

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

The Seventh Angel. A play in 3 acts.

Mann, Klaus

1946

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SYNOPSIS OF A PLAY BY KLAUS MANN:

THE SEVENTH ANGEL

THREE ACTS (SIX SCENES)

General Description: The main theme of this play is Spiritualism -- the communication between two spheres: the world of the living ("the physical plane") and the world of the dead ("the realm of the spirits"). The second theme is the coming end of the world -- an imminent cosmic catastrophe predicted by the leading character (a medium and clairvoyant) and discussed throughout the drama. The third (and maybe most important) theme is pure romance -- a love affair which begins under rather peculiar circumstances, only to come to a quick and tragic end. The structure of the drama is simple and transparent -- with the whole action taking place in one room, in the course of three days. While not involving any particular technical difficulties, THE SEVENTH ANGEL is by no means an easy play to produce. It needs atmosphere -- atmosphere above all! In other words, it needs a director sensitive and experienced enough to mix and measure the various ingredients -- the poetic, the grotesque, the tragic, the macabre -- of which this dramatic organism is composed.

Dramatis Personae:

- VERA VANSTRAATEN: medium and clairvoyant; widow of the "Master," Jan Vanstraaten. (Leading character of the play. About 32; attractive -- of a delicate, romantic beauty, but not hysterical or anaemic. Strong dramatic accents: outbursts of tenderness, anger, fear, etc.)
- TILL (The leading man. About 25; robust, handsome, intelligent; somewhat on the adventurous side: a young vagabond -- slightly irresponsible, but full of dynamics, charm, imagination.)
- JUDITH VANSTRAATEN: Vera's sister-in-law, sister of the late "Master;" Secretary General of the Vanstraaten Society. (About 50; paralyzed; moving about in a wheeled chair. Very intelligent; hard, austere; a domineering personality, conspicuously devoid of any sense of humor. Unscrupulous, out of genuine fanaticism; relentless, cruel -- but without mean or petty features.)
- VERA'S SIX CHILDREN (From 15 to 6 -- the two most important ones being the oldest girl, URSULA, and the youngest boy, DWARF. Take decisively part in the action; should command physical grace, a good diction, intelligence, self-assurance.)
- THREE OCCULT SCHOLARS: UNCLE, LARUE, LI TSO -- representing the Vanstraaten Society in the United States, Europe and the Far East. (Three grotesque characters in their fifties; haggard, haunted, pathetic -- but not farcical! Men of real learning and intellectual passion -- even though muddled, neurotic, and somewhat ludicrous.)
- TWO OLD WOMAN SERVANTS (Both in their sixties; humorous types with a somewhat fantastic touch: the old NURSE, of an aggressive, quarrelsome and stubborn disposition; the old COOK -- good-natured, fat and primitive.)
- BALTASAR: a butler. (About 60; servile, ceremonious.)
- JAKOB: an old fisherman. (About 70; half-crazy, white-bearded, romantic.)
- JANE: an orphan. (15; a half-wit; a natural child of the "Master," living in Vera's house.)

2)
Place of Action: The home of the Vanstraaten family -- situated on a small island in the Pacific Ocean, off the Californian coast.

Scene: A large room on the ground floor, almost on a level with the garden -- half-chapel, half-living room. Prominently displayed, a bust of the late "Master;" a portrait of Vera dressed as "priestess;" a colored reproduction of Böcklin's painting, "Island of Death." ... In the center of the background, an altar-like structure -- a pedestal of white marble covered with magic symbols. ... Two doors: one, at the right, to the interior of the house; the other, at the left, is a glass door which can be covered with a curtain of heavy, dark material. When the curtain is removed, a part of the garden becomes visible -- with palm trees and blooming bushes profiled against the near ocean.

The drama:

ACT ONE

First Scene: Morning. The SIX CHILDREN practicing the Dance of the Seven Angels (from the Apocalypse), which they are to perform the same evening, on the occasion of a special séance. JANE, the half-wit, wants to take over the part of the Seventh Angel, but is derisively turned down by the others. The youngest boy, DWARF, decides to ask Mother to produce a seventh child. ... JUDITH interferes, chides children for taunting Jane, whom she orders to participate in the dance as bearer of the seventh trumpet. ... OLD WOMAN SERVANTS announce excitedly the arrival of three guests on the island. JUDITH sends CHILDREN to fetch Vera from nearby "Contemplation Rock." ... JUDITH and the THREE VISITORS: UNCLE, LARUE, LI TSO. The professors report about the sad state of world affairs: confusion, apprehension in America, Europe, and Asia. JUDITH explains why she asked the representatives to attend the coming séance: the "Master's" spirit is expected to materialize! His appearance will confirm and elucidate a vision Vera, the medium, had some time ago -- a prophetic day-dream suggesting the imminent end of the world. ... Exit PROFESSORS. VERA and CHILDREN from the garden. DWARF asks his mother to present them with a seventh child; VERA's embarrassment. Exit CHILDREN. ... VERA-JUDITH. JUDITH tells her sister-in-law about arrival of guests. VERA refuses to see them; is puzzled, intrigued, uncertain, frightened. She hopes fervently for late husband's promised materialization, but is afraid he will not appear in order to punish her. Remembers an argument she had with him during their last excursion in a sailing boat, shortly before he was drowned; his jealousy when she looked at a young man in a blue sweater passing by in another boat. ... Exit JUDITH. VERA alone: monologue in front of the "Master's" bust; she implores him to appear, lest she believe he has ceased to love her.

Second Scene: The same day, evening; shortly before the beginning of the séance. The TWO OLD WOMAN SERVANTS, arranging the room for coming ceremony; discussing Judith's secrecy, the coming end of the world, the weaknesses of the Vanstraaten family, etc. Later joined by the THREE PROFESSORS, then by BATTASAR, the butler, and JAKOB, the fisherman in whose boat the Master made his fatal trip. General conversation in anticipation of coming séance. PROFESSORS and SERVANTS recall other materializations they witnessed. JAKOB predicts storm. ... CHILDREN, in angel costumes for apocalyptic dance. JUDITH opens meeting with formal little speech informing assembly of probable end of the world. Various reactions. ... Music; dance of the CHILDREN; growing

expectation -- coming to a climax with the solemn entrance of VERA, who takes place in the center of the circle, as CHILDREN are performing their pantomime. JANE's trumpet fails to produce any sound; CHILDREN join circle. ... VERA, in semi-trance, communicates with husband's spirit; repeats with increasing intensity her request that he keep his promise and make himself visible. Her supplication finally assumes the character of a violent paroxysm. As she cries out her demand ("You must come!"), noises are heard at the left: the glass door is opened from the outside, a human figure moves behind the dark curtain. Darkness -- with all the candles blown out by the storm. Panic among the sitters as the human figure falls into the room. VERA, in a breaking voice: "From where do you come?" -- The apparition: "From down there... from the depth..." ... CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

