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The Investigation

by CHARLES L. MEE

Originally produced under the title of
The Investigation of the Murder in El Salvador.

While the audience waits for the piece to begin: the sound of ocean waves, the occasional call of a tropical bird.

Music, interspersed and overlaid with other sounds, plays throughout the piece. It should begin the piece, as an overture of five or ten minutes, to set an estranged opening viewpoint

The lights come up slowly on a vast, white space, with overtones of tropical pink, orange, crimson. To one side is an astonishingly large vase of fresh flowers. A sense of perfect cleanness, simplicity, and purity.

Seven people are on stage, all with their heads slightly turned, listening intently. Two men, Gallejas and Stanton, sit on cushioned white wicker chairs. The men wear white linen suits. Gallejas wears white gloves and yellow (sunlight) tinted glasses. Stanton wears glasses tinted pink.

They will speak first—and as they talk, projections of them are shown on a screen that fills the entire rear stage, seated in various postures, as though they are pictures from a fashion magazine. The projections fall on different places on the screen. Some are simultaneous, spill over one another, or are projected from the side and distorted

From time to time, during the course of the piece, sentences will appear in moving lights; these are meant to look like the lights for the news of the world above Times Square.

Many of the silences indicated throughout the script, whether long or short, should feel as though a life has ended, the actors drift away into their preoccupations, and then society is reconstituted, with the actors having drifted to new thoughts.

Gallejas is half English and half Spanish or West Indian. Stanton is American Presbyterian.

In another similar wicker chair slightly removed from them sits Lady Aithen with her Lhasa Apso in her lap. She, too, is dressed in white, with a straw hat.

Her husband Howard sits all the way upstage at dead center, apart from all the rest, alone, in a wheelchair. He has had a stroke, and holds his drink in one hand that is suspended from a sling that keeps it near his lips. He wears beige. He will not speak at all for the first forty minutes. (If it is thought that the audience requires more biographical information about Howard, his biographical sketch can be passed out with the program.) Just next to Howard stands a bodyguard in dark suit, arms folded, dark sunglasses. On a chaise longue is Meridee, a young woman, stretched out getting a sun tan. She wears pastels. Seated on the end of the chaise is Peter, a young man in white and pastels. At the opening he is applying sun tan lotion to Meridee. Later he will apply a white facial made of lime blossom extract, which she will keep to the end.

Everyone is drinking a red drink. They eat throughout, choosing from copious amounts of fresh fruits, cheeses, delicacies.

STANTON (To Gallejas.)
Did you hear that?

GALLEJAS
What?

STANTON
That scream.

GALLEJAS

Ah. Yes.

STANTON

I couldn't tell whether it came from inside or out.

GALLEJAS

No.

(They are silent, listening.)

STANTON

I was saying. About the Englishman who was instructing me to hold my bat. We were on a green in a small village near London, in the direction of Oxford. A sunny day. He was dressed in flannels, quite correct. In point of fact, I was extremely happy, so that I was surprised when the Englishman, in showing me how to handle one sort of pitch or another, suddenly said, "If you miss them all, then just throw your bat at the pitcher's head" — and with that, he threw his bat with terrific force directly at my head, barely missed me, and shouted, "run!" "But," I said, "that's not cricket." "Cricket!" he said, "I'm talking about how to get to first base."

(Gallejas laughs happily and too long. The call of a tropical bird. Pictures of Lady Aitken join the projections.)

LADY AITKEN

I went to Saks the other day, and I saw, I don't think I've ever seen them anywhere before, very large, eighteenth century Chinese wall hangings, all in silk, brilliant reds, and blues, and yellows, vast silks, four by eight feet, beautifully woven, with beautiful moire patterns, scintillating, appearing and disappearing as the silks billowed out from the wall, and the silks had on them the faces and figures of famous Chinese actors and actresses.

STANTON

Amazing.

LADY AITKEN

And no one was buying them! I couldn't understand it. And then I realized: no one knew what to do with them. No one could even imagine how to get them home. They were so big. No one knew how to fold them. Only I knew the secret: a very rare technique for wrapping them around a bamboo pole to take them home with me. And I took one. I took the red silk, and wrapped myself up inside it, and now you can see what's happened to me!

GALLEJAS

What?

LADY AITKEN

I came out a butterfly!

(All laugh, too long.)

STANTON

Ah!

(A silence.)

Yes.

(He smiles.)

Aren't we all butterflies, really?

(All laugh again. As the conversation continues, pictures are projected of 12 stages in the preparation of a Mediterranean sea bass.)

STANTON

Have you ever been to Howrah?

GALLEJAS

(After a moment.)

Across the Hooghly River from Calcutta.

STANTON

Yes.

GALLEJAS

(After a moment.)

Trading center.

STANTON

Since 1560.

GALLEJAS

Dusty roads.

STANTON

Old warehouses . . .

GALLEJAS

Called godowns.

STANTON

That's the place, yes.

GALLEJAS

Street dwellers huddling under thin blankets at night.

STANTON

Yes. On cool evenings, sometimes, rats will crawl under the blankets, apparently to get warm.

GALLEJAS

Evidently. We had a factory there.

STANTON

Yes. So do we. Some of the workers sleep in the godowns.

GALLEJAS

I did myself.

STANTON

Really?

GALLEJAS

Dark, dusty place, hot, made rather unpleasant by the cockroaches, thousands of large brown ones, flew about in the dark and kept getting into my hair.

STANTON

Nasty business.

GALLEJAS

Yes. At times, more than a hundred rats would be feeding in my room at one time.

STANTON

Bandicoot rats, were they?

GALLEJAS

Lesser bandicoot rats, *Bandicota bengalensis*. The adults are seven and a half inches long, excluding the tail. Blunted snouts. Rarely more than ten ounces in weight. Otherwise they resemble the Norway rat. You've seen them, I'm sure.

STANTON

Of course.

GALLEJAS

Found from Nepal to Sri Lanka, from Pakistan to Indonesia.

STANTON

Extraordinary.

GALLEJAS

Dominant in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras.

STANTON

I should have thought so.

GALLEJAS

Feed on wheat, rice, garbage, insects, dead birds. Preferred wheat or rice actually. Drank from the gutter, or sometimes from the nearby latrines. At times I could watch them there drinking my urine.

