirteenth. We left LA on the twelfth.

TOR

That's right.

PHILIP

We were in Milan on the thirteenth.

CATHERINE

And so were you!

TOR

No, we weren't!

PHILIP

Okay, okay. What day is today?

TOR

(Looking at his watch. Outside, the cab honks.)
The seventeenth.

CATHERINE

Your watch is wrong.

PHILIP

It's the twenty-fourth. We were in Venice on the seventeenth.

CATHERINE

And so were you!

PHILIP

Today's the twenty-fourth for us, and the seventeenth for you.

TOR

Um...excuse me, but, one day at a time, I think, is how it works.

PHILIP

Let's ask a third party.

(They look around, see no one. PHILIP starts to leave.)
The cab driver.

CATHERINE

Oh, Philip, you don't know enough Italian.
(She goes.)

MARGARET

Is she gonna be all right?

PHILIP

I don't know what happens to her. I only know what happens to you and me if we don't change things.

TOR

What things? What should we change?

MARGARET

Are you talking about the future?

PHILIP

The future and the past.

(They just look at him.)

We're caught in something together, some kind of time thing--it might be called an Ouroboros, I don't know. And I'm trying to change it, change our itineraries, change something--

TOR

This is ridiculous.

PHILIP

Then how do you explain that I know you're gay?

TOR

And I thought I was so butch.

PHILIP

And that you want to sleep with priests.

TOR

Oh, who doesn't?

PHILIP

And that you think Margaret is in love with you. Margaret told me that.

TOR

Meg!

MARGARET

I did not!

PHILIP

In Venice.

MARGARET AND TOR

We haven't been to Venice!

PHILIP

And Margaret isn't in love with you. She's in love with me.

MARGARET

I am not!

CATHERINE comes in, but PHILIP doesn't see her right away.

PHILIP

We made love in your hotel room in Venice.

CATHERINE

The cabbie agrees with me. It's the twenty-fourth. He showed me his watch.

TOR

No way!

(He runs out.)

MARGARET

We did not make love. I never slept with your husband.

CATHERINE

I wish I believed you.

PHILIP

We did. We did.

MARGARET

Okay, prove it. If we made love—which we have not—what's my orgasm like? What do I do?

PHILIP

You...cry. You sob. You burst into tears.

They all stare at each other. TOR comes in.

TOR

He showed me his watch. It's the seventeenth.

MARGARET

Tor, we need to go.

TOR

But I just proved them wrong--

MARGARET

(Dragging him out the door.)

We need to go *now*!

PHILIP

(As they disappear.)

Margaret, I'm sorry!

(Sound of cab driving off. He looks at CATHERINE.)
Very, very sorry.

CATHERINE

You should be. They've taken our cab.

She leaves. He follows.

Florence

Offstage, TOR whistles *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*. A TOUR GUIDE appears, removes any other props, and installs a railing near the back wall, then changes banners; the new one has a representation of Michelangelo's *David*. TOR appears and leans against the railing, whistling. He is studying the unseen upper portion of the opposite wall. After a moment, CATHERINE appears. They see each other and he stops whistling.

CATHERINE

(Peering over the railing.)
Oh, it's so high!

TOR

(Gesturing toward the opposite wall.)
Look up at the devils instead.

CATHERINE

Is my husband among them?

TOR

Probably. Eventually. Have you seen Meg? I'm pretty sure she said she'd meet me up here in the dome.

CATHERINE

I haven't seen your wife since my husband disappeared after her in Venice.

TOR

She's not my wife. And we haven't been to Venice.

CATHERINE

Oh. But this *is* Florence, right?

TOR

Yes.

CATHERINE

The only Duomo with so many devils in the dome.

They lean against the rail together, staring at the Last Judgment fresco on the opposite wall. TOR whistles *The Theme from Vertigo*. MARGARET and PHILIP appear and almost run into each other across the stage from CATHERINE and TOR, who do not see them (and vice versa). MARGARET wears her traveling clothes.

MARGARET

(Shoving a votive candle into her purse.)
Oh, dear.

PHILIP

Oh, my. I'm...I'm supposed to meet my wife under the dome.

MARGARET

Tor is supposed to be here, too, but who knows where he is.
(Awkward pause. She looks down.)
Amazing floor, huh?

PHILIP

Yes. If Catherine were here, she could tell us all about it. She's an art historian.

MARGARET

Ah. I have to apologize for my behavior in Siena.

PHILIP

Too bad we're not going there so I'll never know what you mean.

MARGARET

I freaked when you told me we made love in Venice.

PHILIP

I'm really, really sorry. It was a terrible mistake.

MARGARET

Telling me?

PHILIP

No, what we did in Venice. Poor Catherine waited up half the night. And she's not very well.

MARGARET

I'm sorry, too. I feel awful for her.

PHILIP

I've been almost sick about it myself. But...it wasn't bad--

MARGARET

--For a nun.

PHILIP

You're a nun? I'm going to hell.

MARGARET

You saw what I was wearing in Siena.

PHILIP

No. It's not on our itinerary.

MARGARET

Our itinerary is Rome, Siena, Florence, Venice, and Milan.

PHILIP

Ours is Milan, Venice, Florence, Arezzo and Rome. Then the fun ends and we go to Limoges.

MARGARET

So we didn't see each other four days ago in Siena?

PHILIP

What's today?

PHILIP AND MARGARET

October twenty-first?

MARGARET

Oh, that's good. I think. Maybe things are normal now.

PHILIP

No, I don't think so. We're right in the middle of our trip and so are you.

MARGARET

Oh, my. A whadyacallit—

PHILIP

A palindrome.

MARGARET

Able was I ere I saw Elba?

PHILIP

(Holding out his hand, which she shakes.)
Madam, I'm Adam.

MARGARET

But you're not...in love with me, are you?

PHILIP

No. I'm sorry.

MARGARET

No, that's good, cause I'm not in love with you--it's just that--

MARGARET AND PHILIP

You said you were in love with me in Rome/Milan.
(They laugh.)

MARGARET

What else do I do in Milan?

PHILIP

You ask me about the pain of sacrifice--no--martyrdom. Why it's better than the pain of life.

MARGARET

What do you say?

PHILIP

I'd...rather not tell you. I think it's what makes you jump off the roof of the Duomo.

MARGARET

Unlikely.

PHILIP

Then you float off into the sky.

MARGARET

With God rays and an angel chorus just like a Counter-Reformation ceiling?

PHILIP

Well...yes. And what happens to me in Rome?

MARGARET

I'm not sure. You disappeared in the lowest level of San Clemente and your wife seemed convinced the earth had opened up and swallowed you like Faust.

PHILIP

She has these night terrors--

MARGARET

Do you pray?

PHILIP

Professionally.

MARGARET

Oh, that's right. Me, too. I'm very confused--would you pray with me while we wait for the people we're supposed to be with?

PHILIP

How odd. We've spent most of this trip in churches and I haven't talked to God in any of them.

MARGARET

Then I think we ought to.

They kneel and pray silently together.

CATHERINE

How lovely to actually spend time looking at a single work of art! I never get to do this any more. Notice the symmetry of the four large devils north, south, east and west. I've forgotten their names, probably Asmodeus, Beelzebub--but the interesting thing is the symmetry. As the Middle Ages were giving way to the Renaissance, the symmetry is still there, but it's more dynamic--you know, the Golden Mean--and the figures are more realistically human--or in this Last Judgment, demonic--

(Looks down.)

There he is!

TOR

Beelzebub or Asmodeus?

CATHERINE

My husband. With her!

(Cups her hands to her mouth to holler.)

TOR

(Grabbing her hands.)
Rather than make a spectacle of yourself, why don't we see if they do?

CATHERINE

What an evil notion. I think I like you after all.

CATHERINE and TOR lean over the railing
to watch as MARGARET and PHILIP
conclude their prayer and stand.