Third Scene: Next morning. The stranger (TILL) on a couch, covered with blankets; VERA, trying to bring him back to life by magnetizing him. As TILL moves and seems on the point of waking up, she leaves him -- frightened. ("You are not the one I have been calling for!") ... TILL, still asleep, and the SIX CHILDREN. They take him for a demon and try to exorcise him by means of a special exorcising dance with terrifying masks. CHILDREN run away as TILL awakens. ... TILL, awake, first alone, then with JANE, who presents him with shells and begs him, not to let the world come to an end. Exit JANE. ... Next visitor: JAKOB, the half-crazed fisherman, who pays homage to TILL as a "deity of the waves" and decorates him with sea flowers. TILL thinks himself in an insane asylum. Exit JAKOB, as the TWO OLD WOMAN SERVANTS appear with a curious kind of breakfast. ... Humorous scene between TILL and the TWO OLD WOMAN SERVANTS. ... When the two old women are gone, BALTASAR calls on the stranger. In the course of the conversation, TILL finds out that he is being taken for a ghost -- or rather, a special "messenger" of the Master. ... TILL, alone, greatly amused; decides to continue the comedy. Looking around, he notices bust, altar, etc; is fascinated by Vera's portrait. ... TILL and the THREE PROFESSORS. They tell him about the setup and the functions of the Vanstraaten Society; he -- still posing as "Messenger" -- demands to be confronted with the "priestess." Exit PROFESSORS. ... TILL, JUDITH, VERA: Vera, still afraid of TILL, has been persuaded, if not forced, by Judith to present herself to the "Messenger." TILL asks JUDITH to go. ... TILL - VERA. She wants to hear his "message": What does he know about the coming end of the world? He -- rather nonplussed at first -- becomes more eloquent as she begins to "magnetize" him again, caressing his forehead with her fingertips. Half-hypnotized, he begins to develop his plan for a possible salvation of the endangered world -- a detailed program of allegedly supernatural origin on which "priestess" and "messenger" will have to collaborate.

Fourth Scene: The same day, evening. VERA-TILL -- both somewhat exhausted after their long conversation. Having explained his "program" of how to prevent the threatening disaster, he asks her to excuse him for a little while as he wants to return to the "other world" and get new instructions. Disappears into the garden. ... VERA with JUDITH, then joined by THREE PROFESSORS. She informs them about the "messenger's" project and his willingness to stay and work with the Vanstraaten Society. JUDITH does not quite share Vera's enthusiasm; the messenger's idea of saving the world by means of social and economic reforms fails to appeal to the intransigent mystic. The PROFESSORS, on the other hand,

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~~on the other hand~~ are quick in grasping ~~the~~ an enormous chance Vera's project and the presence of the messenger mean from the point of view of business and propaganda. While they are discussing the coming campaign "to save the world from disaster," TILL returns from the garden -- now wearing a blue sweater. (BALTSAR, in the Third Scene, has taken Till's clothes away, to have them dried and cleaned.) VERA, seeing him in his sailor-like outfit, is momentarily perplexed, as he reminds her of the young man who aroused her husband's jealousy. TILL asks JUDITH and the PROFESSORS, rather brusquely, to leave him alone with Vera. ... VERA-TILL: long dialogue. He confesses that he has been cheating her: he is not a ghost, not a "messenger" -- just an ordinary young man who enjoys solitary sailing trips and whose boat was thrown by a sudden storm against the rocks of this island. First she refuses to believe him ("You are the Messenger! You came at the very moment I called for you!"); but gradually he succeeds in convincing her of the truth. She breaks down completely -- horrified and humiliated. He tries to explain how it happened -- his weakness for pranks and disguises; his desire to please and help her; but she remains inconsolable. Finally she asks him to go. Before doing so, he tells her what he thinks of spiritualism ("Maybe there are ghosts: I don't know; but I do know that we mustn't expect any help from them!") and urges her to find back to reality, lest she perish in madness. He is on the point of leaving when she, all in tears, encourages him to stay. Now he reveals his real feelings for her: "Yes, I am the one for whom you have been waiting -- but in quite a different sense..." With increasing passion he tries to make love to her -- speaking of his loneliness, his hard, restless life, his longing for a woman in whose arms he might find peace... And VERA, evading his embraces: "Beware of me! Don't touch me! I am the instrument, the victim, the property of invisible powers who will destroy you if you violate the taboo!" -- In the end, however, he holds her. They are in love with each other: "Nothing else matters," he says. "The world comes to an end..." ... CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

Fifth Scene: Next morning. VERA, on the couch; TILL, listening to her as she talks in her sleep. In her somnambul state, she takes herself for "the Island" -- "the Island of Death, the Island of Love, the Master's Mausoleum" -- and advises the stranger to explore the beauties of her scenery. In particular, she wants him to have a look at the "Contemplation Rock" -- "my most glorious spot, the favourite place of poor little Vera..." As TILL wakes her up, she has forgotten all about her dream. Finding herself in his arms, she realizes that she has offended against the Law of the Island. She urges Till to take her away from this place where both, she and he, would be doomed. He is overjoyed. ("Is it true? You want to live with me? Want to become my wife?") They decide to flee right away. Discussion of their future life: difficulties they will have to meet, etc. VERA wants to go upstairs to pack a few things; she begs Till, not to stay in the house ("He is here -- the Master! Don't you feel his presence?"), but to wait in the garden until she calls for him. Exit TILL. ... JUDITH enters as VERA is just about to go upstairs. VERA tells JUDITH about her decision to leave the island and to live with Till. ("He is not a ghost or a messenger of ghosts: he is a man -- I love him!") JUDITH -- petrified with horror. ("You can't do it! The powers will interfere!") She reminds Vera of her oath, never to leave the island, but in vain: VERA explains, defiantly, that she has to go: "I am his mistress -- here, on this bed..." As JUDITH strikes at her, VERA cries out her

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 accumulated bitterness. ("What kind of life have I had in this accursed house? A magic parrot -- that's what you have made of me! An automat repeating the messages of the dead... But now I am free! I love him!") Exit VERA. ... JUDITH, first alone; then with the THREE PROFESSORS. Short scene. They want to see "the priestess" to get further instruction from her. JUDITH explains that "something slightly unpleasant" has occurred -- "a minor disturbance provoked by an inferior entity that tries to interfere with the Master's plans." Everything will be all right, however: "I am perfectly able to handle the situation." Exit PROFESSORS. ... JUDITH and the SIX CHILDREN. They are not too surprised to hear that the so-called "messenger" (whom they never trusted!) is in reality an evil spirit sent by "the darkest power" to bewitch and kidnap their mother. JUDITH has "direct word from your father" that the demon has to be "destroyed." Having assumed a human body, he cannot be exorcised, but has to be killed. The father-ghost wants the children to take care of this necessary job. ... While JUDITH moves her wheeled chair to the glass door at the left, the CHILDREN, in the foreground, have a little strategic conference. They decide to invite Till for a walk through the island and to push him from the Contemplation Rock. ... JUDITH announces Till's coming. She will give him a last chance. If she succeeds in changing his mind, he may go in peace; otherwise... The CHILDREN are to withdraw to the garden while she talks to him. One of them will hide near the glass door -- waiting for a certain cue from the aunt ("May the powers guide and protect you!") which indicates that they have to go ahead. ... TILL, from the garden, with JANE. He hesitates at first to come in, but then follows JUDITH's invitation. He has explored the island but could not find the place he was really looking for -- the Contemplation Rock --, as his "little guide" (JANE) does not know the secret path. He asks the CHILDREN whether they could show him the way to that particular spot, but they excuse themselves -- for the time being... Exit CHILDREN -- with DWARF staying behind, hidden near the glass door. ... JUDITH - TILL. She tells him that she knows everything; implores him to renounce Vera. As he remains adamant ("I love her!"), she seems to resign herself to the inevitable. ("Well then -- if it has to be, I hope you will be very very happy together...") He -- delighted, grateful -- hugs and kisses her. JUDITH pronounces the decisive words ("May the powers..."); the CHILDREN return from the garden. ... CHILDREN propose walk to the Rock: TILL accepts. JANE, who tries to warn him, is silenced by JUDITH. The SIX CHILDREN put on their terrible "exorcising masks," as they surround TILL -- leading him to the garden. ... JUDITH with JANE (whom she has prevented from following the others); then the TWO OLD WOMAN SERVANTS, who announce excitedly that Vera is ready to leave the house and the island. ... VERA, dressed for the trip, rushes to the glass door, calls for Till. JUDITH: "He does not hear you." VERA goes on calling: "Till... Where are you, my love? Don't you hear me?... Till... Till... Till..."

