

BEAUTIFUL MARIA
(Bellissima Maria)

by Roberto Cavosi

Translated from the Italian by Jane House

Winner of the 2001 'Premio Riccione Teatro'

Characters

MARIA, Rocco's second wife

ROCCO, private investigator

PATRICK, Rocco's son

MAX, Patrick's friend

The setting is contemporary. The stage contains the following five sets or 'zones': the dance floor, the kick-boxing gymnasium, the sewing room, the master bedroom, and the darkroom.

Note: When one scene is interrupted by another, the director may wish to continue the action in the first scene with a sort of simultaneous dumb show.

Act 1

Scene 1: The dance floor

MARIA and ROCCO are sitting far apart. A mambo is playing softly in the background. Each character speaks directly to the audience.

MARIA: I know how to sew. I make bridal gowns, from the veil to the hem of the bridal train. I know how to do all sorts of embroidery and every kind of design.

ROCCO stands up and walks slowly towards MARIA. He hesitates. He turns back.

MARIA: I even sewed my own bridal gown. I was a beautiful bride. It wasn't that long ago. I'd never found the right person. It's hard to find the right person.

ROCCO tries again. Warily, executing a few dance steps as cover, he reaches MARIA. It is a kind of courtship dance.

MARIA: Rocco was the man for me; I knew it from the first dance. At first look, even.

ROCCO reaches MARIA and invites her to dance. MARIA stands up. ROCCO pauses for a moment to look at her and then it is MARIA, with sinuous movements, who seems to be inviting him.

ROCCO: Adulteries, betrayals, deceptions . . . I always get paid for them. Everyone wants to know if they're being cheated on, no matter what the cost—and I'm not just talking about money.

MARIA and ROCCO draw close and dance.

Scene 2: The kick-boxing gymnasium

PATRICK and MAX are boxing in the ring. An explosion of breath or a cry or a loud grunt accompanies each blow, lending more power to the kicks and punches.

PATRICK: You've got to punch much harder.

MAX: It's not a match.

PATRICK: Come on, put your back into it.

MAX (*pressing forward*): Well, watch out, then.

The blows get harder and faster. It is a violent but fascinating dance like ROCCO's and MARIA's.

Scene 3: The dance floor, continuation of Scene 1

ROCCO and MARIA are dancing the mambo. ROCCO breaks off and observes the woman doing the steps.

ROCCO: I've photographed hundreds of couples while they're cheating and each time I'm amazed at how fragile we are.

The dance continues. ROCCO grabs MARIA and mid-way through a turn suddenly lets her go. MARIA's movements become more and more seductive.

ROCCO: Being capable of wonder, that's the secret of life.

Now it's ROCCO's turn to show off and MARIA slows down. ROCCO struts like a peacock displaying its plumage.

MARIA: My bridal gown turned out beautifully, but I didn't like it. I never told Rocco though. It was well made . . . but . . . I didn't like it.

They draw close and the dance continues.

Scene 4: The gymnasium, continuation of scene 2

PATRICK and MAX are fighting without restraint. (*The lines can be adjusted according to the dynamics of the match.*) MARIA enters. She is dressed in a suit. She stops half way between the ring and the punching bag. She sits down, PATRICK sees her but does not talk to her and continues boxing.

PATRICK: Don't stop, you're barely touching me.

MAX: What if I hurt you?

PATRICK: I'll do you first.

MAX: Don't piss around. I can flatten an ox with one blow.

PATRICK: I'd like to see that.

MAX: So get me one then.

They continue more heatedly. MARIA is embarrassed. She's about to leave.

PATRICK: Where are you going?

MARIA: I just came by to say hello.

PATRICK: What brings you here of all places?

MARIA: Just passing by, that's all.

PATRICK *lowers his guard and MAX hits him.*

PATRICK: Are you stupid or something? I'd dropped my guard.

MAX: And don't ever do it again, not when we're in combat. This is a gymnasium, remember, and a fight's a fight.

PATRICK: What are you trying to say?

MAX: Nothing. *(raises his hands)* I think that's enough for today.

PATRICK: Now hang on.

MAX: I'm going to take a shower.

PATRICK: We're not done yet.

MAX: I am. Ma'am. *(exits)*

PATRICK: *(ironically)* Thanks a lot!

MARIA *moves towards the punching bag.*

MARIA: There's a strong smell in here.

PATRICK: People generally sweat in gymnasiums.

MARIA: It's not sweat . . . It's camphor.

PATRICK: . . . yes, it's useful for warming up the muscles.

MARIA: . . . It smells nice. Nice and strong.

PATRICK *joins her at the punching bag.*

PATRICK: You're not working today?

MARIA: I was tired.

PATRICK *starts hitting the punching bag.*

MARIA: I worked all through the night . . . embroidering a veil. It's like I prefer working at night, even if it makes me more tired . . . and I often hurt myself, see, I prick my hands with the needle.

PATRICK: So what if Papa comes home and finds you're not there?

MARIA: What?

PATRICK: Papa!

MARIA: He'll work it out. Is that bag heavy?

PATRICK: Try it.

MARIA *gets closer to the punching bag and tries to push it.*

MARIA: Wow!

PATRICK: Try and punch it. Like this, Maria, like this!

PATRICK *gives the bag a couple of punches and MARIA tries to imitate him.*

PATRICK: When you give it a hit, you've got to be . . . mean and nasty. You have to put everything you have into that punch, all your energy. It's the bag that has to be afraid of you, not you of the bag.

He punches it again.

MARIA: I could be your mother.

PATRICK: Yeah . . . but you're not.

MARIA: Do you mind my coming by?

PATRICK: No.

MARIA: I think maybe you do.

PATRICK: What difference does it make? In two weeks I'm beginning military school.

PATRICK *starts to hit the bag again.*

MARIA: Do you have a girlfriend?

PATRICK: Maybe.

MARIA: Are you in love?

PATRICK: And are you still in love with my father?

MARIA: Why are you asking?

PATRICK *stops again.*

PATRICK: You've always given the impression that you're avoiding me. As if I bothered you.

MARIA: That's true. You have always bothered me.

PATRICK: Right from the day you married my father.

MARIA: Right from that day yes.

PATRICK: And now here you are playing mother hen, watching what I do all day. I can look after myself.

MARIA: I've always felt a very strong physical anxiety for you, it haunts me, because you're my son without my being your mother.

PATRICK: After Mama died I never expected to have another, so don't worry about it.

MARIA: You have no idea why I despise you, why I'm afraid of your gaze. Why I hate the sound of your breathing and detest your every footstep resounding throughout our house every single night.

PATRICK: Get lost.

MARIA: And where am I supposed to go?

PATRICK: Get out of here! Go home. Go! Clear off! Get out of here! Get out!

MARIA *runs away.* PATRICK *starts hitting the bag ferociously again and then his punches change into kicks, then back to punches, until he loses all self-control, all style, building up to a sort of paroxysm as he thrashes out with punches that are accompanied by loud vocal sounds.*

Scene 5: The dark room

ROCCO *is printing photographs under the usual glow of a dark room's red light.*

ROCCO: Maria isn't capable of being unfaithful. She's not one of those women who are into every guy passing by in the street. I know her well. It's not in her nature. When she loves, it's with her whole heart and soul.

Feeling very satisfied, ROCCO lifts up a fresh print. It shows a man falling into a deep ravine. On the edge of the ravine stands a feminine figure dressed in a mint green suit.

Scene 6: The Sewing Room

Night. ROCCO's house. A few bridal gowns are suspended from the ceiling, others are on mannequins. MARIA is working at the sewing machine. She's drinking. She stands up and takes up a new gown. She is about to put it in the machine but she stops. She goes and puts a mambo on the stereo.

PATRICK enters. He has a large dressing on his forehead. Without saying a word he turns off the mambo.

MARIA: Did you hurt yourself?

PATRICK goes to his room without uttering a word.