MARGARET

Your wife seems to be an intensely emotional person.

PHILIP

What a gentle way to put it.

MARGARET

Do you think she'll go through the roof if she finds us looking at the side chapels together
while we wait?

PHILIP

Probably. But she doesn't know what happened in Venice.

MARGARET

Yes, she does. You told her in Siena.

PHILIP

Oh, my. Another reason not to go there.

CATHERINE

(Peering over the railing as MARGARET and PHILIP gaze at the walls.)
They're just looking at the art.

TOR

She can't very well blow him in the sanctuary.

CATHERINE

I blew him in the sanctuary once, back home.

TOR

That's right. I forgot he's a minister.

MARGARET

By the way, I have your ring.

PHILIP

I know. And I have yours.

MARGARET

You do?

PHILIP

(Taking it out.)
We compared them in Venice. They're identical. You left it with me when you ascended in Milan.

MARGARET

(Taking out her ring.)
When you disappeared in Rome, this is all that was left.

PHILIP

So you got the ring from me and I got the ring from you?

MARGARET

I guess that's right.

PHILIP

Then where did it come from? Who bought it?

PHILIP AND MARGARET

I didn't.

MARGARET

Not only does this thing that can't exist exist, there are two of them.
(Reaches out to take PHILIP'S ring.)

PHILIP

No, don't. Maybe they shouldn't touch--like matter and anti-matter.
(They laugh.)

CATHERINE

Wait a minute, how do you know he's a minister?

TOR

You told me in Siena.

CATHERINE

Hmm. Well, he's a very good one, at any rate. Even if his church is dying. There are too many Lutheran churches in Chicago, so Philip only has old people. They love him, of course--he's the care-giving type.

TOR

I imagine so.

CATHERINE

Is that a crack? I think that was a crack. But it's true. Always saving everybody but himself. He takes good care of me and I'm profoundly depressing. His life is full of disappointments. I keep telling myself that's why he's sparkin' with your wife.

TOR

Sparkin'?

PHILIP

I know we're trying to avoid saying this, but something very strange is definitely going on here and we haven't been taking it at all seriously.

MARGARET

Okay, if our trips are the reverse but somehow simultaneous in this kind of palindrome and you know what happens in Milan and Venice and I know what happens in Rome and Siena, who knows what happens here in Florence? I don't.

PHILIP

Me, either. So for the rest of my trip I'll know more and more about you, and you'll know less and less about me?

MARGARET

And vice versa.

PHILIP

How sad.

MARGARET

It's an experiment in predestination!

PHILIP

Except that here--in Florence where neither of us knows what will happen--we're free.

MARGARET

(Touches him to stop him walking.)

So what we do here, while we're free, is our only chance to change the future--or the past--whichever--

CATHERINE

I'm on anti-depressants.

PHILIP

(Taking MARGARET'S hand, excitedly.)

Which means we can surrender to this thing--whatever it is--or thwart it--only here in Florence.

CATHERINE

And they're not working!

MARGARET

Tell me everything about Milan and Venice and I'll tell you everything we did in Rome and Siena, down to the minute.

(They leave.)

CATHERINE

Is that Paolo and Francesca?

TOR

Who? I don't think I can handle running into someone else I know.

CATHERINE

See that couple flying through the air of Hades locked in eternal coitus? I'm sure that's Paolo and Francesca from Dante's *Inferno*--they were murdered adulterers.

CATHERINE begins to scratch herself rather vigorously. TOR grabs her hand.

TOR

(Grabbing her hand as CATHERINE starts to scratch herself.)

Please don't do that--it's horrible.

CATHERINE

I have an itch!

TOR

You have dozens of disgusting scabs and sores across your chest.

(She is aghast.)

You showed them to me in Rome.

CATHERINE

I never show anyone. Not even my husband if I can help it.

TOR

Is it some kind of compulsive thing?

CATHERINE

I pick. For the last fifteen years. I've seen a lot of doctors about it, but I can't stop.

(Starts to do it again, but he grabs her hand.)

TOR

You're not gonna do it in front of me.

CATHERINE

Like you should talk, with your stigmata!

TOR

You said that in Rome. What stigmata?

CATHERINE

In Milan you showed everyone your wounds like some kind of Catholic tourist attraction!

TOR

(Showing her his palms.)

I don't have wounds!

CATHERINE

You did!

TOR

This trip is a nightmare. Meg and I are trying to relax—recover from—well, a lot of things, but we keep running into you weird—aggressively weird—people, Meg's getting weird, too—unpredictable—and I haven't gotten laid the whole time I've been in Italy.

CATHERINE

Oh, shut up! Do you have any idea how long it's been since I've had sex?

TOR

That's different--you're married! All these gorgeous priests in all these churches and--nothing! I want to get fucked so hard my foot goes numb and I limp for three days!

(Starts to leave, turns back.)

And you can tell Meg that's what I'm doing when you go down there.

PHILIP and MARGARET can be heard
singing offstage.

CATHERINE

(As he disappears.)
I'm not going down there!
(Turns and peers over the railing, scratching.)
I can't go down there.

PHILIP AND MARGARET

(Entering quietly singing *Lord of All Hopefulness*.)
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray
Your peace in our hearts Lord, at the end of the day.

MARGARET

That's my favorite hymn.

PHILIP

Really? Mine, too. My parishioners love it, so I put it in the bulletin almost every month.

MARGARET

It's so sweet and sad.
(Gasps.)

PHILIP

Do you see Catherine?

MARGARET

I was singing! I haven't been able to for six months!

PHILIP

You did in Venice.

MARGARET

Oh, thank you!

PHILIP

Catherine and I used to sing together.

MARGARET

You made me forget I couldn't.

PHILIP

Oh, my. I just realized the only time this phenomenon becomes apparent is when I see you. If we didn't keep running into each other, Catherine and I would just go on with our trip, on with our lives, and we'd never know the difference.

MARGARET

That's true. It only involves the four of us. The rest of the world just blithely passes by.

PHILIP

That's one way to stop it, then. Avoiding each other.

MARGARET

Which should be easy, since you plan to go to Arezzo instead of Siena.

PHILIP

Oh, that's right. Good.

MARGARET

You could even change your plans and avoid Rome.

PHILIP

Catherine would be disappointed.

MARGARET

I would be too if I didn't go to Milan.

CATHERINE is joined by a handsome
TOUR GUIDE wearing a long coat, who
peers over the railing next to her. Lights
come up dimly inside one of the archways.

PHILIP

(Playing with his ring.)
Or we could throw these away.

MARGARET

Wouldn't you rather figure this out than just run away from it? I'm dying of curiosity.
Don't you want to know what's happening to us?

PHILIP

Yes, but I'm concerned--

MARGARET

If the rings are important, then let's ask somebody about them--a museum or a jeweler or something.

PHILIP

Museums don't just evaluate things like that--Catherine sometimes has expertise day at the Art Institute, but you can't just walk in--

MARGARET

(Thumbing through her guidebook.)
Okay, a jeweler, then.

PHILIP

Are there jewelers in your guidebook?

MARGARET

There's all kinds of obscure information, amusingly translated from Italian.

PHILIP

(Pulling out a map.)
We get by with maps. Catherine knows what everything is, but I have to get us there.

MARGARET

(Reading.)
"The old Ponte Vecchio bridge is the most elderly bridge over the Arno. Goldsmiths ply their lustrous trade upon it, some quite unusual and rare. Reject them all but Signor Donnola, for only he has what your heart desires." Sounds like a kickback from Signor Donnola to me. Let's go.

PHILIP

I should wait for Catherine.

MARGARET

And I should wait for Tor. But they both should have been here half an hour ago. Maybe they ran off together.

PHILIP

Maybe Catherine decided to take a nap. I'll call the hotel.

MARGARET

Don't be pussy-whipped.

