

Sandpaper Dream

A play by Idan Silberstein

HOP, a young man

NERI, a grown up woman

DIA, a young woman, LITTLE DIA, a girl

SABI, a young man

MAN AND WOMAN, young

D-83, a teenage girl

H-15, a girl

THE HAWKER, a very old man

THE BLINDWOMAN, a very old woman

RATS

1.

[In the examination room. MAN AND WOMAN standing. Enters NERI, barefoot.]

NERI: When I was a child, I appeared on the cover of a magazine. Everyone wrote I'll be a beauty queen. When I was a teenager, my parents enlisted me in the competition. Then I got pregnant. You said, sure, pretty, try again, after you give birth. After the first born, came another, a girl. Now I promise there won't be any more.

WOMAN: Where is the contestant?

NERI: Me...

WOMAN: It's a beauty contest, not a shot-put competition.

MAN *[to WOMAN]*: Why be negative? *[to NERI]* The world has advanced a few years since you were young. And so did you...

NERI: You said, try again, you're really pretty...

Woman: Two pregnancies, overweight, advanced age, barefoot and... It's hard to find beauty in you. Do you really think, with these characteristics, that you fit the contest?

MAN *[to WOMAN]*: And in a more positive way, the train has left, you're left stranded in the station.

NERI: there's always another train...

WOMAN: You've collected dust, cobwebs. The next train, you won't remember. It will run over you!

MAN *[to WOMAN]*: Why so negative? We're supposed to open our hearts, not turn our backs. *[To NERI]* Go a little back and walk towards us. Like... a woman proud of herself and her dress.

[NERI hesitates]

MAN: Right, right... Go back and walk towards us.

NERI *[Turns backwards hesitating. Stands. Walks slowly towards them]*: Like this...?

MAN: Stop.

[NERI stops]

MAN: Neck straight...

[NERI straightens her neck.]

MAN: A confident look, full of mystery, body both tense and relaxed.

[NERI tries.]

MAN: Confident...

[NERI tries.]

MAN: Mystery... Both...

NERI *[Tries, gives up]*: Teach me.

MAN: Teach...? You...? Really... it's not that the train has left. You're standing in a station where no train has ever passed! Every minute you're here, wasting our time, a sixteen years old waits for her turn, getting older! *[To WOMAN]* My aesthetic space has a limit.

NERI: Teach me, please... It's my dream.

WOMAN: There are ways to look young.

NERI: There are...?

WOMAN [*approaching her*]: Just do what you have to do, don't overdo it. Merely an economical question.

NERI: I haven't...

WOMAN: If it's your dream, there are ways to earn it.

NERI: And if... Can I try again...?

MAN: Sure, sure... You are pretty, try again, after your... [*Calls out*] Next!

2.

[*In the cellar. HOP sits on a chair, barefoot and dressed in pajamas, a white sheet covers him. A coffee jar nearby, a cup and a plate. On his other side, a small open suitcase. Everything seems in perfect order.*]

HOP: Dear Norma,

I woke up this morning and again. Everything was in its place. The food you bring me each night and the food for Che.

When I opened my eyes, your perfume smell was still fresh; it hanged like a cloud in the sky of my cellar. I hurried to the crack. [*Gets up, taking the sheet off. Moves the chair, stands on it and peeps out.*]

Men and Women shoes. Hurrying shoes, hesitating shoes, full of doubts and uncertainties, worn out shoes, patched up, tattered, mincing the asphalt, shouting out all they ask for is some rest. Each pair has its own direction. In all this mess, I saw a pair walking sure and serene. A pair of feminine bare feet.

[*In the street. NERI crosses the street, barefoot. Stops. Looks back. LITTLE DIA appears behind her, holding a small suitcase. She is barefoot as well.*]

NERI: Dia, we're late.

DIA: Your steps are double than mine, mom.

NERI: Walk in double speed.

DIA: Right. [*Walks faster*] Double speed is possible. [*Slows down and takes bigger steps*] Can also double the steps. [*Comes up to NERI*] To match your step length, I have to grow taller in... three, perhaps four meters.

NERI: You know already, Dia, don't you?

DIA: Many things, not enough. Suppose, why do lions kill their cubs occasionally... or, why when you cross the Atlantic, your time zone changes... and.... of course, I can't read yet.

NERI [*bends down to her*]: You'll learn how to read and write, and find an answer to every question.

DIA: You can't, mom?

NERI [*stands up*]: Not always.

DIA: That's why there are tears in your eyes?

NERI: No tears...

DIA: Or because of a brother I once had, and am not allowed to mention?

[NERI says nothing.]

DIA: Or that we're barefoot...

NERI [*turns to her*]: Remember, kid, when uncle comes, stay quiet. You mustn't scare him with your questions. We're barefoot... because we are, right?

[*In the cellar.*]

HOP: The barefoot feet stopped [*bends as if hiding. A pause. Goes up again to peep out*], the feet eyes looked straight at me. I felt they were your feet. I thought you were going to tell me something. [*Calls out*] Norma, look out... A pair of shiny shoes stopped, creaking. The bare feet turned towards the shoes. Seemed like a big argument erupted. One shiny shoe stamped the asphalt.

[*In the street.*]

[DIA stamps her leg. Remains quiet to spite.]

NERI: That's it. When uncle comes stay quiet.

DIA: Will you tell uncle, why we're barefoot?

NERI: He won't ask that, kid.

DIA: My name's Dia...!

NERI: And Dia will remain quiet when uncle comes!

DIA: Dia doesn't know uncle.

NERI: Neither do mom... we'll know him when he comes...

DIA: When will he?

NERI: In five minutes.

DIA: On the one hand, five minutes are three hundred seconds. On the other, they are five divided by sixty minutes. Right?

NERI: I'm not sure it's right...

DIA [*running around her*]: You had no time to study...

NERI [*tries to catch her*]: Dia...

DIA: Because you brought me to the world, me and...

NERI: Dia!...

DIA: The brother I had and mustn't talk about...

NERI [*holds her*]: Mustn't...!

DIA: I just speak about the mustn't part. [*Breaks loose of her hold, walks further a bit pretending she's jumping a rope*] When I'll be at uncle's for vacation, you'll have time to study...

NERI: Why do you do that?

DIA: It's interesting without a rope.

NERI [*looks sideways*]: He mustn't see you like that.

DIA: His children jump ropes too, don't they?

[NERI says nothing.]

[DIA stops. Stamps her foot.]

[In the Cellar.]

HOP: Barefoot, against a stamping foot. *[Slowly sits down. Mimes the rope in front of the shoe.]*

[Shoe] We had a good time...

[Shoe] Had?...

[Shoe] Could still have....

[Shoe] A theoretical question....

[Shoe] Practically, I'm available. Shall we talk about love?

[Shoe] I lost it.

[Shoe] It'll come back.

[Shoe] Love is a verbal excuse, for some other aim. Temporary.

[Gets up] L o n e l i n e s s !

[Claps] Loneliness... *[Hops and sings]* Loneliness... Loneliness... Loneliness...

[Calls out] Che...! My little rat... Come dance with me...

Loneliness... Loneliness... Loneliness...

[In the street.]

DIA: Me... on vacation... alone with uncle.

NERI: I'm sure you'll have fun.

DIA: What will I do... alone.... on vacation with uncle....

NERI: You'll learn how to read.

DIA: In a single vacation....

NERI: And write.

DIA: Learn to read and write.... in a single vacation... with uncle... alone....

[In the cellar.]

HOP: Loneliness... Loneliness... Loneliness...

[Stops] Now, writing this to you, Norma, I feel both lucky and an idiot.

Lucky, because you know I stutter. But writing to you, I can speak straight and smooth, without a single stop. And an idiot, because I just realized, through your bare foot, that I need no speaking skills. Loneliness is not a problem, it's a solution. It's not wallowing in the mire, it exaltation. Norma, you brought a new idea into my body. Like a different man was born in it.

[In the street. CLAUDE appears. In his hand a fancy walking stick, to display status not need. Dressed up in a coat. Stops.]

NERI *[comes near CLAUDE. Effectively hiding DIA from him]*: Mister Claude...

CLAUDE *[hums]*: Your name...

NERI: Neri.

CLAUDE: Neri... *[Hums]* Who gave you that name, yes?

NERI: When I was born...

CLAUDE: Why do you think I'm interested? [*Inspects her.*]

NERI: Everything's set...

CLAUDE: No deal. [*Turns back.*]

NERI: Why?

CLAUDE [*stops*]: On second thought, [*turns to her*] whoever gave you that name, gave you a self fulfilling prophecy.

NERI: Full of light?

CLAUDE: Like a moment before the candle dies out and there's this thick pool of wax.

[*NERI looks down.*]

CLAUDE: That's why no deal.

NERI [*looking at him*]: I'm not the deal.

