

Two Loves and a Creature

by

Gustavo Ott

Translation: Heather L. McKay

GUSTAVO OTT

11738 Batley Pl

Woodbridge, VA 22192

gustavott@yahoo.com

© ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Register of Copyrights, Library of Congress

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this play is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention and the Universal Copyright Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound taping, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is laid upon the question of public readings, permission for which must be secured in writing. All inquiries regarding performance rights should be addressed to the author (gustavott@yahoo.com) or his agent, Sociedad General de Autores de España.

"Two Loves and a Creature"... received its first public reading at the Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival (George C. Wolfe, Producer), as part of the New Work Now! Program, (NWN) the 30th of April 2003, Directed by Steven Cosson. The cast and contributors were as follows:

JAIME TIRELLI as Paul
PRISCILLA LOPEZ as KAREN
VANESA ASPILLAGA as CAROLINE

Directed by STEVEN COSSON

Shannon Polly: Stage Directions
Dramaturg: Rebecca Rugg
Stage Manager: Aquaila S. Barnes
NWN Coordinator: Terence Dale
NWN Literary Assistant: Rebecca A. Wolf

"It's easier to disintegrate an atom than a prejudice"
Einstein

Cast of Characters:

PAUL
CAROLINE
KAREN

City zoo

Music:

Beethoven Piano Sonata 23 in F minor Op57 "Apassionata".
Mov 2 Andante con motto

1/ monkeys

MONKEY CAGE / Before

The scene is a zoo with several cages, but also a living room in a house. The scene "moves" with changes in time and images. Three chairs and a television are the only elements on stage.

CAROL: The monkey cage reminds me how fifteen years ago Daddy was put in jail for forty days and had to pay a five thousand dollar fine.

PAUL: Nothing to be ashamed of, really. A short sentence, money I was saving for my own things. The lawyers took care of it all very quickly, so it wouldn't be hard on them.

KAREN: Our lawyers gave him the best advice: keep quiet. Even though he always insisted on doing the worst thing possible.

PAUL: I wanted to explain my case to the press.

CAROL: Mom, on the other hand, to my surprise, wanted to talk, like a parrot.

KAREN: Although he talked for the two of us. The three of us, because he talked for the victim too.

(CAROLINE PICKS UP A BASKET OF FRUIT.
SHE SITS NEXT TO HER FATHER)

CAROL: We visited him seven times during those forty days and he thought it wasn't enough.

PAUL: No one here loves me anymore!

CAROL: The first time I was crying when we walked through the door. Not because it was a prison, it was really more like a county jail. But I knew that Dad was supposed to be serious, Mom sad, and me a crybaby.

PAUL: You were 8!

CAROL: I was 9.

PAUL: You were missing teeth.

CAROL: (ANNOYED) I was not missing teeth!

PAUL: I enjoyed their visits. Not just because of the presents they brought, but the stories, the gossip, the things other people were saying.

CAROL: I took him chocolates and a book he wanted to read. Later, we would visit him like someone at work, with his friends, waiting to finish a big project before he came home. We took him newspapers, notebooks, cigars. Mom was happy because the days went flying by. Although that was fifteen years ago and I remember it all in slow motion.

(IN REAL TIME)

PAUL: Did you miss me sweetie?

CAROL: A whole lot, Daddy. Do you think they'll make you go back there again?

PAUL: Not if I behave myself.

KAREN: Daddy's going to behave himself because he always does and this was all just a big misunderstanding. You understand, Caroline?

CAROL: (HAPPY) Yes! Welcome home, Daddy! (HUGS HIM)

PAUL: What do you think? I'm a criminal?

(PAUL HUGS HIS DAUGHTER)

CAROL: Time passed and I turned 24

PAUL: (PROUDLY, AS THOUGH TALKING TO FRIENDS)...she graduated from veterinary school

KAREN: (PROUDLY, AS THOUGH TALKING TO FRIENDS) ...She worked for the city zoo

PAUL: A good job, a good work environment, doing what she wanted.

KAREN: They've promoted her to the main clinic.

PAUL: She treats all the animals and her colleagues really respect her.

KAREN: The pay's no good, of course...

PAUL: But she's happy.

KAREN: Maybe she'll get married soon.

PAUL: Getting married's for your 30's. She's too young.

KAREN: You're jealous.

PAUL: She's dying for a grandchild.

KAREN: She's always calling her father to hear his stories.

PAUL: Her favorite thing is shopping with her mother.

KAREN: She's gotten so big, so beautiful...

PAUL: So cute, and she's such a chatterbox.

KAREN: Is she ever. All she wants to do is talk!

PAUL: You know how they are right after graduation

KAREN: ...they talk

PAUL: and they never stop talking.

KAREN: That's what the universities teach them: to talk.

PAUL: And to always be right!

(CAROLINE ENTERS WEARING A ZOO UNIFORM, LIKE A DOCTOR)

CAROL: And one Tuesday afternoon, just a few months ago, my parents came to the zoo to celebrate my first year at work.

PAUL: (WAVING, WITH A HUGE BAG OF PEANUTS IN ONE HAND)
Caroline, sweetie, here we are!

CAROL: We spent the day playing and laughing like always

KAREN: We were having a good time at the monkey cage

PAUL: We were happy as can be at the monkey cage

KAREN: It was a gorgeous day and the monkeys were very playful

PAUL: And happy because I threw them a huge bag of peanuts! (HE DOES. LIKE A CHILD, HE WATCHES THE MONKEYS FIGHT OVER THE BAG)
Look! Look how the big one got it away! And the one with the white tail is chasing him. Hahahahaha!!!

CAROL: ...and I was happy with my animals and my parents on a Tuesday afternoon with few visitors

KAREN: Then, looking at the monkeys, just like that...

PAUL: Someone said something

KAREN: ...about the monkey cages

PAUL: ...someone pointed somewhere

CAROL: ...someone said to look over there

KAREN: And there he was

PAUL: The orangutan

CAROL: In quarantine

KAREN: Shut away

PAUL: Locked up

KAREN: An orangutan who'd been separated from the rest

PAUL: In a filthy special cage.

KAREN: "Why is he there?" he was going to ask.

PAUL: "What did he do?" she thought.

KAREN: But instead of leaving the orangutan alone and listening to more of our daughter's stories

PAUL: I admit it; I paved the way for what happened later

KAREN: Because Mr. Stupid had to ask:

PAUL: What did he do?

KAREN: And Miss Know-It-All answered:

CAROL: He didn't behave himself.

KAREN: I swear I thought that answer would send us over the edge.

PAUL: I admit I felt a little annoyed just then

CAROL: I promise I tried to control my words

KAREN: But words can't be controlled

PAUL: Words have that ability to pop out and control you

KAREN: And destroy everything.

PAUL: They should do away with words, or censor them or do something with them to keep them from injuring and hurting innocent people.

KAREN: Words? More like knives, beasts.

PAUL: Words, goddamn words.

KAREN: Because it was words my husband used to ask the question no one wanted him to ask

PAUL: Why didn't he behave himself?

KAREN: And more:

PAUL: What did he do?

KAREN: And then

CAROL: Then, when I was going to explain

PAUL: When I put on my I-want-to-learn-please-wise-daughter-enlighten-me face

KAREN: Right then

CAROL: I told him that the orangutan was being punished because he had

bothered another male monkey

KAREN: In alarm, I tried to change the subject

CAROL: When I said "bothered", I swear I was going to say something else,

KAREN: But then Paul came out with his magnificent phrase, the phrase that was to turn all our words and gazes and souls toward what we should never ever have looked at

CAROL: Then Dad said the phrase that set it all off.

PAUL: I said:

CAROL: He said:

KAREN: He said:

PAUL: You sure can tell that man descended from monkeys.

KAREN: (ANNOYED) Man comes from monkeys!

CAROL: (DISBELIEVING) Man from monkeys?

KAREN: No more, no less.

CAROL: And it was like...

PAUL: ...that Tuesday afternoon, a real Tuesday, when we visited our daughter at the zoo, at her work, and had such a nice family afternoon by the monkey (CON'T) cage with its thirteen chimpanzees and one orangutan locked up in a special cage

KAREN: A big, sad orangutan

PAUL: Young, but grown old

KAREN: With a face like he hardly had a friend in the world

PAUL: Because nothing makes sense to him anymore.

KAREN: An orangutan locked up

PAUL: Who looks a lot like me.

KAREN: Because it was obvious that, suddenly, looking at that monkey, an

orangutan, man's predecessor – but definitely not woman's – a monkey who'd been locked up and punished for bothering another male monkey...

CAROL: It made me think of the episode when Dad was in jail for 40 days and had to pay a \$5,000 fine.

KAREN: Sure, it was only natural. From the orangutan to her father.

PAUL: I strolled over to the camel cage

KAREN: I headed toward the zebras

PAUL: I remember I said out loud that I wanted to see the arachnids

KAREN: I talked about the virtues of the hyena

PAUL: I pointed out the alligators and their 80 teeth...
But she...