MARIA goes back to the sewing machine. She sits down. She puts the gown in the machine. She stands up and turns the mambo back on again. She gets a third gown. She drinks. She takes it to the machine and replaces the other one. She sews.

PATRICK enters holding a bag. He turns the mambo off again. He is about to leave.

MARIA: Where are you going at this time of night?

PATRICK: I'm sleeping somewhere else.

MARIA: And if your father wants to know where you are, what do I tell him?

PATRICK: That I went out whoring. I think he should understand.

MARIA: What are you trying to accuse me of? Let me protect you.

PATRICK: Protect me from what?

MARIA: If we are to blame then we're in it together.

PATRICK: I don't know what you're suggesting. I'm not staying here a minute longer.

PATRICK exits. MARIA drinks. She puts on the mambo again. She dances with her eyes closed. She starts to dance the mambo again, she curls up on the sewing machine, she laughs drunkenly.

Scene 7: The master bedroom

ROCCO *is on the bed looking at the freshly printed photographs. He is talking to MARIA who is in the bathroom.*

ROCCO: Not everyone chooses a ravine for a rendezvous. A rendezvous for what anyway? Just to die? This ravine is shaped like the Devil's arsehole. If he fell in, it only serves him right. What was he trying to do: lick the devil's arse? But I feel kind of sorry for him. This guy saw hell racing towards him. His arms were open wide like an angel. It took them a week to pull him out of there. His girlfriend's suit was enough to make you puke. Pistachio colored. No, not pistachio, mint green.

MARIA *enters from the bathroom. She has just taken a shower. She stops when she sees ROCCO.*

ROCCO: What's the matter? Do these photos make you feel queasy? A fool who doesn't even know why he went to the edge of that ravine . . . and for a girl who likes wearing mint green.

MARIA: I didn't hear you come in.

ROCCO: I've been talking to you for fifteen minutes.

MARIA: I didn't realize.

ROCCO: So I've been talking to myself. You feeling okay?

MARIA: . . . sorry. I just felt a shiver of cold.

ROCCO: The ghost of this guy must have passed by (*lifts up the photographs*).

MARIA: Put those photos away.

ROCCO: If you want. (*moves the photos around on the bed*) I haven't seen Patrick.

MARIA: Patrick's been sleeping away for a few days.

ROCCO: Where does he go?

MARIA: He doesn't tell me.

ROCCO: You should act like a mother to him.

MARIA: You don't think I do? You don't think I try?

ROCCO: You're at home. You work at home. Patrick's almost a man, but he's not the real thing, quite yet. My job's getting more difficult every day.

MARIA: I do everything I can. It's not easy.

ROCCO: Catching the cheating husband . . . or the cheating wife, was much simpler until just a few years ago. It's a different story these days.

MARIA: You spend too much time away from me, pursuing lovers and cuckolds.

ROCCO: Is it upsetting?

MARIA: Very.

ROCCO: (*motioning for her to come to him*) Is there something I can do to console you?

MARIA: You have your son's eyes, and the same way of tightening your eyelids. You're a boy like him.

ROCCO: Do you miss that boy a lot?

MARIA: I never knew you as a boy.

ROCCO: But you know Patrick. Aren't I a lot like him?

MARIA: It's not the same thing.

ROCCO: Maybe it turns you on?

MARIA: What does?

ROCCO: Imagining me a young man like my son?

MARIA: Could you deal with that?

ROCCO: I don't think so.

MARIA: To be turned on, I need to be in love.

ROCCO: And when do you know you're in love?

MARIA: When I feel turned on.

ROCCO: Like right now?

MARIA *does not answer. She goes to get a drink.*

MARIA: No . . . I'm not turned on right now.

ROCCO: You're making me feel uneasy. That's never happened between us before.

MARIA: Turn off the light . . . my eyes are tired.

ROCCO: Where are you Maria?

MARIA: Rocco . . . there's too much light . . . turn it off.

ROCCO: As you wish.

ROCCO *turns off the light.*

Scene 8: The gymnasium

MAX *is skipping*. PATRICK, *bare-chested but still in his trousers, is rubbing camphor into his muscles.*

MAX: Isn't your "mummy" coming to see you today?

PATRICK: Cut it out. It happened once, it won't happen again.

MAX: Tasty little pussy though.

PATRICK: Go fuck yourself!

MAX: It doesn't bother me if she turns up.

PATRICK: It does me.

MAX: Your father sure did well finding that one.

PATRICK: Don't mention my father. I don't like it.

MAX: Want to tell me what's eating you?

PATRICK: Nothing. I just don't like people talking about my father.

MAX: Okay fine sorry. I didn't say anything wrong.

PATRICK: I don't want you to even mention him. Is that clear?

MAX: Very very clear.

PATRICK: Whatever you'd say about him would be rubbish.

MAX: I said okay, I understand, now you shut up.

PATRICK *stops rubbing his muscles with the camphor.*

PATRICK: Work out by yourself today. I'm taking off.

MAX: You're a real prick, you know. A real little prick.

PATRICK *heads towards the changing room.*

Scene 9: The dark room

ROCCO is looking at the photographs of the incident at the ravine. He touches them up with a small brush and toner fluid. He's humming "Como fue,"¹ a slow, traditional mambo.

Scene 10: The sewing room

Night. MARIA is sewing. PATRICK enters.

MARIA: I made you dinner.

PATRICK: I'm not staying.

MARIA: I wasn't expecting you to turn up but I made it anyway. I make it for you every night.

PATRICK: I thought I was a bother.

MARIA: What did you come back for?

PATRICK: I was just passing by.

MARIA: Patrick . . . I think I owe you an apology.

PATRICK: You don't owe me a damn thing.

MARIA: Didn't you leave because I said you bothered me?

PATRICK: You bother me too.

MARIA: It's unbearable isn't it?

PATRICK: Isn't it better that I stay away from this house. In two weeks I'll be gone, and it'll all be over.

MARIA: I promised your father to treat you like my son, to be a mother to you.

PATRICK: I can't stand treating you like my mother.

MARIA: Tell him that.

MARIA caresses him. PATRICK pulls away.

PATRICK: I forgot to take my robe. The one for the gym. Have you seen it?

¹ May be found on YouTube sung by Beny More, with lyrics translated.

MARIA: This one? (*removes a bridal gown from a mannequin. The robe is hanging underneath it*)

PATRICK: Could you give it to me please?

MARIA (*pressing the bridal gown against her body*): This gown is for a very young girl, she'd be about your age. I sewed it myself, stitch by stitch, as if it were mine.

PATRICK: Put it down.

MARIA (*ignores him*): When you get married you enter a labyrinth and lose your way.

PATRICK: Stop talking. You're upsetting me.

MARIA: I know.

PATRICK: We two are not married.

MARIA: I know.

PATRICK: My robe.

MARIA: Take it yourself.

PATRICK: Why did you come into this house?

MARIA: So I wouldn't sleep at night.

PATRICK: As for that, I don't sleep either.

MARIA: Perhaps to have to wait up for you. Like a mother hen.

PATRICK: That gown looks good on you.

MARIA: It's too white.

PATRICK: For the two of us, yes . . . it's too white.

MARIA: You didn't come back because of the robe.

PATRICK: Shut your mouth.

MARIA: How is my mouth? Could it please a boy like you?

PATRICK: We have nothing else to say to each other.

MARIA: Have you ever dreamt about my mouth? Does it bother you the way you bother me?

PATRICK *is about to move towards her but then leaves.*

MARIA: Wait . . . Patrick, don't leave me alone! I can't stand it anymore. (*starts kicking the mannequin with PATRICK's robe on it. The robe falls to the ground*) You have to be deceitful to soothe the beating of your heart. Depraved . . . indecent. Patrick . . .