CLAUDE: There are other dealers, willing to compromise. It's a matter of genetics, yes?

NERI: You haven't seen her yet.

CLAUDE: I see the womb she came out from. Not worth it. Not the money, the mere thought of it. [*Hums*] or in a more human language, if **you're** ugly it's a precedent...

DIA [*stands in front of CLAUDE*]: You're an ugly uncle! My mom's pretty!

NERI: Come, Dia, that's not the uncle you go out on vacation with.

[*DIA looks at CLAUDE.*]

CLAUDE [*looks at DIA, hums*]: Miracles do happen, yes?

[*In the cellar.*]

HOP: My miracle is you. [*Takes out an old magazine from the suitcase. Opens it.*] I learned everything from these magazines, Norma. Reading and writing, day and night, global economics. [*Looks at the magazine*] they say you're a model. I think they mean you serve as a model. [*Kisses the magazine*] And you're with me, asking for nothing. Not demanding all they say about relationship. Keeping me secret. Making up another life for yourself, like a sheet covering a treasure. They say here you're married. I imagine their reaction, had they known the truth. [*Closes the magazine puts it down carefully and neatly in the suitcase.*]

[*In the street.*]

CLAUDE [*Turns around DIA. Inspects her*]: You wish to go on vacation with me?

DIA: Are you a good uncle? Bad uncle?

CLAUDE [*stands between DIA and NERI*]: You're afraid of me?

DIA: You didn't answer.

CLAUDE: Sometimes... sometimes....

DIA: Do you know what oxygen's made of?

CLAUDE [*lifts up DIA's chin with his walking stick*]: Yes, yes.

DIA: You will teach me to read and write.

CLAUDE [*turns around to NERI*]: We said ten thousand.
NERI [*looks down*]: Fifteen thousand.
[CLAUDE *looks once more at DIA. Turns to NERI again, taking a pack of money from his coat.*]
[NERI *holds the notes.*]
CLAUDE [*not letting go of them*]: Any more miracles?
DIA [*comes to NERI. Looks at the notes*]: Mom, look how much money...
[NERI *looks at CLAUDE.*]
DIA: Mom, you have money to study and buy shoes....
CLAUDE [*lets go of the notes. To DIA*]: Let uncle hold your hand.
DIA [*to NERI*]: I'm going on a short vacation with uncle Claude. When I come back, we'll visit the planetarium, ok?
[NERI *gives DIA a quick hug.*]
DIA [*holding CLAUDE's hand. To CLAUDE*]: My name's Dia...
CLAUDE [*to NERI*]: Who gave you a name like that?
DIA: Dia, it's a bird of prey, a hawk.
CLAUDE [*looks at DIA, takes out another note from his coat, gives it to NERI*]: Another hundred. Buy yourself some shoes.
[NERI *takes the note.*]
[CLAUDE *holds her hand more firmly, turns to go away.*]
[NERI *looks after them.*]

[*In the cellar. HOP sits, covering himself with the sheet.*]

HOP: Like you, I'll keep our secret. [*Stand on the chair and peeps out*] the bare feet are gone. One shiny shoe stamped the asphalt, took the other shoe and gone away together. Silence came. [*Gets down from the chair, puts it back in place, sits on it covering himself with the sheet*] Norma, perhaps you can come tonight and bring Che some more food. He's getting older, that rat. Yours, Hop.

3.

[*In CLAUDE's living room. D-83 stands behind a chair. Enters CLAUDE, holding his stick. Stands. After him enters SAVI. Stands.*]

CLAUDE: That Magritte painting you saw in my cellar, *The Son of Man*, it's worth a million and a half. [*Looks at SAVI*].
[SAVI *says nothing*]
CLAUDE: To connoisseurs, yes? That green, juicy apple, defying gravity, is higher than our known reality, yes?
SAV: I see,
CLAUDE: You still don't have a million and a half.
[SAVI *takes out papers from his pocket, gives them to CLAUDE.*]
CLAUDE [*takes the papers and reads them*]: Your name...

SAVI: Savi.

CLAUDE [*keeps on reading*]: A family of real estate brokers.

SAVI: Generations of brokers.

CLAUDE [*looking at SAVI*]: And you wish to be as well. You see it's important, checking your background.

SAVI: Right.

CLAUDE: So that someone from the mire classes doesn't infiltrate the broker class.

SAVU: Clearly.

CLAUDE: And you wish to be as well, yes?

[SAVI *nods up and down.*]

CLAUDE: And you will probably... [*Looks pointedly at SAVI. Hums*] Although... say, did you check your genes for Negros? Grandmother? Grand grandfather? You realize such filthy games, rule you out.

SAVI: None. Generations of brokers.

CLAUDE [*comes near him*]: Who produces children these days? Only the mire classes.

SAVI: I was born before the regulation came into effect.

CLAUDE [*Watches him. A pause.*]: Your advantage. Since it came into effect, biological time has stood still. Brokers don't grow older. You came in young. Your advantage. [*Gives him back his papers.*]

[SAVI *takes them and puts them in his pocket.*]

CLAUDE [*sits on a chair*]: Your dad explained it all, yes?

SAVI: No.

CLAUDE [*hums*]: Real estate business... you need to know how to recognize the exact right moment, when children reach their prime. When their maturity starts shining and spreading. Then their value peaks. From there on, it goes downward.

SAVU: Where do you keep them?

CLAUDE: In pens. Two in the yard. One near the harbor. Two more being constructed. We're expanding. [*Bangs the floor with his stick.*]

[D-83 *comes to CLAUDE, stands by his side.*]

CLAUDE: That's D-83. You chose her, yes?

SAVI [*looks at her*]: I believe so. They seem... so similar in the catalog.

CLAUDE: You can go back to the catalog, if you don't like her.

[SAVI *looks at D-83.*]

CLAUDE [*hums*]: I keep them all educated and learned from a young age. Reading and writing, literature, science, history... Any subject you can think of. Theoretical and practical sex, home community service. No chance a person who grew up with me tries to run away. [*Bangs the floor with his stick.*]

D-83 [*stands near SAVI*]: I will not run away, master Savi.

SAVI: Just Savi...

D-83: Master Savi...

CLAUDE [*hums*]: Educated, yes? [*A pause.*] Ask her. Anything.

SAVI [*pauses*]: What's your name.

D-83: D-83.

CLAUDE: Ah, come on.... What was the immediate cause for the first world war?
D-83: The murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, twenty eighth of June, 1914.
CLAUDE: What's evolutionary genetics?
D-83: Studying the history of Human DNA transformations.
CLAUDE: What's...
SAVI: It's understood.
D-83: Will you buy me, master Savi?
CLAUDE [*hums*]: Please, show some manners, D-83... She's just approaching maturity. You can make a profit off her, yes?
[SAVI *watches* D-83.]

[*Enter* DIA, *holding a tray with two glasses of whiskey. SAVI looks at her.*]

CLAUDE: It's a deal?
SAVI [*keeps on looking at* DIA]: Haven't seen her in the catalog.
[CLAUDE *bangs the floor with his stick.*]
[DIA *looks at* CLAUDE.]
CLAUDE: Serve!... [*Softer*] Serve...
[DIA *serves* CLAUDE, *then* SAVI.]
SAVI: What's your name?
DIA: If that interests you, my name is...
CLAUDE: D-15.
[DIA *stamps her foot.*]
CLAUDE [*hums*]: A wild mare. [*To* SAVI] The only one living in house. The only one I let grow to an older age.
SAVI: Looking at her... you could almost.... fall in love....
CLAUDE [*bursts out laughing. Stops laughing abruptly. Gets up to* SAVI]: Fall in love, yes? You're sure no Negro genes?
DIA: Two slave merchants speak of feeling and the lack of it. [*To* SAVI] And if you fall in love with me... what then...? What then?...
[CLAUDE *bangs his stick.*]
DIA [*looking at* CLAUDE, *mumbles*]: Sorry... sir... [*To* SAVI]: You're through...?
[*Takes his glass. To* CLAUDE] And you... sir...? [*Takes his glass. Turns and exits.*]
CLAUDE [*sits down, hums*]: A wild mare...
SAVI: It's a deal. I'll take... D-83.
CLAUDE: Thirty thousand. You can split it in three installments.
SAVI: Three thousand for a week trial.
CLAUDE: Three days trial. Five thousand surety deposit. If you decide to return her, you won't get your money back, but will be credited for some other deal.
[SAVI *takes out a bundle of notes from his pocket, gives them to* CLAUDE.]
CLAUDE [*takes the notes and stuffs them in his pocket*]: On the way out see M-1. She'll issue your permits. So those bloody human rights cavaliers won't bother you.
SAVI [*A pause.*]: Well... [*Turns to* D-83.]