KAREN: But she...

PAUL: Didn't let it drop.

CAROL: And that's when I asked...

PAUL: Point blank

CAROL: Dad, why did you go to jail that time?

(WE HEAR MONKEYS FIGHTING IN THE DISTANCE.
ONE THROWS THE BALLED UP PEANUT BAG BACK OUT OF
THE CAGE. IT HITS PAUL)

CAROL: Dad went dead still. Then Mom looked at me and said

KAREN: Don't talk nonsense! Dad was never in jail.

CAROL: She was lying.

KAREN: Why did she have to go and ask, after so many years, about that unpleasant affair?

CAROL: Mom: don't treat me like a child.

KAREN: You aren't a child, that's why I'm telling you Dad...!

CAROL: I asked a question and I'll ask it again and I want you to answer. Now I really, really mean it.
Why was Dad in jail?

PAUL: Sweetie, (PAUSE) where are the Pandas? I want to see the Pandas. They're so cute. They look like stuffed animals...

CAROL: Why were you in jail?

KAREN: And then, for the second surprise of the day: Paul answered her...

PAUL: Sweetie: fifteen years ago I went to jail

KAREN: He told her the truth

PAUL: Because I killed a dog.

CAROL: ...you killed a?

KAREN: Those things are all in the past and we don't even remember...

PAUL: (SERIOUS) Kicked it to death.
One December 24TH in the afternoon I kicked a dog to death. His name was "General".
That's why I was arrested. There was a quick trial and I was given 40 days in jail.

CAROL: Ho... How could you kill a dog?

PAUL: And a \$5,000 dollar fine

KAREN: That's enough, Caroline! You're spoiling our afternoon, sweetheart

CAROL: But...but...but... Whose dog was it? Was it someone's dog or a stray? How big was it? What was it doing with us? What did it do to us?

KAREN: ...and especially

CAROL: ...and especially

KAREN: ...most important of all

CAROL: Why?

KAREN: Right. (IMITATING HER) Why?

CAROL: Why did you kill the dog?

(WE HEAR MONKEYS FIGHTING IN THE DISTANCE)

PAUL: (IN REAL TIME. TO THE AUDIENCE) I always knew that girl would be fresh. Ever since she was little she couldn't let things go.

KAREN: Badgering her father in a way that even I never had!

CAROL: Suddenly I knew my mother and my father, who they were and why they did what they did. I had never asked myself that question before: do I know them? Can I say what they think, they believe, the ideas they uphold, what they're like?

PAUL: Children are a threat left hanging in the air. A threat that comes to nothing, flung at someone and then in shame we wish we could forget it, but by then it's too late. They're out there forever.

KAREN: "Forever" it so happens is a very short thing

PAUL: "Forever" is one of those things whose days are numbered

KAREN: That's asking for a final solution

PAUL: "Forever" is so short

KAREN: That it doesn't even seem like a word

PAUL: Although it's serious

KAREN: And even has three syllables

CAROL: Why did you kill the dog?

(WE HEAR MONKEYS FIGHTING IN THE DISTANCE)

KAREN: (AGAIN, TO THE AUDIENCE) But there was nothing we could do anymore

PAUL: Change the subject, hope for an announcement over the loudspeakers... or noise from the monkey cage.

KAREN: They could monkey around

PAUL: The orangutan could faint

KAREN: Monkeys never monkey around when you need it the most

PAUL: Instead they sat there listening to our words, goddamn words. Like they were trying not to laugh at us

KAREN: Or saying: "this is getting good"

PAUL: Even though I looked her straight in the eye

KAREN: Even though I took her by the arm

PAUL: Even though I looked away and cast my glance into the void

KAREN: Even though that pause was torment

PAUL: Even though the silence blocked out the noise

KAREN: Even with all that

PAUL: Daddy's little girl

KAREN: My only child

PAUL: Damn her hide

KAREN: Didn't hesitate to repeat the question I had never dared to ask

CAROL: Dad, why did you kill the dog?

(WE HEAR MONKEYS FIGHTING IN THE DISTANCE .TO THE AUDIENCE)

KAREN: Apparently when a dog bites someone it's not news, but if someone bites a dog, it's different. Now if a dog kills someone even the walls talk about it, but if you kill a dog, it's not such big news

PAUL: Unless

KAREN: Unless you did it for some unusual reason

PAUL: A special reason

KAREN: More like an insulting reason.

CAROL: Dad...

PAUL: A reason is always a powerful weapon.

CAROL: ...why?

KAREN: A reason that makes headlines.

CAROL: ...what did it do to you?

KAREN: Because the reason my husband killed that five-year-old Poodle/Yorkshire Terrier mix kept curiosity seekers entertained on a day when, the truth is, there were other things to talk about that no one was interested in. That day the news was that a bomb had gone off at a school, destroying the entire front of the building, leaving a hole the size of a crater and more than 230 dead. One hundred thirty four children, 53 teachers, 22 parents and guardians, 10 employees, and 11 teenagers who were waiting for brothers and sisters, for nephews and nieces, for girlfriends and boyfriends, for life that was bearing down on them but never arrived.

PAUL: But that news wasn't important.

KAREN: No, what was important was that my husband confessed the reasons why he had decided to put an end to that dog's life. A dog that by the way cost us plenty and to make things worse cost us even more dead.

CAROL: It was our dog?

KAREN: It was HIS dog

CAROL: Dad's dog?

KAREN: He bought it, he raised it, he taught it its first tricks, and he himself killed it.

PAUL: I had every right to do whatever I wanted to with him, he was mine.

CAROL: Why?

(WE HEAR MONKEYS FIGHTING IN THE DISTANCE)

PAUL: My daughter is looking at me

KAREN: Who almost never looks at us

PAUL: A daughter looking at me and an orangutan looking at me too. Why

today? Really, daughter of mine, why do you care?

KAREN: All year long she does her own thing

PAUL: Boys, friends, dates, clothes...

KAREN: Embarrassed by the shirt her father wears and the color of my shoes and the style of my dress

PAUL: The color of our blinds, the wallpaper, the living room rug, the book on the nightstand.

KAREN: Yes, daughter of mine, making fun of us in that affectionate way

PAUL: But making fun of us,

KAREN: And she still has the gall to ask

PAUL: At the now famous monkey cage

CAROL: Why did you kill it Dad? What happened?

(WE HEAR DOGS FIGHTING IN THE DISTANCE. PAUL MOVES TO ONE SIDE. HE USES TWO CHAIRS TO REENACTS KILLING THE DOG)

PAUL: When the neighbors got there, they yelled (KICKING THE DOG) but I didn't hear them.

KAREN: (AS A NEIGHBOR) "Please don't beat that poor creature anymore"

CAROL: (AS A NEIGHBOR) "You're killing that dog"

KAREN: "It's practically dead already"

CAROL: "Leave it alone!!"

KAREN: "You're kicking its guts out!"

CAROL: "It can't breath!"

KAREN: "It can't do anything anymore!"

PAUL: In the middle of all that shouting, someone called the police, and where the police go the press is not far behind, and I must have been beating that dog for a long time because they took twenty minutes to get there,

then, then, then, when I heard the sirens I realized what I was doing and of course, it was too late by then, because the poor creature was already dead. I stopped beating it for a while, to see if it would get up, to see if it growled, but nothing.

KAREN: The reporters took pictures.

PAUL: Even though there were other stories, they picked mine.

KAREN: The dog was dead 20 minutes before anyone got to the scene of the crime.

PAUL: But the reporter wrote that he had heard the last bark

KAREN: When the truth is the poor dog didn't bark after the first minute.

CAROL: A minute's a minute. That's a very long time when you're dying.

KAREN: The reporters came and did their interviews.

PAUL: And that's when I said

KAREN: And that's when he said

CAROL: Why did you kill the dog?

PAUL: (LOUDLY, BUT NOT DRAMATICALLY) I killed him because he was homosexual.

KAREN: He said it.

CAROL: MOM?

PAUL: The orangutan was there for the same reason. For bothering other male monkeys. You see? They punish them for that, going against nature, for doing whatever they feel like.

CAROL: Dad? But... but... How could you?

(WE HEAR BEETHOVEN'S APPASSIONATA)

KAREN: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Now my daughter's afraid. Before she was asking out of curiosity, but now her world is about to be blown to smithereens.

CAROL: It can't be... it can't be... I don't remember any of it...!