PHILIP

You are a most unusual nun.

MARGARET

According to you, I even fly.

They leave. CATHERINE scratches more violently.

TOUR GUIDE

Lei e sola, Signorina?

CATHERINE

Oh, yes, I'm alone.

Behind them in the archway, TOR saunters past wearing nothing but a white towel. He disappears.

TOUR GUIDE

You're American! You are so beautiful, I thought you were Italian.

CATHERINE

(Stares at him a moment.)
My grandparents were from Caserta. Weren't you in Milan a few days ago?

TOUR GUIDE

(Gestures toward the fresco.)
No. You appreciate saints. Do you like relics?

CATHERINE

I am a relic.

TOUR GUIDE

I show you bones of amazement.

CATHERINE

Your line is dreadful, but your timing--
(Glances over the railing.)
--Is impeccable.

They leave together. Lighting change.
PHILIP and MARGARET appear,
consulting his map.

PHILIP

This is the Ponte Vecchio, so Signor Donnola should be there--through that arch--

MARGARET

I've got this weird feeling about Signor Donnola. I've heard his name before.

Behind them, in one of the archways, TOR and another MAN in a towel appear from different directions and size each other up, almost mirroring each others' movements.

After a moment, they put their hands under each other's towels, then start making out.

MARGARET

What if trying to figure this phenomenon out is what actually causes it?

PHILIP

So we're punished for our curiosity?

MARGARET

Or rewarded with a spiritual gift.

PHILIP

That sounds so New Agey—God handing out merit badges.

MARGARET

I'd like to think I had some hand in my own fate.

PHILIP

Does fate hinge on a single act or a series of decisions?

MARGARET

Either way you're hauled before the throne of judgment.

PHILIP

And condemned.

MARGARET

Or forgiven.

PHILIP

Do you think this phenomenon is Christian?

MARGARET

If Christianity can encompass resurrections and healings and stigmata, why not this?

PHILIP

But who believes in those kinds of miracles these days?

MARGARET

I do.

PHILIP

Catherine does.

MARGARET

Sometimes I think we make God too small.

PHILIP

(Gesturing to the archway.)
Then let's go see how big he is.

PHILIP, MARGARET, TOR and the MAN
disappear as CATHERINE appears.

TOUR GUIDE

(Off.)
Signora, come here! I have fingers, thighs, hair--

CATHERINE

(Engrossed in unseen reliquaries.)
In a minute. Here's another fragment of the True Cross, and *la spina*--another thorn from the Crown of Thorns--I think I've seen enough to make a whole briar patch. I can't tell you how grateful I am you brought me here--these reliquaries are wonderfully gruesome, and I was just in the mood. I feel the suffering of the saints so personally sometimes.

CATHERINE continues to peruse the reliquaries on one side of the stage, while MARGARET and PHILIP follow SIGNOR DONNOLA on from one of the archways. He is dressed as a shopkeeper and carries one of the rings.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

Questo anello é maledetto.

MARGARET

Excuse me, not everyone speaks—

SIGNOR DONNOLA

(Fairly strong Italian accent.)
Ring is cursed. Where you get?

MARGARET

He gave it to me.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

And where you get?

PHILIP

She gave it to me.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

(Rolls his eyes.)

The legend say who possess the Ouroboros find what heart desires.

MARGARET

Isn't that a blessing, rather than a curse?

PHILIP

I suppose it depends on what's in your heart. What did you call it?

SIGNOR DONNOLA

Ouroboros--the dragon devouring his own tail. In alchemy the symbol for cycles, eternally round and round. With every turn pure elements rise, base ones sink, refining closer and closer to perfection.

MARGARET

Can it turn lead to gold?

SIGNOR DONNOLA

No one knows--alchemists who make disappear in fifteenth century. Rings, too. There were two. So I must tell you ring is false. Legend say are together or not at all.

PHILIP

(Producing the other ring.)

Then I must tell you it's true.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

Let me see.

PHILIP

Who were the alchemists?

SIGNOR DONNOLA

I don't know names. One in Roma and other in Milano. Please.

PHILIP

(Reluctantly handing him the ring.)

Are they gold?

SIGNOR DONNOLA

Oh, no. That I can tell you just by eye.

(Holding them next to each other, but not touching them together.)
Also same mold mark, this little flaw. Mass produced, I am sure.

PHILIP

I'm not so sure.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

I tell you what. I call expert friend. Uno momento.
(Disappears through an archway with the rings.)

MARGARET

You don't trust him, do you?

PHILIP

Neither do you. Maledetto!

SIGNOR DONNOLA [Recorded.]

(Offstage as MARGARET and PHILIP talk.)

Avvoltoio? Qui Donnola. Non puoi immaginare cio che ho in mano. Gl'ourobori—
Esattamente come gli anelli tutt'e due. Si, un dragone che si mangia la coda.
Esattamente come la foto del mille ottocento ottante cinque. E come se fossero caduti
nelle mie mani--un regalo dal cielo. Questi turisti. Schiocchi Americani--non hanno
alcun'idea. Ah, si, possono sentirmi ma non capiscono l'italiano. Certo che sono d'oro
fino. Ma tu sai che valgono piu del metallo in se. Qualsiasi museo pagherebbe un
patrimonio. Un miliardario pagherebbe anche di piu. Infatti credo che dobbiamo
venderli privatamente or saremo nei guai con il governo. Certo che conto su di te! Sei il
mio esperto--come posso venderli senza di te? Nessuno mi crederá senza qualche
autoritá. E tu sei legato alle persone piu ripugnanti--no, sto scherzando! Ma ovviamente
questa situazione é molto delicata e no mi serve solo il migliore. Certo che ti lusingo!
Ma non ho bisogno di farlo, no? Sei tanto entusiasmo quanto me. Non si vedono questi
anelli da piu di cent'anni--non credevo veramente che esistessero. Perche sono proprio
uguali--fino all'incavo vicino alla testa del drago. Gli ho detto che era un'impronta dalla
forma. E da ridere, no? Sono cosí creduloni. Ho l'intenzione di dire a loro che li
prenderó per dieci Euro, come curiositá. Ho bisogno del tuo aiuto. Vieni qui e digli che
sono solamente bagatelle. La maledizione? Ma non esiste. E stato creata per spaventare
la gente. Sono assolutamente squisiti e non ti devo dire quanto pregiati. Vieni adesso!
Se posso ottenere questi anelli, muoio come uomo beato. Ciao! [Avvoltoio? It's
Donnola. You won't believe what I have. The Ouroboros--both rings. Yes, a dragon
devouring itself--both of them. Just like the photograph from 1885. It's like they just
dropped into my hands--a gift from heaven. These tourists. Stupid Americans--they have
no idea. Oh, they can hear me, but they speak no Italian. Of course they're real gold.
But you know as well as I do they're worth more than just the metal. Any museum would
pay a fortune. Private investors would pay more. In fact, I think we have to go private or
the government will be on our backs. Of course I'm counting you in! You're my expert--

SIGNOR DONNOLA (Cont.)

how can I sell them without you? No one will believe me without some higher authority. And you have the most unsavory connections--I'm just joking! But this is obviously a most delicate situation and that's why I need the best. Of course I'm flattering you! But I don't need to, do I? You're as excited as I am. These rings haven't been seen for more than a hundred years--I didn't really believe they existed. Because they're exactly alike--down to a dent near the dragon's head. I told them it was a mold mark. Isn't that funny? They are so gullible. I'm going to tell them I'll take them off their hands for twenty thousand lire, just as curiosities. I need your help. Come over and tell them they're just trinkets. Curse? There's no such thing! Someone just made that up to scare people away. They're absolutely beautiful and I don't have to tell you how valuable. Come over now! If I can get these rings, I'll die a happy man. Ciao!]

MARGARET

(Continuing over SIGNOR DONNOLA.)