STANTON

Really?

GALLEJAS

They didn't go out of their way to bother me, I must say. They investigated me, of course, as they would any object, walking over me, sniffing. Licking. That's all. Sometimes one of the boys I was with would kick one of them, or even beat it to death.

STANTON

Really? Why was that?

GALLEJAS

No point to it, really.

(Gallejas laughs. All laugh. A black butler enters, passes a tray heaped with little sandwiches. Gallejas waves them away. Stanton carefully chooses a single one. The laughter of a myna bird.)

GALLEJAS

(To butler.)

You didn't scream a moment ago?

BUTLER

No, sir.

GALLEJAS

Do you know who did?

BUTLER

I don't know, sir. It must have been one of the maids.

GALLEJAS

Will you ask her to see me when she has a moment.

BUTLER

Yes, sir.

(Long silence.)

Will that be all, sir?

GALLEJAS

Yes, thank you.

(They are silent until the butler leaves.)

STANTON

Of course they're not easy to prepare.

GALLEJAS

Not easy to bone.

STANTON

Not that hard to bone, but how would you have them? Filets sauteed with butter, perhaps?

GALLEJAS

A light cream sauce.

LADY AITKEN

I think you might do them as one does quail.

STANTON

How is that?

LADY AITKEN

Well, I don't cook, dear, but however one does quail is how one would do rat. I think.

MERIDEE

I'm ready for desert!

STANTON

Haven't we eaten dessert?

GALLEJAS

(politely)

What will you have?

MERIDEE

(Bored)

Well, I know what I want: a sort of an ice cream soda, in a tall, fluted, crystal goblet, very large, very tall and very big around, you know what I mean?

GALLEJAS

Yes.

MERIDEE

And it is brought to me.

GALLEJAS

Yes.

MERIDEE

And then, after it is set down on the table in front of me, then the ice cream is put into it—four, five, six scoops, maybe eight scoops, vanilla, and chocolate, fudge swirl, strawberry, something with nuts . . .

[IN MOVING LIGHTS: What was she doing here? Had she been so bored where she had been? And thought this might be interesting?]

GALLEJAS

Black walnuts . .

MERIDEE

Right, or maple fudge nut.

GALLEJAS

Yes.

LADY AITKEN

I don't know.

MERIDEE

And when the ice cream is put in, then the whole thing reacts like an atomic bomb—I mean the tumult and the churning and the shaft rising up...

GALLEJAS

Yes?

MERIDEE

And the swirling turmoil, the mushroom cap on top—oh, it's amazing, you've never seen anything like it; you can see through the sides of the glass the beautiful swirling and churning, powerful, intricate, complex movements, and it goes on and on and on, after you think it can't go on any longer, it still does, going on and on. I'm a visceral person.

(Sound of a helicopter overhead. A long silence. To Stanton.)

What are you having for desert?

STANTON

Oh ...I...hadn't thought about it.

MERIDEE

Think about it.

STANTON

Well...I think I might have a chocolate mousse.

MERIDEE

Unhhunh.

[STANTON'S VOICE THROUGH LOUDSPEAKER, OR DIRECTLY TO AUDIENCE: I saw at once that she was disappointed by my choice, so I tried to improve it.]

STANTON

I see it arriving, being brought in from the kitchen on the back of a horse, and I get up to go and meet the horse and take its lead rope to bring it to the table.

MERIDEE

It's the only way to serve a mousse, really, if you don't want it to bore you to death.

PETER

The other night at Nigel's, they served Jamaican food, while a Jamaican band played steel drums and penny whistles, you know, yams, sweet potatoes, lentils, all warm and steamy, and it all smelled wonderful, such a wonderful warm happy satisfying meal, and when they brought in the main course, I knew it would be exquisite, and I had to smell it right away, it smelled so good, and somehow quite familiar. Why! I said, it smells like shit! Yes, sir, said the maid. And it was! Jamaican shit!

(He gives a long, loud shrill, whinnying laugh, hoping he has impressed Meridee. No one else laughs. He subsides.)

MERIDEE

(To audience.)

I don't think of myself as rich. I think of myself as comfortable, yes, but not rich.

PETER

Well no, yes. I mean no. Doesn't everybody?

INTERLUDE

THE ACTORS sit, silent, all looking out at audience.

MUSIC: Beautiful, quiet, pure—Brian Eno perhaps.

VOICEOVER: A quiet, soft, female voice, a monologue: instructions on how to care for a gun.

PROJECTIONS: A movie of a young woman at a health spa, with stills, on a second scrim, of the same young woman.

NOTES ON INTERLUDES IN GENERAL: These interludes "bleed" both ways—that is to say, they may begin before the preceding scene is completed, and the succeeding scene may begin before the interlude has been concluded. Usually, just one element of the interlude will bleed to form a bridge with the preceding and succeeding scene.

(During the ensuing scene, Meridee, restless, tries lying first one way and then another, gets up, paces, lies down on terrace in front of others, turns over, drapes herself over the chaise, etc.)

LADY AITKEN
Do you swim?

GALLEJAS
Of course. In hot water.

LADY AITKEN
It's the only sport I can do, really. Good for my back.

GALLEJAS
Yes.

STANTON
I swim when I'm in Greece, Corsica, the Porto Rotondo. Off Cavallo.

LADY AITKEN
Do you swim the breast stroke?

STANTON
Yes.

LADY AITKEN
It's my favorite stroke. I like to do the breast stroke in the nude, don't you?

STANTON

No.

[IN MOVING LIGHTS: And why had she come with him? Could it have been a casual affair?]

LADY AITKEN

I like to swim at night. Howard and I used to swim in the bay at Acapulco. That used to be my favorite for swimming at night. Not now, of course. Sometimes I go into a pool now, the one at the Hotel Nikko. But I much prefer to swim off the yacht near the Turkish Islands. With my little surfboard. I hold it and kick my legs behind. Don't you love the feeling of being able to swim and swim anywhere?

STANTON

I usually stay in one area, actually.

(One beat.)

Fear of sharks.

(Silence.)

LADY AITKEN

To me, swimming is like being baptized. It just washes away all your sins and troubles.

(Howard looks up, around, back down. Lady Aitken asks politely.)