- KAREN: A world that until that day, that Tuesday afternoon, watching the monkeys monkey around and telling us what she was up to and all her little (CON'T) stories, a perfect world where everything until then had an explanation, when her unmerciful Father tells her what she never wanted to hear:
- PAUL: I killed it because it was Homosexual.
The dog was a fag, that's why I killed it.
- KAREN: Deep down, I felt good. Not because of him, but because I saw my daughter's face, because after doing and saying all the things she saw and did, suddenly she felt like a frightened nine-year-old again, taking books and candy to her father in jail.
- CAROL: Oh my God... My God... Daddy... Daddy.
- KAREN: And I sat down to watch her, nine years old and missing teeth and him, an ogre who without a word, threw himself on a helpless Poodle/Yorkshire Terrier mix like a bomb that explodes in a school and blows it to smithereens. Like a house turned upside down by assailants, like a wife who answers his lover's call and hangs up.
- CAROL: How can... but... I don't... (SHE CRIES, MOVES TO ONE SIDE, LIGHTS DOWN)
- KAREN: These are my two loves and my two stories: the girl who holds all the cards and has every chance of winning and suddenly finds that, not only are her cards blank, but she doesn't even know how to play cards and, most certainly, should never have proposed a game at all
- And him... The man who began the afternoon with a family outing to the zoo and now has begun to see that the sentences we leave unended always end up getting said sometime. And words are always there to fill a vacuum.
- PAUL: Two stories that met one family Tuesday at the zoo. Two stories that talk about a subject that everyone talked about once and later no one could talk about again.
- KAREN: Two loves and a creature that open and close the story. (SHE TAKES OUT A YELLOWED NEWSPAPER CLIPPING. SHE READS. MUSIC) ...the jury convicted Paul Stevens of antisocial behavior and cruelty to animals. Stevens was accused of beating his dog to death because he thought the animal, a five-year-old Poodle/Yorkshire Terrier mix named General, was homosexual.

(CAROLINE WATCHES HER FATHER IN TERROR)

KAREN: Witnesses to the event reported that Paul Stevens, 48, grew incensed when his dog GENERAL tried to have sexual relations with another male dog, a Jack Russell Terrier named BANDIT, owned by his wife...'

(THE STAGE IS DARK EXCEPT FOR THREE SPOTS ON PAUL, CAROLINE AND KAREN)

KAREN: For so many years, two unanswered questions:
First, and most important: did he kill his dog just because he was doing it with another male dog or because that dog was mine?

And second: Do I have something to do with that incident?

Those are the questions that came to light today on a gray afternoon one crappy Tuesday, after seeing a miserable orangutan who was locked up and dying of sadness and from the flies that were eating him alive.

PAUL: (TO HIS WIFE) How do you think she'll take it?

(HE DISAPPEARS AS HIS SPOT GOES OUT)

KAREN: We don't know.

(SHE DISAPPEARS AS HER SPOT GOES OUT)

CAROL: Daddy, how could you do something like that?

CAROL SOBS WRETCHEDLY.

SHE RUNS OFF STAGE.

THE ORANGUTAN BEGINS TO MOVE AND LETS OUT A TERRIBLE SCREECH THAT ADVERTISES HIS PAIN.

A NEWSPAPER CLIPPING APPEARS THAT READS:

"134 CHILDREN, 53 TEACHERS, 22 PARENTS AND GUARDIANS, 10 EMPLOYEES, AND 11 TEENAGERS DIED IN THE EXPLOSION"

BLACK OUT. FLIES BUZZING

2/ zebras, penguins

ZEBRA AREA / Before

IN THE DISTANCE, WE SEE WHAT COULD BE A ZEBRA,
ALTHOUGH WE DON'T SEE EITHER THE HEAD OR REAR OF
ITS BODY, JUST A WHITE SPACE CROSSED BY BLACK LINES.

CENTER STAGE, A TABLE AND TWO CHAIRS

KAREN: Of course, there are those who say that, as his wife, I should have kept quiet

CAROL: Always keep quiet; the ones who talk are always guilty

KAREN: But I was nervous too

CAROL: We all were

KAREN: And they asked me

CAROL: Little questions

KAREN: Well-meaning questions

CAROL: Is your husband in a homosexual relationship? Were you cheating on your husband with the dog? Was your husband jealous of the dog, the other dog, or you?

KAREN: And you ask yourself, what should I do to help him? What should I say? (TO SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE) Sure, you would have done it all differently, but we all do the right thing until it happens to you.

Then, you get lost and to hell with the right thing. Your thinking gets all mixed up and you say the first thing that comes into your head.

Nothing is black and white, you see?

Besides, sooner or later they always end up blaming the wife.

CAROL: (READING A NEWSPAPER) ...According to statements made by Karen Stevens, wife of Paul Stevens, the two dogs had been having sexual relations for some time and she did not understand the reasons why her husband reacted that way...

- KAREN: They did it all the time. It was ugly, but I never thought it was abnormal.
- CAROL: ...that her husband's dog, a Poodle/Yorkshire Terrier named GENERAL, was always chasing after other dog, named BANDIT.
- KAREN: He sniffed him and followed him everywhere. My husband didn't realize it at first because he always went out for lunch and got home late. But they were doing it all the time. The dog would mount him and the other one would let him. But like he didn't care, more like something normal, everyday, like when it was time for his dinner or to get excited because he was going out to do his business. It happens in every family.
- CAROL: His wife stated that, even though it was unnatural behavior that the murdered dog...
- KAREN: They were dogs, for God's sake! Animals! Who can possibly care about all this!
- (CAROLINE PUTS ON GLASSES AND A VEST,
PLAYS WOMAN 1)
- WOMAN 1: We do, Mrs. Stevens, the Society for the Protection of Animals. This is no longer just the case of a domestic accident; it's become a matter of public concern.
- KAREN: How could this happen?
- WOMAN 1: Because there are reporters and people are concerned.
- KAREN: It's just a dead dog.
- WOMAN 1: We're all very sensitive here.
- KAREN: With all the real crime there is in the world and here we are with a nothing little situation that must happen in every home.
- WOMAN 1: It doesn't happen in every home.
- KAREN: I thought it happened all the time.
- WOMAN 1: In fact, it's the first time I've ever heard of something like this.
- KAREN: Maybe I've got the wrong idea about other homes.

WOMAN 1: If this was a repeated behavior in the two dogs, why on that day in particular did your husband decide to kill it?

KAREN: He lost control. He went crazy.

WOMAN 1: Why?

KAREN: He was watching the news and he was angry that people had died.

WOMAN 1: Who?

KAREN: Children and teachers. A bomb in a school, like 300 dead, I don't know.

WOMAN 1: And then?

KAREN: He was furious. He was shouting about terrorism and death. Then, he saw the dogs, what they were doing, you know, and then, he lost control and...

WOMAN 1: Killed his own dog.

KAREN: Kicked it to death.

WOMAN 1: Do you consider your husband a violent man?

KAREN: No, not particularly. As violent as the next.

WOMAN 1: The next who?

KAREN: Like all men.

WOMAN 1: Not all men are violent.

KAREN: No? Maybe I've got the wrong idea about men.

WOMAN 1: He killed it because it was homosexual?

KAREN: That's what he says.

WOMAN 1: He says. Is it true?

KAREN: Ask him.
(SHE GETS OUT OF HER CHAIR, MOVES TO ONE SIDE)
And I left it like that, halfway. I didn't say yes, I didn't say no. I said

nothing that could be taken as definitive, I confirmed nothing. Not just because I thought it was the best way to help him, but because I've always thought that nothing is what it is, that what seems to be could be something else and that, most certainly, nothing is black and white.

PAUL: (PAUL APPEARS, SITS DOWN IN A CHAIR) Except zebras.

KAREN: Zebras?

PAUL: Zebras are black and white.
(PENSIVE)
And pandas.
(INTELLIGENT)
And penguins.

(KAREN DISAPPEARS)

WOMAN 1: Good afternoon. I'm from the Society for the Protection of Animals. Your wife wasn't open in answering our questions, so we'd like to repeat the interview with you. Tell me, what exactly happened?

PAUL: It all happened on Christmas Eve.

WOMAN 1: It was Christmas Eve.

PAUL: December 24th. I was watching t.v., the news.

Then, my wife reminded me that the Christmas lights hadn't come on and that I needed to fix them.

(HE ACTS OUT THE SCENE AS HE RECOUNTS IT)

I'm always the one who fixes the lights while my wife makes the meals, the calls, our plans. Our daughter was playing.

The t.v. was talking about the story of the day...

WOMAN 1: The bomb in the school.

PAUL: Aha. Four hundred dead or something like that...the whole front of the building destroyed...

WOMAN 1: Yes, but that's not the case that interests us.

PAUL: No one knows why they put a bomb in that school. The principal blamed the media.

WOMAN 1: And what does that have to do with us, you, and the dead dog?

PAUL: Nothing, nothing at all.

WOMAN 1: So?

PAUL: So nothing. I was watching t.v. and they were covering the story about the bomb that terrorists planted at that school.

WOMAN 1: And then?

PAUL: Then, I finished with the lights on the tree, and that's when I saw the dog.

WOMAN 1: Your dog.

PAUL: General.

WOMAN 1: General.

PAUL: He was after Bandit again.

WOMAN 1: The other dog.

PAUL: (HE USES TWO CHAIRS TO REENACTS THE SCENE) Yes, he was after him and I had told them not to do it. I had warned them not to do it. I had just spanked him with the newspaper a few days before, I gave him a kick the last time I saw him trying to do it with the other dog and he looked at me like he had understood.