I wish I could remember where I heard his name.

PHILIP

He's just jabbering away in there. Can you understand any of it?

MARGARET

He's going awfully fast.

PHILIP

If he offers to buy them, we'll just say no.

MARGARET

Shhhh!

As MARGARET and PHILIP listen intently to SIGNOR DONNOLA'S conversation, TOR and the MAN appear in the dimly lit doorway. They are still wearing towels and have their hands all over each other.

TOR

(Whispering.)

I wish I knew how to say "condom" in Italian.

MAN

(American accent.)

I think it's preservativo.

TOR

You're American!

MAN

But I don't have a condom.

TOR

They gotta have 'em up front. Maybe at that espresso bar thingie.

MAN

Let's go.

CATHERINE

Luca, come see this. Tell me if you think it's real. Luca?

The MAN and TOR come out of the archway into brighter light. CATHERINE disappears into the other archway.

MAN

(Staring at TOR revealed in light.)
Oh, my God! Tor!

TOR

Father Cestaro!

FATHER CESTARO

What are you doing in Florence? I haven't seen you since the funeral.

TOR

You hypocritical fuck! The wages of sin!

TOR suddenly slugs FATHER CESTARO and runs out. FATHER CESTARO recovers, then runs out after him.

FATHER CESTARO

(As he disappears.)
Tor! You asshole! You still don't understand dichotomy!

MARGARET

Philip, I believe he's trying to cheat us.

PHILIP

What'd he say?

MARGARET

He's called us names more than once. And he's using a lot of money words. Something about--the government. Sounds like he's trying to get someone to help him. He's really buttering him up. This guy is an incredible sleaze!

PHILIP

Should I just take the rings so we can get out of here? Catherine must be going crazy.

MARGARET

No, I'll enjoy telling him we're onto him.

PHILIP

Now what's he--?

MARGARET

Shhh!

CATHERINE

(Off.)

Luca, I think it's Saint Catherine of Siena--part of her, rather.

(She comes into view, with the TOUR GUIDE following. She points.)

She's my absolute favorite saint. I'm named after her cause I was born on her day.

What do you think that is? The label's handwritten in that old style--

TOUR GUIDE

Is toe.

CATHERINE

St. Catherine's toe. I can't tell you how much I identify with her--kind of a mystical connection.

TOUR GUIDE

Been to Siena?

CATHERINE

No, and unfortunately it's not on our itinerary this time.

TOUR GUIDE

If you love Santa Caterina, you visit birthplace. And San Domenico.

CATHERINE

What's there?

TOUR GUIDE

Is very holy.

CATHERINE

I could use a little holiness, but we're going to Arezzo and my husband wouldn't want to change plans--

TOUR GUIDE

Italy is for changing plans. Come--I show you shroud of Caterina.

CATHERINE and the TOUR GUIDE go
back through the arch.

MARGARET

He's going to offer us ten Euros.

PHILIP

That's just a few dollars!

(MARGARET suddenly gasps.)

What? What did he say?

MARGARET

I just remembered who told me his name.

PHILIP

Who?

MARGARET

You. In Siena. We have to get out of here.

PHILIP

Not without our rings.

MARGARET

You told me he died.

PHILIP

Oh. Well, we'll just have to make sure he doesn't, which will put an end to this whole Ouroboros thing.

MARGARET

We can't play with a man's life--

PHILIP

(Grabs her.)

We're not! Margaret, nothing is going to happen! You're acting just like my wife! Yes, odd things have been going on, but only between you and me. And I don't want to give that up.

(Embarrassed, he lets her go.)

I mean, you're a very nice nun--and I'd like to--you know--stay on your Christmas list after we all go back to our lives.

MARGARET

But what if it's immutable and we never go back to our lives?

PHILIP

We'll change it.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

(Returning with a ring in each hand.)

I am sorry. Signor Avvoltoio agrees my opinion, but will come prove worthlessness of these rings. I feel bad, so I pay you ten Euros for them for your trouble.

PHILIP

Ten Euros!

SIGNOR DONNOLA

Each.

MARGARET

Lei un imbroglione e un bugiardo! [You are a liar and a cheat!]

SIGNOR DONNOLA

Anche Lei, che fai finta di non capire l'italiano! [So are you, pretending not to know Italian!]

PHILIP

(Holding out his hand for the rings.)

Give us our rings and we'll be leaving.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

No, no--stay until Signor Avvoltoio comes. You believe him.

MARGARET

You lied about the mold marks and everything.

SIGNOR DONNOLA

Your wife is very...American. Skeptical. Is not becoming in woman.

(Holding the rings together to show them.)

Molded, not original. See, hold them together--

(He gasps.)

Insieme--[Together--]

(Drops the rings and stumbles backward, clutching his heart.)

Il cuore! [My heart!]

MARGARET

Philip, it's happening!

PHILIP

No, we can save him!

(Catching SIGNOR DONNOLA as he falls.)

Signor Donnola--is it your heart? Isn't that what he said--heart?

MARGARET

He touched them together!

(Falls to her knees to retrieve the rings, one in each hand.)

PHILIP

Then don't you touch them! Call 9-1-1! Do they have 9-1-1 in Italy?

(He attempts mouth-to-mouth for SIGNOR DONNOLA.)

MARGARET

There's nothing we can do. It's fate. Or maybe our judgment.

TOR runs out on stage through an archway, still in his towel. He stands there, trembling with anger.

PHILIP

Get rid of the rings--it's the only way to stop this! Margaret, please--call the police! This man has no pulse whatsoever!

CATHERINE

(Running back out of the archway to stare at the reliquary.)

Uno momento, Luca! One last look at Saint Catherine's toe.

TOR

Of all the people in the world--!

CATHERINE

Yes, a mystical connection.

MARGARET

It's too late, Philip.

PHILIP

Not if we never see each other again.

CATHERINE

Catherine, I need you. We're coming to Siena.

PHILIP pounds helplessly on SIGNOR
DONNOLA'S chest. MARGARET clutches a ring
in one hand, and presses the other into PHILIP'S
hand. They stare at each other. The lights fade.

END OF ACT ONE

Venice

Offstage TOR whistles *O Solo Mio* or some other tune frequently sung by gondoliers. A VENETIAN POLICEMAN appears and changes banners to one featuring a winged lion (the symbol for St. Mark and Venice). Then he pulls out a bed upstage center and leaves. CATHERINE and PHILIP appear, gazing over the audience.

CATHERINE

Venice traded extensively with the East, so these Doomsday mosaics derive from the Byzantine rather than Roman tradition.

PHILIP

The skulls with the worms in the eyes are certainly gruesome.

CATHERINE

Aren't they compelling? They almost seem like contemporary art.

PHILIP

Too compelling. Hell's so fascinating heaven looks dull. I guess that's true of any Last Judgment.

CATHERINE

You're always intrigued by lost souls. Paintings of Lot's wife, Jezebel, Judas—

PHILIP

Shall we go?

(Taking out his map.)

At least I won't get lost. I can even read this upside down.

CATHERINE

Philip, you're a very bad tourist. Everyone gets lost in Venice. That's the point of Venice.

PHILIP

We don't have time to get lost.

CATHERINE

There's something innately depressing about being a tourist. You know you're only seeing the surface of everything, never going any deeper. All we saw in Milan was *The Last Supper* and the Duomo.

PHILIP

We saw quite a bit more in Milan than your average tourist, if you count jet-lag hallucinations.

CATHERINE

Next flight, no melatonin. I think it clashed with my medication.

PHILIP

I wish we could find out what really happened to that poor woman.

Offstage, TOR whistles *Chain Gang*.

CATHERINE

I tried, darling. I'm sorry my Italian isn't any better.

PHILIP

You're right--surface! This bizarre thing happened and we don't know why.

CATHERINE

Even in our everyday life it's no better. We never know much.