[D-83 *stands near* CLAUDE, *looks down.*]
CLAUDE: Well... right, right...
[SAVI *gestures to* D-83.]
[D-83 *exits.*]
[SAVI *looks at* CLAUDE, *exits behind her.*]

4.

[*In the clinic.* NERI *stands, waiting. She holds notes of money. Near her* THE DOCTOR, *holding papers and a pen.*]

NERI: What do you think I have to?
THE DOCTOR: I'm no psychologist.
NERI: For my... young look.
THE DOCTOR [*marks the air with the pen*]: A thorough facelift. Also the neck. Raising the cheekbones... adding volume to sub-skin fat. Lip filling... Filing the upper lip. With sandpaper...
NERI: With sandpaper...?
THE DOCTOR: Humor.
NERI: You frightened me.
THE DOCTOR: I'm no psychologist!
NERI: Look... young...
THE DOCTOR: Brow lifting. Eyelid surgery.
NERI: I have to do all of these?
THE DOCTOR [*turns away as if hurt*]: Don't have to. Can leave.
NERI: Wants to. Don't have to...
THE DOCTOR [*turns back. Points at the papers*]: Who you wish to resemble?
NERI [*pauses, looks at* THE DOCTOR]: You.
THE DOCTOR: That'd be difficult...
NERI: Can you try?
THE DOCTOR [*A pause*]: It's a question of genetics. And status. [*Inspects her body*]
You're sure only face surgeries?
[NERI says nothing.]
THE DOCTOR [*about to write in the papers*]: You should have told me!
NERI: No...
THE DOCTOR [*comes back and inspects her*]: That... No pregnancies...
NERI [*a pause*]: That's it...?
THE DOCTOR: In your case, luck too.
NERI: Why luck...?
THE DOCTOR: Well anyway. [*Mumbles*] Modern plastic surgery has its limits...
NERI: How much?
[THE DOCTOR *gives* NERI *the papers and pen.*]
[NERI *signs them.*]
THE DOCTOR: Seven thousand five hundred.

[NERI *says nothing.*]

THE DOCTOR: Now.

[NERI *counts notes and gives them to THE DOCTOR.*]

THE DOCTOR [*takes them*]: Wait. [*Exits.*]

5.

[*In CLAUDE's living room. CLAUDE stands. H-15 stands behind him. Enters DIA holding a new jacket. Pauses a little when she sees H-15. Comes to CLAUDE.*]

CLAUDE: You're done sewing. And on time. Good.

DIA [*spreads the jacket*]: Put your hand in.

CLAUDE: Sir...!

DIA: Sir, sir...

[*CLAUDE puts his hands in the jacket.*]

DIA: Who's that... sir?

CLAUDE: H-15. New.

DIA: Very young... sir.

CLAUDE: I could spot you as well when you were very young. Right, D-15?

[*DIA says nothing.*]

[*CLAUDE bangs the floor with his stick.*]

DIA: Yes, sir.

CLAUDE [*hums*]: Precise work. Fits. Right?

DIA [*inspects it*]: Fits you nicely.

[*CLAUDE hums.*]

DIA: Sir.

CLAUDE: Did you dust the cellar?

DIA [*gazing at H-15*]: Yes, sir.

CLAUDE: Careful not to harm the paintings?

[*DIA comes near H-15.*]

H-15: When does the vacation starts, uncle Claude?

CLAUDE: It did already.

H-15: When will you teach me to read and write?

CLAUDE: Tomorrow, H-15.

H-15: Why do you call me H-15, uncle Claude?

CLAUDE: You'll learn that as well tomorrow.

H-15: Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow... I want to know already and go back to mom. I promised her we'll go together....

DIA: To the planetarium.

H-15: You know my mom?

CLAUDE [*goes away from them. To H-15*]: Go to sleep. A busy day waits for you tomorrow.

[*H-15 comes to CLAUDE and hugs him. Turns to go, looks at DIA.*]

[DIA *looks down.*]

[H-15 *goes out hopping.*]

CLAUDE: These last days, I've been seeing this shadow in the window facing the garden. [*Turns to DIA*] As if someone stands there... Waiting for someone.... And when he sees me approaching, he runs away... You know anything about that?

[DIA *looks after H-15.*]

CLAUDE: I asked...

DIA: I heard.

CLAUDE: Know who he is?

DIA: No.

CLAUDE: If you had, would you tell?

DIA: Perhaps... [*Looks directly at him*] Perhaps.

CLAUDE [*hums*]: Something changes tonight, right?

DIA: You prepare a replacement for me.

CLAUDE: I've put out an ad. I guess in two or three days a rich broker will come... become happy...

DIA: You taught me. Set me free.

CLAUDE: What kind of logic can make me set you free?

DIA: Not logic.

CLAUDE: I don't get it...

[DIA *approaches him.*]

CLAUDE: You're using perfume already...

DIA: That's my body smell.

CLAUDE: It's perfume...

DIA: You know I haven't... any perfume... [*Puts her hand to her nose.*]

CLAUDE: That's strange...

DIA: Teach me in the next two or three days, all that I don't already know and let me leave.

CLAUDE: That's not logical...

DIA: It's emotional...

CLAUDE: No emotions...

DIA: Call it whatever you like...

CLAUDE: Yet, I raised you...

[DIA *takes his hand and kisses it.*]

CLAUDE: What do I get?

[DIA *puts his hand to her cheek. A pause.*]

CLAUDE: That's not... Enough...

DIA: Let me leave...!

[CLAUDE *frees his hand from her. Bangs his stick.*]

DIA [*stands erected in front of him*]: What will you do if I run away?

CLAUDE: My power outside exceeds even my power inside.

DIA: I'll manage!

CLAUDE [*grabs her hair*]: My messenger will find you within hours. He'll play with you a little, abuse you a little, and kill you a little. He'll turn around, walk away and

completely forget about you. [*Lets go of her hair.*] Your insolence sets a precedent, yes?

DIA: Claude...

CLAUDE: Sir..!

DIA: Sir Claude...

CLAUDE: You're a wild mare for someone else to tame, and that's after he'll pay your price. Because I deserve it, after all these years of making you who you are. You mustn't forget that for a single moment, inside those clouds of perfume you spread around you. You are from the mire classes. Your distinction only makes your price higher. In gold.

[*DIA looks at him.*]

CLAUDE: I'll teach you in the next two or three days, everything you still don't know. And sell you.

[*DIA turns away from him.*]

CLAUDE: I didn't tell you to leave, D-15.

[*DIA stops. Turns to him.*]

CLAUDE [*sits down*]: Go on telling me the story you told me yesterday, about that king...

DIA [*pauses. Comes near him*]: Silenos amused king Midas with his stories. The king asked him what, he believed, a man needed most...

[*CLAUDE hums.*]

6.

[*In the clinic. NERI stands. Her face covered with a mask of white gauze. She holds her remaining notes. Next to her THE DOCTOR, holding papers, a pen and a pack of pills.*]

THE DOCTOR [*Gives NERI the pack of pills*]: Painkillers. Pain because of the wounds, not emotional. Two a day. One in the morning, one in the evening.

[*NERI takes the pack.*]

THE DOCTOR [*gives her the papers*]: You're in a good condition. Luck, is not our responsibility, sign.

[*NERI signs.*]

[*THE DOCTOR exits.*]

NERI [*brings the pack to her eyes. Opens it. Takes out a pill, puts it in her mouth.*]

[*Shouts of THE HAWKER from outside. NERI hurries in his direction. Effectively comes out to the street. Enters THE HAWKER. Dressed in a coat from which items hang. On his shoulder a bag with more stuff.*]

THE HAWKER [*calls out*]: Depressants, anti depressants, appetite killers, socks following first use...

NERI: Shoes?

THE HAWKER [*keeps on turning*]: Hard to recognize... [*looks pointedly*] Women's? One last pair...

NERI: What size?

THE HAWKER [*glances quickly at her feet. Keeps on turning*]: Yours.

NERI: Stop...

THE HAWKER: Cannot. If I stop, I fall asleep.

NERI: How much?

THE HAWKER: Eighty.

NERI: I'll give you a hundred.

THE HAWKER: I want eighty.

NERI: A hundred. For you to stop and give me the shoes.

THE HAWKER [*stops and takes out a pair of shoes from the bag*]: Stops. Quick. Shoes. A hundred. [*Opens his coat*] Painkiller? Another hundred. A bargain.

NERI [*gives him a note and takes the shoes*]: I have.

THE HAWKER: If need, pass here twice a day. Regular.

[*NERI sits down and wears the shoes.*]

THE HAWKER [*keeps on going*]: Depressants, anti depressants, appetite killers....

7

[*By the window in CLAUDE's house. DIA sits writing.*]

DIA: My Drumboy. Can I call you that? For me you bring the change. I saw your shadow a few times and felt drums beat inside my body. I feel you've come for me. Is it true? **Did you ever think of being someone else?** Yours, Dia. [*DIA folds the paper, looks outside and throws it away. Looks inside, into the house, and slips out the window.*]

8.