WOMAN 1: Were they always doing it?

PAUL: Lately, a lot.

WOMAN 1: And you didn't approve.

PAUL: They were two males!

WOMAN 1: And you didn't approve?

PAUL: No, of course not, I didn't like it and neither did the other dog, because he would run away, you see. Bandit was suffering; he would always look at me like asking for help, like he was saying, "How long do I have to put up with this? Why don't you do anything? Why do you let this stupid dog do it to me whenever he feels like it?"

WOMAN 1: The dog said that.

PAUL: He didn't say it, of course not. It was like he was saying it. He looked at me with that thought in his eyes and I felt sorry for him, I agreed.

WOMAN 1: With the dog.

PAUL: I felt the situation was uncomfortable, my 9-year-old daughter there seeing everything and my wife hanging her head each time it happened because she didn't have the guts to do anything.

And the dogs panting and the one drooling and the other trying to run away and General not letting him...

WOMAN 1: And then?

PAUL: Then, then I saw Bandit as a victim, helpless, and I went over to General and I yelled at him and my daughter started crying. She doesn't like it when I yell because she loves animals. She says she wants to be a veterinarian or something like that. So, I hit him, but the dog wouldn't stop doing it, and then
(PAUSE)

WOMAN 1: Then?

PAUL: Well, it happened.

WOMAN 1: What happened, Mr. Stevens?

PAUL: Something happened to me, I lost my composure, I didn't know what I was doing.

WOMAN 1: You attacked the dog.

PAUL: I started kicking it.

WOMAN 1: Until you killed it.

PAUL: Yes, I think.

WOMAN 1: You think?

PAUL: I kicked it but I don't know if to death.

WOMAN 1: You think it was alive afterwards?

PAUL: I mean, maybe it was already dead and I went on kicking it.

WOMAN 1: Are you homophobic?

PAUL: Excuse me?

WOMAN 1: You hate homosexuals.

PAUL: It was the dogs, just the dogs that bothered me. People don't bother me, I understand people, I like people...

WOMAN 1: But you killed the dog because of its homosexual activities.

PAUL: I had warned him not to do it.

WOMAN 1: And they kept on doing it.

PAUL: Yes...

WOMAN 1: So, when someone does something you don't like, you become enraged
(PAUL SHAKES HIS HEAD)
And you become violent.

PAUL: No, not at all.

WOMAN 1: If you would do that to a dog, what would you do to a human being?

PAUL: Never.

WOMAN 1: How can we be sure that if you get off Scot free, you won't turn around and commit another crime?

PAUL: I've never committed a crime.

WOMAN 1: You killed a dog.

PAUL: That isn't a crime.

WOMAN 1: There are laws to protect animals.

PAUL: But dogs aren't the same as...

WOMAN 1: As us?

PAUL: Humans.

(WOMAN MOVES OVER TO HIM)

WOMAN 1: That dog, when it died, didn't hate you.
Because they think if you punish them, it's because they did something to deserve it. While that dog was dying, it was thinking: I deserve it, because I didn't obey.
Dogs think that we are good.
But we're not. That's not the truth.
The truth is that humans are beasts.

So, since I'm human, I think I'll do to you what you did to that dog.

I'm going to kick you to death in my own way.

I'm going to show you my hatred, which is what your dog should have felt while he was in agony as you kicked him to death.

That's what I'm going to do
I'm going to bare my teeth
So you can see how it feels.

I'm going to recommend that they keep you in custody for 40 days and fine you \$5,000, to be donated in full to the Society for the Protection of Animals.

Now what do you have to say: do you hate me?
You want to kick me to death?
Why don't you?
(BOTH STAND)

PAUL: (TO AUDIENCE) I killed the dog because it liked other male dogs. That's why I killed it. It was my dog and I could do whatever I wanted with it. But they gave me 40 days and a \$5,000 fine. NOT because of the dog, because the law isn't really all that strict when you kill an animal – if you own it, if it's yours, if it doesn't affect anyone else but the dog, naturally.

They did it because of the report from the Society for the Protection of Animals, which said I was dangerous, and because of the press, which quickly forgot the bomb at the school and focused on me. There on the front page, a picture of the dog and one of me. Me, at my worst, after 36 hours of no sleep. The dog –not the dead one- but one that looked a lot like him, was a groomer's poster dog, all cute and frisky, to inspire tenderness. And people hated me. They hated me instantly, easily, gratuitously, with a hate that was just waiting for something to happen to load it on me.

(PAUL DISAPPEARS. CAROLINE IS ALONE)

CAROL: When we say something is black and white, we never distinguish the various shades of gray that make everything that is white and everything that is black possible. That's why a zebra and a penguin and a Dalmatian aren't the same even though they're black and white.

They aren't the same, but with people we don't notice that difference.

And it's odd that we don't. Because in the end, penguins and zebras and Dalmatians probably have more or less the same thoughts: cold, hot, hunger, sex, sleep, affection, look how white or look how black.

But, us?

We can't even agree about God.

(MUSIC.

THE ZEBRA MOVES, BUT WHEN WE SEE ITS WHOLE BODY,
IT IS NOT JUST WHITE WITH BLACK LINES. THERE IS A RED
LINE RUNNING THROUGH IT, A NOTICEABLE AND ANGRY
RED LINE)

3/ birds

BIRD CAGE/ Now

BIRD NOISE TAKES OVER THE SCENE

CAROL: Night falls, hours pass, you go to bed and all you can hope is that, the next day, you'll wake up with the relief of someone leaving behind a dream.

Only that night I didn't sleep.
I went to work at the zoo like every day and there was my friend
Veronica...

(VERONICA APPEARS—THE SAME ACTRESS WHO PLAYS
KAREN. VERONICA IS STRAIGHTENING THE OFFICE)

VERONICA: It's been a long time since I've seen you this way.

CAROL: What way?

VERONICA: Sad. You're sad today.

CAROL: Yeah, all day long I've had the feeling that it wasn't worth coming in to work.

VERONICA: You love your job, Caroline.

CAROL: I love it.

VERONICA: We all feel the same way. With the terrorist attacks, everyone's in that mood, gray, discouraged, that shade of something like shame and pity.

CAROL: What happened?

VERONICA: Thirty dead at a mall, car bomb. It was parked there and BOOM! Did you hear it? A lot of people said they heard it miles away. They're beasts. They deserve to die. I know, I don't support the death penalty, but sometimes we need it. Like for exceptions. Don't you think?

CAROL: I hadn't heard anything about it.

VERONICA: And you always know everything. (HANDS HER A CUP) Here, have

some coffee.

(SHE DRINKS IT, LIKE WATER. VERONICA WATCHES IN AMAZEMENT. CAROLINE POURS HERSELF SOME MORE AND DRINKS IT LIKE JUICE. SHE POURS AGAIN, BUT VERONICA STOPS HER.
CAROLINE REALIZES)

CAROL: I saw my parents yesterday.

VERONICA: I saw you by the monkey cage. Is everything o.k.?

CAROL: Yeah, everything's fine. I found out that my father made a mistake fifteen years ago.

VERONICA: Want to talk about it?

CAROL: No, it's all right. It was a mistake.
(PAUSES LIKE SOMEONE WHO WILL LEAVE IT AT THAT, THEN SUDDENLY) My dad went to jail for killing a dog.

VERONICA: Good God!

CAROL: An accident.

VERONICA: Of course. What happened?

CAROL: He kicked it to death.

VERONICA: What an animal! Sorry.

CAROL: I didn't sleep last night because I knew I'd dream about the dog.

VERONICA: So, why'd he kill it?

CAROL: He thought it was homosexual.

(VERONICA DROPS THE CUP. IT BREAKS)

VERONICA: Maybe you better not tell me any more. Do you want to take the day off, go home? There's nothing for you to do here today.

CAROL: Yeah, you're right. I better go. (PREPARING TO LEAVE) Remember you've got to keep a special eye on the black goat today; it could be her day. Don't forget to talk to the students. So they won't let anyone touch the babies. We're expecting 2 goats, alive and kicking. And tell them

not to forget the mandrill's vaccination.
And check the bird cage, to see if they're getting better.

VERONICA: O.k., O.k. Go. Everything's under control. We don't need you here today.

CAROL: Maybe it's a virus.

VERONICA: Go on, get out of here. You look beat. Whether it's a virus or whatever, nothing ever happens to the birds. They're the strongest of all.

CAROL: Parrots are like lions.

VERONICA: They get sick less than the elephants.

CAROL: And they get themselves in all kinds of trouble...!
(LEAVING)
Don't forget to let the orangutan out.

VERONICA: I'll take care of it. Goodbye.

(CAROLINE IS ABOUT TO LEAVE, BUT COMES BACK.
VERONICA LOOKS AT HER, KNOWING WHAT'S COMING)

CAROL: What do you think I should do?

VERONICA: About...?

CAROL: Yesterday.