PHILIP

I suppose if we did, we'd be God.

MARGARET and TOR appear, TOR still whistling. CATHERINE and PHILIP continue to gaze. Neither couple sees the other.

MARGARET

My dear, it's really rather tasteless to whistle while crossing the Bridge of Sighs.

TOR

We're going to a prison. It's a prison tune.

MARGARET

The last thing my life needs is underscoring.

TOR

It's already got great locations and special effects. Look at all this tagging.

MARGARET

You've lived in L.A. too long. This graffiti is the tragic outpouring of souls surrendering to their fate.

TOR

Is that what you want to do?

MARGARET

Surrender to my fate?

TOR

You believe all this crap, don't you? You like it, even! Despite what happened in Florence--no!--*because of* what happened in Florence--!

MARGARET

If you'd been there, you'd understand.

TOR

I was! Running into Father Cestaro was a disgusting coincidence, but won't change my life.

MARGARET

What I witnessed was horrifying. There is no comparison.

TOR

So this Midwestern soothsayer makes a bunch of predictions and one of them comes true—

MARGARET

An absolutely awful one!

TOR

That doesn't mean time is going backward--

MARGARET

It's not going backward. It's going forward, just in different directions for different people.

CATHERINE

Here I am, a so-called expert--*the* expert in Limoges enamels since Jacques Marandel died--and I still have everything to learn about those stupid fucking plates. I'll die a dilettante.

PHILIP

Those plates got you a free flight to Europe.

CATHERINE

Somebody at the Art Institute has to write this catalogue or we have to give the enamels back to the donor.

PHILIP

It's a compliment! When was the last time they asked an editor to actually write—?

CATHERINE

They're just tossing me crumbs because they don't care enough to hire a real curator. It's humiliating to have to write a book no one will read.

TOR

Meg, should I be worried?

MARGARET

About what?

TOR

That our trip to Milan is going to end with a self-fulfilling prophecy?
(She doesn't answer. He starts whistling *Que Sera Sera*.)

PHILIP

(Taking CATHERINE'S hand, comfortingly.)
You're a real curator to me. A Renaissance woman.

CATHERINE

And therefore totally unemployable in the twenty-first century. The woman who knew too much.

CATHERINE and PHILIP leave through
one of the archways.

MARGARET

You know I hate that song.

TOR

Prophecies are usually wrong. Saint Scabby said I would get stigmata--
(Holds out his palms.)
--And look, no chocolate mess!

MARGARET

You simply don't understand faith.

TOR

Faith!? You wanna find him here in Venice, don't you?

MARGARET glares at him a moment, then
disappears through an archway. TOR

follows. CATHERINE and PHILIP sit in a gondola bench, with a GONDOLIER piloting the boat behind them with his pole.

CATHERINE

You know, if my husband got stigmata, I'd jump off the Duomo, too.

PHILIP

Why?

CATHERINE

Envy. As a child I always felt cheated that all the miracles happened so long ago. People in the Bible got special tutoring in faith and I was left to fend for myself. Plus I identify with saints. Saint Catherine of Siena, of course, and there was one--I forget the name--who mortified his flesh by picking at his scabs, never letting them heal.

PHILIP

It's nice we're here in October, when it's not so crowded. Aren't you glad we splurged on a gondola?

CATHERINE

Sometime on this trip you're going to have to deal with me, Philip.

PHILIP

What?

CATHERINE

I'm here so I can go to Limoges and research those disgusting enamels, but you're along--

PHILIP

To see Europe for the first time.

CATHERINE

--So we can explore some things.

PHILIP

So--explore.

CATHERINE

This isn't about weaning me off my medication. It's not even about being turned down for adoption.

PHILIP

(Standing.)

Is this our stop?

GONDOLIER

Si, Signore.

PHILIP

You're--we're--not stable enough for kids anyway.

CATHERINE

(Standing.)

Exactly. It's about divorce.

CATHERINE and PHILIP leave through an archway as MARGARET comes in through another, pursued by TOR'S whistle.

MARGARET

(Slapping her thigh.)

Tor, come on!

TOR

(Calling from offstage.)

Quit skittering ahead—what are you looking for?

MARGARET

(Consults her watch anxiously, smiles slyly, then calls off.)

Tenente! Tenente, ho bisogno di aiuto. [Officer! Officer, I need some help.]

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

(Appearing.)

Si, Signora?

MARGARET

Quell'uomo mi segue da piu di mezz'ora. [That man's been following me for over half an hour.]

TOR appears, still whistling.

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

E un complimento alla Sua bellezza. [It is a compliment to your beauty.]

TOR

Are we lost? Are you asking directions?

MARGARET

Mi fa paura. Per favore, gli chiedo di smettere. [He's frightening me. Please ask him to stop.]

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

Come vuole, Signora. [As you wish, Signora.]

(To TOR.)

Vada a seguire un'altra signora. [Go follow another lady.]

TOR

I'm sorry. I don't speak Italian. Meg, what did you tell him?

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

(Pushing TOR.)

Non discuta. Si muova! [Don't argue, just move along.]

TOR

Hey! Meg! Tell him I'm okay!

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

Va via! [Go away!]

TOR

(Desperately trying to communicate by means of signs.)

I know her! I came here with her!

MARGARET

Dice che mi vuole violentare! [He's saying he wants to rape me!]

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

(Grabbing TOR.)

Giochi sono giochi ma non scherziamo. Dovro arrestarLa? [Fun is fun, but let's not take it too far. Am I going to have to arrest you?]

MARGARET

I told him you want to rape me.

TOR

I'm going to be arrested for your fantasies!?

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

Smetta di essere volgare con lei! [Stop speaking filth to her!]

MARGARET

Va bene, tenente. E mio marito. [It's all right, officer. He's my husband.]

VENETIAN POLICEMAN

(Taking his hands off TOR. To TOR.)

Castrato!

(To MARGARET.)

Troia! [Slut!]

(Leaves in disgust.)

TOR

How'd you get him to lay off?

MARGARET

(Grinning.)

I told him you were my husband.

TOR

You told me this trip would change me, but suddenly you're lying to cops and chasing men. You're mutating before my eyes!

MARGARET

My dear, green is not your color.

TOR

I'm not jealous--you're crazy. You want to sleep with this guy just because he told you you would!

MARGARET

Yes, I do! I do want to make love with him!

TOR

Really? I was only speculating. What about his wife? Doesn't she count?

MARGARET

I feel sorry for them both. They're pulling each other down. She needs to be free of him, too.

TOR

And that's your job?

MARGARET

I have always done what my parents wanted me to do, what my teachers wanted, my employers--you! I'm old enough to do what I want for the first time in my life. I'm too old to do anything else!

TOR

What about what God wants? What about breaking holy vows?

MARGARET

Who are you to talk about God?

TOR

You're not fighting with me, you're fighting with Him.

MARGARET

Maybe He likes to be fought with. Remember Jacob wrestling with the angel? A little resistance, a little *thinking!* Maybe God approves of this whole thing.

TOR

I guess when you jump off the Duomo, we'll know if he approves.

(She just glares.)

I'm only saying don't get reckless just cause you're disappointed by life. You used to be so risk-averse.

MARGARET

Disappointed by life?

TOR

Life. Love.

MARGARET

How astonishingly arrogant to think I'm unhappy because I'm not like you.

TOR

Why do you think I'm going into debt for this trip? To protect you from yourself--I can't lose you, too!

MARGARET

Lose me?!

TOR

You lost your voice. For weeks you didn't get out of bed.

MARGARET

I was reading!

TOR

Abelard and Heloise, yes, I know.

MARGARET

People deal with trauma differently.

TOR

I dealt with it alone. When you finally do show up, you're moving to Pennsylvania, going into seclusion, *retiring*. You plunged into religion to get away from me--

MARGARET

I was called! I had no choice!