Scene 11: The dark room, a continuation of Scene 9

ROCCO *is humming. He stops.*

ROCCO: I met Maria in a dance class. At that time I was looking to distract myself after the death of my wife. Maria became like a drug for me. What heaven it was, dancing and holding each other tight, getting through the whole night even . . . without stopping, without resting. There's something strangely tragic in her kisses, they always perplex me . . . but they give me such pleasure . . . Oh God . . . such pleasure. Losing her would be the end of me.

ROCCO *starts humming again.*

Scene 12: The gymnasium

PATRICK *is practicing on the punching bag. MARIA is in the ring. She is smoking a cigarette.*

MARIA: I want to fight.

PATRICK: I've told you already that I don't want you here. You owe me that much at least.

MARIA: Owe you that for what?

PATRICK: For my silence.

MARIA: The silence is on both sides.

PATRICK: My father didn't deserve this.

MARIA: I want to fight. Come here.

PATRICK: Why don't you leave me in peace?

MARIA: If you came home I wouldn't have to follow you about.

PATRICK: Put out that cigarette.

MARIA: Doesn't it mean anything to you how much we're both suffering?

PATRICK: I told you to put out that cigarette.

MARIA: I'm obeying you. It's you who's carrying on like a child.

MARIA *stubs out the cigarette but lights up another.*

PATRICK: Do you want me to drag you out of here?

MARIA: We can't ignore what we feel for each other.

PATRICK: Speak for yourself.

MARIA: You're a coward.

PATRICK: What about my father!

MARIA: He's not here now. Fight like a man.

PATRICK: You're absurd.

MARIA *puts out the cigarette and slowly takes off her dress.*

MARIA: Give me some gloves. You don't want to leave me like this, do you?

PATRICK *climbs into the ring. He picks up MARIA's dress and hands it back to her. MARIA slaps him. PATRICK hits her, knocking her to the floor. She tries to stand up but falls again immediately and faints. PATRICK bends over her, caressing her cheek with the back of his boxing glove. He lifts her up tenderly in his arms. Before she comes to, he brushes her forehead with his lips.*

Scene 13: The sewing room

ROCCO *is alone. He is flicking through the photographs of the ravine. He talks to MARIA who is still in the bedroom.*

ROCCO: The house reeks of camphor. Patrick uses too much of it, it's nauseating. It overwhelms all the other smells. The smells I need: the saliva of Maria, the perfume of her breasts. The smell of her sweat, holy sweat that gives me eternal life, simply thinking of it at night makes me come like a child. *(to MARIA in the other room)* The wonder of looking at you, Maria, looking at your body, looking at your legs. And your arse . . . I look at your arse and I'm always deeply moved. It reminds me that somehow the juice of ancient tropical plants still courses through my veins. That wonder: that's what keeps me alive.

MARIA *enters undressed as she was in the previous scene. She's putting on a sewing smock.*

MARIA: I worked all through the night. I had to deliver some things. Do me up please?

ROCCO *does so.*

ROCCO: One word from you and I'll quit, I'll retire, and we'll never be apart again.

ROCCO *wants to kiss her.*

MARIA: Not today please.

ROCCO: Today is just like yesterday and I wouldn't want tomorrow to be just like today.

ROCCO watches her, bewildered. MARIA goes to the sewing machine. She inserts a garment. PATRICK enters. MARIA speeds up the rhythm of her work. PATRICK looks at the pair of them.

PATRICK: Excuse me.

PATRICK starts to leave for his own room.

ROCCO: Where are you going?

PATRICK: To my room.

ROCCO: Aren't you going to kiss Maria?

The sewing machine jams.

PATRICK: Is that really necessary?

ROCCO: What does it cost you? It would make me happy.

PATRICK moves close to MARIA and kisses her on the cheek. They are both highly embarrassed. MARIA smiles, she caresses his face. PATRICK pulls back. MARIA starts up the sewing machine again.

PATRICK: Now may I go to my room?

ROCCO: In a few days you'll be leaving . . .

PATRICK: I have training at the gym. I only came by to change my stuff.

ROCCO: I see . . . go if you're in a hurry.

PATRICK: What are you doing here?

ROCCO: Don't you like it?

PATRICK: You're never at home.

ROCCO: I lost my light meter. I was hoping it was here.

PATRICK: Haven't you got another one?

ROCCO: This one's a sort of lucky charm for me. I've had it forever. It's my light meter, the first light meter I ever bought. *(sighs)*

PATRICK: Are you actually sighing?

ROCCO: Let's all sigh together. Let's all sigh, let the anxiety pass, let everything pass.

PATRICK (*sighing involuntarily*): I've had enough . . .

ROCCO: Sorry. I won't sigh anymore . . . One of those guys that gets hunted down, one of those 'rabbits' . . . he fell in a ravine. (*shows the photograph to PATRICK*) This little incident has really discombobulated me . . . Maria's already seen them . . . I can feel my guts churning around and around. It's an awful sensation. It stays with me. I can only drive it away by thinking of the two of you.

(*pause*)

MARIA *who has not once lifted her head from the machine, suddenly stands up. She's pricked her finger.*

MARIA: Damn this machine.

PATRICK (*worried*): Are you hurt?

MARIA (*more upset than necessary*): No, it's nothing. Nothing. Just blood. Every day I have to prick my hands and clean off the blood. I'll disinfect it. (*exits*)

PATRICK *takes a step to follow her then stops himself. ROCCO notices.*

ROCCO: She's very beautiful. I hope you can find a woman like her.

PATRICK (*nervous*): . . . Let's hope so.

ROCCO: Where do you spend your nights?

PATRICK: You never gave us any explanations, "my work," period, nothing else. You were always out, anytime, day or night, following your "rabbits."

ROCCO: You're rather belligerent.

PATRICK: I don't know how Mama put up with you . . . I don't know how Maria can put up with you.

ROCCO: You think I haven't been a good father?

PATRICK: You're a peeping Tom, Papa. You spy on people, you photograph them. I can't stand the kind of work you do . . .

ROCCO: It's clean work, and honest as far as it's objective. One photograph says it all, shows reality. I'm not the one to blame.

PATRICK: How does it feel to watch other people, while they kiss, while . . . while they're doing their own fucking shit?

ROCCO: Listen, you worry about your military school, about making a prick of yourself with the young recruits, and I'll worry about what I do.

PATRICK: Is that what you think?

ROCCO (*backtracking*): We're all pricks sometimes in this life, Patrick, some more than others.

PATRICK: I cried about that sometimes. When I was little. My father is one of those men who destroy other people's lives, their feelings, and all for money.

ROCCO: And now you don't cry anymore?

PATRICK: It's you who should be crying, Papa, only you.

Scene 14: The gymnasium

MAX is alone shadow boxing, with his legs most of all.

MAX: Legs are a good part of what unites us, they solidify the connection between one person and another: they bring people close, shorten the distance between them. If you think about it, in some ways they facilitate marriage. Like lips or tongues. . . They're all organs that determine the fate of our society.

He continues training.

Scene 15: The master bedroom

ROCCO is waiting for MARIA. He's drinking. He's walking on the bed. He's drunk.

ROCCO: What's the very worst act of treachery? Is it the one that deceives you and turns a lover strolling beside you into your executioner? Every act of treachery is experienced as an injustice; but when one feels betrayed by life itself, the injustice is unbearable. So, whether life is worth the effort, that's the essential question. Any others, like whether the universe has three dimensions or whether the soul has nine or twelve hierarchies, they're all secondary. That's just playing games. An answer to the essential question must come first.

MARIA enters again.

ROCCO: I waited up for you all night.

MARIA: I went for a long walk. I needed to, and this morning I went to mass and lit a candle.

ROCCO: What for?

MARIA: I don't know.

ROCCO: Do you want to have a drink with me?

MARIA: Yes . . .

MARIA *takes a drink.*

ROCCO: Help me undress, I'm too drunk.

MARIA *helps him.*

ROCCO: What's the problem?

MARIA: What problem?

ROCCO: You've got a problem. You don't undress enough, you need to undress more (*tries to take off her clothes*).

MARIA: Leave me alone.