Do you shoot?

GALLEJAS

Of course.

LADY AITKEN

La Chasse is out.

GALLEJAS
Certainly not.

LADY AITKEN
I think you'll find it is.

(As Lady Aitken continues to speak, superrealist still life paintings
by Jeanette Pasin Sloan are projected: DietRite, 7Up, Heller mug.)

Loose face powder is in.
Linen bath towels are in.
But la chasse is out.

STANTON
Ahha.

LADY AITKEN
Swiss bank accounts are out, as you know, I'm sure.
Loulou de Waldner is in again.
Omelettes are out. Too bad.
But mashed potatoes are in.

STANTON
Ahha.

MERIDEE
The Forties are out.

LADY AITKEN
Surfing is out.

MERIDEE
Belgium is out.

LADY AITKEN
Scotland is in.

MERIDEE

Fucking is out, although you wouldn't know it, the way people talk about it all the time.

LADY AITKEN

Chintz is out.

MERIDEE

Owning your own island is in, for sure, and I can see why, too.

STANTON

Small dinner parties at a round table are in, I think.

LADY AITKEN

Blue hydrangeas are in.

GALLEJAS

Collecting old airplanes is in.

STANTON

Dining in your green house is in.

PETER

Sicily is in.

LADY AITKEN

(Gently.)

No, dear, Sicily is out.

GALLEJAS

Hunt breakfasts are in.

STANTON

And whalewatching.

LADY AITKEN

Tiny cookies at tea time are in,

White cotton Indian nightdresses are in.

And letter writing.
And fringe.
But loofah sponges are out.

GALLEJAS
That's too bad.

LADY AITKEN
Chopin nocturnes are in. The Bristol Hotel in Paris.
Placing your furniture at an angle is out.
The rockhard derriere is out.

MERIDEE
No, the rock hard derriere is still in, you can take my word for it.

LADY AITKEN
Oh?

MERIDEE
And firm thighs.
And the exposed back is in,
you can count on it.

LADY AITKEN
Really?

MERIDEE
Walking your mother is in, too, I'm told.

LADY AITKEN
Uhhuh.
(Resuming.)
Floral sachets in the closet are in.

MERIDEE
Bachelors are out. Face it. You know what I mean.

LADY AITKEN
Long nails are out, too, really.

PETER

Onion soup is out.

LADY AITKEN

Yes.

Bonsai cherry trees are in.

STANTON

Swedish antiques are in, I think.

MERIDEE

Caviar is out.

LADY AITKEN

Thoughtfulness is in.

Lunch under an apple tree is in.

Politics are out.

(The music eases into the sound of ocean waves.)

LADY AITKEN

I've seen all the inaugural parades, you know, since McKinley. We watched the McKinley parade from our rooms in the Blackstone—or is that Chicago? After a while, they all look alike. The motorcars change, the dresses change, but nothing else changes. After a while, you think: well, what difference does it make? And: what can I do about it? After the First War, the peasants cut down my family's woods in Vienna to use for firewood. It was dreadful.

STANTON

That they cut down the trees.

LADY AITKEN

Yes.

[IN MOVING LIGHTS: But was this fun? Were these her kind of people, after all?]

MERIDEE

That they suffered so.

GALLEJAS

The peasants.

LADY AITKEN

Yes! It was such a crime.

STANTON

What woods were they?

LADY AITKEN

The Vienna woods.

STANTON

The Vienna woods belonged to your family?

LADY AITKEN

Well, we're all immigrants, aren't we?

(The sound of ocean waves.

Several moments silence.)

MERIDEE

Let's talk about your servants.

GALLEJAS

Ah, yes. They're from Rhodesia. Trained by the English.

MERIDEE

You don't like the locals?

GALLEJAS

They're rather too tied in with the situation.

STANTON

What do they want, anyway? What do servants want?

GALLEJAS

I don't think you can blame the servants.

LADY AITKEN

I don't think you can blame Howard.

GALLEJAS

(Sharply.)

I haven 't blamed Howard.

STANTON

I don't think I'm at fault.

PETER

Sometimes the way they look at you, you think you might be at fault.

STANTON

At me?

(Beat.)

Well. How do they manage? I sometimes wonder.

PETER

Of course, servants are a different thing from peasants. For a lot of these people. This is the choice they've made, after all.

(Silence.)

STANTON

(Uncertainly.)

Yes. Indeed.

LADY AITKEN

Annie Whitlaw was raped, you know.

GALLEJAS

After her massage.

LADY AITKEN

In Rhodesia.

GALLEJAS

Not the place to fall asleep.

LADY AITKEN

I don't think you can say it was Annie Whitlaw's fault.

PETER

Do you sleep with a gun?

LADY AITKEN

I think it's in their genes.

MERIDEE

Genes? I think it's in their toilet training. They have this very macho toilet training where the mothers smear feces on the babies' faces.

PETER

Who is this?

MERIDEE

The natives.

PETER

Is this true?

STANTON

Surely it's more organizational. Historical, perhaps, really.

LADY AITKEN

Well, of course. Isn't everything?

MERIDEE

You mean the way the English have treated them?

LADY AITKEN

(Very carefully.)

Treated? I wouldn't say that. The English are a very decent people really.

STANTON

Indeed.

LADY AITKEN

They suffer for it.

STANTON

(Almost catching her drift.)

The English.

LADY AITKEN

Who?

STANTON

Suffer for it.

LADY AITKEN

Yes. I sometimes think that's why they indulge themselves so in food and drink and comfort.

(Silence. No one comprehends.)

They need an anesthetic.

(Insisting.)

It's not a good situation. The natives are enraged, and the English are anesthetized. And these are graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, mind you. These are people who have read philosophy and history and poetry. They have studied astronomy. They have read the Bhagavad Gita. These are the finest minds that have chosen to spend their lives half asleep. This is a tragic situation. It is as though you were to take a fine piece of crystal and just throw it to the floor and shatter it.

(Silence.)

The call of a tropical bird. The actors contemplate. The call of a myna bird.)

GALLEJAS

Yes, well, history makes neurosis. We repress things. Nothing personal in it.

STANTON

No. One can't be too careful.

GALLEJAS

It's not a pleasant continent, Africa.

MERIDEE

This isn't such a pleasant continent either!