Sixth Scene: The same day; evening. VERA - JUDITH. VERA, still in her travel clothes -- still calling for Till. She collapses as JUDITH tells her, "He is gone." While VERA cries and whimpers in her lap, the older woman speaks of the inexorable hardness of "the Law," the necessity of renunciation, her own bitter experiences. ("What is the price we have to pay for our privilege? Not less than -- everything...") Finally she encourages VERA to appeal to the spirits again. Exit VERA. ... JUDITH, first alone, addressing the altar of the "invisible powers" ("Forgive her! Give her strength! And forgive me, too, for what I may have done wrong. All I wanted was, to serve you, beloved spirits...");

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then with JAKOB and JANE -- carrying a covered bier which they leave outside, in the garden. It is Till's body. JUDITH orders them to re=turn the corpse to the sea, and not to tell anybody about their discovery. Also, she orders JANE to leave the house and live from now on with old JAKOB in his hut. ("You have disappointed me. The failure of your trumpet remains unpardonable. You are not good enough to act as the Seventh Angel.") Exit JAKOB and JANE, with bier. ... JUDITH with TWO OLD WOMAN SERVANTS and BALTASAR, later with THREE PROFESSORS. SERVANTS prepare room for séance, while PROFESSORS try to explain their plans for coming campaign. They are interrupted by JUDITH. Vera, she says, has been incorrectly informed by the treacherous Messenger. "Instead of trying to prevent or postpone the inevitable, it is our task to prepare a doomed mankind..." ... The CHILDREN appear in angel costumes, ready for their dance; the "sitters" form their circle in front of the altar -- waiting for the beginning of the séance. ... Enters VERA -- now again dressed as "priestess," She asks everybody to leave the room; only the CHILDREN are to witness her dialogue with "the other side." ... VERA and the CHILDREN; séance. First she comes in contact with Till's ghost who tells her about the circumstances of his death. ("It was nobody's fault... The sea attracted me...") Another voice -- the Master's -- interrupts him, quarrelsome. (All this is not to be heard by the audience but becomes clear merely through Vera's answers and reactions.) Then the two voices merge, unite, and -- having become one twofold organ -- disclose the great news: VERA is to give birth to a seventh child! Will it be the angel whose trumpet announces the coming of the apocalypse? Or will it be the savior? Or just another child...? VERA asks these questions, but she receives no answer: the spirits withdraw -- bidding her farewell. This will be the last time that she hears from them. From now on, she has a new "raison d'être," a new mission, a new dignity. ... Alone with the CHILDREN, she tells them about her happiness: "You are going to have a seventh brother!" As the others (JUDITH, the THREE PROFESSORS, the SERVANTS) return to the room, VERA admonishes the CHILDREN not to betray the secret. JUDITH and her friends -- avid for news about the end of the world -- are disappointed and angry when told by VERA that she will not communicate with the other world anymore. No matter what destiny may bring -- she is not afraid, nor does she want to know. ... "Look at her!" one of the PROFESSORS whispers. "A glory around her head..." -- "And what about us?" JUDITH asks bitterly. "Are we to remain in darkness?" -- And VERA -- smiling, transfigured --: "Darkness there is also in me, where new life begins to grow. But no anxiety anymore! The bliss radiating from my brow -- you, too, might find it: if only you ceased to search for it! Fear not!" CURTAIN.

T H E E N D

PERSONS OF THE PLAY:

VERA VANSTRAATEN, medium and clairvoyant; widow of the "Master",
Jan Vanstraaten

DR. JUDITH VANSTRAATEN, sister of the late Jan Vanstraaten; Secretary General of the Vanstraaten Society

PROF. H. F. UNCLE, representative of the Society in the United States

PROF. HECTOR LARUE, representative of the Society in Europe

PROF. LI TSO, representative of the Society in the Far East

URSULA (14)

CASPAR (13)

CHRISTOPHER (12)

DORIS (11)

BETTY (7)

PUCK (6)

VERA'S CHILDREN

JANE (14), an orphan

NURSERY MARY

KITCHEN MARY

JACOB, a fisherman

TILL

The action takes place in Vera Vanstraaten's home -- the central seat of the Vanstraaten Society --, situated on a small island in the Pacific Ocean, off the Californian coast.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

(At the rise of the curtain, before the stage is illuminated, five trumpet-blasts are heard, accompanied by the hollow beat of a drum. A fine morning. The glass door to the garden is open. Garden and sea which can be seen through the door appear gloriously fresh and alive under a radiant sky.)

In the foreground, the SIX CHILDREN are standing, arranged according to their height and age. From right to left ("right" and "left" of the audience), URSULA, CASPAR, CHRISTOPHER, DORIS, BETTY, PUCK. The children are wearing dark suits of austere simplicity. Their faces are covered with painted masks topped by wigs -- the features frozen in a blissful, yet uncanny, smile under the baroque crown of luxuriant silver curls. In their raised hands they hold large silver trumpets of eccentric shape.

Somewhat remote from the others, at the extreme right of the foreground, JANE is squatting, with a large drum between her knees. She is not wearing a mask. Her face appears almost idiotic with its watery eyes and half-open mouth. She, too, is dressed in black, but the cut of her loose, dirty garment differs from that of the neat uniforms worn by the other children.

At the extreme left of the foreground stands a big black box full of many-colored masks and costumes. Other theatrical properties -- wigs, wings, weapons, musical instruments, and the like -- are scattered over the floor.)

THE SIX CHILDREN: "And the sixth angel sounded..."

URSULA (produces the sixth trumpet-blast.)

JANE (beats the drum with increased intensity.)

THE SIX CHILDREN (perform a few solemn steps, to the rhythm of the drumbeat.)

SCENE :

A large room on the ground floor -- almost on a level with the garden.

At once pompous and gloomy in appearance, the place seems to suggest the combination of a somewhat eccentric chapel and an elegant living room. There are groups of chairs and small tables, a couch, a standing lamp, a little library, and various other pieces of conventional furniture. The center of the background is occupied by an altar-like structure -- a massive cube of white marble covered with magic triangles and hieroglyphics. On top of this pedestal stands a big gold candelabrum with seven branches carrying seven tall candles. The following inscription is written in prominent gold letters across the entire width of the rear wall of the room, behind the altar: BELOVED SPIRITS, GUIDE AND PROTECT US, LEST WE GO ASTRAY! -- A medium-sized organ has its place not far from the altar, in the center of the rear wall.

In the foreground, prominently displayed, a bust of the late Jan Vanstraaten, with a gold inscription reading, THE MASTER. The white marble face -- cold and majestic, with its aquiline nose and imposingly arched forehead -- seems to dominate the whole room.

The two side walls are adorned with one colored picture each: to the right, a reproduction of Arnold Boecklin's painting, DIE TOTENINSEL (Island of Death); to the left, a portrait of Vera Vanstraaten presented as THE PRIESTESS -- an attractively ethereal face with closed eyes under a white head-band, emerging isolated and disconnected from the darkness of cosmic space.