[*In the cellar. HOP sits, covered in a sheet.*]

HOP: Dear Norma,

Thanks for bringing CHE some more food. [*Gets up, takes off the sheet. Moves the chair, stands on it and peeps out.*] By the smell of perfume, I knew my chance of seeing your feet was tiny. The shoes more tattered, walking faster, as if a storm's coming. And the noise... [*Covers his ears and comes down from the chair. Calls out*] Che... Che... come out to play with me... [*Looks around and puts the chair back in its place. Sits down and takes a magazine out of the suitcase. Opens it.*] Norma, you're even more sophisticated than I thought. You say here you changed your name. They call you Marilyn. I shall go on calling you Norma. [*Bends his back forward, as if telling a secret.*]

I saw that picture as well, Norma, the one in which you lacked some cover. What it did to you, I'll keep that a secret even from you, ok? [*A pause.*] Tomorrow could you,

with the food you leave Che and me, leave a picture of you as a child? Yours, Hop
[Looks around.] Che... Che...

9.

[*In the contestants room. MAN and WOMAN stand. Enters NERI, wearing shoes, without the gauze mask. Her looks is just as it was before the surgery.*]

NERI: You said, you're really pretty, try again, after surgery... [Shows herself.]

WOMAN: Where's the contestant?

NERI: I did as you told me.

WOMAN: Nothing changed with you, with us, everything's changed.

MAN: Or to put it more positively, the old train was exchanged for a fast and digital hovercraft.

NERI: Look. [Goes away from them. Walks towards them.] A sure look, full of mystery, the body both tense and relaxed.

WOMAN: You should be both sexy and revealing, abused in childhood, righteous and humble, awkward and outgoing. In short, modern.

NERI [keeps on walking. Tries]: ... And revealing... Abused... Outgoing....

MAN: In a way, completely un-negative, I will tell you. Every contestant in the beauty contest, has a price tag.

NERI [stops]: Name your price...

MAN: Every minute you're here, wasting our time, a fourteen years old, worth fifty thousand, waits her turn, getting older!

NERI: And if... there's a price, can I try again...?

MAN: Yes, yes... after the... [Calls out] Next!

10.

[*In CLAUDE's living room. H-15 enters and stands behind the window. Enters CLAUDE, after him, SAVI. Both stand.*]

CLAUDE: That never happened before.

SAVI: It did now.

CLAUDE: You're the first it happened to.

SAVI: You promised.

CLAUDE: What did you do for it to happen?

SAVI: I woke up one morning and she was gone.

CLAUDE: You have a large house?

SAVI: I looked everywhere.

CLAUDE: I'll send a messenger after her.

SAVI: That's what's bothering you now?

CLAUDE: Believe me, he'll find her.

SAVI: I don't want her.

CLAUDE: You chose D-83.

SAVI: And she ran away. That's your credibility?

CLAUDE [*approaches him*]: You have doubts, yes?

SAVI: I look at the actions.

CLAUDE: A young one comes to me, takes a property for trial, and it disappears.

SAVI: Did I chase her away?

CLAUDE: For instance...

SAVI: I know I shouldn't mess with you.

CLAUDE [*comes near the chair and turns it around*]: Sit.

SAVI: I'd rather stand.

CLAUDE [*pushes him into sitting and spreads SAVI's legs with his stick*] If you're cheating me... [*Aims at his groins.*]

[SAVI *looks at him.*]

[CLAUDE *puts the stick near his groins.*]

[SAVI *freezes.*]

[*Enters NERI. Holding notes in one hand, the pack of pills in the other.*]

NERI [*Sees H-15. Approaches her. Caresses her hair*]: You're a pretty girl...

CLAUDE [*approaches*]: How did you enter?

NERI [*to H-15*]: What's the price of a girl so young?

CLAUDE: You don't seem like someone who can ask for prices.

NERI [*turns to him*]: No one stopped me, master Claude.

CLAUDE: Do we know each other?

NERI: I changed.

[CLAUDE *says nothing.*]

NERI [*shows him*]: I bought shoes with the money you gave me.

CLAUDE: Who are you?

NERI [*A pause*]: One who asks for prices.

CLAUDE [*goes towards her. Inspects her*]: You...? Wish to buy...?

NERI: Sell.

CLAUDE [*hums*]: Sell...

NERI [*a pause*]: Name your price.

CLAUDE [*turns to SAVI. Bangs his foot on the floor*] Get up.

[SAVI *doesn't react.*]

CLAUDE: Get up, get up...

[SAVI *gets up.*]

CLAUDE: She needs a price.

[SAVI *looks at NERI.*]

CLAUDE: Go near, inspect, react.

[SAVI *goes near NERI slowly. Inspects her.*]

[NERI *stands as if trying to impress.*]

CLAUDE: Old or young?

SAVI [*pauses*]: Not young...

NERI: Younger than I was. *[A pause.]* Right?

CLAUDE: Repulsion or attraction?

SAVI *[A pause]*: Not attraction...

CLAUDE: Fat or skinny?

[SAVI pauses.]

CLAUDE: Right.

NERI: What's the price?

CLAUDE: What do you say...?

NERI: Five thousand...

CLAUDE *[calls out]*: Five thousand for the fat lady!

SAVI *[a pause]*: No...

NERI: Three thousand, ok?

CLAUDE *[calls out]*: Three thousand for the fat lady!

NERI *[opens the pack and puts a pill in her mouth]*: That's a painkiller. Not emotional ones.

CLAUDE: Perhaps she's willing to pay us to take her, yes? How much you offer to pay?

NERI *[presses the money to her chest. To SAVI]*: Name a price.

SAVI *[stands in front of NERI]*: We go to the girls, they don't come to us, ok?

NERI *[to SAVI]*: Will you come to me?

SAVI: We might...

NERI: And name your price.

SAVI: If we come, we name.

NERI: And if I'm not there when you come?

SAVI: Then some other time.

NERI: If I'm not there, leave me a message, ok?

SAVI: And now, leave.

NERI *[goes to H-15]*: You remind me of her so much.

H-15: Of whom?

NERI: My daughter was your age.

H-15: And you remind me of mom. She's waiting for me to come back from vacation and...

CLAUDE *[hums]*: Yes... yes...

NERI *[to CLAUDE]*: For my daughter you paid fifteen thousand.

CLAUDE : Your daughter....

NERI: Can I see her?

CLAUDE *[puts the stick to her forehead]*: Who's your daughter?

NERI: She looked like...

CLAUDE: Do you realize how many "looked like" I've had throughout the years?

NERI: You yourself said...

CLAUDE: I say many things when I do business.

NERI: That she's like a miracle...

CLAUDE *[puts the stick more sharply]*: Your daughter I sold, like many others, long ago, yes? And if you wish to go on keeping that pathetic thing called life of yours...

SAVI: If you're not there, we'll leave a message.

NERI [*goes away from CLAUDE*]: Your helper says...

SAVI: Now leave.

NERI: And... name a price...

[*CLAUDE puts down the stick.*]

NERI: You will name a price...! [*Exits.*]

SAVI [*looks after her*]: I'll be your messenger.

CLAUDE: You..?

SAVI: You won't see her again.

CLAUDE: How?

SAVI [*turns to him*]: No need for details.

CLAUDE: I won't see her again, yes?

[*SAVI looks at him.*]

CLAUDE [*looks at him*]: You'll make that redundant chunk of fat disappear, and do it... in a seemingly humane way.

SAVI: We live off her womb...

CLAUDE [*a pause*]: They have a self destruct mechanism. No use wasting a messenger on her. [*Turns around and sits.*] We're two brokers. We have a more important matter to see through.

SAVI: As you wish.

CLAUDE: If you do for me, I'll owe you, yes?

[*SAVI says nothing.*]

[*Enters DIA. Holding a tray with two glasses of whiskey. SAVI looks at her.*]

CLAUDE: Offer me a deal.

SAVI: Someone in exchange for D-83, same conditions apply, same trial period.

DIA [*serves CLAUDE*]: Master Claude.

CLAUDE [*hums to DIA. Takes a glass. To SAVI*]: From the catalog.

[*DIA serves Savi.*]

SAVI: Also off it.

CLAUDE [*gets up*]: Nothing but rumors, yes? You won't take advantage of me!

DIA [*hurries to CLAUDE*]: You should think of your health.

SAVI: You're ill?

DIA [*to CLAUDE*]: Especially in such a condition you should keep your inner calm.

[*A pause.*] Sit...

CLAUDE [*sits*]: I will also get over this small fall. [*Hums*] I will... And don't tell me you didn't hear any rumors.

SAVI: I did hear something...

CLAUDE: The rumor made a mountain out of a mouse.