VERONICA: You can't do anything about terrorists, Caroline. Wish them dead or that their car bomb blows up on them, or their plastic explosives go off, their automatic weapons jam and backfire, that they make a mistake and kill each other. Or their families, let their families die too.

CAROL: Veronica!

VERONICA: I'm sick of them!

CAROL: I meant about my father. What should I do?

VERONICA: That was years ago.

CAROL: I just found out yesterday.

VERONICA: I don't interfere in family matters. Your father's your father. So, off to

bed with you, and to work with me. And as for the terrorists: death.
See you tomorrow.

(VERONICA DISAPPEARS IN THE DARK. CAROLINE REMAINS
ON STAGE. SHE TAKES HER BAG. WALKS)

CAROL: I left the office, but I didn't go home. I went walking around the zoo.
Everything was normal. Not many visitors. I stopped at the bird cage,
because they're very sick and we don't know why. They have such a
strange disease. So unusual.
(CAROLINE GOES INTO THE BIRD AREA.WE HEAR BIRDS)
They don't fly. They don't want to or can't.
We've run every possible test, but we didn't find any pathology.
They're just there, with no desire to fly.
And all I do is watch them every morning, completely powerless,
because I was used to being able to do something for them and now,
well now I can't.
Then, while I was watching the birds
I realized someone was watching me.
It was him. He was there. It was Dad.

(LIGHTS UP ON PAUL. HE TRIES TO HUG HER. SHE DOESN'T
LET HIM)

PAUL: Do you remember when I used to bring you to the zoo?

CAROL: How old was I?

PAUL: You were little. Maybe 9. You didn't have all your teeth. You'd stay
here all day long watching the animals. And you'd say you wanted to
take them home with you. "Daddy, can we take the giraffe home with
us? Can I have the elephant...?"

CAROL: Can I take the zebras to bed...?

PAUL: Wouldn't you rather have a grasshopper? Wouldn't you like to raise
cockroaches? How about taking the ants in our backyard to bed?
They're animals too. They're not in the zoo, but they're all God's
creatures. And they're smaller.

(TO THE AUDIENCE. WE HEAR BEETHOVEN'S
APPASSIONATA)

CAROL: They say that when we know our father, that's when we really lose him.

PAUL: When we stop being heroes and become monkeys, when we stop being
Gods.

CAROL: When they don't wear long pants anymore or have the best jobs.

PAUL: Or the biggest car, or the most money, we're not the strongest, or always right.

CAROL: When they no longer seem immortal.
I told him and he tried to understand me.

PAUL: Suddenly, our children remind us that we're already at the end of the road.
And that makes us sad.
Because, like this, backed into a corner, without the prestige or admiration we once had, how do you want us to remember the past?
How do you expect us to explain it?

CAROL: It was late when I got home and I still felt that terrible desire not to sleep, to talk to him, to do something, to stay awake, as if there was an emergency.

I looked for the news on every channel and in all the papers about the terrorist attack. I read every article, some I memorized.

All day with my father and we both avoided the most important subject:

Why did he hate the dog so much?
Who was my father?
What makes him hate everyone who's not like him?
Why didn't he ever talk to me about himself?

(THE PHONE RINGS. MUSIC STOPS)

CAROL: Hello?
(TO THE AUDIENCE)
That was Veronica, from the zoo.
(KAREN DOES VERONICA'S VOICE)

VERONICA: Caroline, I've got bad news.

CAROL: What happened to the goats? Were there complications?

VERONICA: No, the goats haven't been born yet.

CAROL: They're late, but...

VERONICA: The problem's the birds.

CAROL: What's the matter?

VERONICA: I'm calling to tell you they're dead.

CAROL: All of them?

VERONICA: All of them. There's not a single one left.

CAROL: But... but... what did they do to them? What happened?

VERONICA: We don't know. I'm at the zoo and it doesn't look like they were attacked. I think it was an epidemic. They all died at once.

CAROL: What about the swan?

VERONICA: Dead. All of them.

CAROL: But... but... I don't understand.

VERONICA: Me either. I know it's late, but why don't you come to the zoo and help me?

CAROL: Right, I'm on my way.
(CAROLINE QUICKLY GETS READY)
The city was empty and dangerous. I got to the zoo and it was the police who met me at the door. The police? That's odd, the police, what do they have to do with all this?

VERONICA: It's because of the birds dying. They consider it suspicious. They said there are "unusual circumstances..."

CAROL: Did you tell them they were sick?

VERONICA: They're investigating. There've been so many attacks, they think...

CAROL: That's ridiculous.

VERONICA: But they're interrogating us all the same.
What do we think? What could have happened?
How much do those birds cost?

(WE HEAR BEETHOVEN'S APPASSIONATA)

CAROL: (PICKING UP BIRDS) While they were questioning me, I just kept looking at them, on the damp, gray floor of the great bird cage. They

were so many and so beautiful, they looked like a carpet. I started to pick them up, one by one, the way you'd lift the bodies of brothers in arms. And after the sadness, I felt real alarm.

I suffered when the animals died although I admit I haven't felt the same sadness and despair over human beings. Do you think that's a sin? Will I go to hell for preferring animals to men, because I only feel something for the weak?

I still don't know what I did wrong, but I made a mistake somewhere, just look at the end result: 64 birds dead all on one day.

Somewhere I went wrong.

How could this happen?

How will we ever replace them?

And most of all, where had God been for the last 24 hours? Because enough has happened to make his absence seem suspicious.

(HOLDING THE BIRDS SHE WAS ABLE TO GATHER)

Where is he when so many things happened and he didn't stop them, he didn't intervene, or warn us, or lend his strength to the side of beauty, harmony, innocence? Where is that damned God who's never here when we need him, where is he hiding, what the hell is he doing to justify that he's not here with us tonight, helping us to gather up this tremendous tapestry of feathers covering the largest cage in the zoo with the chill of death? Where is he? Where is he?

I've got a few things today I want to straighten out with him.

BLACK

4/ tigers

BIG CATS AREA/ Now

PAUL AND KAREN AT THE TIGER CAGE.
TO ONE SIDE, A WOMAN WE CAN'T SEE, WITH A STROLLER.
SHE ALSO WATCHES THE TIGERS.

PAUL: Ah tiger...
Grrrrgrrrrgrrrr

Ah tiger
Grrrrgrrrr

Here kittykittykitty
Grrgrgrrrr

Look at those paws.

KAREN: They're huge.

PAUL: Fifteen years ago a tourist fell into this cage. He was taking a picture. He leaned right here. The tigers were playing, biting each other and all. Then, the tourist tried to take one more close-up. He didn't realize these bars are a little loose (HE TESTS THEM. THEY ARE STILL LOOSE) and he fell into the cage.

KAREN: And what happened?

PAUL: To who? The tourist or the tiger?

KAREN: The tourist.

PAUL: Nothing. Nothing happened to him. Nothing ever happens to tourists. The tigers went to the shore, but not to attack him, just to stare at him. He seemed strange to them. Maybe they thought a tourist is nothing much, not good enough for prey. The tourist could barely swim. Really all he did was float. And scream like a maniac, he was hysterical.

KAREN: Two tigers were waiting for him!

PAUL: All they did was watch; they weren't going to hurt him. A tiger in a zoo is like a big cat. Full belly and a sad heart.

KAREN: Two tigers are two tigers!

PAUL: More like two scared cats.

KAREN: Big ones, with claws and teeth. No, thank you.

PAUL: The tourist paddled over to the shore. The tigers, when they saw him coming, they ran away. They went to the other side. The biggest tiger even started batting around a ball they threw him to distract him. Like saying: "It's o.k., we don't care. We're kitties. We play with balls and all that..."

Until security got there and shot them.

Right in the head.

(THE LITTLE GIRL IN THE STROLLER CRIES. KAREN LOOKS AT HER AND MURMURS AFFECTIONATELY)

KAREN: You scared the little boy (TO HIS MOTHER) Sorry...
He's a beautiful boy.
A girl?
She's gorgeous...
(THE GIRL STOPS CRYING)
You made the little girl cry with your story.

PAUL: You think she understands me?

KAREN: Little girls understand everything.

PAUL: Like animals.

KAREN: You and your stories made her cry.

PAUL: That's no story. I was here. They shot the tigers right when the tourist had reached the edge. When the tigers had moved away, at the precise moment the tourist was safe on the other side of the fence.

(THE GIRL STARTS TO CRY AGAIN)

KAREN: (COMFORTING THE GIRL) ...there, there, it's o.k. now. There's nothing to cry about...

(THE GIRL STOPS CRYING. THE MOTHER MOVES AWAY A LITTLE AND ROCKS THE STROLLER)

PAUL: Bang bang. Dead. But, who cares? Two big, beautiful Bengal tigers in danger of becoming extinct, just bought at an astronomical price, and then they're bagged by the hunter's bullet, taken out in their own cage, while playing with a ball.

(KAREN TAKES A BALLOON AND TIES IT TO THE GIRL'S STROLLER VERY SWEETLY)

KAREN: ...did you see the panda bears, yet, sweetheart? Did you see how cute the panda bears are?