There are two doors. The one to the right (of the audience) connects the room with a spacious lobby and the adjacent staircase. The one to the left is a large glass door which can be covered with a curtain of heavy, dark, rough material. When the curtain is removed, a part of the garden becomes visible, with palm trees and blooming bushes profiled against the near ocean.

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URSULA (comes to an abrupt stop, while the others continue their pompous procession for some more seconds. She removes her mask -- revealing a bold, boyish face with expressive, dark eyes under a mane of dark, unruly hair. She shakes her head, shrugs her shoulders): The whole thing doesn't work. Our dance is no good -- that's all. There should be seven of us.

CASPAR (removes his mask. His face is gentle and dreamy, framed by soft, silky curls. His voice, too, sounds softer than that of his sister): But Ursula! What are you talking about? After all, we have never been more than six. Why should there be seven of us, all of a sudden?

URSULA: Because in the story Father told us everything went by seven: seven stars, seven thunders, seven churches, seven seals, seven vials of wrath. Don't you remember, Caspie? It was seven every time: The seven last plagues, and the seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Even the great red dragon had seven heads, and on his heads the names of blasphemy.

CHRISTOPHER (removes his mask. The face he shows to the audience is of precocious gravity, with a pointed little nose and near-sighted eyes. As soon as he has taken off his mask, he hurriedly produces a pair of spectacles and, even before he puts them on, he has already begun to speak in a pedantically earnest fashion): I am surprised at you, Ursula. You're getting everything mixed up. It's not the dragon who has the seven names of blasphemy; it's the Beast -- you know, the awful Beast that rises up out of the sea.

URSULA: Well, what's the difference?

CHRISTOPHER: That's the way Dad told us the story. The Beast he told us about looked like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. I remember just how he put it. The awful Beast and the great red dragon are not the same thing. Not

at all. Do you want to change Dad's story?

PUCK (removes his mask. He has the clever,, humorous features of a mischievous cherub. His high-pitched little voice has quite an aggressive tone): I want to play the Beast.

URSULA: Ridiculous.

BETTY (removes her mask. She, too, looks impish enough, if somewhat less pugnacious than her little brother): And I want to play the dragon. The great red dragon -- that's what I'm going to play!

DORIS (removes her mask. Her eyes are blue, wide and round in a cute, doll-like face. She sounds quite annoyed as she exclaims in a chirping little voice): Always the little ones! Too silly! Always the two dwarfs! Why don't you let Christopher speak? Why don't you let him finish the story?

URSULA (to Christopher): All right then, Chris, since you're so smart and know everything, you may as well tell us what happened after the sixth trumpet-blast.

CHRISTOPHER: Why, of course, after the sixth trumpet-blast there was the army of the horsemen -- two hundred thousand thousand of them. The horsemen had breastplates of fire, and out of the mouths of the horses came fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three the third part of mankind was killed -- by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.

PUCK: Why just the third part of mankind? Why not all of them?

BETTY: What's brimstone, Chris? Does it hurt? And why did the smoke harm the people so much? What's wrong with a little smoke?

URSULA (to Christopher): Don't pay any attention to them. Just go on with your story. And what happened next?

CHRISTOPHER: You know it yourself, Ursula -- don't you? You know perfectly well what happened. The nations of the world are angry, and "the great wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged".

CASPAR: And the seventh angel sounded.

URSULA: That's it! The seventh angel sounded. And there are just six of us. Not seven.

PUCK (giggles as he apes the worried tone of his sister): Just six -- not seven! Not seven of us -- just six!

URSULA: Now, what's so funny about that?

PUCK (giggling): It's y o u , Ursula, who's being funny! Funny Ursula! Always so excited, taking things so seriously! Just like the grown-ups. Just as funny as the funny grown-ups.

BETTY (giggles): Funny Ursula -- always so grown-uppish!

URSULA (rather irritated): Well, if I am "grown-uppish" -- you two are just babies, and pretty fresh babies at that. You'd better do a little thinking, Puck -- and that goes for you, too, Betty baby. Don't you see that we have plenty of reason to worry? After all, it's not just another Dance of Enticement we're practicing here; it's supposed to be something different, something important! Dad has asked us to prepare a very special number for the Party tonight. The number he wants us to do will be based on the story he told us some weeks ago. You remember the story, Puck?

PUCK: Of course! I know my stuff. In my own way, I'm just as smart as Chris who thinks he knows everything by heart.

URSULA: That's fine. Then it shouldn't be hard for you, Puck, to understand that Father expects a dance of seven angels tonight -- not six!

PUCK: But there only a r e six of us -- not seven. It isn't o u r

fault -- or is it?

URSULA: We have to find some way out. Dad mustn't be disappointed. Not tonight! That would be terrible. Mind you, this is the day we've been waiting for...

CASPAR: The great day for which Daddy has promised...

CHRISTOPHER: It's today that Mother thinks Father will... might be ready to...

URSULA: Now imagine! If our dance doesn't quite come off, he'll be annoyed; and in his anger -- just to punish us -- he might change his mind...

PUCK: What are you talking about, Ursula? Are you trying to say that Dad may not come at all?

URSULA: Exactly. That's what I'm afraid of.

PUCK: But he m u s t come!

URSULA: I don't think he will. Our dance isn't good enough. Six angels, instead of seven!

PUCK: All right, then we've got to have a seventh angel.

URSULA: I know it. But where are we going to find him?

PUCK: I'll talk it over with Mama. She'll get another little brother for us.

URSULA: How could she -- in such a rush? We need the seventh angel by tonight. Besides ... Well, anyhow, it's a silly idea. Quite out of the question. Just forget about it.

PUCK: I'll ask her -- I will. Mom can do anything. She won't let us down Not Mama!

URSULA: Forget about it, Puck. Mother must not be bothered. We can't even talk to her -- you know that. Aunt Judith doesn't want us to talk to Mother at all.

PUCK: Then I'll ask Aunt Judith for special permission to ask Mama...

URSULA: It is against the Law.

PUCK: I'll do it. I will.

URSULA: Now listen to me, you stubborn little fool...

PUCK: I certainly will. You'll see. I'm not afraid of Aunt Judith.

CHRISTOPHER: There we are, wasting time with idle talk -- just six of us, not seven! Where is the seventh angel?

THE SIX CHILDREN: Where is the seventh angel?

JANE (who has been squatting motionless and aloof during the preceding conversation, now points at herself, grins and stammers): Number Seven -- it's me, it's me ... Don't you recognize me? Little Sister Jane -- the seventh...

URSULA: Simple Jane -- the seventh angel! What a joke!

JANE: Number Seven -- it's me! The seventh little sister, the seventh trumpet-blast...

URSULA: Shut up. You don't belong to us. You're no% sister of ours.

JANE: But Aunt Judith says...

URSULA: Whatever Aunt Judith may say, you are not a member of the family. A stranger -- that's what you are. And a half-wit at that!

DORIS: I don't like strangers. Strangers smell. Makes me kind of sick -- the strange smell of strangers.

JANE: Little Jane -- no stranger... Your little sister she is...

The number Seven you are looking for...

URSULA: That's enough from you, idiot. Why, I wonder if you're anything like a real human being. What about your finer organs, Jane? Do you have a decent astral body? What about your vibrations? The soul, the karma, the ethereal substance -- everything gone, I suppose? The whole spiritual personality -- not quite developed, withered, shrunk

away?