TOR

--That's hypocrisy worse than Father Cestaro--!

MARGARET

I'm not in love with you!

TOR

I'm disappointed, too. I'd like not to be making my living writing grants to finance other people's creativity! I'd prefer not to be conducting a rinky-dink community choir full of bad singers! And I *really* wish the man I've loved for seven years was here with me. Now you're leaving me, too. I am desperately disappointed, but I'm not committing suicide!

MARGARET

Your whole life is suicide.

TOR

Whoa! My life or my *lifestyle*?

MARGARET

Suicidal because *you're* the one who thinks you're bad. The wages of sin. Walter wasn't your fault. He just had to go.

(He starts to leave.)

Where are you going?

TOR

To find someone to help me slit my wrists.

MARGARET

Does that mean I have the hotel room to myself tonight?

TOR

Oh, yes.

TOR leaves. MARGARET lets out a sigh, then consults her watch. She peers into an archway, then darts into the other one. After a moment,

CATHERINE and PHILIP appear through the first archway.

CATHERINE

My needs always come first--it's time we thought about yours.

PHILIP

This is not the self-sacrifice decathlon.

CATHERINE

I could never compete with you in that. We need to explore--

(Trying to take the map from him; he keeps it.)

--Go off the goddam map.

PHILIP

I'm not--rigid. Don't you love me anymore?

CATHERINE

Frankly, it's the opposite.

PHILIP

You think I don't love you?

CATHERINE

Oh, darling, how could you possibly?

MARGARET

(Crossing through and disappearing through an arch.)

Hello, Catherine. Hello, Philip.

PHILIP

Oh, my.

CATHERINE

A vision! An apparition! Go after her.

PHILIP

Come with me.

CATHERINE

Go beneath the surface of her mystery. Explore. Ask her back to the hotel. I'll meet you there.

PHILIP

We only have one map.

CATHERINE

I want to get lost.

(He hesitates.)

Go.

He disappears through the archway after MARGARET. CATHERINE heaves a sigh, then leaves another way. Lighting change focuses on the bed and a nearby collection of votive candles. MARGARET comes in with PHILIP.

PHILIP

May I use your phone to call my wife?

MARGARET

Oh, this won't take long. The ring's right here.

(As she pulls it from under the bed, he reaches for it.)

No, we can't let them touch, believe me. Hold yours up.

(He does. She holds hers about a foot away from it.)

See, identical. Down to that flaw, that nick. They're the exact same object. The snake swallowing its tail.

PHILIP

I got mine from you. Where did you get yours?

MARGARET

From you.

PHILIP

Oh, no. I've only seen you--

MARGARET AND PHILIP

--Once before.

MARGARET

I know. But I've seen you three times before.

(She lights the votive candles.)

Every time I did, I bought a candle. I thought they were for a friend, but I guess they're for you.

PHILIP
 You've been spying on me--us?

MARGARET laughs. Dimly lit in one of the archways, TOR appears with a PRIEST. The PRIEST carries a large cross and leans it against the wall inside the arch.

PRIEST
 Spogliati! [Take off your clothes.]

TOR
 I'm sorry, I don't speak--

The PRIEST rips opens TOR' shirt. TOR gets the idea and disrobes.

MARGARET
 We don't have much time. I'd rather not waste it explaining.

PHILIP
 Then I need to get back to my hotel--my wife--

MARGARET
 You're going to see me three more times, but I'm only going to see you once more.

PHILIP
 How can that be?

MARGARET
 (Coming very close to him.)
 God. I think. I'm pretty sure it's God. You're a minister--you tell me.

PHILIP
 How do you know I'm a minister?

MARGARET
 Your wife told me.

PRIEST
 Sbrigati! [Hurry up!]

PHILIP
 Catherine isn't in on this. If you know I'm a minister--and you know Catherine--then you know why I need to leave now.

MARGARET

Not yet. I like that you're a minister. I researched the other owners of these rings--all monks, priests, and nuns--from the middle ages to 1885. We're like Abelard and Heloise.

PHILIP

Who are they?

MARGARET

I'll tell you later. No--Tor will. In Siena.

PRIEST

Christi eleison.

(Ties TOR to the cross.)

PHILIP

In Milan you said you loved me. I don't love you.

MARGARET

You will.

PHILIP

I don't know you. We have nothing in common.

MARGARET

We've both sacrificed ourselves because we think we don't deserve love. All my life I've surrounded myself with the wrong men--too young, too attractive, too--

PHILIP

Too nuts. Pardon me for saying so, but your husband *undressed* on top of the Duomo.

MARGARET

My husband?

(She laughs.)

Oh, Tor, I can't wait.

PHILIP

And speaking of him, aren't you breaking some vows just by having me here?

MARGARET

As a matter of fact, yes, but some vows are best broken.

Once TOR is tied to the cross, the PRIEST lights a cigarette and stares at him, smoking. As the

PRIEST lights his cigarette, MARGARET extinguishes one of the votive candles.

MARGARET

For instance, your vows to Catherine.

PHILIP

I have never been unfaithful to my wife. You are amazingly confident.

MARGARET

You're still here.

PHILIP

(Starts to leave through an arch.)

You're right. I can't blame this on anyone but myself.

MARGARET

She's not going to divorce you, if that's what you're worried about.

PHILIP

You couldn't possibly know about that. She brought it up for the first time today.

MARGARET

I also know she's attempted suicide--more than once, it sounded like.

PHILIP

She--*we*--had an abortion fifteen years ago, before we were married. It messed her up inside--

(Gestures to his abdomen, then his head.)

—And inside—

MARGARET

I've never been exactly suicidal, but ask Tor about my month in bed, my flight to Pennsylvania—

PHILIP

We applied for adoption, but Catherine's medicated, so--

The PRIEST, still smoking, caresses TOR all over. TOR gazes heavenward and whistles *Rock of Ages*.

MARGARET

She's eating you alive.

(He sits down on the bed. She puts out another candle.)

On this trip, every time I see frescoes of martyrdom, I think of you. I'm afraid that's your heart's desire—suffering for others, suffering for some cause—you have to stop punishing yourself—

PHILIP

I'm...Lutheran.

(They both laugh.)

MARGARET

We have suffering in common. You're married to a woman who has visions of Satan. I've been in love with a man whose goal is to sleep with a priest.

PHILIP

Your husband?

MARGARET

My friend. My amazingly loyal friend.

PHILIP

Are you still in love with him?

MARGARET

He thinks so, but no, not since...not any more. Do you love Catherine, or is it just sacrifice?

PHILIP

There's love...and there's love.

MARGARET

Six months ago, a friend of mine saw heaven. Just like a bad Charleton Heston movie--mist, bright light, and in the distance, the throne of judgment. As he got closer, he got very excited--he was going to see God. The throne was simple, magnificent--and empty. No judge. No God. He started screaming and wouldn't stop. Faced with emptiness, a moral void, I lost faith, lost my voice. Finding you is like finding faith again.

PHILIP

That wasn't really heaven. There's no empty throne.

MARGARET

If keep hoping there's a reason it's empty. A good reason.

PHILIP

Don't tell me there's no judge.

MARGARET begins to brush her hair, gazing into a mirror. CATHERINE appears from the other archway, wearing a nightgown, mirroring MARGARET'S actions.

MARGARET

There must be, otherwise why the throne?

(Looking into the mirror.)

Ah!

PHILIP

What? Who?

MARGARET

(With sudden astonishment.)

Right in front of me!

(She smiles and sings along with TOR'S whistling.)

Rock of ages, cleft for me

Let me hide myself in thee

CATHERINE joins MARGARET in song as they let down their hair while gazing at each other in invisible mirrors. They harmonize.

CATHERINE AND MARGARET

(Oblivious to each other except as reflections.)

Let the water and the blood

From thy riven side which flowed

(PHILIP joins them in harmony. TOR continues to whistle.)