ROCCO: No way I'm leaving you alone.

MARIA: Don't touch me take your hands off me.

ROCCO: What are you afraid of I'm your husband. You've been avoiding me for days. (*She caresses him. He calms down a little.*)

MARIA: Let's do something together, let's go back to dance school.

ROCCO: I don't want to dance with you. I just want you.

MARIA *runs to the wardrobe. She opens it and searches amongst ROCCO's clothes.*

ROCCO: What are you doing?

MARIA: Looking for your dancing clothes, the suit you always wore to class.

ROCCO: I don't want to see it.

MARIA: I don't understand. I can't find it. It's always been here.

ROCCO: I don't want to see it!

MARIA *goes and gets a drink.*

MARIA: It's always been in that wardrobe and now it's not.

ROCCO: Good. I've something else in mind right now. . .

MARIA: What have you done with it?

ROCCO *moves towards her.*

MARIA: I want that suit back.

ROCCO (*threatening again*): Think about lighting your candles in church.

ROCCO *takes a gulp of his drink.*

ROCCO: The flame from your candles is weak. You should light up more of those religious ones,² fill up all the basilicas and cathedrals.

ROCCO *collapses on the floor. With difficulty MARIA drags him towards the bed.*

MARIA: You're like a sack of potatoes.

She hoists him to the bed.

MARIA: Rocco, wake up! I hate seeing you like this! Rocco, wake up! (*starts slapping him*)
Rocco!

Scene 16: The gymnasium, a continuation of Scene 14

MAX *is shadow boxing, now using his arms as well.*

MAX: God gave human beings the possibility, at the extremities of their arms, to clench their fingers, and thus the fist was born: a miracle of nerves, bone, veins, cartilage, and muscle, a contract made with the unknown . . .

He continues practicing.

MAX: In our clenched fists lies the secret of our talent, our power, and our fear. You need to clench your fist tightly, nothing should leak out, and nothing should be wasted until the moment you strike. I've trained for months, much longer than Patrick, his fists can't be compared to mine.

He continues practicing.

Scene 17: The sewing room

MARIA *is trying to teach PATRICK how to dance. She is in her slip and wearing a bridal veil. PATRICK is almost naked. They are sharing a time of joy and abandon. The lines are interspersed with dance steps and cries. Every so often MARIA makes a bridal gown slip from a mannequin and fall to the floor. From the radio in the bathroom you can hear "Mambo Caliente" or a similarly frenzied mambo.*

² Here, Rocco uses the word "cero," which refers specifically to candles used in church. Previously he had used the generic "candela."

MARIA: Come on. On the balls of your feet! Look straight ahead, chin high, knees bent, arms outstretched. Uno, dos, tres, cuatro . . .

PATRICK: I'll never get it!

MARIA: Uno, dos, tres, cuatro . . . I'll lead, I'll do everything for you, just let yourself go, you just have to let yourself go.

PATRICK: What do you want me to do more than I'm doing to let myself go?

MARIA: Your hand governs mine, like at the altar . . . Drag that left foot, throw that right leg back and begin again. It's the simplest thing in the world. Now, do it alone.

MARIA *leaves him and gets a drink.* PATRICK *tries to dance.*

PATRICK: I can't do it. Give me a tiger to hold by the tail, or a shark to bite, but this has no rules.

MARIA *takes off her veil and begins a "solo."*

MARIA: You like this woman?

PATRICK: She's the only woman in the world.

MARIA: I'm no longer a whore?

PATRICK: Of course you are. You're the worst of them all.

MARIA *embraces him.*

MARIA: They're strong these arms, like your breathing. What ties us together, Patrick? Do you know?

PATRICK: Your beauty, Maria, that's what ties us together.

MARIA: Never leave me.

PATRICK: Why would I?

MARIA (*holding him even tighter, almost talking to herself*): A body has the obligation to exist and live for what it is. There should be no restraints, there should be no regrets. It's not my fault that we're made of flesh and blood, it's not my fault that you appeared in this garden.

MARIA *lets go of him, dancing by herself again.*

MARIA: Never leave or else take me with you. I'll be there on the street waiting for you and you can have me for a flat rate every night. And I'll rob you of all your money, you won't have a penny left.

PATRICK: Stop dancing.

MARIA: Take me.

PATRICK moves toward her slowly. A ballet of seduction and “the chase” begins. PATRICK tries to seize her but she dodges him, dancing all the while. Their movements, growing in emotional intensity, assume the features of a tribal dance. Finally MARIA deliberately gives in, and PATRICK grabs her. Together they fall to their knees. The music stops on a trumpet’s high note.

PATRICK: Save me, Maria.

MARIA picks up the bridal veil from the floor and places it on PATRICK’s head.

PATRICK: We’ll never be free.

MARIA: If you can’t change heaven it’s best to ignore it. It’s not difficult. Heaven is for those who get married in white. Our clothing is these fingers of our hands, these our knees, the nape of our necks . . . our lips. Give me your hand and let us marry, even if I were your mother and you were Cain (*kisses PATRICK’s hand*). Let us marry, like this: without candles, without ceremony, only looking into each other’s eyes. Searching for each other’s tongue . . .

The two kiss passionately.

Scene 18: The dark room

As he speaks, ROCCO is hanging the prints of the man in the ravine on the drying line, one by one. He studies them . . .

ROCCO: You run, run, run, and very often you realize you haven’t even taken a step.

My son is right, I’m a snoop trying to catch kids while they’re jerking off. And for what? Because they’re not faithful to some moral law that I didn’t even write. Even God himself didn’t write it: when he created mankind he allowed unions with animals! Fear wrote it, fear of killing and being killed and I don’t only mean flesh and blood . . .

He quickly gathers up all the photographs.

Scene 19: The master bedroom

MARIA is wearing boxing gloves, she is drinking and smoking, she’s drunk. Her nerves are fraught. She tries to put on her lipstick while wearing the gloves.

MARIA (*referring to the lipstick*): It’s driving me crazy . . . It’s too small!

Scene 20: The gymnasium

ROCCO *has his photos in hand. He's standing in the ring while PATRICK shadow boxes without gloves.*

ROCCO: Our debut in life is so full of promise: we're thirsty and we're given something to drink; we're hungry, and our mother's teat is there, ready to spurt out milk. We grow up with the impression that justice is being served when all our needs are quickly satisfied, and that's why we feel authorized to consider them legitimate.

PATRICK: Why are you telling me this?

ROCCO: Because I'm hungry, atavistically hungry, I feel like I haven't eaten in months. And there doesn't seem to be anything in this world left for me to gnaw with my teeth.

PATRICK: Eat those damned photographs you're always carrying around with you.

ROCCO: I'm not a cannibal, each photo I create is made of my flesh and blood.

PATRICK: You take yourself too seriously.

ROCCO: I wish it were the other way around.

PATRICK: I don't know what you mean . . .

ROCCO: I wish you were a cannibal, Patrick. Bite my flesh. Eat it piece by piece. Then we'd be united forever, indivisible. We could get beyond our grief, Patrick.

PATRICK: What grief is that?

ROCCO: The estrangement between you and me . . . I feel it. Why is it there?

PATRICK: Papa . . . if you don't know why . . .

ROCCO: You see this man? There's something in his hand, can you see what it is?

PATRICK *looks at the photograph.*

PATRICK: The back of his hand is facing us, you can't see anything.

ROCCO: But can't you see he's holding something? Do you see that?

PATRICK: Maybe. Yes, it's possible. But why's that so important?

ROCCO: You're right it's not at all important. Come on let's box a bit.

PATRICK: Don't mess around.

ROCCO: I'm perfectly serious. A good sweat, let's work up a good sweat.

ROCCO *takes off his jacket and shirt.*

PATRICK: Cut it out, Papa.

ROCCO: You stink of camphor. It's disgusting.

PATRICK: I don't know what to do about it.