PUCK and BETTY (begin to dance around Jane -- giggling and shouting):
All shrunk away, all gone! The nicer organs, the astral vibrations --
all foul, all rotten! Fie!

JANE (bursting into tears): All shrunk away... It's not my fault...
Too bad...

PUCK and BETTY (continue to caper and laugh with increasing violence):
Too bad, too bad'. Nothing left of Jane's finer stuff! All gone, all
withered -- fie! Shame on you, shrunken astral Jane!

JANE (in tears): No fault of mine... Too bad...

THE SIX CHILDREN (now united in their derisive dance around the weeping
Jane): Shame on you, shrunken astral Jane! Pish, pish! Fie, fie!
Phew, phew! A seventh angel without finer organs! All withered, shrivel-
ed, crippled -- what a shame!

(While the CHILDREN are shouting and jumping about, DR. JUDITH VANSTRAATEN,
moving in a wheel-chair, has entered the room from the garden. She is a
woman in her late forties or early fifties; dressed in black; a figure
of austere dignity; grey-haired, with sharp, intelligent, ascetic
features. Half-paralyzed, she handles her wheel-chair with remarkable
dexterity and assurance; she has the air of an Oriental potentate on a
litter).

JUDITH (with great authority): Quiet!

THE SIX CHILDREN (stop capering, as if petrified).

JUDITH: Are you out of your minds? You're acting like little demons,
like common poltergeists -- I am shocked! To turn handsprings -- here,
in the sacred Parlour, just a few steps from your father's bust --: what
an outrageous thing to do! Your unspeakable conduct will certainly be
brought to the attention of your mother who, in her turn, will inform

your father.

PUCK: Don't tell Mama, Aunt Judith! Please, don't tell Mama to tell Dad that we haven't been good. We'll always be good from now on.

JUDITH: Well, I'll think it over. Why is poor little Jane crying?

URSULA: You know how she is, Aunt Judith. Cries without any reason.

JUDITH: Was there no reason now?

URSULA: I didn't mean to hurt her feelings. It was just... Well, you see, I just told her that she doesn't have any astral body.

JUDITH: That was very cruel of you, Ursula, -- and, moreover, very ignorant. If you had paid any attention to your father's lectures, you would know that *e v e r y* individual possesses an astral body -- the simplest fool as well as a genius or saint.

CASPAR: We shouldn't have teased poor Jane -- naturally, we shouldn't. But, you see, Aunt Judith, what annoyed us so -- or rather, what struck us as kind of funny was that idea of hers to take over the part of the seventh angel.

JANE: Number Seven -- it's me! Poor Jane is the seventh you're looking for...

JUDITH: The seventh angel with the trumpet, in tonight's Dance of Enticement? Why, of course, that's Jane's rôle!

URSULA: But, after all, Aunt Judith -- Jane doesn't belong to us...

DORIS: We don't like strangers. Have no use for them.

CHRISTOPHER: Besides, Jane doesn't know how to dance. Never will learn to, either. Too clumsy, I suppose.

JUDITH: Children! I am surprised. Don't you remember what your father told you -- not once but repeatedly? Don't you know your father wants you to treat poor Jane as if she were your sister?

URSULA: Yes, Aunt Judith.

JUDITH: And what is a good child's foremost, sacred duty?

THE SIX CHILDREN: To obey Father!

JUDITH: That's right: to obey Father -- at all times, under all circumstances! ... So that's settled: Jane takes over the seventh trumpet in tonight's show. And now, will you please remove your stuff from the floor and get the room cleaned up. There are visitors coming.

URSULA: W h a t is coming...?

JUDITH: You heard me the first time. I'm expecting guests.

URSULA: People from the outside world? Strangers?

JUDITH: Not strangers, child. The people I expect are friends. They come from far away.

PUCK: What for?

JUDITH: I have invited them to attend our gala tonight. And also to deliberate with your mother and me on matters of the greatest urgency and importance -- and I mean, t h e g r e a t e s t !

(NURSERY MARY flings open the door to the right and remains on the threshold, breathless with excitement. She is about seventy, dressed in black, her head covered with a large, beribboned hood of the type worn by Dutch peasant women.)

NURSERY MARY (still out of breath): Miss Judith...Miss Judith... people... there are people coming!

JUDITH: I know it, Nursery Mary.

(KITCHEN MARY appears by the side of Nursery Mary in the open door. She, too is in her late sixties or early seventies. Her dark dress and cap are of the same style and color as Nursery Mary's. Kitchen Mary, however, wears a grey apron on top of her heavy skirts. Even though apparently of a stolid, sedate disposition, she seems now just as excited as her colleague.)

KITCHEN MARY: Three of them! Three men with funny hats! Oh, dear me, dear me! Just arrived in a motor boat...

NURSERY MARY: Strangers -- on our island! It's an outrage, an invasion...

JUDITH: Didn't you hear what I said? I've been expecting those gentlemen.

NURSERY MARY: Now really! If you knew they were coming, Miss Judith, you might at least have given us a little hint, a warning!

JUDITH: I'm sorry I forgot to mention it. Where are the gentlemen now?

KITCHEN MARY: I don't know. Can't be far, I suppose. Ge, how silly they looked with their big sun glasses and their umbrellas!

JUDITH: Now listen to me, both you Maryes! Those gentlemen come a long way, almost around the world, just to accept my invitation. I want them to feel at home here -- understand? So you two had better get busy. Nursery Mary, you will fix the guest rooms for our friends. And as for you, Kitchen Mary, you'll prepare something to eat.

NURSERY MARY: The guest rooms? Sounds like they intended to settle down here for good.

KITCHEN MARY: Probably they're meat-eaters, too? In other words, from now on I'm supposed to cook dead animals twice a day?

JUDITH: My friends believe in the Law by which our diet here is regulated. Besides, they're not going to stay with us long -- just a couple of days or so.

KITCHEN MARY: Well, that sounds a little better. Now then, what kind of snack do you want me to fix for them? What about that spicy broth -- you know, the new recipe that came through a few weeks ago?

JUDITH: The Consomé à la Paracelsus? An excellent idea!

NURSERY MARY: Too good for them, if you ask me!

JUDITH: That will be all. Show the gentlemen the way up to the house.

Try to be nice to them!

NURSERY MARY: Nice! Vagabonds, tramps, dirty strangers -- and a decent person is supposed to be nice to them!

(NURSERY MARY and KITCHEN MARY, exit to the right.)

URSULA: You aren't going to receive the strangers h e r e , Aunt Judith? Not in the sacred Parlour?

JUDITH: That's exactly what I'm going to do, my dear. Incidentally, you don't have to wait for them, if you don't want to, children. But Vera... where is your mother? She should be here to welcome our guests.

URSULA: Mother hasn't come back yet from her morning walk. She's still meditating, I guess, up there, on the Rock of Devotion.

JUDITH: She ought to be here, now... Listen, Ursula -- do you know the secret path up to the Rock?

URSULA: Mother used to take us along when we were still allowed to talk to her. Yes, I suppose I'd find the hidden path all right.

JUDITH: That's fine. Be a good girl then, and run up to the holy place to fetch your mother: she is needed here. Ask her to come at once.

URSULA: Want me to tell her about the visitors?

JUDITH: Certainly not. You are not supposed to talk to her at all -- you know that. Just deliver your message, and then keep quiet. Is that clear enough?

URSULA: Yes, Aunt Judith.

JUDITH: Well then, you'd better hurry.

URSULA: Do I have to go all by myself, or may the others come along with me?