(The Butler enters. A movie is projected during the following scene and then on through the succeeding interlude: of a black man running away in the countryside.)

BUTLER

I beg your pardon, sir, but I wonder if I could speak with you for a moment.

GALLEJAS

It is a bit awkward just now. Can it wait?

BUTLER

Oh, yes, sir, I think it can, sir. Certainly, sir, if you wish.

(Silence.)

All look at Butler. Is he too obsequious?

Projections of a black man assaulting his wife. A half dozen still shots of a man beating a woman. Done fairly quickly, in a count of six or eight.

IN MOVING LIGHTS: And had she meant to stay with Peter this long, really?)

GALLEJAS

Weren't you going to send in one of the maids?

BUTLER

Yes, sir, if you wish, I certainly shall.

GALLEJAS

That is what I wish, yes.

BUTLER

Right away, sir?

GALLEJAS

Right away.

BUTLER

(After a pause.)

Will that be all, sir?

(Long silence.)

GALLEJAS

Yes.

BUTLER

Thank you, sir.

(He leaves. All are silent. Terrified.)

THE ACTORS watch Gallejas, who, having finished eating a piece of fruit, washes his hands very slowly and carefully in a silver bowl of water and dries his hands equally slowly and thoroughly.

MUSIC: Quiet. Contemplative. With the sound of distant jet planes high above.

VOICEOVER: A soft, female voice, calm, beautiful, and matter of fact:

"With Saturn now passing over the midheaven point of your solar chart no one can say you are not totally dedicated and personally ambitious. In fact, they may well complain you have been something of a workaholic

of late. Only you realize how important it is for you to consolidate your position. But you really do need to find time to relax and unwind this month, especially during the first three weeks while the Sun remains in the grueling sign of Capricorn. Astrological tradition has it that this is when your physical resources are at their lowest and you are prone to minor ailments. Also, when Mercury, the planet of the mind, turns to retrograde motion in your own sign on the eighth, you could fail to notice storm warnings in close personal relationships and end up having to say you are sorry—something Aquarians find almost impossible to do."

PROJECTIONS: Models in handcuffs, swimsuits in bombedout buildings, models holding rifles, modeling camouflage fashions. These projections bleed into the following scene.

PROJECTED QUOTATION: "We go to the stud sales. We don't just sit around. I can tell you that. "

(The sound of a jet tears across the sky from one side to another.)

PETER

(Laughing uneasily.)

Of course we don't have a servant problem in New York. I mean, I have a cleaning woman, of course, but she doesn't live in. Your servants live in.

GALLEJAS

Yes.

PETER

You must trust them.

(Long silence.)

GALLEJAS

No.

MERIDEE

How many servants do you have?

GALLEJAS

Five.

MERIDEE

Do they rape you quite a lot?

GALLEJAS

Not me, often. Young white women are another thing, of course.

MERIDEE

How do they do it, I wonder.

GALLEJAS

With their cocks, I'm told.

LADY AITKEN

Charles!

GALLEJAS

I don't think there's much fist fucking in this part of the world.

LADY AITKEN

(Rising.)

Really!

GALLEJAS

Buggery is another matter. I think 73 percent of all sex acts involve buggery these days.

LADY AITKEN

Charles!

PETER

(Concerned.)

Do they really?

MERIDEE

Are you afraid?

GALLEJAS

Not for myself, although, since I've come to know you, I often think of you in this context.

MERIDEE

What a delightful luncheon this is turning out to be.

[WORDS PROJECTED: I should really live in Cuba, I love sugar so.]

MERIDEE

What do you do all day?

GALLEJAS

Do?

MERIDEE

Yes. All day.

GALLEJAS

I give advice, mostly. Nothing official. Technical questions, you know: what to do with the bodies, that sort of thing.

(Meridee laughs.)

What do you do?

MERIDEE

I sunbathe.

GALLEJAS

Ahha.

MERIDEE

You know, I've gotten to the point where I change my clothes thirteen times a day. I'm getting to feel like a real professional. But I am learning how to control my quim muscles.

STANTON

Your what?

MERIDEE

My quim muscles. You know. I can make the muscles in my quim contract and move back and forth until it comes insideout, my quim comes right out, like a man.

STANTON

Ahha.

(Beat.)

Well. Extraordinary.

PETER

(Still caught up in a sort of delayed action, in the excitement.)

Last night at a dinner party I got into the most incredible conversation where this guy across the table was telling me that he had tied up a whore in Mexico one time and carved the chart of the year's Dow Jones averages into her, starting at her navel and going right around her torso and back to her navel—up and down, a whole year's worth. Is that incredible?

(Silence.)

MERIDEE

Yes.

(Silence.)

PETER

Look, don't try to make me out some kind of Goebbels or something. I happen to be a very average sort of person, with very average typical sort of stuff, very sort of usual human feelings. I mean, if you can't see the humor in what that guy did then you're just cut off from half the people in the world. I mean, some things are funny even if they're not nice. I mean, this is the real world. Look, I'm as nice as people get.

(Silence.)

MERIDEE

I should be working in a general store in Vermont.

PETER

Well, you're hard to figure sometimes, but we've had some wonderful times together.

MERIDEE

Who?

PETER

You and I.

MERIDEE

Are you kidding? Are you entirely conscious?

PETER

You're goddamn right. Mexico. Lake Tahoe. Aspen that time.

(Beat.)

The Orange Bowl.

(Beat.)

I mean, I'm not a dumb person. I'm not an insensitive person. I'm a human being, too. Some people think I'm very smart. I remember numbers, for instance. I have a head for figures. I remember when three month money was at 19% percent at the same time it was 6 in Japan, 9 in West Germany, 7 and 3/5 in Holland, 12 and 3/5 in France, 15 in Belgium, 11 in Britain, 11 in the U.S., 8 in Switzerland. I remember that. At the same time that government bonds were 4.22 in Switzerland, 19.18 in Italy. I play tennis. I've read RosenstockHuessy. I'm not at a loss for dinner companions. Some people think I'm quite funny.