Be of sin the double cure

Take my guilt and make me pure

PHILIP

Catherine and I used to harmonize like that.

(MARGARET kisses him. He does not resist.)

How did you know I'd stay?

MARGARET

You told me.

MARGARET puts out the last candle, plunging the bed into darkness. In the darkness, the bed disappears from the stage.

PRIEST

No one forgets their first trip to Italy.

TOR

You speak English!

PRIEST

Or their last.

(Burns TOR'S palm with the cigarette.)

TOR

No, no, don't!

(Blackout on TOR and the PRIEST.)

CATHERINE

(Still gazing in the "mirror.")

Saint Catherine, watch over my husband this night. Project him from--

CATHERINE stops as she hears the sound of MARGARET sobbing in the darkness. Blackout.

Milan

A GYPSY FORTUNETELLER posts a banner depicting Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. PHILIP leads CATHERINE on through an archway.

CATHERINE

(Laughing.)

No, Philip--it's too touristy!

PHILIP

Don't be such a tight-ass!

FORTUNETELLER

La bella fortuna! I tell future! Signore, Signora--the desire of your heart!

CATHERINE

Mine is to take a nap! Come on, Philip.

PHILIP

No, we have to stay up to avoid jet lag. We're still flying! How much for two? Due?

CATHERINE

(Sighs.)

Quanto per due fortune, Signore?

FORTUNETELLER

Ten Euros.

PHILIP

(Handing him money.)

Oh, see, Catherine, it's cheap.

FORTUNETELLER

Each.

CATHERINE

That's outrageous!

PHILIP

(Handing him more money.)

Don't you want to know how our trip will go?

(To the FORTUNETELLER.)

Tell us about the next two weeks--beyond that I don't care.

(Holds out his palm.)

FORTUNETELLER

No read hand. God write fortune.

(Reaches up into the air, grabs something invisible, hands it to PHILIP.)

PHILIP

(Reading the piece of paper.)

It's in English.

FORTUNETELLER

No, is in American.

PHILIP

Catherine, this is amazing.

(Reads.)

“Say good-bye to Chicago.” How'd you know we're from there?

(FORTUNETELLER shrugs. PHILIP pushes CATHERINE forward)

Do hers.

CATHERINE

Philip, this is humiliating.

FORTUNETELLER

(Grabbing air again, and handing it to her.)

Surrender to fate, Signora.

CATHERINE

How in the world? Philip, look at this.

PHILIP

Oh, it's just a misspelling and the “L” is really an “I” with the dot connecting.

FORTUNETELLER

No mistake. True fortune.

CATHERINE

(Reading.)

“You will have difficulty overcoming enamels.”

PHILIP

That's “enemies.” There's a logical explanation for everything in this world.

CATHERINE

Then how do you explain Chicago?

PHILIP

(Consulting a map.)

He heard your accent.

(Looks off and back at his map.)

There's the Duomo—let's go up on the roof!

CATHERINE

I'm going to keep this.

PHILIP

How 'bout that—I figured out the map despite the Italian!

CATHERINE

(To the FORTUNETELLER.)

You have no idea how accurate it is. I am having difficulty overcoming enamels.

FORTUNETELLER

Need more luck.

CATHERINE

Oh, no, we can't afford more. Grazie.

FORTUNETELLER

No charge.

(Points to center stage floor.)

Spin on balls of bull.

PHILIP

I beg your pardon?

FORTUNETELLER

Is tradition in Milan for luck. Spin on balls of bull.

CATHERINE

(As they study the floor at center stage.)

What a beautiful mosaic. Oh, the poor thing. His little testicles are all worn down.

PHILIP

You just spin--how--on your heel?

FORTUNETELLER

Si. Buona fortuna!

(Leaves.)

CATHERINE

(As PHILIP goes to the bull on the center stage floor.)
No, Philip, don't! Isn't it enough we blew money on gypsy fortunes?

PHILIP

We need all the luck we can get.

CATHERINE

People are looking. It's embarrassing!

PHILIP

They don't know us. As far as they're concerned, we're just tourists. Might as well act like it.

(Strides to center.)

CATHERINE

Oh, hell! I'll see you in the Duomo.

(Starts to leave.)

Offstage, someone is whistling *On Top of Old Smokey*.

PHILIP

(Spinning on his heel.)

Catherine, this is for you!

(Spinning again as CATHERINE disappears through an arch.)

And for me.

(Spinning as the lights begin to fade.)

The trip.

(Spinning.)

Everything!

Lighting change as PHILIP leaves, and MARGARET and TOR come through the ungated archway. TOR is whistling, but starts singing as soon as they appear. She is wearing practical traveling attire; he is well-dressed for travel with the incongruous addition of gloves. He limps.

TOR

(Singing.)
 On top of the Duomo
 Right here in Milan
 I lost my poor lover
 When she dove like a swan.

MARGARET

Stop that. We need to be inconspicuous.

TOR

They've never seen us before. We're automatically inconspicuous.

MARGARET

Not with you wearing gloves when it's so warm. And what's with that limp?

TOR

(Limping.)
 What limp?

CATHERINE and PHILIP arrive through the
 un gated archway. MARGARET nudges TOR for
 silence and they try to look inconspicuous.

CATHERINE

You Lutherans miss out on all the fun with saints. That statue was Saint Bartholemew
 flayed.

PHILIP

So he was holding his skin?

CATHERINE

Wasn't it beautiful? Really just an excuse for an incredible study of anatomy.

PHILIP

Look at that view!

CATHERINE

This is nothing. Wait till you see the view from the Duomo in Florence or St. Peter's.
 (They use binoculars and start taking pictures.)

TOR

So, how do you feel?

MARGARET

That's not just a pleasantry?

TOR

We're on top of the Duomo, they've arrived as expected, and I wanna know what you plan to do.

MARGARET

I hadn't really thought. Once it starts happening, I'll know.

TOR

And if nothing happens we can go back to the hotel?

MARGARET

I have a feeling I won't be seeing La Scala.

PHILIP

Every spire has a saint.

CATHERINE

There are 150 of them.

MARGARET

What should I say to him?

TOR

Nothing. If it's meant to happen, he'll talk to you first.

MARGARET

You'd put the kibosh on the whole thing!

TOR

(Sotto voce, but loud enough that CATHERINE and PHILIP can't help but hear.)
Meg, it's my moral obligation! I'm out of my mind to let you come up here in the first place.

MARGARET

Did you come only to stop me?

TOR

You still think this is just a funny series of coincidences--

MARGARET

It's not coincidence--it's God!

TOR

And you're perfectly safe in the bosom of the Lord.

MARGARET

That's faith, my dear. Something I never fully understood until now.

TOR

(Taking off his shoes.)

God isn't safe.

MARGARET

What are you doing?

TOR

You're not thinking about consequences. I'm showing you some.

MARGARET

Tor, they're looking!

TOR

Maybe they need to see this, too! Maybe that would put a stop to it!

(Throws his shoes offstage.)

MARGARET

(Running to look over the edge of the roof.)

If you hit someone--!

PHILIP

Um...hey!

MARGARET

(Glancing nervously at PHILIP.)

Tor, this isn't how it's supposed to happen!

TOR

(Peeling off his shirt.)

How do you know? Maybe this is exactly what's supposed to happen.

PHILIP

Shouldn't somebody stop him? Aren't there guards?

MARGARET

You're provoking--! Please, please, stop!

TOR

(Gets the shirt off, revealing a small wound in his side.)
I'm not provoking, I'm preventing!
(Throws the shirt after the shoes.)

MARGARET

What happened to your side?

TOR

Oh, that's the least of it.
(Pulls off his socks.)
My feet, too--hence the limp!

CATHERINE

Philip, he's going to hurt her.

MARGARET

(Going to her knees to examine his wounded feet.)
Tor, what happened?