JUDITH: You'll be safer with your brothers and sisters.

URSULA: Yes, Aunt Judith. (To the other children): Aunt Judith wants us to fetch Mother at the Rock of Devotion.

PUCK: Okay. Let's go.

JUDITH (to Jane, as the other children are moving towards the glass door): You run along with the others, Jane.

JANE: Number Seven doesn't want to run along with the others! Is afraid of the high, steep rock -- Number Seven is!

JUDITH: Nonsense, child. There's nothing to be afraid of.

JANE: But you don't know the others the way I do, Aunt! Nasty children they are -- may push poor little Number Seven from the high, steep rock...

THE SIX CHILDREN (standing near the glass door, burst out laughing -- not in a malicious way, just heartily amused.)

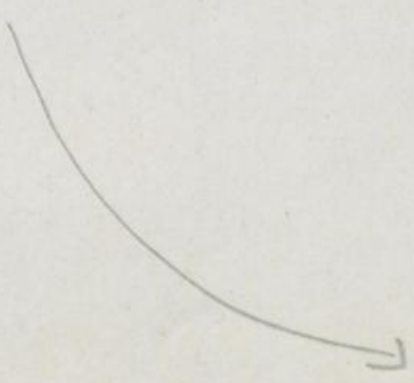
(NURSERY MARY appears at the door to the right to let the visitors in.)

NURSERY MARY: Well, here they are... You've asked for it, Miss Judith!

(She withdraws as soon as the THREE PROFESSORS have entered the room.)

(The three visitors -- PROF. H.F. UNCLE, PROF. HECTOR LARUE, and PROF.

LI TSO -- linger near the door, awe-struck and self-conscious. All three of them are white-haired, bespectacled, dressed in black, burdened with brief cases, umbrellas, and slouch hats. Of gloomy but respectable appearance, they look like the representatives of an expensive undertaking establishment. UNCLE, standing between his two colleagues, is tall and lean; whereas LARUE, to his right, is of short stature -- fragile, nervous, his sallow little face half-covered with a wool scarf. LI TSO, with his unmistakably Mongolian features, has the frozen,



unfathomable smile of a Chinese idol.)

THE SIX CHILDREN (have been staring at the visitors with icy curiosity and unconcealed distrust. Now they produce a grunting, grumbling noise, while escaping into the garden with deer-like shyness and agility. JANE follows them.)

THE THREE PROFESSORS (smile uncomfortably.)

JUDITH: Never mind the children. They're a little shy -- that's all. (Rolling towards the guests, then with cordially outstretched hands): And now -- welcome, my friends! It's so good to see you!

UNCLE (in a deep, hollow voice): It was good of you, Doctor Van-straaten, to allow us to come.

LARUE (in a high, whining falsetto): We are happy to be here. Infinitely happy, chère amie.

LI TSO (Bowing deeply): It is a great honor: the greatest!

JUDITH: Had a pleasant trip?

UNCLE: Not at all, Quite the contrary. I daresay the difficulties were all but insurmountable.

LARUE: To travel from Paris to the Californian coast -- quite an adventure, these days! Almost too much for me... Our usual journeys -- the mental excursions into cosmic space -- are certainly more convenient.

LI TSO: The trip I had to make from Shanghai may have been even worse than yours from Europe, dear friend. Yet I do not complain. Are we not philosophers -- detached, aloof, above the hardships of an evil, chaotic world?

JUDITH: Are conditions still so bad, out there? I'm surprised to hear that. After all, there is no war on, right now -- if I am not mistaken...

UNCLE: The war is over, they say; but surely there is no peace.

LI TSO: No peace in Asia...

LARUE: No peace in Europe, either...

UNCLE: Nor in rich, prosperous America. Nowhere!

JUDITH: Nowhere -- except here! Surrounded by crime and folly, this island remains untouched -- an oasis of wisdom and beauty.

UNCLE (with a sigh of relief): Yes, there is peace...

LI TSO: One breathes freely here, in the aura of friendly spirits.

LARUE: What comfort, what relief for our tortured nerves'.

UNCLE (looking around): So that is what the inner sanctum looks like-- the Master's haven, the heart of our cult! How wonderful to be here! To see these sacred things -- the bust, the altar, the portrait of the priestess...

LARUE: May we hope to be presented to Madame Vanstraaten?

JUDITH: Naturally. Soon. Vera will be back before long. As usual, she spends the morning hours up in the mountains, praying and meditating.

UNCLE: Up in the mountains... So the illuminata likes to retire to the majestic cliffs we passed in our motor boat as we approached the island?

JUDITH: The scene of Vera's spiritual exercises is what we call the Rock of Devotion -- a unique spot, lovely and isolated. It's not a place for people inclined to giddiness, though! The cliff hangs over an abyss, a chasm. Down below, at the foot of the steep slope, there are more cliffs and rocks -- washed by the surf, covered with water at the time of high tide. It was there, on those rugged stones, that the Master's boat, on his last, fatal trip... It was there that my brother passed from this life to higher forms of existence.

UNCLE: A holy place. Let us go there and meditate.

JUDITH: Vera doesn't like strangers to know the secret path leading up to the Rock. But I may show you the way. You belong to the family, after all.

UNCLE: Thanks, Madam Secretary General. We can hardly wait...

JUDITH: Patience! We have quite a program. (Opening, as it were, the official part of the ~~program~~ conversation): Friends, before disclosing to you my own news, I'd like to hear your reports. How is our Society getting along, these days?

UNCLE: We're trying hard, Doctor Vanstraaten. You may rest assured that your orders are always followed most conscientiously.

JUDITH: And the results?

UNCLE: Satisfactory -- to put it conservatively. Of course, it was not easy to re-organize our international movement -- disrupted as it was by the War. We succeeded, however, -- thanks to your realistic advice, Madam Secretary General, and, above all, thanks to the inspiring messages we received from the Master through the courtesy of our beloved Priestess.

LARUE: Madame Vera's prestige is considerable in occult circles all over Europe -- and it goes on increasing!

LI TSO: In Asia, too, our cult is becoming more and more popular with the intelligentsia. Thousands of men and women in China, India, and other countries, hoping for comfort and enlightenment from the Master, venerate Vera as his legitimate mouthpiece and prophet.

JUDITH: Excellent! I'm delighted to hear of your success -- delighted, but not surprised. How could it be otherwise? The present confusions and tragedies on the temporal plane cannot but help our cause. The more desperate the situation of the material world, the greater the appeal of immaterialized intelligences!

UNCLE: Certainly. No doubt. But the more desperate our followers, the more difficult our task!

LARUE: There is indeed a universal sense of apprehension, fear, uncertainty, a general malaise and uneasiness. People everywhere are afraid of the future -- its unknown dangers, its mysterious challenge...

LI TSO: Will our race survive? Where lies the salvation? How do we find the way out of the present crisis? These questions are on everybody's mind, are in the air -- disturbing, frightening...

UNCLE: The Master knows the answers. But he was silent for the past few weeks. Why?

LARUE: We have been hoping, waiting...

LI TSO: ... waiting in humble patience...

LARUE: ... and yet with ever-growing anxiety!

UNCLE: You may imagine, dearest Doctor Vanstraaten, how much your



precious, unexpected call, your generous invitation meant to us, at this critical juncture. No doubt, the news you're going to reveal come from the other side -- from h i m . We're all expectation...

JUDITH: You will not be disappointed. Friends, our great Teacher in the spirit world will not only speak to us again -- he will give us a sign, a visible token of his grace and loyalty!