DIA [*to SAVI*]: His shares fell three and a half percent. Analysts expect further falls. No real reason for them, except for the rumors.

CLAUDE: Spread by those damned people from the agency for the rights of... mire kids...

DIA: They spread a rumor he started taking large loans from the black market.

CLAUDE: Those useless people, with some Negros in their genetic past and some faggots in their present... not producing anything, who scorn the meaning of human wealth... They don't understand that of my kind goes down, the entire human race goes down with it, yes?

DIA [*to SAVI*]: He solved it already.

CLAUDE: *The Son of Man*, Magritte, with the apple? I got a somewhat lower price for it. That's all. My share shall double its value. My messenger are out to deal with these damned people, from the agency for the rights of... you've nothing to take advantage here, yes?

SAVI: I'll take her. [*Points at DIA.*]

CLAUDE: Who?

SAVI: Fifty thousand.

CLAUDE: She's off the catalog!

SAVI: According to your own system, her maturity shines and spreads.

CLAUDE: She's a moment before peaking. I can tell!

SAVI: From peak to low, you sure you have time for that?

DIA: You're sure fifty thousand is tempting enough?

SAVI [*a pause*]: Let him name his price.

DIA: You can't afford it.

SAVI: Let him name it and see.

DIA: I'll turn you to dust.

SAVI: I accept the challenge.

SAVI [*looks at CLAUDE and speaks to DIA*]: It's not your decision.

DIA [*looks at CLAUDE and speaks to SAVI*]: I still have stuff to learn from him.

CLAUDE [*gets up. Pauses. Looks at DIA, hums. To SAVI*]: I'll let you have one plus one. Same conditions apply, for a trial. From the catalog.

SAVI: Sixty thousand. [*Points at DIA.*]

DIA [*goes to H-15*]: Fifty thousand. For her.

SAVI: For her...?

CLAUDE: She's not negotiable too!

DIA [*to CLAUDE*]: Everything has its price.

SAVI: She's still young.

DIA: A great potential for profit.

CLAUDE: Add her distinction, and you'll find the reason she's off the catalog.

DIA: The public will see you sell a one like this, at that price. And understand that if there's been any crisis, it subsides now.

[*Silence.*]

SAVI [*to CLAUDE*]: Five thousand I've already given you. For a three days trial.

CLAUDE: No trial period. What you've given me was an advance for fifty thousand.

SAVI: Forty.

CLAUDE: Take it or leave it.

SAVI [*takes a bundle of notes from his pocket, gives it to CLAUDE*]: Ten all together. The rest within a week.

CLAUDE [*takes the notes and puts them in his pocket. Holds out his glass to toast*]: To economic growth.

SAVI: To economic growth. [*Toasts.*]

DIA [*goes to H-15*]: You're going for another vacation, with that uncle...

SAVI: Savi.

DIA: With uncle Savi. He'll teach you to read and write and....

[*CLAUDE hums.*]

H-15 [*goes to CLAUDE*]: Don't be sad, uncle Claude. When the vacation's over I'll come visit mom and you as well.

[*DIA goes to SAVI. He puts his glass on the tray.*]

SAVI [*holding H-15's hand*]: Well...

[*DIA goes to CLAUDE, he puts his glass on the tray.*]

CLAUDE: Well... yes, yes...

[*SAVI turns to leave. H-15 with him. Takes one step.*]

H-15 [*stays in her place*]: Uncle Savi, your step is double the size of mine. I have to walk in double speed...

SAVI: Or double your step. [*Keeps on walking.*]

H-15 [*walks with him*]: To match your step, I'll have to grow taller... three, perhaps four meters. [*Both exit.*]

CLAUDE [*after a short pause*]: He'll make a nice profit off her.

DIA: Regret is not a part of your world.

CLAUDE: You've learned quite a bit about my world.

DIA: You're not a bad teacher.

CLAUDE: Flattery is not a part of your world.

DIA: Wrong interpretation.

CLAUDE: Tell me.

[*DIA approaches him.*]

CLAUDE: Still not using perfume...

DIA: You know I haven't...

CLAUDE: That's the smell of...

DIA: Probably...

CLAUDE: A few nights ago... I thought I saw something go out the window... disappearing in the darkness...

DIA: You saw a shadow waiting for someone, and now someone going out the window and disappearing in the darkness.

CLAUDE [*a pause*]: Stuff disappears from the kitchen. Do you come out at night, form the window?

DIA: And wake up magically in my bed...

CLAUDE [*hums*]: And if you knew who goes out, would you tell me?

DIA: Perhaps... [*Looks directly at him*] Perhaps.

CLAUDE: What's the meaning of that change in your behavior?

DIA: You're too direct...

[CLAUDE hums.]

DIA [*goes away from him and stops*]: It's more efficient to keep me here. [*Turns to him*] With you.

CLAUDE: It's not logical...

DIA: Call it what you like...

CLAUDE: What do I get out of it?

DIA: For now, fifty thousand and no regrets.

CLAUDE: And after that...?

DIA: I go... take a shower...

[CLAUDE hums.]

DIA: When I come out, I'll go on telling you.

CLAUDE: A new story?

DIA: The continuation of the tale of king Midas.

CLAUDE: I thought that was over. Everything Midas touched turned to gold, no?

[DIA *looks at him for a moment. Exits.*]

11.

[*In the clinic. NERI stands, waiting. Notes of money in one hand. A pack of pills in the other.*]

[NERI *puts a pill in her mouth.*]

[THE DOCTOR *comes in. Holding papers and a pen.*]

NERI: The pill... for the pain. Not emotional... from the wounds.

THE DOCTOR [*examines her face*]: A perfect job.

NERI: No complaints.

THE DOCTOR: So why are you here?

NERI: They will come. I must be ready for them when they come. They will name a price.

THE DOCTOR: Now speak so that I'll understand.

NERI: A new surgery.

THE DOCTOR [*examines her body*]: We said it was due to the pregnancies?

NERI: No.

THE DOCTOR: No? [*Reads the papers.*]

NERI: What you think, I must? It's for the...

[THE DOCTOR *looks at her.*]

NERI: For the young look.

THE DOCTOR [*marks the air with the pen*]: We'll start by shortening the stomach. Sucking fat from the ankles and knees... from the waist and hips... and the lower belly.

NERI: That's all?

THE DOCTOR: Perhaps also reducing the breasts... and a touch to the chin, but we'll keep it double. I believe that's all.

NERI: Well, hope for luck.

THE DOCTOR: If you don't trust me, you can go.

NERY: I Trust. Luck, means looking like you...

THE DOCTOR: That's a matter of...

NERI: Genetics and status, I know. In my case, also luck.

THE DOCTOR: You're right. [*Mumbles*] Modern plastic surgery has its limits.

NERI [*give her the notes*]: Seven thousand five hundred.

[*THE DOCTOR takes the notes.*]

[*NERI takes the pen and papers from her and signs them.*]

THE DOCTOR [*takes the papers and pen*]: Wait. [*Exits.*]

12.

[*By the window in CLAUDE's house. DIA sits reading.*]

DIA: My Dia,

That shadow you saw was me, who've been following you for a while now. I saw you throw a letter out the window. You've no idea how thrilling it was to find out it was meant for me. If I herald a change for you, for me, you herald a revolution. As for your question, if I ever thought of being someone else, I'll keep that a secret, for now. By the way, I saw you escape out the window and come back in the early morning. Am I going to share you with some other secret holder? Yours, Drumboy.

13.

[*In the cellar. HOP stands sipping a cup of coffee. Throughout the monolog he occasionally sips from it.*]

HOP: Dear Norma,

I can't find Che. He didn't come to eat, didn't come to play, I haven't heard his squeak in a... very few shoes walking, too fast to follow them, the large tears in them reveal torn socks, but no rat feet. So I figured perhaps my relationship with you made him jealous. Don't worry, Norma. I won't give you up. That rat will have to handle it like a grown up. [*A pause. Comes near as if telling a secret.*] Saw a picture of you in the magazine, from a movie called *Some Like It Hot* and read a story you've met the president of the united states. I'm sure the world will be better if you'd be the president. Yours... ah, thanks for your childhood photo. [*Takes out a photo from the pajamas' pocket.*] Yours, Hop.

14.

[*By the window in CLAUDE's house. DIA sits writing.*]

DIA: My Drumboy, heralding a change. The drums inside my body beat hard. Indeed, you came for me! It's true I go out and come back through the window. And that secret only makes the attraction grow stronger, doesn't it? Reveal yourself. **Did you**

ever think of being someone else? Yours, Dia. [DIA *folds the paper, looks out and throws it away. Looks inside, into the house, and slips out the window.*]

15.