ROCCO: I had a good jab once upon a time. In my line of work, you have to know how to defend yourself. One time I caught a boxer and he saw me as I was photographing him with his pants down, his dick hanging out and his girlfriend waiting for action.

PATRICK: Put your shirt back on. Let's drop it.

ROCCO: What would you have done if you'd been that boxer . . .

ROCCO advances and starts to throw the first punches. PATRICK doesn't fight back. He limits himself to parrying the blows and keeping his distance.

PATRICK: I'm not that boxer.

ROCCO: I know, but what would you have done?

PATRICK: I'd have gone crazy.

ROCCO: And that's exactly what happened, he went crazy, like a wild animal. And I went crazy too, crazy mad like I'd never been before.

ROCCO steps up the intensity and the rhythm of his punches. PATRICK stays on the defensive. While the fight is escalating . . .

Scene 21: The bedroom, continuation of Scene 19

MARIA: On this desolate earth everything pairs off, everything. The animals, the plants, even the stones pair off.

She falls on her hands and knees.

MARIA: And sometimes they leave each other. Remember: sometimes the farewells get the upper hand and prevail. So speak. Why don't you ever speak? What are you thinking about? Thinking about what? Remember what you are thinking about. About Rocco. . .

Scene 22: The gymnasium, continuation of Scene 20

ROCCO and PATRICK are still engaged. ROCCO has grown bolder. PATRICK continues to be on the defensive.

ROCCO: A few good punches never did anyone any harm. Isn't that right?

PATRICK: You don't have to work so hard.

ROCCO: Too old, am I? I'm not old. I'm a wild beast.

PATRICK: We'll hurt each other.

ROCCO: I've got muscles you can only dream about. Hit me in the abdomen. Try it, come on.

PATRICK *lowers his guard.*

PATRICK: I'm not going to hit you anywhere.

ROCCO: You're insulting me, Patrick. You have to hit me.

ROCCO *rushes at his son with all his might. His punches are muddled and have no style, he swings wildly, without any tactic. PATRICK tries as much as he can to limit the damage.*

ROCCO: You're very clever, aren't you, very careful. But if you won't come out to play I'll have to get past your guard.

ROCCO *becomes more violent.*

PATRICK: Stop it Papa! Stop it!

ROCCO: I'm alive, I am! I'm alive. I'm alive!

PATRICK *makes a little run and hits him. ROCCO sways, but comes back at PATRICK again. PATRICK grabs him and holds him tight, as tight as he can.*

PATRICK: It's over, Papa. That's enough. It's over.

ROCCO: What's over?

PATRICK: This round . . . it's over.

ROCCO: You're all sweaty.

PATRICK: So are you.

ROCCO: We've never embraced each other like this before.

PATRICK: I don't believe we have.

ROCCO: You've got strong arms . . . You must make women go wild.

PATRICK *slackens his hold.*

ROCCO: Don't let go, Patrick. Don't let go.

He hugs him tight.

ROCCO: If we let go it'll be forever.

PATRICK *hugs him hesitantly.*

PATRICK (*uncertain*): We don't need this. We'll be together whatever.

ROCCO: Your sweat's released the smell of the camphor, Patrick.

PATRICK: Papa . . . (*holds him tighter*)

ROCCO: Don't call me that . . .

ROCCO *breaks away from* PATRICK.

ROCCO: There's the smell of your mother on you. It's Maria's smell.

PATRICK: What are you saying?

ROCCO: I've spent too many nights with her not to know that smell. I've gone without a shower after a night with her just to have her smell on me all day, to feel her with me. It's my smell . . . and now it's become your smell too.

PATRICK *is stunned.*

ROCCO: You have nothing to say? Deny it, at least, like they all do, all the ones I've watched all my life. At least deny it.

PATRICK: You're wrong.

ROCCO: You shouldn't have said that. Not to me.

He slaps him lightly. PATRICK remains still. He slaps him again and then again.

ROCCO: Now defend yourself. Defend yourself.

PATRICK remains still. ROCCO slaps him violently. PATRICK does not react. ROCCO insists. PATRICK submits, not even raising his arms in defense. ROCCO goes to get his shirt. PATRICK looks like a discarded puppet.

ROCCO: You're a little prick.

He punches him twice, once on his cheekbone, once in his stomach. PATRICK sways and then falls. ROCCO puts his shirt back on.

ROCCO: If you'd been innocent you'd have pummeled me to death.

ROCCO puts his suit jacket back on and leaves. PATRICK tries to stand up. He drags himself with difficulty to the ropes.

PATRICK: Free me of this guilt, you're the only one who can do it. Let me live, Papa! Let me have my life.

End of Act 1

Act 2

Scene 1: The dance floor

MARIA and ROCCO are dancing the same mambo heard in Scenes 1 and 3 of Act 1. After a few moves they separate and continue dancing.

ROCCO: I've photographed hundreds of couples while they were cheating, and each time I'm amazed at how fragile we are . . .

They dance . . .

MARIA: My bridal gown turned out beautifully, but I didn't like it. I never told Rocco though. I did a good job sewing it . . . but . . . at the altar it bothered me.

They dance . . .

ROCCO: Adulteries, treacheries, deceptions . . . they always paid me for them. Everyone wants to know if they're being cheated on, whatever the cost and I'm not just talking about money.

MARIA's dance is sensual, performed with abandon and with eyes closed. Movements showing yearning alternate with highly energetic movements to create unpredictable and thrilling syncopations. ROCCO is on his knees, gazing at her admiringly, keeping the beat by clapping his hands. Suddenly, both MARIA and the music stop.

ROCCO: Eat this, don't eat that . . . back then in that time of Paradise on Earth we were already beginning our fall . . .

The two link up again and the dance begins again.

Scene 2: The master bedroom

PATRICK is lying on the matrimonial bed. He's cleaning the wound on his cheekbone with a handkerchief. MARIA is in the bathroom. He is speaking to her.

PATRICK: I wish he'd never been born. Do I disgust you because of what I'm thinking? Tell me, I'd feel better. Once upon a time, I bothered you, from that to disgust isn't very far. I wish my father had never existed. Do you hear me? (*almost to himself*) I only had to slug him once today, just once, and I'd never have seen him again. Instead, I did nothing, just

stood there, not moving, like a stone. I should have reacted, should have dispatched him before he was able to bash me. I was paralyzed, I had no strength, no courage . . .

MARIA *enters, ready for bed, carrying some cotton and alcohol.*

PATRICK: Is killing someone an act of courage?

MARIA: When one kills, it's never because one's courageous. Whoever kills has chosen to live in the night, like us.

PATRICK: And ours, you don't call that courage?

MARIA: I don't know. For me it's easier to call it sex, passion . . . love?

She cleans his wound with the alcohol. PATRICK shudders from the burning alcohol.

MARIA: Does it burn?

PATRICK: Yes, a little. I hate my father so much.

MARIA: Love and madness sometimes go hand in hand. It's necessary for growth . . . and an erection can be worth a father's life.

PATRICK: Even when I kiss you, I see his face.

MARIA: I'd prefer that you not tell me that.

PATRICK: But it's the truth.

MARIA: The truth is you're confusing day and night.

PATRICK *reacts by violently grabbing her by the arm.*

PATRICK: Don't treat me like a child.

MARIA: Let me go.

PATRICK: Tell me you're sorry.

MARIA: Would you let me go please?

PATRICK *lets her go. MARIA goes to light a cigarette.*

MARIA: Good and bad people don't exist in this world, only males and females exist.

PATRICK *(makes a movement of rage)*: I . . . I can't bear it anymore . . . My father . . .

MARIA: . . . smoke, Patrick, relax.

MARIA *leans toward him.*

MARIA: Open your lips a little.

PATRICK *looks at her, surrendering to her proposal.*

MARIA: It's easy . . .

PATRICK *does so.* MARIA *passes him the smoke from her own mouth.*

MARIA: Want more?

PATRICK: Yes.