[PETER'S VOICE ON LOUSPEAKER (OR PETER AS NARRATOR): Just then I noticed something was gripping my left leg. I put my hand down to see what the trouble was, and I felt something furry. I looked down. A small dog was biting my leg. That was a surprise. I tried to jerk my leg away from the dog, but the dog, a

little Lhasa Apso, a scrappy little dog, had a good bite on my leg and wouldn't let go. I can't say that it hurt very much; it hurt a little, sure; but mostly it was tremendously irritating. The dog was on a leash. He belonged to Lady Aitken.]

PETER

Pardon me.

PETER'S VOICE

I said to her.

PETER

Is that your dog?

LADY AITKEN

Yes.

PETER'S VOICE

she said, turning back to her champagne.

PETER: Well, look,

PETER'S VOICE

I said,

PETER: your dog is biting me.

PETER'S VOICE

She got upset at that. I guess I had somehow rubbed her the wrong way.

PETER

Your dog is biting my leg.

LADY AITKEN:

(Looks at Peter, looks at the dog, back to Peter.)

He is not.

PETER

(Screaming.)

Your dog is biting my leg!

LADY AITKEN

You're screaming.

PETER

He's biting my leg!

(She looks at him evenly; he speaks quietly.)

Call off your dog!

LADY AITKEN

My dog is not doing you any harm.

PETER

(Quietly.)

Anybody in the world could see that your dog is biting my fucking leg.

LADY AITKEN

This conversation has gone far enough.

PETER

(Calmly.)

Let's start this one from the beginning. I'm going to kill your dog. I'm going to bash his head in with a hammer.

LADY AITKEN

You don't have a hammer.

PETER'S VOICE

But, I did have a hammer. I took it from my pocket, and I said...

PETER

But I do have a hammer, right here, and I am going to bash his head in.

LADY AITKEN

Here, boy.

PETER'S VOICE

she said—

and the dog let go.

HOWARD

(A long laugh.)

I've always worked with decent people, whatever the situation I've been in, however bad things have gotten: you think people were always animals but that's bullshit bullshit because I have never been associated with anyone but people who have read Plato St. Augustine that sort of thing Aquinas even I'm talking about you know whashisname Penny knows I'm talking about Averell, I don't care what you might think well, sure, a man with that kind of money, you know, 300, 400 shirts in every closet but that's bullshit bullshit because even Averell comparatively speaking. And he returned my phone calls.

Hello Governor, I would say, Hello Howard he would say because he knew me he knew me starting back with Stevenson and then you know Birmingham, the marches Lyndon Johnson the whole fucking thing I could tell you stories. One has vanity after all, this is no sin, one likes to be with powerful people. Even Albert Schweitzer liked to be with powerful people. Oppenheimer you know: a very civilized man. A very civilized man. We talked about the moon program, and he got up and stepped to this blackboard he had in his office and wrote out an equation on the blackboard and he said: Now we know this to be true, don't you think it's vulgar to spend all this money simply to demonstrate it? You know one likes to be with civilized people. But you people haven't been anywhere. You people haven't seen these places. I'm talking about Clare Booth Luce's house with Bush and Buckley and Al Haig I mean some of these people I've lived with were animals I'm talking about Colby and Teller, fucking Kraut, you know a real Krautófourteen rooms, and lanais and atriums and baths, God it was hard to secure, that house.

CLARK BOOTH LUCE'S VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKER

Military people love me...

HOWARD

she said.

LUCE VOICE

and I love them.

HOWARD

She even said she might marry again.

[LUCE VOICE

But only if I find a handsome, retired, homosexual admiral.

(Movie continues as Howard continues to talk.)

HOWARD

But you haven't seen the backs of the heads blown off, brains leaking through your fingers like Jello, flies, flies all in the mouth, in the ears, flies in the nostrils, the eye sockets inside the skull—they fly up against your lips, cheeks—and dogs tearing away the flesh, you've never seen such dogs where you come from, pulling flesh from bone, until your head is so filled with these pictures that it has to explode!!

(Silence.)

And then, when they'd finished with me, they threw me away like an old dog. Well, I always planned to get out anyway, as soon as I could.

(Silence.)

STANTON

Well, I'm getting out as soon as I can.

LADY AITKEN

(Studying Stanton closely.)

Have you had plastic surgery?

STANTON

Certainly not.

LADY AITKEN

Just a little tuck in the fat pockets around the lower lids.

[IN MOVING LIGHTS: Was her sense of revulsion entirely aesthetic?]

STANTON

Certainly not.

LADY AITKEN

Are you afraid of the complications?

GALLEJAS

(Absently.)

Blood clots. Scarring.

[WORDS PROJECTED: Her majesty and I were both surprised by the word "informal" on the invitation, but when we asked, we were told "That's Hollywood."]

STANTON

Or worse.

GALLEJAS

Going blind.

PETER

Dying.

GALLEJAS

Having a facial nerve cut, a lower lid pulled down, a red eye.

(He shrugs.)

These things happen in life.

LADY AITKEN

There's a greater chance with a doublelayered lift, so I'm told, than with the standard lift of the lower half of the face.

GALLEJAS

Or a chemical peel with carbolic acid. Do you know of that?

LADY AITKEN

No.

GALLEJAS

Quite simple, really. Just paint phenol on the face. Cover it with adhesive tape. Leave it on for 48 hours. And your wrinkles are gone.

PETER

How long does a facelift last?

GALLEJAS

With fat excision, six to seven years. Four to five for a temporal lift. Then you can always have another—though there is a limit.

LADY AITKEN

The face is never quite the same as when you first go in for surgery. The effects of gravity and aging and all the things we don't really understand are going on even during surgery; they never stop.

(Maids and Butler enter. They are covered with blood.)

GALLEJAS

What is it?

MAID

We don't know, sir.

(A pause. Gallejas ponders.)

GALLEJAS

You're covered with blood.

MAID

Yes, sir.

GALLEJAS

It looks as though someone has been murdered.

MAID

Yes, sir, it does.

(Silence. Gallejas ponders.)

GALLEJAS

Who screamed?

MAID

We don't know, sir.

(Silence.)

GALLEJAS

Did you?

SECOND MAID

Not me, sir, no.

GALLEJAS

How did you come to be covered with blood?

FIRST MAID

The body was about waisthigh, lying on the table, when it began to spurt blood.

GALLEJAS

It began to spurt blood.

FIRST MAID

Yes, sir.