[*In the clinic.* NERI stands, thin and skinny, the dress on her body seems as if hanging from a cloth hanger. It seems that she's grown much older as well. She holds a pack of pills. Enters THE DOCTOR. Holding papers and a pen.]

[NERI takes out a pill, puts it in her mouth.]

THE DOCTOR [*examines NERI*]: You're in a good condition. Luck, is not our responsibility. [*Gives her the papers.*] Sign.

NERI: Painkillers... you're supposed to give me a pack, no?

THE DOCTOR: You got them free last time, this time you have to pay.

NERI: I haven't...

THE DOCTOR: Sign.

NERI: Can't you give me some for free...?

[THE DOCTOR *says nothing.*]

[NERI *signs.*]

[THE DOCTOR *exits.*]

[NERI *spills the remaining pills into her hand. Puts them back in the pack.*]

16.

[*In CLAUDE's living room.* Enters CLAUDE, then SAVI. Both stand.]

CLAUDE: I know it's a risk.

SAVI: But I'm flattered you trust me.

CLAUDE [*comes in front of him*]: You don't mess with me.

SAVI [*a pause*]: I'm listening.

CLAUDE [*goes away from him*]: Someone's peeping from the yard and someone's going out and back at night. Perhaps the same one. I don't know. [*A pause.*] And stuff disappears from my kitchen.

SAVI: One of the women you've collected.

CLAUDE [*looks at him*]: Dia?

SAVI: For instance.

CLAUDE [*hums*]: She has no reason.

SAVI: Someone from outside...

CLAUDE: I feel exposed. As if I'm visible everywhere.

SAVI: You wish me to explore.

CLAUDE: To follow, at night, and find him.

SAVI: To bring him to you, or...

CLAUDE: To me. I want to understand.

SAVI: And the deal?

CLAUDE: A picture from the cellar. I have another original by Magritte.

SAVI: I don't know about paintings. Three of the house girls.

CLAUDE [*hums*]: Two. From the pens. One now, one when you bring him.

[SAVI *says nothing.*]

CLAUDE: Pick one on your way out.

[SAVI *exits.*]

17.

[*In the street.* NERI stands, holding a pack of pills.]

NERI [*puts a pill in her mouth*]: I'm here... his helper said they're coming. To me. I'm here... [*Takes another pill. Moves restlessly.*] I'm young... and thin... and you'll name a price... I'll join the contest... there... me... a beauty queen....

[*Shakes the pack of pills.*] They're coming. To me. I'm here...

[*Shakes the pack of pills. Turns the empty pack upside down.*]

18.

[*In the cellar.* HOP moves around restlessly. Holding a cup of coffee, he sips from it occasionally.]

HOP: Dear... Norma....

I'm worried. That rat must be really angry at me. [*Turns the suitcase upside down. Magazines fall out.*] I looked all over the cellar but he's... [*Takes out the photo from the pajamas' pocket.*] That childhood photo you gave me, it doesn't make me feel good too. [*Looks up at the crack.*] No more shoes in the street. No socks. No feet. [*Comes forward.*] More coffee, Norma, I hope you won't be mad at me. I'll stay awake...

19.

[*In CLAUDE's living room.* DIA enters and sits. CLAUDE comes after her. Stands at some distance from her.]

CLAUDE [*hums*]: I'm not hallucinating. I've been seeing this figure, these figures, for many nights.

DIA: And he sits there day and night, waiting for you to catch him.

CLAUDE: Yes.

DIA: So why worry?

CLAUDE: Time to decide already, yes?

[DIA *stands softly.*]

CLAUDE: I got an offer.

DIA: How much?

CLAUDE: A lot... a whole lot...

DIA [*comes to him*]: You can tell a business opportunity. Sell.
CLAUDE: Simply, yes?
DIA: No...?
[CLAUDE *turns away from her and sits.*]
DIA: Money's important for you, in your situation.
CLAUDE: No doubt.
DIA: So why doubt?
[CLAUDE *hums.*]
DIA: You've closed the deal already. [*A pause. Turns to go.*]
CLAUDE: I haven't yet.
DIA: That's unusual for you.
CLAUDE: Right.
DIA [*comes a bit closer*]: The years have softened you...
CLAUDE: Not the years...
DIA: Grab yourself together. It's a matter of profit and loss, no?
[CLAUDE *hums.*]
DIA: You've invested in me. You deserve a lot of money. Where's the doubt?
[CLAUDE *gets up and moves away from her.*]
DIA: I promise to give you a good reputation. Everyone shall see how good you've taught me.
CLAUDE [*turns around and looks at her*]: You said you wanted to stay.
DIA: Since when do I get to decide?
[CLAUDE *hums.*]
DIA: It's illogical...
CLAUDE: Do you want me to sell you?
DIA: What if I say yes?
CLAUDE: Give me a simple answer.
DIA: You never asked me before. Why now?
CLAUDE: Now it's important that I know.
DIA: Important to your broker ego or male ego?
[CLAUDE *says nothing.*]
DIA: You buy children like shares, smooth, white, smelling fresh... And sell them once their value increases, a moment before the paper turns brown.
CLAUDE: I don't steal.
DIA: You use parents' weaknesses.
CLAUDE: They know about evolution.
DIA: You have a choice.
CLAUDE: Choice is the stage that comes after evolutionary development and genetics.
DIA [*comes closer*]: According to which, you neither grow older nor old.
CLAUDE [*faces her*]: Right.
DIA: Really...?
[CLAUDE *hums. Turns away from her.*]
DIA: I remain here, uncle Claude. You'll get you chance to miss me yet.

CLAUDE: It's all a game for you, yes?

DIA: It's business for you, no?

[CLAUDE *says nothing.*]

DIA: I want to stay here. As your full partner. In business and personal life.

CLAUDE: A partner who cares about her partner?

DIA: Perhaps... [*Looks directly at him*] Perhaps.

CLAUDE [*comes to her*]: There a third option, yes? [*Puts the stick to her head.*]

DIA: That would be a waste...

CLAUDE: I can choose to waste.

DIA [*moves the stick away. Comes really close to him*]: So that you know if it's worth wasting...

[*Enters NERI. Seems bent and worn out, older than before. Stops. Throughout the scene scratches her neck occasionally.*]

[*DIA turns around. Looks at NERI.*]

NERI [*looks at DIA. Pauses*]: You're not a child anymore... But you're pretty... Your price must be high... You can join the contest... the beauty queen... [*To CLAUDE*] I've been waiting... you said you'd come...

CLAUDE: How did they let you in again?

NERI [*to CLAUDE*]: I said I was your mom...

[*CLAUDE bangs the floor with his stick.*]

NERI [*to CLAUDE*]: I am your mom...

[*CLAUDE goes towards NERI.*]

DIA: Claude!

[*CLAUDE stops.*]

NERI: Your mom, her mom, a mom to all the children in the yard... a mom to everyone....

CLAUDE: What do you want, old hag?

NERI: Call me mom...

CLAUDE [*hums, bangs his stick*]: I'll show you...!

DIA: What is it you want... [*A pause*] Mom...?

NERI: I wanted... but the train has passed... and there were pills, but no more... and I itch all over... because there are no more...

CLAUDE: The old hag's addicted.

NERI: Not for emotional pain... for wounds...

CLAUDE: And you want some money...

NERI: To sell...

CLAUDE: You got no price, old hag.

NERI: No... he's special.... but sharp... [*Points to her temple*] Here... my son...

DIA: He won't buy your son!

NERI: Five thousand?

CLAUDE: Go away!

NERI: Three thousand...

CLAUDE: Before I...

NERI: Five hundred... ok?

CLAUDE: Not ok!

NERI: You say no to... mom?

[CLAUDE comes near, raising his stick on NERI.]

DIA: Claude!

[CLAUDE stops the stick midway.]

DIA: Go away, old hag.

NERI: The nerve they have... kids... you bring them to the world and they... [Spits.]

Spit... I'll find someone else... to buy pills... [Corrects.] M...y son... Shame on you!

[Spits.] S h a m e o n y o u ! [Turns to go.]

20.

[*In the cellar.* HOP is restless. Sips from the cup of coffee.]

HOP: Norma...

Che never came. Neither did you. I'm hungry, Norma. And soon running out of coffee. If you didn't come last night, it means you didn't get my previous letter. What about this one? [Takes the photo out of his pocket and looks at it.]

[*In the street.* NERI stands, scratching.]

NERI [calls out as if selling something]: A boy... special... but sharp...[Points to her temple.] Here... Five hundred...!

[*By the window in CLAUDE's house.* DIA sits writing.]

DIA: My Drumboy,

I have to get out of here. Fast. But someone's watching the exits. Can you help somehow? Yours, Dia.

[*In the cellar.* HOP sits scratching. Holding the photo in his hand. A magazine in the other.]

HOP: Marilyn... dead... in her own house, from an overdose... that's also a part of your show, so you can be with me? Where are you, Norma? [Watches the photo. Points at her.] I think that's... me. Here...