PAUL: The animals here are dirty, hairy, flea bitten, sad and alone.

KAREN: You didn't see any birds? The cages were empty? And no zebras? There wasn't an orangutan?

PAUL: They make the cages larger to keep people quiet. But the animals get uglier and uglier. Smaller. More tame.

KAREN: (TO PAUL) What a beautiful little girl. I've thought about having another baby. I'd like to have a girl...another little girl.

PAUL: At our age, we'd be better off with a cat or a...

KAREN: (BEFORE HE CAN SAY "DOG") No, I want a baby. You can have the animals. You hate them anyway.

PAUL: I don't hate animals. Remember I've been coming to the zoo since I was a little boy.

KAREN: I think you just do it to feel superior to these creatures.

PAUL: Anyone is superior to these creatures. These in here aren't animals at all. They're nothing. You put them in the jungle and the jungle would eat them. Because they'd be foreigners. Piece of shit animals, sniffing their asses, 'cause it's where they smell best.

(KAREN IS NOW FACING PAUL)

KAREN: I want to have another baby girl.

PAUL: Tigers...my tigers...the girl...yeah.

KAREN: But not with you. That's all.

PAUL: With...with... with someone else?

KAREN: Whoever. I want to leave you.

(WE HEAR A TIGER'S ROAR. KAREN AND PAUL REMAIN,
ALONE)

PAUL: Are you seeing someone else?

KAREN: I've been thinking about what you did to the dog.
I had forgotten about it, I'd stopped thinking about it. Then, it all
came back into our lives again. And then thinking about it, I
remembered why you did that to the poor dog.

PAUL: Because it was homosexual.

KAREN: I'm not talking about that.

PAUL: He was bothering your dog and he was sad.

KAREN: You killed the dog because who you really wanted to kill was me.

PAUL: ...wolves, coyotes, hyenas, they're all really wild, bad dogs. There's
no training in the world that can keep a dog from acting like what it is:
a beast.

KAREN: Because you blame me. You blame me for everything.

PAUL: So, did you think this up on your own or did you get it from a shrink?

KAREN: I thought it up on my own.

PAUL: You're sleeping with a shrink? Huh?

KAREN: Leave me alone!

PAUL: You think I want you dead?
(KAREN NODS) And instead of asking you for a divorce or
disappearing or not loving you anymore, my best choice was to kill
you. And since I couldn't, then I killed the dog. Is that how it goes?
Simple as that? Is everyone so simple or is it just me?

KAREN: It's entirely possible.

PAUL: What book are you reading?

KAREN: I haven't read a book in years.

PAUL: So I could say it's just the opposite. Maybe it's you who saw an opportunity to leave me because I'm a monster.

KAREN: I didn't say you were a monster.

PAUL: But I am!

KAREN: Why?

PAUL: Because I did what I did and I'm doing what I'm doing!

KAREN: What are you doing?

PAUL: Roaring!

(WE HEAR A TIGER'S ROAR)

KAREN: Before you weren't like this.

PAUL: Before I didn't know what I was saying.

KAREN: Before I fell in love with you.

PAUL: Before I fell in love with you too.

KAREN: So?

PAUL: So what happened?

KAREN: You died.

PAUL: I'm not dead, Karen.

KAREN: Aren't you?

PAUL: No!

KAREN: Then, how come I don't recognize you?

PAUL: It's me!

KAREN: How come you look like someone else?

PAUL: I'm not someone else.

KAREN: How come you don't seem like you're here. Like you're a ghost. Like they replaced you with a copy of you. Like you aren't who you were before.

(ANIMAL NOISES.
THE NOISE RISES UNTIL IT THUNDERS. THEN IT CALMS)

PAUL: It happens sometimes. Suddenly, for no reason, they all start shouting. They all start shouting at once: "Let me out," "I want to go home," "I don't belong here".

(AN ELEPHANT TRUMPETS IN THE DISTANCE. HE GOES AFTER HER, LIKE A TIGER TO ITS PREY)

A real man is basically a wild animal, an untamed soul.
Competing for prey, marking its territory, doing what it wants, dominating others.

If I wanted to kill you it wasn't to have my freedom. A man is always free.

If I wanted to kill you it was instinct.

A reflex that makes us resolve everything with violence.

KAREN: What are we going to do?

PAUL: About...

KAREN: Me leaving you.

PAUL: That's how you roar. Where is he?

KAREN: Who?

PAUL: The man you're sleeping with.

KAREN: I'm not...

PAUL: Huh? Is that him over there? The one looking at us? (TO THE PERSON) Is it you?

KAREN: No, it's not him.

PAUL: Where is he? What does he think about me?

KAREN: He thinks you're a crazy man who tells stories about tigers.

PAUL: That's what he thinks. Maybe he's not a man. Maybe he doesn't get it. Why doesn't he show his face? Why doesn't he show me his teeth? Why is he hiding?

KAREN: No one's hiding, Paul!

PAUL: Maybe he's homosexual. Does he like swans? You have to be careful. There's so many of them now; they pretend to be men, but they're really fags and they go after married women. Pay attention and bring him to the zoo. If he watches the swans, then you can be sure. He's gay.

KAREN: (LEAVING) You know you're an ass?

PAUL: No, I'm not an ass. I'm just not a tiger.

KAREN: Well, you smell like one!

(KAREN LEAVES THAT AREA. SHE IS STILL LIT BY A RAY OF LIGHT)

KAREN: I wasn't seeing anybody, I wasn't with anyone, I wasn't cheating. But I was thinking about someone else. Someone I'd been talking to about my life, who made me feel good. Someone younger, better looking, more honest. Although he did talk a lot about swans, something that bothers me now.

(PAUL IS ALONE ON STAGE, LOOKING TOWARD WHERE KAREN EXITED)

PAUL: ...Faggot
He's a fag.
He walks like a fag and dresses like a fag.
Faggot...
They should hang them or something.

(HE TURNS TOWARD THE TIGER CAGE)

Ah tiger...
Grrrrgrrrrgrrrr

Ah tiger
Grrrrgrrrr

Here kittykittykitty
Grrgrgrrrrr

Look at those paws. You're getting old, tiger. You're getting old.

(HE WATCHES THEM FOR A WHILE. MUSIC AS THOUGH
THE SCENE WERE ENDING UNTIL SUDDENLY WE HEAR A
LOUD, HARD SOUND.
HE LOOKS UP. WE HEAR A DISTANT SCREAM)

VOICE: (FROM A DISTANCE) Help! A little girl with a balloon has fallen
into the tiger cage!! Please, somebody help me!

PAUL: (ANXIOUS) Help! A little girl...! Security!!
Run, little girl... run!

PAUL DOESN'T TAKE HIS EYES OFF THE CAGE. WE HEAR
VOICES IN THE DISTANCE.

SUDDENLY, PAUL WATCHES THE SCENE, WITH INTEREST.

AFTER A BEAT, HUSHED

Grrrr...grrr...
Come on tiger... Grrr

(HE LAUGHS A BIT, NERVOUSLY. HIDES HIS LAUGHTER,
YELLS)

PAUL: Someone save the little girl! Help!
AFTER A BEAT, HUSHED
Grrrr...grrrr... tiger...grrrr...grrrr

5/ rhinoceroses

RHINOCEROS CAGE/ Now

WE SEE THE LEGS OF A SLEEPING RHINO. THEY ARE A REAL CENTER OF ATTENTION.

AT TIMES HE STIRS A LITTLE.
ON STAGE, PAUL. TO ONE SIDE, THE POLICE WOMAN,
PLAYED BY CAROL

POLICE: Sir, we're conducting a routine inspection and we'd like to ask you a few questions. Sir... sir...

PAUL: What a magnificent animal! And yet, there he is, humiliated. Did you know that if he were in his natural habitat he'd have killed us both by now? And not because he's hungry or a dangerous animal. No. He'd have killed us because we didn't pay him the necessary respect.

POLICE: Sir, I'd like to speak to you.

PAUL: (REALIZING SHE'S A POLICE OFFICER) Oh!

POLICE: Officer Lyons, Josephine Lyons, state police.

PAUL: I didn't know you were...

POLICIA: We're conducting an investigation and we need the cooperation of people who come to this zoo on a regular basis.

PAUL: What happened?

POLICE: We're looking for information.
I've seen you at the zoo before.

PAUL: I come a lot.

POLICE: Does your profession require you to observe the animals?

PAUL: My daughter works here.

POLICE: And what is her name?

PAUL: Caroline Stevens.

(THE OFFICER WRITES IT DOWN)

POLICE: Do you come to see her?

PAUL: I also come to see the animals.
(PAUSE. PAUL WAITS FOR HER NEXT QUESTION, BUT IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE OFFICER IS ALSO WAITING FOR HIM TO VOLUNTEER MORE INFORMATION)

Um... I live nearby and I like to come watch the animals. I take pictures. Some of them know me.