GALLEJAS

Had someone stuck it?

FIRST MAID

No, sir, I don't believe so.

GALLEJAS

How did it get on the table?

BUTLER

It had been stuffed in the dumbwaiter, sir.

GALLEJAS

From above or below?

BUTLER

I couldn't tell, sir.

GALLEJAS

How was it?

BUTLER

Bloated, sir. Belly distended. Pustules here and there. It was as we took it out of the dumbwaiter that its belly exploded.

LADY AITKEN

Poisoned?

BUTLER

Shot, madam, as near as I could tell.

LADY AITKEN

Was he a native?

BUTLER

Yes, madam.

GALLEJAS

It was a man, then.

BUTLER

Yes, sir.

GALLEJAS

A stranger shot elsewhere and then delivered to the premises.

BUTLER

So it would seem.

(Silence.)

GALLEJAS

Why would someone do that?

BUTLER

I'm sure I don't know, sir.

GALLEJAS

What do you think?

BUTLER

I'm not entirely certain that I understand all the things that are and are not done, although I think I have acquired some knowledge of appropriateness, for instance, in a given situation, this ought to be postponed, this done at once, this calls for patience, this for dispatch, this for acquiescence, this for courage, and this, finally, for a certain manner of speaking which I think I can say fairly I have mastered. And of the forms of behavior, that a certain way of moving is not done, an attitude of the body, a certain footsoud, a kind of glance, a manner of fixing one's ascot, a way of cocking the head, a certain presumption—all these are not done, whereas a kind of slam dancing is done, burning one's cheek with a cigarette is done, shooting out another's jaw is done, giving comfort to the grieving is not done, although you may think I am not one to judge, being a dependent person myself and yet on my day off I walk the streets, and as I cast my mind back over my own life I find more and more I remember less and less—I think it's fair to say I've come unhinged, having tried as I have to fit in and go along, after all, one needs to live, it can't be wrong to take a job, so that now as I look back I realize I have had twenty years of misery and could not say exactly who I am, for instance, or where my loyalties might lie at any given time, or what place I might call home, who my people are, these are things I think about on my day off when every week I go to a place where I sit in the front row, they do a striptease there, and after the show the same woman every week sits in my lap for a few minutes, and then in the park as I look around I see others quite like myself, sitting amidst the rubble, glass and shattered stone, and I pray to Jesus—who else?—and I feel my mind is so filled with anguish as to have become a fire hazard—so that under the circumstances, sir, it seems to me that anything is possible. Would that be an answer to your question, sir?

GALLEJAS

(To the Maid.)

Have you anything to say?

(Silence.)

MAID

No, sir.

(Silence.)

STANTON

I don't mean to compare myself to a poet—really, not at all—but even bankers actually hope that what they are doing is, in a sense, creative. Building something. Bringing into being something that hadn't been there before. Structures that no one had seen before you made them and not only do you make the structure but it results in physical, palpable things. A friend of mine, a banker, put together the money for the Alaska pipeline. Now whatever you think of that—and you always have to run costbenefit analyses of these things—nonetheless he put together a structure of private and public capital—Citibank, Deutchesbank, underwriting companies, Morgan Stanley, Solomon Brothers. An impressive group, Lazard Freres, government agencies, an extraordinary act of imagination, really. Sometimes you can look at the financial plan that has been put together to finance a skyscraper, and the financial plan is a beautiful thing really by itself, a novel thing, very often an avantgarde thing, even a thrilling piece of intellectual daring, if you are sensitive to that sort of thing. And you look at the finished building and you actually see all these extraordinary structures of finance and political arrangements and mechanical stress and the molecular structure of the materials and you are moved by it. And there is something very powerful and captivating about a structure. You actually take some pride in what you are contributing to this society. You even think—though I know this is difficult for some people—that you have earned your income, or at least that it's not despicable to accept it, because this is the way society is structured and you are doing your part to keep it together and keep it going and make it a humane place.

GALLEJAS

Where is the body now?

BUTLER

It's gone, sir.

GALLEJAS

Gone?

BUTLER

Yes, sir.

GALLEJAS

Gone entirely, you mean.

MAID

Entirely, sir.

(Long silence.)

GALLEJAS

Well, in that case, you may serve dessert.

MAID

Yes, sir.

(Butler and Maid exit.)

(The sound of breathing—as though of someone asleep, with occasional sharp inhales and sobs, from here for a while.)

MERIDEE

(Very quietly.)

I think we'd better leave.

PETER

Didn't we just get here?

MERIDEE

I don't think I feel well.

GALLEJAS

That's quite normal.

LADY AITKEN

I often feel that way myself. It passes soon enough.

PETER

She'll be all right.

STANTON

This is not a usual sort of thing.

MERIDEE

What have they done with it?

GALLEJAS

Thrown it out by the roadside, I expect.

MERIDEE

Thrown it out?

GALLEJAS

Did you want to see it?

MERIDEE

See a dead body?

GALLEJAS

Some people like it.

PETER

I understand that.

MERIDEE

(Still quietly.)

Let's get out of here.

PETER

We can't just leave.

STANTON

It's not easy.

LADY AITKEN

One can't leave one's friends. One has—associations.

STANTON

Obligations.

PETER

You get used to it.

LADY AITKEN

One's life becomes so—entwined. And where would one go? Who would one be somewhere else? I suppose one could say, really, we never should have come to begin with; but, then, we did. And here we are.

STANTON

One thing led to another.

LADY AITKEN

I don't know whether one thing led to another, but here we are. And it is awkward to leave. And what would you take?

MERIDEE: Take?

LADY AITKEN

I'd take my underwear, I imagine. Other things you can buy easily enough, but one always needs fresh underwear, and it's so hard to find on the road. When the Whitlows left Africa, Annie Whitlaw neglected to take any underwear with her, and she was devastated. I often remember the little traveling case that Marie Antoinette had—a case of leather, with a silk lining, and filled with several dozen perfumes and creams, all in exquisite little silver jars and vials—and she kept it always prepared and ready to go. I always thought, you know, that she was rather an underrated person, knowing that all there was to do is wait.

STANTON

Why didn't she just leave?

LADY AITKEN

Why don't you leave?

PETER

Don't they bury their bodies here?