[*In the street.* NERI stands, scratching.]

NERI [calls out]: I'm your mom... all of you... and no five hundred...? [Spits.] Shame on you...! S h a m e o n y o u !

[In the cellar and in the street.]

[HOP walks around. Scratches. Mumbles.]

[NERI walks around. Scratches. Mumbles.]

21.

[In CLAUDE's living room. CLAUDE sits. Enters DIA, holding a single glass of whiskey.]

DIA [*stands*]: Here's the whiskey you asked for.

CLAUDE: I'm moving somewhere else.

DIA: Will you let them decide for you?

CLAUDE: Didn't you see how many dead rats they spread in the yard.

DIA: Where was your guard?

CLAUDE: He was drugged. The agency for the human right to die of poison... he's recovering now. [*A pause.*] They will bring on an epidemic. Me, you, the kids in the pens, through the germs spreading, the contaminated outgrowth in the yard... They have no limits, trying to eliminate a perfectly lawful businessman.

DIA: You're running away.

CLAUDE: You're the one who told me about king Midas, who grew donkey ears. I've been checking my ears all night. [*Hums.*] I'm moving elsewhere, yes?

DIA: I suggest that you first remove the paintings from the cellar. Send them to the harbor.

CLAUDE [*a pause*]: You're right. Those bleeding hearts, from the agency for the rights... they will be happy to hang my paintings in their museums. Or living rooms, celebrating my fall over some cocktail party. Good for nothing. Faggots with a Negro genetic past, who never worked a single day in their lives. [*Gets up to stand.*]

DIA: An article in a magazine.

[*CLAUDE looks at her as if asking.*]

DIA [*comes to him*]: A profile story. About you. Tell there about your business growth. You're moving elsewhere because this place is too small for you.

CLAUDE: Yeah... one can buy an article like that.

DIA: Present yourself as a savior of children, a great educator.

CLAUDE: Just like I am...

DIA: After the article organize a parade. A carnival. The children shall move from here to the new place. Give them colorful hats and noisy trumpets. So that everyone can see and hear your educated children going.

CLAUDE: Then we'll tell them about the agency for the rights... that abuses me.

DIA: A savior of society...

CLAUDE: We'll submit a regulation outlawing that agency.

DIA: Destroy their public image.

CLAUDE: And no more poison in my house, yes?

DIA: And back to a growing, expanding business, no?

CLAUDE [*looks at her. Sits*]: And I was thinking perhaps I couldn't trust you either.

DIA [*sits on his knees*]: Suddenly the whiskey is for celebrating.

CLAUDE: So why not bring another glass?

[DIA *puts the glass to his lips.*]

[CLAUDE *sips from it.*]

22.

[*In the street. NERI walks around. Scratches.*]

NERI: Where are you...? Hiding...? One... two... searching...

[THE HAWKER's shout are heard from a distance.]

THE HAWKER [*calling out*]: Depressants, anti depressants... [*Enters.*]

NERI [*quickly turning to him*]: Here you are... I need pills... painkillers...

THE HAWKER [*keeps on turning*]: One hundred.

NERI: I haven't... [*Bends to take off her shoes.*] Stop...

THE HAWKER: Can't. If stops, falls asleep.

NERI: The shoes, one hundred...

THE HAWKER: These? Forty.

NERI: I paid you... one hundred... for these shoes...

THE HAWKER: Used merchandize. Forty.

NERI [*stands up. Holding both shoes*]: How many pills... for forty...?

THE HAWKER: Four.

NERI: But the pack has...

THE HAWKER: Four...

NERI: Four... Take shoes... give four...

THE HAWKER [*stops*]: Stops. Quick. Four. Shoes. [*Opens his coat. Takes out pills and counts them.*] Men shoes. One hundred. A bargain.

[NERI *nods her head from side to side.*]

THE HAWKER: If need, pass here twice a day. Regular. [*Gives her.*]

[NERI *takes the pills.*]

THE HAWKER [*goes his way*]: Depressants, anti depressants...

[NERI *puts a pill in her mouth.*]

23.

[*In CLAUDE's living room. CLAUDE sits, his body relaxed, eyes closed. The walking stick rests on the chair. DIA by his side, holding the glass of whiskey.*]

[DIA *puts the glass of whiskey by the chair. Opens CLAUDE's jacket. Takes out of his pockets bundles of notes. Collects them in her hands.*]

[SAVI comes running in. Stands.]

[DIA grabs the walking stick and brandishes it at SAVI as if threatening him. Holding the notes in her other hand.]

SAVI: What happened to him?

DIA: He had a bad dream.

[SAVI goes slowly and puts his fingers at CLAUDE's artery. Straightens.]

DIA: A guard and a scavenger...

[SAVI about to come near.]

[DIA brandishes the stick.]

[SAVI stops.]

DIA: I won't let you come near the children!

SAVI [a pause]: I thought once of being someone else.

DIA: Drumboy...?

SAVI [points at CLAUDE]: We were collaborating.

DIA [Lowers her voice]: Poisoned rats...

SAVI: Come with me to the city we've built. Everyone works there in factories, boys and girls, grownups, even old people. Everyone shares the burden and the profit. The revolution is happening, and you, I'm sure the comrades will recognize your distinction. They will let you be a factory inspector! [Gives her his hand.]

[DIA raises the stick.]

SAVI: I must take you with me.

DIA: Let me go in peace.

SAVI: The comrades will put me to trial if I don't bring you.

DIA: Tell them you found me dead.

[SAVI walks toward her.]

DIA [brandishes the stick]: I'll come to you.

SAVI [stops. A pause]: Ask about Savi in the city we've built. Everyone knows your Drumboy.

[DIA looks at him. Lets the stick fall down. About to leave.]

SAVI [calls after her]: Will you look for me...?

[DIA stops. Looks straight at him. Watches him for a few seconds. Exits.]

24.

[In the street. NERI stands, looks upwards. It goes on for a few seconds. Enters THE BLINDWOMAN, gropes with the help of a stick.]

THE BLINDWOMAN [stops, head tilted upwards]: It's a beautiful night, I imagine.

[NERI says nothing. Looks at THE BLINDWOMAN and upwards alternately.]

THE BLINDWOMAN: The sky is filled with stars, or so they say.

[NERI says nothing.]

THE BLINDWOMAN: Your breath. That's how I recognized you, if you ask me.

NERI [mumbles]: I didn't ask...

THE BLINDWOMAN: Oh... welcome voice.... a blind and a mute are not a great recipe for conversation, you see.

NERI: No conversation...

THE BLINDWOMAN: What a pity. A conversation is a way to solve the problem, otherwise, just pay.

NERI: For what... pay?

THE BLINDWOMAN: For the place, what else...

NERI: A street... outside....

THE BLINDWOMAN: You're right. Everything seems public. Actually, my own private, what can you do... [A pause.] Unregistered, but ask any cop working in the area, guess what he'll tell you.

[NERI pauses for a moment. Turns to go.]

THE BLINDWOMAN [bangs her stick]: What a pity.

NERI [stops]: I see... yours... leaving...

THE BLINDWOMAN: The debt remains. You stood already, what can you do.

NERI: I stood for a few minutes...

THE BLINDWOMAN: A few minutes count as the first hour. That's how it goes.

NERI: Let me go.

THE BLINDWOMAN: Oh.... welcome self pity. That's not a great recipe for business, you see.

NERI: No business...

THE BLINDWOMAN: You stood here. There is.

NERI [a pause]: How much...?

THE BLINDWOMAN: For the first hour, one thousand.

NERI: One thousand...?

THE BLINDWOMAN: Three hundred for each additional fifteen minutes.

NERI: I haven't...

THE BLINDWOMAN: That's what a conversation is for. [*Gropes towards her. Gently outlines her contours with the stick.*] Two boys, one sold...

NERI: A girl...

THE BLINDWOMAN: The other one.... afraid.

NERI: Doesn't come out...

THE BLINDWOMAN: And you don't go in.

NERI: Can't give him answers....

THE BLINDWOMAN: Yeah, conscience itches, but the surgeries you've had itch even more.

NERI: Nearly gone by now....

THE BLINDWOMAN [*lowers the stick*]: As I thought, suitable.

NERI: For what?

THE BLINDWOMAN: To work for me to pay your debt, what else.

NERI: For how long?

THE BLINDWOMAN: One week.

NERI: One week...?

THE BLINDWOMAN: With other girls it takes one month. One week because you're a beauty queen.

[NERI *says nothing.*]

THE BLINDWOMAN: Now you tell yourself, me...? a beauty queen...?

NERI: And that from someone who can't see...

THE BLINDWOMAN: For someone who can't see, no one sees better than me here. Ask around...