LARUE: A token...?

UNCLE: ...visible...?

JUDITH: Be prepared to witness tonight the first materialization of Jan Vanstraaten's spirit!

LARUE: Tonight...? Here...?

JUDITH: In this very room.

UNCLE: To hear his voice -- to see his face again!

LI TSO: And to receive his message! A message he chooses to deliver in person, visible, must be of singular significance.

JUDITH: The subject my brother wishes to discuss tonight is indeed not without interest. To be brief, he has promised us some first-hand information about the imminent end of the world.

LARUE(with a little outcry): End of the world...?

UNCLE: I take it that you're using the term in a purely symbolic sense?

JUDITH: Not at all. We have reasons to believe -- in fact, we are almost certain that this planet will soon be destroyed by a cosmic explosion.

LARUE (shuddering): Soon...? Did you say s o o n , chère amie?

JUDITH: That's right. It seems to be a question of months or weeks -- not years.

UNCLE: And how did you find out...?

LI TSO: Was it the Master himself who told you...?

JUDITH: Not directly. It all began with a vision Vera had, one beautiful morning, on the Rock of Devotion. She was sitting there as usual, contemplating the sea. Under her very eyes the blue water changed its color, turned red, the red of blood. From the ocean of blood emerged a city -- a mighty fortress with high walls and seven towers. It was night. The city gleamed in the darkness. It was a spectacle of great beauty, Vera says, but at the same time very frightening --: the phosphorescent towers profiled against a dark, stormy sky.

LARUE: Phosphorescent towers... This is breath-taking! ... And then...?

JUDITH: Then there was lightning --- seven blinding flashes, seven streaks of celestial fire, followed by seven bursts of thunder. The towers collapsed -- swept away by the twofold rage of sea and sky. At the same time there was a downpour of hail -- a heavy shower of metallic stones, covering everything: the fiery sky, the ruins of the city, the blood-colored ocean. And a voice from heaven cried, "Woe betide you -- woe!" These awful words were spoken seven times --: seven times, the deadly malediction from above! Before the seventh "Woe," there was a pause -- a short silence of indescribable suspense and terror. After the seventh cry, and explosion of extreme violence shattered the universe. And that was the end.

LARUE: The end...

UNCLE: A question of weeks, you said?

JUDITH: Vera had the same vision seven times, seven days in succession, always at the same hour. Nothing changed: the purple

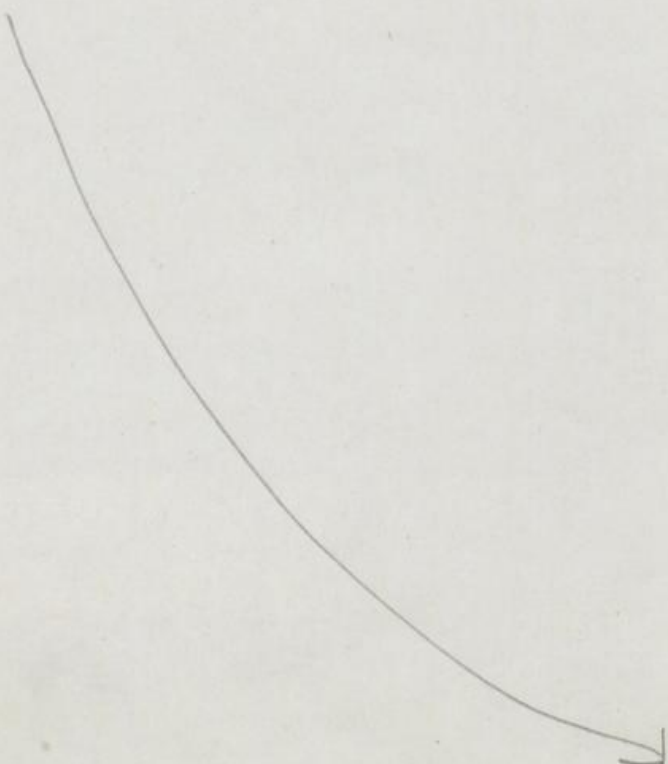
flood, the phosphorescent towers, the metallic hail -- seven times she had to endure their sight! But already after the first vision, the clairvoyant had understood. The world is coming to an end, she knew. And soon! The end is near. Any day the seventh "Woe" may sound.

LI TSO: And the Master? He confirmed Vera's prophetic dream?

JUDITH: He has indeed. The ultimate disaster -- he told us, without mincing his words -- has been agreed upon, unanimously and irrevocably, by all the Powers in charge. Man's more and more perfected depravity has scandalized the spirits. Our perverted race has been disturbing the peace of the universe long enough with ever new crimes, ever new blasphemies, ever new diabolical inventions. The viciousness of modern civilization exceeds all bounds. It is a disease that cannot be cured: it will be exterminated.

(A silence. Then):

UNCLE: Overwhelming... beyond words...



LARUE: Just one question, chère amie: Why has this tremendous revelation been concealed from us, up to now?

JUDITH: Vera insisted on this secrecy. She wanted to be quite sure.

UNCLE: Is the Master's word not enough?

JUDITH: She wanted more -- a sign. He promised it to her.

LARUE: Tonight's materialization....

LI TSO: The coming séance will bring us the decision!

JUDITH: That's why I wanted you to be here today, my friends. As representatives of the Vanstraaten Society you are entitled, indeed, are duty-bound to be present at the crucial meeting.

UNCLE: If he gives the sign, if he appears -- the mere thought is staggering...

LI TSO: Among millions of blind, ignorant men -- we, the only ones to know! We, the initiated, the illuminati!

JUDITH: A privileged position involving both unique opportunities and enormous duties! Imagine, friends, the role our Society may be destined to play during this last phase of the human drama! Ours will be almost unlimited authority, unprecedented power...

UNCLE: ... if he gives the sign!

(A knocking is heard at the door, off-right)

LARUE (starts nervously): What's that?

JUDITH (with a smile): Not the sign. Not yet. Just one of our Maryies. Come in.

(NURSERY MARY opens the door to the right.)

NURSERY MARY (from the door, without entering the room): Breakfast is served. Up in the cabalistic library.

JUDITH: Thank you, Nursery Mary. And will you please show the gentlemen upstairs. (To the professors): I'll join you later,

friends. Right now I'll have to be excused, just for a little while. Vera must be here any moment -- I'd like to talk to her, before presenting you.

UNCLE: Of course. Only too understandable, under the circumstances...

LI TSO: But what about our projected pilgrimage to the Rock of Devotion? After what we just heard, we are more anxious than ever to spend some hours of solemn contemplation at that hallowed place.

JUDITH: Quite so. As soon as I'm through with Vera, I'll draw you a little road map. I'm sure you'll enjoy the walk. But be careful not to lose your footing. The secret path is dangerous.

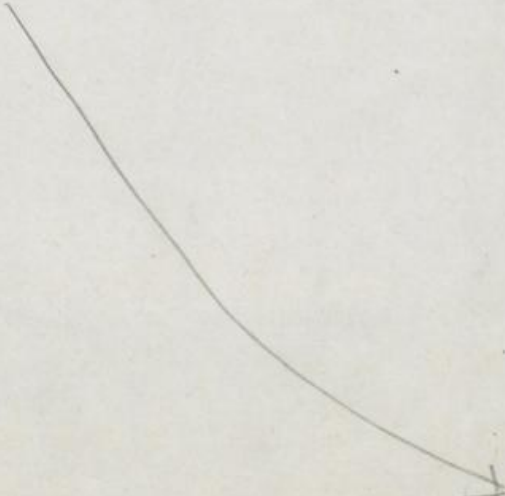
UNCLE: Don't you worry, Madam Secretary General. I am an accomplished mountain-climber -- it's my only hobby.