POLICE: They know you? How's that?

PAUL: Well, they look and they know it's me. They've seen me so often. Like this rhino. He's seen me for years. He knows who I am and he says hello. He moves his head when he sees me. One day I was sad and I came to see him. But he was in the water, he didn't want to come out, it was hot. But I started talking to him anyway, telling him why I was sad. And you know what he did? Just the way you stop doing something you like to listen to a friend, he got up out of the water and walked over to me. He lumbered over, like it was a big effort, but he knew he had to do it. For me.
A rhino his size, pacing back and forth, understanding my loneliness. He came and stood in front of me, in the blazing sun. Just to listen to me.

POLICE: (LOOKING AT THE RHINO IN AMAZEMENT) And to think I thought all animals were the same. Monkeys or lions. They stink.

PAUL: Because they're here. But if they were in their natural habitat, they wouldn't smell bad. They'd be in their context. Context is everything. Like you and me. If we were where we really wanted to be maybe we wouldn't be what we are or look the way we look.

POLICE: I always wanted to be an engineer.

PAUL: Me, a vet.

POLICE: You look like a vet. You know a lot about animals.

PAUL: Not all of them, but that rhino, for example, I do.
There was a time when they mistook them for Unicorns. Marco Polo, on his voyages, was the first to see one.

(THE OFFICER GETS A BIT BORED. TRIES TO INTERRUPT)

He saw it with its horn and he thought it was a Unicorn, like the ones he had seen on the prairies of Italy. Instead of calling it by its name or making one up, he decided to use a name he already knew.

POLICE: Your name?

PAUL: Rhinoceros. Rhino-ceros...

POLICE: Not it. You. What is your name?

PAUL: Paul Stevens.

POLICE: Mr. Stevens, listen, I'd love to hear all your fascinating stories, but I've got a job to do. And maybe you can help me. We're looking for someone.

PAUL: A man or woman?

POLICE: We believe it's a man. He's been frequenting the zoo in the past few weeks and he's killing the animals.

PAUL: Killing them? But, how? Which ones?

POLICE: He started with the birds, but then he moved on to the snakes, two tigers, three penguins, a goat –that by the way was about to give birth. He killed the hippos –two of them. And he's killed several monkeys too, like Titi, three chimpanzees, other monkeys I don't remember, and an orangutan.

PAUL: The orangutan.

POLICE: You remember him?

PAUL: He was in a special cage.

POLICE: We think his next target will be the Panda Bears.

PAUL: Those bears cost a fortune!

POLICE: And they're everyone's favorites.

PAUL: Kids, kids love them.

POLICE: That's why we think he'll go for the Pandas.

PAUL: Something has to be done about that delinquent!

POLICE: We haven't made it public because we know the perpetrator comes to the zoo every day. We think he's some kind of terrorist or fanatic.

PAUL: So, how does he kill them?

POLICE: With a special virus. A virus that destroys their defenses. First they get sick for a few days and then they die. They drop like cards, all of a sudden.

PAUL: And the animals don't complain.

POLICE: They just get sad, stop making any sound at all or doing what they're supposed to do.

PAUL: The monkeys just sit there, the crocodiles sleep in the water, the birds stop flying.

POLICE: The virus causes other diseases. And then finally, the animals die.

PAUL: Son of a bitch.

POLICE: That's what we think. He's a son of a bitch. And that's why we want to stop him. You come to the zoo a lot, you know the people.

PAUL: I know the animals better.

POLICE: The animals know you.

PAUL: Not all of them. The turtles are tough.

POLICE: What I'd like is for you to remember if you've seen anything or anyone suspicious. Here's my number. You see anyone suspicious, give me a call.

PAUL: You think he spends his time wandering around in here?

POLICE: It's highly probable. He likes to see the animals after he poisons them.

PAUL: How do you know that?

POLICE: Because he makes them suffer.

PAUL: (LOOKING AT THE RHINO) I think the rhino's acting a bit strange.

POLICE: You think so?

PAUL: He looks sad, like he's weak.

POLICE: You think he has the virus?

PAUL: They're not careful.
(RAISING HIS VOICE)
I think he's falling down!

POLICE: (ALARMED) You're right.
I think he's...
Wait here.
(TO THE RADIO) Attention, Rhinoceros Cage... Rhinoceros Cage...
(LEAVING)
I'm going to get the doctors...

(PEOPLE SCREAMING)

PAUL: A real monument to the jungle.
And to think Marco Polo mistook it for a Unicorn, no less.
And unicorns never existed.
And rhinos did.

(WE HEAR AN EXTRAORDINARY BOOM)
He's falling!
(CON'T) The rhino is falling!
GOD! How magnificent!
He's falling!
God!
How beautiful!

(ADMIRINGLY)

Look how it dies!

WE SEE THE RHINO'S LEGS TURN OVER, AS THOUGH IT HAD
FALLEN.

PEOPLE SCREAMING IN THE DISTANCE AND POLICE
WHISTLES.

MUSIC

6- *pandas*

PANDA BEAR CAGE / TODAY

PAUL AND KAREN ENTER.
THEY CARRY SHOPPING BAGS.
A CHRISTMAS TREE APPEARS ON STAGE

- PAUL: It was fifteen years ago. It was December 24th and a domestic incident caught the attention not only of the public.
- KAREN: But ours too.
- PAUL: Although there are things I never said and never will.
- KAREN: Like how we're all the consequence of something.
- PAUL: Just like December 24th, too, whether you like it or not, is a consequence of something.
- KAREN: Like, December 23rd
- PAUL: Or the 22nd
- KAREN: And especially the 21st
- PAUL: Right. That December 21st.
- KAREN: Every day comes with another behind it.
- PAUL: That day we had gone out
- KAREN: We went shopping in the afternoon on December 21st while our daughter
- PAUL: And the dogs
- KAREN: Spent the day with her grandmother in the park
- PAUL: We browsed through the stores, each going his own way.
- KAREN: I was hardly talking to him anymore.

PAUL: I was thanking God she didn't say a word to me.

KAREN: I hardly talked to him because that morning

PAUL: She had found out

KAREN: He had a lover

PAUL: Younger and prettier

KAREN: Than me. But I thought, "Could he really leave me or is he just doing it because he's afraid?"

PAUL: Afraid of death

KAREN: Of being with me

PAUL: I don't know.

KAREN: I don't know. We got back late that day.

PAUL: And when we got back

KAREN: I went to open the front door and...

PAUL: And the door was open

KAREN: We'd been robbed.

(IN REAL TIME)

Oh my God, what happened here?!

PAUL: Did you leave the door open?

KAREN: Paul, look, what's everything doing on the floor?

PAUL: Someone broke in!

KAREN: We've been robbed!

(THEY RUSH INSIDE, DESPERATELY)

PAUL: Where's Caroline?

KAREN: She's with my parents. They're at the park.

PAUL: And the dogs?

KAREN: They went too.

PAUL: Thank God no one was here!

KAREN: Oh my God, what a mess!

PAUL: I'll call the police.

KAREN: They took the t.v.!

PAUL: (DIALING) Fucking, fucking thieves.

KAREN: They slashed our paintings. Why would they slash the paintings?

PAUL: Go check the rest of the house.

(KAREN EXITS)

PAUL: Police. This is an emergency. I just got home and there's been a robbery. Someone broke in and... they tore up everything... they took... the t.v.... (LOOKING AROUND) ...and the stereo and some decorations from the living room. What? (PAUSE) I haven't checked. I mean, we just got here and I just picked up the phone to call to... Are the thieves still in the house? Is that possible?

(HE PANICS. PAUL IS DYING OF FRIGHT)

I... I... I didn't check... my wife... Please hurry and come

Karen!!!!

(KAREN ENTERS. SHE STARTLES PAUL)

The police say they could still be in here.

KAREN: I thought the same thing and I froze in the hall.

PAUL: What should we do?

KAREN: Don't ask me. You tell me what you want me to do!

PAUL: Me?

KAREN: Yes. You. What should we do?
(BEAT. PAUL IS DYING OF FRIGHT)

PAUL: I... I... I don't know.

KAREN: (TAKING MATTERS INTO HER HANDS) I don't hear anybody. Maybe they left. The house was empty, they broke in, they took everything, and they left. A clean job. I don't think anyone's here. What about the police?

PAUL: They're on their way.

KAREN: Did you give them the right address?

PAUL: I forgot!

(KAREN LOOKS AT HIM IN DISAPPOINTMENT. PAUL SEES)

PAUL: I'm all nerves.

(HE DIALS AGAIN)

KAREN: (TO THE AUDIENCE) He called the police and I started picking up the glass, cleaning the floor, putting what was left back in its place. And meanwhile he talked to the police, then the neighbors, he called his mother, his sisters, his friends. He told everyone what had happened.

PAUL: (TO THE PHONE) ...It isn't safe here, we need more police, they should put those bastards in jail and throw away the key!