MARIA *repeats the "procedure."*

Scene 3: The dark room

ROCCO *is alone. He's cleaning the trays and mixing the acids.*

ROCCO: Alone. Maria, I feel alone. I've had the piss taken out of me. No one keeps me company anymore. Not even me. It's disillusionment. (*places one hand in the acid*) The only thing that remains for me is the awful smell of these photographic acids. It's monstrous. (*smells the acid on his hand*) What a stink, it makes you want to throw up. It's like the stink of flowers rotting in cemeteries. It's like a curse. Is anyone here? Are you there Rocco? Maria?

He hits the acids in the trays with his hands, splashing them everywhere.

Scene 4: The gymnasium

MAX *is in the boxing ring wearing MARIA's bridal veil, the one she wore when she 'married' PATRICK. PATRICK menaces him. Both are naked except for towels wrapped around their waists.*

MAX: Do you want to marry me, Patrick?

PATRICK: Take that thing off.

MAX: I found it in your locker.

PATRICK: I know. I put it there myself. Take it off.

MAX: You and your "mummy" aren't sneaking in here are you?

PATRICK: To do what?

MAX: That's what you have to tell me.

PATRICK: Leave me alone.

MAX: Let's see if you have any marks, any souvenirs.

MAX *lifts up* PATRICK's towel.

PATRICK: Just back off!

MAX: If you have no nail marks recording your nights of passion, your love will diminish.

PATRICK: Keep your thoughts to yourself. And take off that veil.

MAX: The man with teeth marks or nail marks here and there on his body will disturb a woman's soul, no matter how strong she might be.

PATRICK: You make me sick. Are you done?

MAX: Do you want me to bite you? Just to impress her.

PATRICK: Will you fuck off, Max. Just fuck off.

Scene 5: The sewing room

MARIA *has placed among the bridal gowns a few mannequins wearing ROCCO's clothes. Some of his other clothes are hanging on moveable coat racks while others are arranged on the floor, the jackets and trousers assembled as if MARIA had reconstructed ROCCO's body. She is busy arranging a jacket on one of the mannequins.*

ROCCO: I was so alone when I met you, Maria . . . I needed just one body to regain my balance. One doesn't forget a wife simply by spreading oneself all over the place . . .

MARIA: . . . I've been working all night.

ROCCO: I've been thinking and rethinking how to confront you. And I still don't know . . .

MARIA: What are you moaning about? Isn't it obvious that all my thoughts are about you?
(*alluding to the mannequins*)

ROCCO: I would like that.

MARIA: Have you gone blind? Look around you.

ROCCO: It's just appearances.

MARIA: I still can't find your dance outfit.

ROCCO: I'm here in person. Why do you need that outfit?

MARIA: Rocco . . . Patrick's not to blame. It was always I who provoked him.

ROCCO: What you've done to me is beyond words.

MARIA: I'm suffering as much as you.

ROCCO: I suppose you feel your heart bleeding.

MARIA: I'm scared of losing him, now that he is so much more than my son.

ROCCO: And I'm so much less than your husband.

MARIA: He's so young . . .

ROCCO: And you are not.

MARIA: And you are not.

ROCCO: We're quick to be vindictive and forget the feelings that hold us together no matter what.

MARIA: Patrick only has to hear your name and he gets mad at the whole world.

ROCCO: Every boy has thought at least once about killing his father. It's normal. I thought about it too when I was his age. Getting mad is nothing.

MARIA: I want him to be happy, that's all.

ROCCO: That's strange. It seems to me that up to now the only thing you've wanted is to be happy yourself.

MARIA: I'd like to make you a new dance outfit, make it from scratch.

ROCCO: Are you serious?

MARIA: Let me take your measurements.

ROCCO: Why don't you stop joking?

MARIA: Why do think I'm joking? This is my work.

ROCCO: Do I look like a bride to you?

MARIA: What about me? I looked like a bride to you once, didn't I?

ROCCO: Why, Maria?

MARIA *goes to get the measuring tape. She comes back to ROCCO.*

MARIA: Lift up your arm.

ROCCO (*lifting his arm*): Does death solve anything? Tell me. Would it really solve anything? For me, for Patrick, or for you?

MARIA: The other one. (*makes him lift his other arm*)

ROCCO: Would you be able to accept death? Death would carry off everything one feels. If your blessed orgasms turned into a death rattle, that wouldn't be a way of prolonging your life.

MARIA (*kneels and takes his waist measurements*): Keep your arms up.

ROCCO: That man in my photos, the "rabbit," I'm sure he knew what he was going to encounter that day. He knew exactly what was there at the bottom of that ravine: he was heading straight into the devil's arse.

MARIA (*measuring his legs*): So, what was there?

ROCCO: Have you finished taking measurements?

MARIA *is stunned. She looks at ROCCO's shoes.*

MARIA: Rocco, your shoes!

ROCCO: These are the ones I use for dancing.

MARIA: . . . yes . . .

ROCCO: You hadn't realized?

MARIA: Since when have you been wearing them?

ROCCO: A while, the ones I usually wear were all worn out.

MARIA *stands up throwing the measuring tape into a corner.*

ROCCO: What's wrong?

MARIA: If you wear them every day you'll ruin them and then what will you wear when I've finished your new suit?

ROCCO: . . . my love . . .

MARIA: Don't call me that. I'm not turning back.

ROCCO: And I'm not changing my shoes.

MARIA: So clean them at least. Promise me that. Clean them every day.

Scene 6: The gymnasium, a continuation of Scene 4

PATRICK *is fighting his friend to get the veil off his head.*

MAX: There no point in trying to get the veil, you'll never marry that one.

PATRICK: I'll marry your mother instead.

MAX: Tread carefully.

PATRICK: You've become squeamish all of a sudden.

MAX: You're not squeamish, you're out of your mind, I see it in your face, you'd be capable of doing it with your own sister, it's lucky you're an only child.

PATRICK: You think you're being funny?

MAX: If a woman kisses him, he has to kiss her back; if she hits him, he has to take his turn beating her up.

PATRICK *snatches the veil from him. The two friends face each other, panting.*

MAX: Every night I have a date with Eve and her serpent. It is they who teach me these obscenities.

PATRICK: I'm happy for you.

MAX: And me for you . . . if you're having fun.

Scene 7: The master bedroom

The bathroom door is open. A "primitive" mambo is heard from that room. MARIA, clearly drunk, executes some dance steps. She is drinking and smoking and very jittery.

MARIA: If I love Patrick it's because loving him makes me happy. Loving another body one that's different from Patrick's would be impossible. I'm the one who's taught him what it means to possess, just as I taught you. Your first wife taught you nothing. She was not a woman, if she didn't love Patrick. Turn off that radio. No, don't turn it off. What should I do now? What should I do? I'll hurl myself into the street just as I am, and I'll walk up and down with my hair in disarray, or falling all over my face. What will we do tomorrow? Whatever will we do? Do you want your wife to go out into the streets like this? I'd only do it if Patrick asked me to. You just lie there, speechless, in the bathtub. Wash yourself, wash yourself: you'll always be dirty. It won't do you any good lying in that tub . . . I'll always be here to make you dirty again.

PATRICK *enters, distraught. He crosses to MARIA, she looks at him . . .*

MARIA: Patrick . . .

PATRICK: Let's leave together. Let's get away from here. I'll become a non-commissioned officer and we'll find a beautiful house.

MARIA *is so surprised she can hardly speak; she can't even tell him that his father is in the bathroom.*

MARIA: Patrick?

PATRICK: I want to be with you forever.

MARIA: Patrick . . .

PATRICK *throws himself on her and kisses her. Drunk, she is unable to stop him in time and so she passionately kisses him back and then collapses at his feet. ROCCO, a towel around his waist, covered with lather from the bath, appears at the bathroom door "brandishing" a bar of soap.*

ROCCO: . . . you're so pathetic.

The mambo has ended, and bursts of laughter are heard coming from the bathroom radio.