GALLEJAS

Not usually.

PETER

Are they that superstitious?

GALLEJAS

No, no. They'll be shot for it, you know.

(Silence.)

PETER

No.

(Beat.)

I didn't know. Is that why their villages smell so?

GALLEJAS

Do they?

PETER

When you drive through the countryside you get that dreadful odor coming in through the window. Like you get in Mexico sometimes. I always thought it was just the way they smell, you know, Mexicans. Sometimes you pass one on the street and they give off this smell, too, I'm not saying it's genetic or anything, but just, you know, well, let's face it, they, you know, have odor.

[IN MOVING LIGHTS: And come to think of it, where would she go? And what would she do? And would that be tolerable now?]

LADY AITKEN

Oh, I'm afraid this conversation is going to get horribly boring. Mrs. Fish, I remember, once had all the guests at her luncheon talk baby talk to keep the conversation light. To be sure, sometimes one's mind just takes hold of something and there's no reining it in. I remember when Eleanor Roosevelt died, she insisted on a wooden coffin. She and Franklin had heard that if one were buried in a metal coffin, one's corpse would liquefy. They both meant to be buried in wooden coffins, but Franklin died at Warm Springs, and by the time Eleanor got there he had already been embalmed and put in a metal coffin, and the glass plate had been sealed, and it was spring, you know, and rather warm, and they had the train ride to take back to Washington, so she let it go, but it always bothered her to know that Franklin had just turned to ooze.

STANTON

It's a delicate matter, no doubt of it.

GALLEJAS

Here, the dogs get them. The jackals. The vultures. It's all quite natural.

(A monkey screams.)

STANTON

People don't think it of bankers, I suppose, but on the whole, actually, I never was the sort of fellow to believe, well, if I don't do it someone else will. My father was a fine man, and I was raised with certain expectations, and then I got into this business, and before I knew it, I thought: well, on the whole, this is not so bad. And, after all, I'm not killing people.

(Silence. His eyes fill with tears.)

LADY AITKEN

Of course the important thing is to send the children home. Howard and I have sent them home. One must be realistic. You don't keep your children with you here.

GALLEJAS

No.

STANTON

Don't you miss them?

LADY AITKEN

Miss the children?

(She tunes out, lost in thought.)

We don't think about it.

HOWARD

We think about the children all the time! We never think of anything else! You spend your life reading them books, tucking them in, swimming, catching them off the edge of the pool, dressing them for birthday parties, wearing funny little hats—god knows, you can't take enough pictures, all the time they're growing up, you take pictures, but you can never take enough.

(He is crying—the tears just coming quietly, from a man whose emotional "governors" simply no longer function.)

And you teach them to be decent, after all. You can't raise these children without hope!

(Silence. The others all look at him, turn away in discomfort.)

STANTON

The oddest vision sprang to my mind not long ago about my son. His face had been burned, a third degree burn, and I'd taken him to a doctor who

said he would need certain treatments, certain face packs. And then I'd just gone off to Mexico City and left my son for a week, and, when I got back, it was too late to do anything for him.

PETER

But I mean, not everyone thinks of leaving. Some people have just started out, and hope they will have interesting careers—and they make no apology for it. They came here to pitch in, and they're ready to pitch in. I mean I am interested in opportunity And have servants: I mean, people do think of these things, how nice it is. The servants here are really awfully nice people, and I mean you feel so well taken care of, and the beaches and the free time, and I mean, altogether there's just a terrific ease of living.

STANTON

No doubt.

PETER

What do you mean by that?

STANTON

No doubt. I mean: no doubt.

PETER

(Shouting.)

You mean you think I'm a son of a bitch. That's damned easy for you to say.

STANTON

Oh, I...No....

(He falls back on his chair, his hand instinctively to his heart.)

GALLEJAS

I must admit: I myself am rather fond of spinach frittata. I don't mind a bit of luxury. I am rather partial to the touch of silk, aren't you? I've seen all the films of Andrzej Wajda, would you believe it of a provincial character like myself? I rather like the music of Philip Glass, do you? Of course, if you wish to have a high culture, you must have leisure, if you would have leisure, you must have excess wealth. If

you would have excess wealth, you must exploit someone. And finally what is human life worth if it produces nothing of excellence, nothing of beauty, nothing extraordinary, nothing astonishing, if it only manages, day in and day out, to get along? Don't you find that somehow less than human?

LADY AITKEN

I believe in art. I think I would like to be a painting. Those of us who can't paint should be painted, I think.

[IN MOVING LIGHTS: Could this be true?]

GALLEJAS

And, I must say: I'm not eager to give up my garden. My terrace. What would be the point? What do you think would happen? After the hedges are trampled, after the throats are cut, after the women are raped, after the bodies are mutilated, after the mass executions throughout the countryside?

(Beat. With contempt.)

Soon enough, you'd see a new bunch sitting here on the terrace. Possibly without tastes as fine as ours—these are barbarians, after all, after all these years they've been barbarized.

(Beat.)

And what would they do, except that those among them with the finest instincts for bullying would rise to the top and society would be reconstituted exactly as it is today, with the most elusive scum among them moving from tax haven to tax haven in their private boats and planes and taking their women with them.

(Beat. To Meridee.)

You look at me as though I am some particular form of scum. But look what's happened to you: You've become my accomplice. I was born here, but you've come of your own free will! How utterly absurd! And now you

wonder what you ought to do? Well, you ought to tear your hair out. You ought to weep and cry out and run through the streets dressed like a cockatoo!

HOWARD

How you start out. Who you think you are. Who you think you can become. What you learn. What you study. How you learn to think. Plato. What you believe. Descartes, Rousseau.

(He begins to leak tears again.)

You show you can do it. You prove you can do it. Then you begin to do it. If you didn't have children, if you didn't fear the bad example you would set, you'd kill yourself.

LADY AITKEN

You haven't done so badly, Howard.

HOWARD

(casually—no longer having the energy to argue)

Oh, well. Killing fourteen year old boys ...

(Silence.)

LADY AITKEN

(Putting it in a good light.)

Of course one always says, well, it's a matter of the reason, a matter of in this case or for this purpose or this time under these circumstances, whatever it may be, and then, before one quite knows it, it simply becomes: what one does!