[NERI *says nothing.*]

THE BLINDWOMAN: Now you tell yourself, me! a beauty queen! At last! [A *pause.*] Well, it means something else here. Most of my clients are brokers. They believe time can't harm them, conscience won't itch... [Chuckles.] Someone like you, gives them balance. When they do it with you, they can dream of their beauty queen with a clear conscience. And pay cash. A lot.

NERI: I should sell my...?

THE BLINDWOMAN: Oh... welcome righteousness. "I should sell my body?" How come...?

NERI: Don't think.... I have my limits...

THE BLINDWOMAN: No question about that. Obviously. Selling your kids, here's a limit.

NERI [a *pause*]: Give me an hour... I'll be back with one thousand within an hour....

THE BLINDWOMAN: Come on, show some originality... you all react exactly the same. [A *pause.*] Who will give you money? The kids you abandoned?

NERI: I will find...

THE BLINDWOMAN: No you won't. Now you tell yourself, I'll fudge her with my sweet words, and run away. [Grabs her neck.] Actually, I spare you a lot of pain. Physical pain. My messengers, a moment before they kill beauty queens like you, they abuse them. For free... [She holds her hair in one hand and threatens her with the stick in the other.] You've no choice, beauty queen. A week of work, or one thousand, now!

[Appears DIA, holding the notes.]

DIA: A mere thousand...?

THE BLINDWOMAN [turns her head towards DIA]: Two for both of you.

DIA: I'll let you have a thousand more if you hit her.

THE BLINDWOMAN: Oh.... welcome compassion. Genetics performing live. What a surprise...

DIA: Two thousand...

THE BLINDWOMAN [brandishing the stick]: The legs? [Brandishing.] The back...? [Brandishing.] The... face...?

DIA: Pick your choice.

THE BLINDWOMAN: My choice... that's a lot more than two thousand, you see.

DIA [comes a bit closer]: Start with the legs.

THE BLINDWOMAN: By the amount of her screams? We need some objective measure to determine the price. [*Lets go of NERI. Gropes her way. Comes towards DIA.*] I'll tell you what. Four thousand, by a soul per hour. And that already [*chuckles*] with family discount. [*Raises her hand.*]

[*DIA pauses a bit. Comes to THE BLINDWOMAN. Counts the notes and puts them in her hand.*]

[*THE BLINDWOMAN sniffs the notes. Makes her raised her more prominent. Chuckles.*]

[*DIA puts another note in her hand.*]

THE BLINDWOMAN [*Sniffs. Stuffs it down her bra. Lifts her head upwards*]: Man used to be an animal who gathered in herds. The offspring, the old and the sick, were in the middle. The young and strong enveloped the herd like a shield of steel. That way the herd could have ensured its life through generations. [*Straightens her head.*] Did you ever see a star complaining of loneliness? [*Chuckles.*] I should have asked for more money for stars.... [*Calls out.*] Rats, let me pass through. [*Gropes her way out.*]

[*A rat appears from behind. Constantly moving.*]

[*DIA goes to the rat and caresses his head.*]

NERI [*looks at DIA and the rat alternately*]: I did all I could do. I didn't know to read or write, I didn't have any, to buy me shoes.... I did all I could do...

DIA: Mom sent a little girl to a vacation with uncle Claude.

NERI: I... I had nothing to give you.... He made you an educated beautiful woman...

DIA: For a little girl you were the most beautiful woman in the world.

NERI: Ex-beautiful. With pregnancies, with additions around the waist and belly... an ex-woman... you see, I gave birth to you and your brother, but the dream wasn't over....

DIA [*hums*]: Children are a mother's dream come true....

NERI: When I was child, I appeared on the cover of a magazine.... everyone said.... I'll be a beauty queen...

DIA [*goes on humming*]: Children are...

NERI: I went to the contest... they said.... you are pretty....

DIA: A mother's.....

NERI: You try.... after giving birth....

DIA:dream come true....

NERI: Stop it....

DIA: Do you remember?

[*Enter two more rats. Constantly moving.*]

[*NERI repulsed. Watching DIA and the rats alternately.*]

DIA [*goes to one of them and caresses his head. Sings to it*]: Children are a mother's dream come true...

NERI: Stop it!

DIA [*stops for a moment*]: Mom combs the little girl's head and sings to her... children are...

NERI: I remember!

DIA [*goes towards the third rat. Moves as if jumping a rope. The rat plays with her, trying to enter the jumping cycle*]: When the vacation's over, the girl will come back to mom...

NERI: I was meaning to win the contest...

DIA: When the vacation's over...

NERI: To study and...

DIA: ...the girl will come back....

NERI: Buy you back...

DIA: ...mom....

NERI: Why do you do it?

DIA: Uncle Claude's kids can jump even without a rope, right...? [*Stops.*] My mom doesn't know that either. She sold a little girl, never looking back.

NERI: I went to him... Asked about you...

DIA: Mom stood facing her little girl not recognizing her....

[*NERI says nothing.*]

[*Enters another rat. The first three extend their moving circle directed towards NERI.*]

[*DIA goes to the rat. Plays a game of erotic caresses with him.*]

[*NERI freezes.*]

DIA [*while playing*]: Mom wants to make her dream come true, children prices are up today. After saying goodbye to little girl, she also says goodbye to little boy. Because mom wants to make her dream come true, children prices are up today...

NERI: He won't come out of the cellar... Afraid to be outside.... He's mind is sharp, but his heart sensitive....

DIA [*the erotic game intensifies*]: And mom knows that because she visits little boy every day...

NERI: I tried to help him, to lure him out...

DIA: Giving food to boy and giving drink to boy and caressing his hair and singing to him, children are a mother's dream come true... [*The game approaches its climax.*] Oh dear, that's not the right story. Because the truth, is the truth, that mom doesn't even know whether her boy is alive or dead! [*Stops.*]

[*The rat joins the other three. They intensify their movement.*]

NERI: Why do they come like that?

DIA: Who...? [*Faces her.*]

NERI [*a pause*]: Forgive me. [*A pause.*] Please... Forgive me....

DIA: For what...?

NERI: The legs... the belly.... even the face...

[DIA *says nothing.*]

NERI: Hit me already...!

DIA: One should care in order to hit...

NERI [*goes near her*]: Tell me what to do...

DIA: Forgiveness? Pity? Compassion...?

NERI: Tell me.... I'll kill myself.... just tell me to do it...!

DIA: That's too easy. [*Comes to her and puts the notes in her hand.*] Mom knows living is the thing, no...? Money for shoes, mom has. To grow old.... memory plays tricks on mom... can't remember anymore from where, where to.... mom doesn't control her bladder anymore.... the faeces get smeared.... mom needs help... [*Looks upwards.*] Little girl turned into a woman came back from vacation...

NERI: You'll also have children....

DUA: Or, not.... girl turned into a woman, will not be a womb for hire. [*Looks pointedly at her.*] I will not have children. [*Goes to one of the rats. Caresses it.*] I will keep a rat. A pet for a child. [*Goes to the second rat. Caresses it.*] I will not keep anything I never promised. I will not send him on vacation, to learn reading and writing. [*Goes to the third rat. Caresses it erotically.*] And love...? Love is a verbal excuse, for some other aim. Momentary. [*Speaks to the rat*] Rodents shall herald the new message, like a plague, to every corner of the world. [*Calls out*] Rat is the pet to take the place of children....! Rat is the pet to take the place of children....! [*Speaking*] They survive, rodents. They will be here long after we're gone. [*Comes to her.*] Do you know who heralds the rat revolution?

[HOP's *stuttering shouts are heard.*]

HOP [*stutters*]: Nor... what... Che... [*Enters, hesitating, holding the photo. Addresses one rat*] Che... [*Goes to another rat*] Che.... [*Caresses it. Looks at the other two*] I fo...und you.... Che.... you nau... ghty boy.... ra....n away so.... I co....me out to... you and I'm.... out....side [*Looks around. Shrinks. Rats surround him. Hugs one of them.*] Wi....th you.... out...side no... t frightened [*Straightens. Closes his eyes.*] Per....fume hangs in out....side sky [*Truns to DIA*] You see....m diff...erent from the pho....tos in the ma...ga...zi...n.

DIA: Prettier...?

[HOP *looks down and says nothing.*]

DIA [*comes to him pointing to the photo in his hand*]: That's you, Hop. And that's.... me.

HOP: I ho...ld yo...u....

DIA: Yes, you hold me.

HOP: Nor.... what she Ma....ri...lyn de....ad. I re....ad.

DIA: I'm Norma who's Dia.

HOP: Di...a... [*Points at NERI*] Who... 's that...?

DIA: That, [*A pause.*] a beauty queen, Hop. [*Takes him by the hand. Looks upwards.*] See, she took you and me to the planetarium...

[HOP *looks upwards.*]

[Light fades out.]

[Darkness.]

The End