TOR

(Pulling off the gloves.)
I was hoping you could tell me. I think it's usually a religious phenomenon.

PHILIP

Hey, buddy. Maybe you shouldn't--

TOR

(Tossing the gloves after the shoes and shirt.)
Hey, buddy, maybe *you* shouldn't. You're gonna end up worse than this!
(Displays his wounded palms.)

CATHERINE

My God! Stigmata!
(She takes a flash picture.)

MARGARET

Oh, Tor!

PHILIP

Um...isn't this the kinda private thing you might wanna do somewhere else?

MARGARET

(To PHILIP.)
I'm not ready! I'm not ready for you!

PHILIP
 What? I'm sorry--

MARGARET
 Tor, you forced this--!

TOR
 I'm trying to stop it!

CATHERINE
 Our first day in Italy and already we're witnessing a miracle.
 (She takes a picture.)

MARGARET
 Go to Rome! Whatever happens, make sure you go to Rome!

PHILIP
 Why?

MARGARET
 There's no time! I can't tell you! There's never any time! But that's where you'll find
 what you're looking for.

CATHERINE
 How do you know what he's looking for? He doesn't even know.

PHILIP
 Catherine, please, don't start--

MARGARET
 That's why the throne is empty. We're the judges! We decide. We judge *ourselves*.

PHILIP
 What empty throne?

MARGARET
 Please just tell me this: Why choose the pain of martyrdom over the pain of life?

PHILIP
 Martyrdom?
 (TOR whistles the *Jeopardy* theme.)
 I'm sorry, ma'am--I don't—

CATHERINE

Because it's holy!

MARGARET

I want your answer!

PHILIP

Because martyrdom's...shorter. It's over more quickly.

MARGARET

Of course! I knew you'd say that!

CATHERINE

Philip, what an awful thing to say!

MARGARET

That's his answer! His faith reverses mine, like a mirror! That's why you have to go to Rome.

(She kisses him.)

I love you, Philip. I'm sorry, Catherine. Tor, forgive me.

TOR

Meg, no--stay away from the edge--!

PHILIP

What's she doing?

MARGARET dodges TOR and runs through the gated archway, slamming the gate behind her. TOR leaps to the gate.

TOR

It's locked! Where does this go?

PHILIP

(As they look high upstage, then turn to look high above the audience.)

Up...to...

CATHERINE

The top of the cupola.

PHILIP

The highest part.

TOR

Catherine, you know Italian--call a guard or the police or someone!

CATHERINE

How do you know I know Italian?

TOR

Call!

CATHERINE

Gendarme! Gendarme!

PHILIP

Sweetheart, that's French.

CATHERINE

Oh, of course. Aiuto! Carabinieri! Polizia!

PHILIP

(Pointing up over the audience.)

There she is!

TOR

Meg! No!

CATHERINE

Aiuto!

PHILIP

Please, ma'am! You could fall!

TOR

You can call her Margaret. Believe me.

PHILIP

Margaret, whatever is bothering you, come down so we can talk about it.

TOR

What if it's all lies? A trick!?

PHILIP

Why is she doing this?

TOR

She thinks God wants her to jump.

CATHERINE

Margaret! Sometimes Satan disguises himself as God!

PHILIP

Thou shalt not tempt the Lord your God!

MILANESE POLICEMAN

(Rushing in.)

Cosa e tutto questo gridare? [What is all this shouting?]

CATHERINE

Oh, mille grazie. [A thousand thanks.]

(Pointing.)

Questa donna--she wants to jump--

(Mimes jumping.)

MILANESE POLICEMAN

Dov'e? Non vedo niente. [Where is she? I don't see anything.]

CATHERINE

(Points and uses binoculars.)

She's right there, right next to Saint--Lucy--I think--cause that looks like a dish of eyeballs--

MARGARET

(Off and above.)

Philip, do you love me?

TOR

No--tell her no!

PHILIP

I don't even know her! But if she's depressed--!

TOR

If you tell her yes, she'll jump.

PHILIP

If I tell her no, that might be what pushes her over the edge. I know about depression.

CATHERINE

Tell her yes, Philip. Tell her you love her. It might be the only thing that can save her.

TOR

(Trying the locked gate. To the POLICEMAN.)
Do you have the key? How do you say key?

CATHERINE

Chiave.

TOR

Chiave? Chiave!?

MILANESE POLICEMAN

(Pulling TOR away from the gate.)
No, no! Passaggio vietato! [Passage forbidden!]

CATHERINE

(Gives a little scream.)
Philip, tell her! She's about to--! She's about to--!

PHILIP

Margaret, I love you! Can you hear me! I love you!

CATHERINE

Philip! She's smiling!
(Screams as they see MARGARET jump.)

TOR

Meg!!

PHILIP

No!!

Their eyes follow MARGARET'S plummet,
but after only a few seconds, they gasp.
Their gaze arrests in mid-descent, then
slowly rises.

CATHERINE

Oh, my God.

PHILIP

That's impossible.

TOR

It's true. It's all true.

MILANESE POLICEMAN

Cosa? Che cos'e? [What? What is it?]

PHILIP

She's floating.

CATHERINE

She's ascending.

TOR

Just like you said.

PHILIP

Who said?

TOR

You did.

CATHERINE and PHILIP look at TOR, puzzled,
but before they can say anything, they are distracted
by a bright golden light emanating from above the
audience. The light shines on CATHERINE,
PHILIP and TOR, but not on the POLICEMAN.
CATHERINE puts on sunglasses.

PHILIP

(As the three of them squint.)

What's that?

TOR

God rays.

CATHERINE

I can barely see her.

MILANESE POLICEMAN

Signora, che cos'è fa? [Signora, what's happening?]

With a clink, a ring drops down from above.
 CATHERINE, the POLICEMAN and
 PHILIP jump back, but TOR is unperturbed.

CATHERINE

She's throwing money!

TOR

No, it's just a ring. Pick it up.
 (To PHILIP, who picks up the ring.)
 It's for you.

PHILIP

I've never seen anything like this.

CATHERINE

Shhh! She's saying something.

MARGARET'S VOICE

(Very far off.)
 I can see La Scala from here!

TOR starts whistling *The Hallelujah Chorus*
 as their gaze continues upward.

MILANESE POLICEMAN

(To TOR.)
 Signore, dove sono i Suoi vestiti? E nudo, Lei! [Where are your clothes? You're indecent!]

(To all three of them.)
 Temo di dovervi chiedervi d'andare via. Spaventate gli altri turisti. [I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave. You're frightening the other tourists.]

CATHERINE

Philip, we should go.

PHILIP

But...she's--

CATHERINE

Do you want to spend our whole trip in a Milanese police station?

TOR

No, don't go! There's so much to explain.

When TOR stops whistling to speak, other offstage whistlers quietly harmonize the tune.

PHILIP

Yes, there is! What the hell is going on in this country?!

MILANESE POLICEMAN

(To TOR.)

Passaporto, per favore. [Passport, please.]

CATHERINE

Philip, we can't get too involved.

TOR

It's way, way too late.

CATHERINE

(Tugging at him.)

Philip, he's weird. I'm feeling anxious.

PHILIP

But...I want to know--that woman--!

CATHERINE

Please!

TOR

If you'll just listen, I can save you so much--

CATHERINE

No! Come on!

PHILIP

(As CATHERINE drags him through the ungated arch.)

I'm sorry--!

TOR turns back to the glow emanating from above and hears the other whistlers. He joins them in whistling the *Chorus*. The POLICEMAN stares into the sky, seeing nothing, then turns back to TOR.

MILANESE POLICEMAN

Passaporto, Signore, per favore.

TOR begins to conduct the heavenly whistling chorus, a beatific smile on his face. The whistling grows louder as the lights fade.

MILANESE POLICEMAN

Signore? Passaporto?

Blackout.