HOWARD

(again without much feeling)

Shivs up their backsides.

LADY AITKEN

In the olden days, people studied the liberal arts, and conversations positively sparkled. What do people know any more but the warning signs

of cancer, the rules of proper diet, the techniques of stress management, the knowledge of when to move money and of when to move?

HOWARD

(with sudden conviction and rage)

We agreed in the beginning and I went out there. I did it. Now we are staying. I am not quitting. Because I am not quitting. And I make no apology for it!

(Three scrims tear in half, one after another, and fall to the floor. A fourth scrim descends slowly, to cover the torn scrims, and is lit with a beautiful light.)

MUSIC: Gentle, and beautiful, like a Salvadoran flute: piercing, melancholy, tragic

VOICEOVER: A soft, quiet, female voice, matterofact, not seductive:

"I dreamed last night that I needed to change. I went into the women's room at the railroad station, into one of the stalls, and closed the door. I took off my raincoat and laid it on the floor, and then took off all my clothes and laid them carefully on the raincoat. And then the raincoat, with all the clothes on it, was drawn slowly out underneath the stall door—and I couldn't stop it, and all my clothes were gone, and I was left alone, and naked."

PROJECTIONS: On one screen a movie, on the other stills. the stills are the sort of bedrooms one sees in Town and Country magazine; the films are very beautiful, slow motion, dreamy helicopters, exploding bombs, flames, smashing buildings.

PROJECTED WORDS: I think everything is fantasy, really. What we surround ourselves with, how we relate to color, how we see beauty—it takes a long time to develop, but I've reached the point where everything is fantasy.

PETER

I dreamed last night I was coming up the stone stairway at the market.

MERIDEE

Is this the story you told me?

PETER

Yes.

MERIDEE

And he saw this man who had been burned from head to foot.

PETER

He had no eyebrows, no eyelashes. He shivered convulsively.

By the time I got to the top of the steps I was shaking with fear.

And there was a woman who had been shocked speechless by the sight of the burned man. She grabbed me. She was already weak and dying. I pushed her. And she fell backwards, down the steps.

(Pause.)

And as she fell, I thought: she would have died of her diseases anyway; it was almost an act of euthanasia to kill her. And that's how I feel. I feel that way.

(The lights fade sickeningly, flicker, and resume with a dozen explosions of strobe flashes.)

STANTON

I had the same dream.

LADY AITKEN

One is so fragile, after all.

STANTON

Sometimes it seems to me that my instincts are those of an insane person. They seem good to me and yet I feel entirely insane.

LADY AITKEN

Yes.

STANTON

I dreamed I came into a room filled with heads, waiting for relatives to come and claim them.

LADY AITKEN

(Dropping her glass.)

Oh...

(Beat.)

I'm sorry.

HOWARD

I was putting my son to bed one night, when the whole facade fell off the front of the house—just fell away into the street, and my son's bed was there, next to the edge. And I just told him to pull his bed back away from the edge, and I left him there, exposed to the night.

(A horrendous, shattering explosion that rocks the theatre. Music opens explosively. Meridee stands, in a panic, looks around with mounting anxiety, and, during the following moments, exits.)

THE ACTORS sit and are served dessert by the servants.

PROJECTIONS: Beautiful things broken. Churches smashed. A broken tree. A shattered vase. A child's broken toy. A ruined bedstead. One picture, of the woman who has been hit in the mouth with a rifle butt, appears several times.

SOUNDS: Explosions. Hammering: as of hammer on stone, club on wood, fist on flesh. A highpitched piercing sound. Terrible screams. The breaking of glass as though whole walls of glass are crashing down. The siren that the Nazis used. Helicopter blades, deafeningly. A babble of shouting, laughing, panicky directions, crowds in riot

VOICEOVER: Toward the end, as the other sounds become intermittent, then fade, a soft, female voice reads a list of charity benefits for the month in Los Angeles.

(The lights ease toward twilight. Howard remains in a brighter light.)

GALLEJAS

(To Peter. As they talk their pictures are projected as at first. Their voices are miked to echo.)

Do you shoot?

PETER

Certainly.

GALLEJAS

I go on a shoot from time to time in BadenBaden.

PETER

Really?

GALLEJAS

I find it helps relieve the tedium. One can only take so much of buttermilk and cottage cheese and those wretched unsalted bits of waferbread before one wants to shoot something.

PETER

Yes.

(A silence. He ingests the drug du jour.)

I know it's wrong of me, but I've never enjoyed BadenBaden. I like the massage, but I don't care for all that water and the deep breathing and calisthenics.

(He thinks.)

I don't mind a little brushing and scraping, having my pores cleansed, my torso packed in astringent gels, a pedicure, but I don't care for those sessions of lymph drainage.

(Offering his drug to Gallejas.)

Have some?

GALLEJAS

Thanks.

SOUNDTRACK: The sound of someone breathing, panting, as though running.

(As they prepare and share drugs, their voices are heard over the loudspeaker, very smooth, quiet, almost whispering. The conversation drifts—long silences sometimes occur between remarks.)

[GALLEJAS'S VOICE: Life is more difficult but not impossible. I go out a lot—not to Paris much any more—but around here. I never really thought seriously of doing anything else.]

[LADY AITKEN'S VOICE: It's a natural, traditional pursuit

—part of our
heritage, and a recognized method of population control.]

[GALLEJAS'S VOICE: I don't know how many rooms there are. Somewhere around thirty-five or so, I've been told.]

[PETER'S VOICEOVER: I guess I'd have to say the way I feel is: I don't have a problem with it.]

[LADY AITKEN'S VOICE: Sometimes I feel, you know, utterly transparent.]

[GALLEJAS'S VOICE: In my country, I see so little difference, generation to generation.]

[LADY AITKEN'S VOICE: There are still people who do it every day but it isn't what it used to be. People are wearing the wrong jackets and don't even know the rules.]

(The lights go to deep pinks and reds, the colors of sunset, lingeringly. The sound of the ocean and tropical birds. Three distinct, deliberate gunshots, coming almost from within the room. Startlingly present and real in sound. They should be fired by a pistol and not come over a loudspeaker. With the third one Howard's head suddenly explodes, and blood is splattered all over the rear wall. The lights fade slowly.)

END

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