PATRICK: We're pathetic?

ROCCO: Very.

More laughter comes from the radio. MARIA, intoxicated, crawls aimlessly around the room.

PATRICK: I didn't know you were here.

ROCCO: I've been here since before you were born.

More laughter comes from the radio.

PATRICK: This time I'm not sticking around to be slugged.

ROCCO: You're a jerk and she's a slut.

ROCCO *throws the soap and hits him. There's more laughter from the radio and applause.*

ROCCO: I'm cold. I'm going back in the water to warm up.

ROCCO *walks back triumphantly into the bathroom. A mambo is once again playing on the radio. MARIA tries to rise from the floor.*

PATRICK: It won't ever happen again, I promise you.

MARIA: We need to talk about your father.

PATRICK: It's time to put an end to this.

PATRICK *walks menacingly towards the bathroom. He enters it.*

MARIA: Patrick where are you? I heard someone say we'll be together always . . . so you should be here. Patrick where are you? Patrick for heaven's sake, I'm drunk . . . give me something to drink, Patrick. Patrick!

The radio suddenly stops playing. There is a huge flash from the bathroom, and then darkness. MARIA presses her heart, clicks on her cigarette lighter. PATRICK appears white as a ghost in the bathroom doorway.

MARIA: At another time and in another place I would have been a humble Mary Magdalene, sinned against rather than sinning . . . I would have strewn my tears over the bare earth.

PATRICK: The radio fell into the tub by mistake. I knocked it in without meaning to . . .

MARIA: Pour me a drink . . .

PATRICK: My father . . .

MARIA: Yes?

PATRICK: . . . he's alive.

MARIA: Patrick . . .

PATRICK: It's insane: he's alive. He's still alive! He's alive.

Scene 8: The dark room

ROCCO *is enlarging a detail of the "rabbit's" hand. He is directing the enlarger onto the wall so that the image of the "rabbit" falling into the ravine is gigantic. At the edge of the ravine, in the background, one can make out the blurred image of the woman in green. The beam of light from the enlarger is masked by a red filter.*

ROCCO: A flash of light . . . it's a part of my craft. A violent discharge of electricity, it's a killer . . . Days and days of useless lying in wait, spending nights in the cold, while the others, flesh upon flesh, make your wait seem endless . . . until suddenly . . .

ROCCO *positions a sheet of paper over the hand of the "rabbit." He removes the red filter from the light of the enlarger. He counts the seconds of exposure on his fingers.*

ROCCO: It was so simple to grasp; the truth was right there within reach; I only needed to lift the shroud from my eyes. When the radio fell in the water, I thought: that's it, I'm dead. But no. Kiss my arse: I'm not dead, I couldn't die!

ROCCO *stops counting and puts back the red filter on the enlarger. He takes the photo and places it in the tray.*

Scene 9: The sewing room

The notes from “Accidental Mambo” are blasting from the radio. ROCCO’s dance outfit is basted to a mannequin. MARIA, using her scissors, is taking out her rage on the garment.

MARIA: Dance Maria, the needle is running, the thread is sewing. Dance Maria, dance . . . What are you doing you’re not dancing?

She leans on the sewing machine.

MARIA: What’s wrong? Don’t you want to dance tonight? Dance Maria, dance . . . Don’t you want to? Dance . . .

MARIA places her hand beneath the sewing machine’s needle and deliberately pierces her finger. She falls on her knees transfixed by the pain.

Scene 10: The dark room, a continuation of Scene 8

ROCCO is stirring acid in a tray.

ROCCO: When the photo is fixed the wrath of God will destroy every plan, every hope for a happy life. There will be a savage shattering of the heavens, akin to the lion’s roar, or the hyena’s howl of hunger. *(with a pair of tongs he removes the print from the developer)* The same screams that were heard when God split Adam’s ribs, screams that disrupt our dreams, that fill our nights.

ROCCO throws the sheet of paper in the fixative. He turns off the enlarger.

Scene 11: The sewing room

ROCCO’s dancing suit is hanging on a frame suspended by a cord from the ceiling. It is identical to the one he has worn in all the scenes. PATRICK is in his pajamas. He is looking at the suit. MARIA is walking around him smoking.

MARIA: My hands are wounded. The needle of that machine is cursed. Cursed. I worked through all those nights, I finished your father’s suit, and I still stain it slightly with blood. I have to change that machine.

PATRICK grabs the suit by the trouser legs and moves it about. The suit is now swinging all over the room.

PATRICK: This suit is cursed.

MARIA: I don’t live anymore, Patrick, I don’t sleep anymore.

PATRICK: Neither do I.

MARIA: Your father will never leave us.

PATRICK (*hits the suit again violently*): Look at it, just look at it. (*alluding to the suit dangling from the ceiling, and he hits it again*)

MARIA *calms* PATRICK *down, hugging and kissing him.*

PATRICK: We're guilty, Maria. Even though my arms only want to hold you tight.

MARIA: The smell of our skin, of our sweat, will take away our remorse, the sweet scent of our hair . . . of our words.

PATRICK: Remorse is a shadow that kills you without letting you die. It crushes you just to make you live.

MARIA: My hands are so painful.

PATRICK: Let me kiss them, let me heal these wounds. You've worked so hard.

MARIA: I will take the blame on myself. Let me have it. You need to become a non-commissioned officer, get away from this house.

PATRICK: I don't want you to talk like that.

MARIA: Let's not talk, then, let's not talk, now that we are caressing each other. Now that your breathing is so gentle.

Scene 12: The dark room, a continuation of Scenes 8 and 10

ROCCO *is shuffling about the room alone and without music. He is studying his "beautiful" print. In the hand of the "rabbit," now projected on the back wall, one can perceive an object very similar to a light meter. He stops.*

ROCCO (*alluding to the photograph*): This "rabbit" has nowhere left to run: he's finished and in the bag. What a stink in that ravine, it was worse than my chemicals. A stink of shit . . . Like the eyes of the dead, like their eyes when they close. What a great hunter I am, what a great bloodhound. (*slowly starts dancing again*) I've never misfired. I've never disappointed a client. When I sniff the air, I always find the trail. What a profession, I love it so much. Be objective, be objective, to the point of absurdity.

He continues to dance stepping up the beat as he whirls about the room.

Scene 13: The gymnasium

PATRICK and MAX *are boxing in the ring. At every blow there's an explosion of breath, or a cry, or a loud vocalizations to lend more power to the kicks and punches.*

MAX: What's eating you today? You seem quite out of your mind.

PATRICK: Are you scared?

MAX: It's not a serious match. It's just us . . .

PATRICK: Let's pretend it is a match.

MAX: Don't talk bullshit.

PATRICK (*in a paroxysm of rage*): It's either you or me.

MAX: Have you gone mad? We're friends, Patrick . . . cut it out . . . Patrick!

PATRICK *presses on with inordinate passion*. MAX, *who has only been defending himself, now throws himself into the "struggle" with all his might. Explosions of breath, cries, or loud vocalizations are heard again after every blow.*

MAX: You're an animal, a wild animal.

PATRICK: You haven't seen anything yet.

They box.

PATRICK: You'll have to knock me out because I'm not stopping.

MAX: Who the fuck do you think you're fighting? What the fuck are you doing?

PATRICK *throws himself at his friend with all the strength he has left.*

PATRICK: Hit me! Come on! Hit me! I'm going to kill you!

MAX *parries the blows as best he can, until PATRICK stops unexpectedly and lets down his guard. MAX strikes him hard with a deadly combination of kicks and punches. PATRICK falls to his knees. MAX is about to be pitiless when PATRICK collapses on the floor and MAX stops himself.*

MAX: I'm so sorry . . .

PATRICK: Max . . .

MAX: I don't know what got into me, but you were possessed . . .

PATRICK: My dear friend . . .

MAX: Give me your hand. Breathe, please, get your wind back. Catch your breath . . .