KAREN: By his sixth call, I had the house picked up again. No t.v., no stereo, no decorations, no money I was saving for a trip, no jewelry they gave me when we got married, no wedding ring. But everything ready. Spic and span.

PAUL: (TO THE PHONE) Forget jail! They should kill them! That's it! They deserve to die! Fucking with people who worked their whole lives! If I see them, I'll kill them myself!

KAREN: I wanted to get cleaned up.
(TO PAUL) I'm going to take a shower.

PAUL: (TO THE PHONE) Excuse me. (TO KAREN) Why don't you wait to pick everything up?

KAREN: It's already done, Paul.

PAUL: (LOOKING AROUND, DISPLEASED) You're fast.

KAREN: I'm going to take a shower.

PAUL: (NOW ALONE. HE PAUSES. WE FEEL HIS FEAR, SLIGHTLY. HE DIALS AGAIN) ...The cops never come when you need them... Hello... hello... Police? Yes, I'll hold.

(BEAT. WE UNDERSTAND PAUL IS LISTENING TO MUSIC ON HOLD, SUDDENLY HE BANGS THE TELEPHONE. HE BECOMES DESPERATE. HE HAS A PANIC ATTACK. THE PANIC ATTACK IS ACCOMPANIED BY SHOUTS AND SOBS, AS IF A MONSTRUOUS ANIMAL WERE ABOUT TO EAT HIM. AFTER THIS REACHES A CLIMAX, PAUL FALLS TO THE FLOOR. KAREN COMES OUT IN A TOWEL. SHE REVIVES HIM. PAUL RESPONDS WELL. HE CALMS DOWN)

KAREN: Paul has panic attacks when he can't handle reality. He felt insecure, vulnerable.

(THE MUSIC AND LIGHTS CHANGE. PAUL GETS UP. HE CHANGES CLOTHES)

He looked like a little boy lost, looking around and seeing that everything was taller, bigger, more mysterious.

(THE MUSIC AND LIGHTS CHANGE. KAREN GETS DRESSED)

By December 22nd he had calmed down.

PAUL: I bought a t.v. A better one. This one has Internet. And it's bigger. I missed the sound of the t.v. It gives the house more life.

KAREN: On December 23rd the terrorists set off a bomb during a school party.

(THE T.V. COMES ON. WE SEE A PROGRAM ON PUBLIC TELEVISION. A SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA IS PLAYING. PAUL CHANGES THE CHANNEL VIOLENTLY. HE CHANNEL SURFS)

PAUL: ...Too much democracy makes people uncontrollable. Here everybody has rights except the working man. Liberty's turned libertine. What we need is a little strong arm in this damn country!

(HE CHANGES CHANNELS. NOW WE SEE THE INEFFABLE GAZELLE FLEEING THE EVER SWIFT TIGER)

KAREN: On December 24th the house was like before. I was cooking and the lights on the Christmas tree were weren't working. (TO PAUL) Paul, why don't you fix the lights? (PAUL DOES) What do you want to do tonight?

PAUL: Stay home with Caroline and the dogs.

KAREN: What's the t.v. saying?

PAUL: The terrorists blew up a bomb at a school. They were having a party. Almost 100 dead or more.

KAREN: (LOOKING AT THE T.V.) And who's that?

PAUL: She's the principal.

KAREN: She looks familiar.

PAUL: Yeah, she looks like one of us.

KAREN: Poor woman. Look at her eyes. What a shame!

(PAUL STOPS FIDDLING WITH THE LIGHTS, HE LOOKS AT THE TELEVISION.
SUDDENLY, WE HEAR BARKING)

PAUL: What are they doing?

KAREN: They're at it again.

PAUL: (ANGRY) I told them I don't want them doing that.

KAREN: It's all right. It'll be over soon.

PAUL: ...in front of Caroline, she can see everything!

KAREN: Here, Bandit, come, get away from General.

PAUL: Filthy mutt!

KAREN: Here, Bandit... leave him alone, General... don't do that. It's natural, Paul, don't get like that.

PAUL: How is that natural?! What are you saying?! That's for sickos! That's not normal! There's no way that's normal!

KAREN: I think these dogs need to meet other dogs and...

(THEN, PAUL HAS THE SAME PANIC ATTACK HE HAD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCENE. BUT INSTEAD OF FEAR, HE FEELS HATE. AN EXTRAORDINARY HATE, AS THOUGH HE WERE AN ANIMAL. PAUL SHOUTS. HE GOES OVER TO THE DOGS AND WE SEE HOW HE BEGINS KICKING ONE OF THEM)

PAUL: Son of a bitch... Son of a bitch! Can't you leave him alone! Can't we have a little peace! Somebody's always fucking someone! Leave him alone, you goddamn faggot dog! Son of a bitch...!

(HE KICKS HIM UNTIL THE BARKING STOPS. MUSIC. LIGHTS BEGIN TO GO DOWN ON THE SCENE. ONLY THE TELEVISION IS ON SHOWING A FASCIST DEMONSTRATION. SIGNS WITH SWASTIKAS. RACISM, WHATEVER INTOLERANCE HITS CLOSEST TO HOME FOR THOSE PERFORMING THE PLAY, WHETHER POLITICAL, SOCIAL OR EVERYDAY. WE SEE THOSE IMAGES UNTIL CAROLINE APPEARS, CENTER STAGE)

CAROL: Someone was killing the animals in the zoo because they thought they should be in the jungle instead of cages.

KAREN: There were more and more empty cages.

CAROL: People stopped coming and we ran out of money. No money meant no new animals and personnel cuts, so we no longer had security.

CAROL: Then, people came, other people. A mass of people. They came when they wanted and killed the animals that were left.

KAREN: What did they do with them?

CAROL: They ate them. They were hungry, they said. Horse meat, lion's belly, the ostriches are supposed to taste very nice. Crowds in the street, people, the whole country. And no one did a thing. They devoured the tiger.

KAREN: They ate tiger!

CAROL: They ate tiger and they ate turtles, they ate the giraffes and if they didn't eat the alligators it's only because the creatures sensed it and didn't come out of the lake. They acted like fish. They say they drowned.

And even though there was almost nothing left, the people kept on coming. Every day and every night.

KAREN: Why did they keep coming if there was nothing left here?

CAROL: They were looking for the big catch.

KAREN: The Pandas?

CAROL: The Unicorn.

(WE HEAR BEETHOVEN'S APPASSIONATA. THE LIGHTS DIM)

They wanted to try something they'd never had before. Something new, exciting, something innocent. They said Unicorn meat is the best. That it tastes like dog, only a little sweet.

KAREN: I never knew there was a Unicorn.

CAROL: It was in that cage. The Unicorn Area. I remember it like I was seeing it right now.

KAREN: That was the rhino.

CAROL: No, the rhino is very different. The rhino is like a huge pig. This was like a horse, it liked to whinny like a horse.

(THEN WE SEE THE SILOUHETTE OF THE UNICORN, WHICH TAKES UP THE WHOLE STAGE)

...like a mistreated horse, but a horse. It had a silver horn and everyone called it by another name because they'd never seen one like it before.

KAREN: What happened to the Unicorn?

CAROL: A bomb blew it to pieces during the Christmas festivities. Don't you remember?

(MUSIC. THE IMAGE OF THE UNICORN DISAPPEARS. PAUL ENTERS. PAUL SITS NOW AND SPEAKS TO THE PERSON THEY ALL HAVE BEEN TALKING TO THE WHOLE TIME)

PAUL: At first, you feel like you're on trial all the time. People come with their questions and their answers about your life, about who you are, about what you think.

CAROL: We think we know people because we learn to think in commonplaces.
In prefabricated platitudes. In neatly wrapped ideas.

PAUL: In those moments, you start to lose your memory. At first, it's once in a while. A little one day, a little more next week, until you find it again, in bits and pieces, as though it were old photos narrating the life of someone else like you. A life where you can no longer place the dates or the times or the people.

KAREN: They call it a "Panic Attack" and it's an incurable disease.

CAROL: Others call it hatred and it's also an incurable disease.

PAUL: Or the "Panda Bear Complex". When you fall in love with death just because they look at you with pity.

(LIGHTS OUT.

ONLY THREE SPOTS REMAIN, ONE FOR EACH CHARACTER)

CAROL: Fifteen years ago, I went over to the dead dog and started to cry. Like now, seeing Dad all alone, I feel so sorry for him and for me.

(SHE LOOKS AT HER MOTHER AND FATHER)

I hope you both will always be with me.

(CAROLINE DISAPPEARS IN THE DARK)

KAREN: After fifteen years I was finally able to make my life different. All because of two loves and a creature that open and close the story.

(SHE LOOKS AT HER DAUGHTER AND PAUL)

I hope you both will always be with me

(KAREN DISAPPEARS IN THE DARK)

PABLO: (RESIGNED, ASHAMED) In the end, I hope you both will always be with me.

(BEFORE BLACKOUT)

To help me face the beasts.

ANIMAL NOISES AGAIN

ONLY THE FIGURE OF THE UNICORN REMAINS

BLACKOUT