PATRICK *pulls himself up on his elbows, and motions to his friend to wait a moment but then falls back.*

Scene 14: The master bedroom

ROCCO is speaking to MARIA who is in the bathroom with door closed. Naturally ROCCO is holding the photograph in his hand. It's dark. The faint sound of a mambo is coming from the bathroom.

ROCCO: Maria! My light meter is at the bottom of the ravine, right at the bottom where it's darkest. Why don't you come out! Come out of that disgusting bathroom! How am I going to get a light reading now? Any hope I had of finding it is now gone. It's been lost forever. It stinks down there, it's putrid. Disgusting. Get out of there! Maria! What do you have to clean up? Surely not the blood and secretions from when you were born.

MARIA enters ready for bed, with a cigarette in her mouth and cotton wool in her hand. She's taking off her red nail polish. She's smoking. The mambo can now be heard more clearly from the bathroom. ROCCO exhibits his photograph.

ROCCO: You know what all this means? The "rabbit" has my light meter in his hand. And I'm the only person who could be holding that light meter.

MARIA: . . . Your suit's finished. It took a lot out of me.

ROCCO: I didn't ask you to make a new one.

MARIA: I need another drink.

MARIA goes and pours herself another drink.

ROCCO: Why can't you be my mother now, and I be Patrick? You could embrace me forever, like that ravine embraced the "rabbit." Take hold of me, I want to be a drop of sweat on your belly button, in a crease of your groin.

MARIA: How many more times must I sew you a suit so I can be sure you no longer exist?

ROCCO goes to get the suit from his wardrobe, which is empty except for the suit that MARIA has made. ROCCO is wearing an identical suit.

ROCCO: Look: it's the same suit as the one I'm wearing.

MARIA: . . . I was the one who put it on you . . . you were laid out lifeless in the mortuary . . . I dressed you in your shirt and your trousers . . . I knotted your tie and buttoned your jacket . . . one button at a time . . . and it took me almost all day . . .

ROCCO: Do you think my light meter is broken?

MARIA: I was the one who tied your shoes . . .

ROCCO: I've kept them clean like I promised. I was happy to do it. I detected some affection for me in your request.

MARIA: You were just lying there cold . . .

ROCCO: How will I measure the light from now on? It worries me so.

MARIA: Your hands were cold and hard like marble.

While ROCCO is talking he slowly gets on his hands and knees on the bed as if he were simulating the slow-motion fall into the ravine.

ROCCO: . . . As I fell I held on tightly to my light meter, as tightly as I could as death swallowed me up. But it brought me no luck. It must have shot away from me as I hit the ground . . .

ROCCO *motions to MARIA to join him on the bed by tapping the pillow a few times.*

MARIA: How many times must I kiss Patrick to make your face disappear, to bury you forever?

ROCCO: I wasn't the one to create the sky and the stars.

MARIA: I'm tired, Rocco. I've done so much sewing just so I'd get tired . . .

ROCCO: Yes . . . now everything is coming back to me, now everything is really clear: as I was falling, from the corner of my eye, I saw standing on the edge of the ravine, that woman in a mint-green suit, I saw her backlit by the sun, speeding away from me . . . What a whore.

MARIA: I can't sew anymore, I can't keep it up, I keep piercing my hands.

ROCCO (*inviting her*): Lie down and rest.

ROCCO, *in a dangerous manner, kisses her on the forehead. MARIA wants to escape . . . but hasn't the energy.*

MARIA: Your lips are cold.

ROCCO: And what about yours?

MARIA: Go away, leave me alone.

ROCCO: Would you open these lips again to a man as cold as me?

MARIA: What would I receive in return?

ROCCO: How much longer will it last with Patrick?

MARIA: Longer by far than what lasted between us.

ROCCO: Tell me that's not true, tell me that I'm wrong, that there's still a faint hope.

He kisses her forehead again. This time MARIA manages to escape.

MARIA: I don't like it.

ROCCO: Everything here? You don't like it?

MARIA: No.

ROCCO: How much do you love Patrick?

MARIA *walks to her wardrobe. She opens it. She takes out the mint-green suit of the photograph.*

MARIA: You don't know how much I spent on this suit. I would never be able to make a suit like this. It's perfect.

ROCCO: Except the colour.

MARIA: Stop making judgments, Rocco: You're dead.

ROCCO: And you drop that tone. It doesn't seem to me that you're in such a happy place. But I'll forgive you if you give me a kiss, only one kiss.

ROCCO *stretches his arms toward MARIA. She is unsure. ROCCO grasps her firmly.*

MARIA: You're hurting me. You'll break my wrists.

ROCCO: Don't be so honest all of a sudden.

MARIA: You've taken my eyes, my neck, my face, you've robbed me of my feet that could run, taken my knees, my arms, you've had all of me. At least let me have him, at least leave me Patrick.

ROCCO: . . . give me a reason, one single reason.

Scene 15: The gymnasium, continuation of Scene 13

MAX is carrying his friend in his arms. PATRICK is in a critical condition.

MAX: Patrick, wake up . . . speak to me.

PATRICK: It wasn't so difficult, you know?

MAX: What wasn't?

PATRICK: I betrayed everyone and everything, Max, even you . . .

MAX: What are you saying?

PATRICK: That was a good punch, you know, a real good slug.

MAX: You lowered your guard . . . you know I punch hard.

PATRICK: You were good, but I tricked you into bashing me . . . I turned myself into that ox you were looking for . . . one punch, just one, you were right. I can't feel my legs anymore, I'm cold . . .

MAX: I'll call an ambulance. You'll see that it's just a bad blow . . .

PATRICK: I killed my father.

MAX: What are you talking about?

PATRICK: I killed him. A gentle push, nothing stronger than a gust of wind. He flew for maybe a hundred feet, without a sound. I used to see Maria every day, I'd listen to her talk, I'd feel her move, I'd hear her at night in the arms of that man.

MAX: It's not true . . . It was an accident. You weren't even there . . . isn't that right?

PATRICK: We were talking about military school, Maria was smiling at both of us. It was a beautiful afternoon full of sunlight, we were on the edge of that ravine. It was very hot. And my father was taking so many photographs that day. And I took many of him, with Maria in his arms . . . and as he was falling . . . when I pushed him I released the shutter, without realizing it . . .

MAX: You're going to get better . . . you'll go to military school.

PATRICK: Maria . . . she is so beautiful . . . and so innocent.

MAX: Patrick . . .

PATRICK: I'm cold.

MAX: Stay strong.

PATRICK: I can't even shed any tears for what I've done, what's the punishment for someone like me? . . . (*he dies*)

MAX: Patrick. Oh for God's sake. Patrick . . . Patrick

Scene 16: The dance floor

MARIA and ROCCO are dancing the same mambo as in Scenes 1 and 3 from Act 1 and Scene 1 from Act 2. They dance apart.

ROCCO: There's nothing to fear. Being thrown out of Paradise, the serpent, God's anger, they happened so long ago they have nothing to do with today's society. No harm will come to anyone . . .

They dance . . .

MARIA: Rocco was the man for me; I knew that from the first dance. From the first look he gave me in dance class. He was the first man I danced with in that class and the last. Each step of his was a seduction and I'd lose my head every time his legs brushed against mine.

They dance . . .

ROCCO: So whether life is worth the effort, that's the essential question. Any others, like whether the universe has three dimensions or whether the soul has nine or twelve hierarchies, they're all secondary. That's just playing games. An answer to the essential question must come first.

They dance . . .

MARIA: For our wedding I would have made the most beautiful gown I'd ever put my hand to. But then . . . Something happened. Just before the festivities I met Patrick. It was silly. I looked at him and . . . I blushed.

MARIA stops dancing: she sees PATRICK who appears smiling. The never-ending dance starts up again, now with PATRICK too. MARIA dances center-stage, PATRICK and ROCCO on either side, one step behind her. The two men throw each other challenging looks as they quicken the pace of the dance. The lights fade to black.

Curtain