JUDITH: How nice. Well then, goodbye for now. And try to relax over your food.

NURSERY MARY: Nothing to relax about. The Paracelsus soup smells burnt.

LARUE: I'm afraid I don't have much of an appetite, anyhow -- for one reason or another...

(The THREE PROFESSORS shake hands with JUDITH; then, exit, to the right, with NURSERY MARY.)



(JUDITH, left alone, remains motionless, absorbed in thought. Then she moves her wheel-chair to the right side of the foreground and stops in front of a desk. Opening one of the drawers, she picks up a sheaf of papers and begins to read. After a few moments, VERA enters the room, coming from the garden, followed by the SIX CHILDREN. She is about 33 but does not quite look her age. She is beautiful -- of a fragile, sensitive beauty, but by no means anemic or frustrated. Her honey-colored hair, arranged in simple tresses around her head, seems almost too heavy a burden for her delicate neck. In contrast to the black of the other costumes, her dress is of immaculate white -- a loose, simple garment vaguely reminiscent of those worn by antique priestesses. With bent head, lost in thought, she remains standing near the glass door to the left. The SIX CHILDREN -- three of them to her right, three to her left -- also remain silent and motionless.)

JUDITH (her back turned to the glass door, fails to notice Vera's noiseless entrance and goes on reading.)

URSULA (after a long silence, in a timidly lowered voice): Aunt Judith...

JUDITH (turning her head, then also her wheel-chair): Oh, there you are! (to Vera): How are you feeling, dear?

VERA (with an absent-minded smile): Thank you... A little tired.

URSULA: May we go now, Aunt Judith?

JUDITH: Of course, my dear child, of course! You run along and play in the garden.

URSULA (reproachfully): Not in the garden, Auntie! It's high time for our yoga training hour in the Indian boudoir. You know, the new breathing exercises Father dictated the other day -- we have to practice them, or else Father will be mad.

JUDITH (slightly irritated): All right, all right, you do your exercises. What are you waiting for, anyhow?

THE SIX CHILDREN: So long, Mother.

VERA: Goodbye, children... Yes, I'm sure those exercises will do you a lot of good. It's a pity I can't join you.

URSULA: Why don't you, Mother?

PUCK: Gee, that would be fun!

VERA: Not today... I can't... Another time, maybe... Well, run along now, children.

(THE SIX CHILDREN, exit, to the right)

JUDITH: I hope you'll forgive me, dear, for having disturbed your morning meditation.

VERA (still rather vague and distraught): That's all right. Quite all right, my dear.

JUDITH: Of course, I wouldn't have bothered you, if it hadn't been for an important matter. Do you recall the name of Professor H.F. Uncle, the representative of the Vanstraaten Society in the United States?

~~VERA: I'm afraid~~

VERA: I'm afraid I don't.

JUDITH: But you must remember the name of Professor Li Tso, our agent in the Far East!

(PUCK sneaks into the room -- tiptoeing from the door at right to his aunt's wheel-chair.)

PUCK (whispers eagerly): Aunt Judith...

JUDITH: What's the matter now?

PUCK: Just want to ask you if I can ask Mama a little question.

JUDITH: You know perfectly well that you're not supposed...

VERA: That's all right, Judith. -- Well, what's on your mind, my son?

PUCK (close to Vera): It's just... You see ... I was wondering...

VERA: Speak up, dear. What is it?

PUCK: Nothing much. We need one more little brother -- that's all. Or a little sister. Couldn't you get us one? But it has to be in a hurry.

VERA (taking her hands from his shoulders; rather perplexed): But, child...

JUDITH: Nonsense!

PUCK: It's because of the Dance of Enticement tonight. The one with the trumpets, you know. There should be seven trumpets and seven angels to carry them -- that's the way Dad has ordered it. Well, we're short of one angel. So I thought Mama might help us out...

JUDITH: That's quite enough, Puck! You get out of here, and quickly!

PUCK (withdrawing towards the door to the right): I didn't mean to say anything wrong -- honest, I didn't. It's just that we'd like to do a good job tonight. And since Dad wants to see a dance with seven angels...

JUDITH: You heard what I said, you little imp. Get out.

PUCK: All right, Aunt Judith, all right. But don't blame us if anything goes wrong tonight! It won't be our fault, Aunt Judith, if anything goes wrong. (Exit.)

VERA: A little brother -- just like that! In a hurry! What an idea...

JUDITH: Too childish. Too absurd.

VERA: You know, they frighten me at times -- the children do. They don't have much to tell me, it would seem -- except, once in a while, something extremely puzzling.

JUDITH: Let's forget about it.

VERA: The dance of the Seven Angels... It is rather strange -- is it not?

JUDITH: I don't quite understand...

VERA: What could have been in Jan's mind when he asked the children to perform that particular ritual? After all, there are just six of them... Whom does he want to play the seventh angel? Simple Jane, perhaps?

JUDITH: Frankly, Vera, the whole issue seems to me of comparatively minor importance. What I was going to tell you...

VERA: I don't think we should allow Jane to dance with the other children. I'm strictly against it. Why, it's bad enough to have the poor thing attending our séances...

JUDITH: His order! He insists on her presence.

VERA (irritably): I know, I know! You don't have to remind me of his weakness for the little wretch. I know he's crazy about her -- sometimes I can't help thinking that he likes Simple Jane more than any of his legitimate children.

JUDITH: You know better, dear. But let us change the subject...

VERA: And then, why shouldn't he? He must have been more in love with Jane's mother than he was with me -- otherwise he wouldn't have betrayed me with her, in the first year of our marriage.

JUDITH: Why do you say such things? Jane's mother, as you know only too well, was a homely, humble creature. If the Master was good to her, his motive was pity rather than desire.

VERA: I don't know... And what was the motive behind his feeling for me? Maybe that was pity, too...

JUDITH: Vera! I am surprised.

VERA: Are you? -- Never mind. Don't pay any attention to me. I'm nervous -- that's all...

JUDITH: I'm sorry, my dear, to find you in such a condition. Just today I'd have liked you to be at your very best. We're having guests.

VERA (completely flabbergasted): What was that...?

JUDITH: Guests, visitors, my dear. Three representatives of the Van=straaten Society.

VERA: You're not trying to tell me that those three -- representatives are here, right in this house?

JUDITH: That's exactly what I've been trying to tell you for the past ten minutes.

VERA: And what are they doing here? How dare they...?

JUDITH: I've asked them to come.

VERA: You did indeed! But it's against the Law! Never would Jan have permitted... This place has always been out of bounds to all his



friends and disciples.

JUDITH: I know that. But in an emergency...

VERA: Emergency or not -- I don't see any reason...

JUDITH: Be sensible, dearest! Try to understand. Tonight's séance may turn out to be an event of unique significance, a turning point in human history. Suppose he gives the sign, appears, materializes...

VERA (closer to Judith; whispering): You think he will...?

JUDITH: I do not doubt it. But as for our guests...

VERA: Don't speak about them. Don't! I'd like to forget that there are strangers here.

JUDITH: In other words, you do not intend to see them?

VERA: Not now. Not before the séance.

JUDITH: As you wish. They'll be disappointed, though. You can't imagine how impatient they are to talk to you.

VERA: I have nothing to tell them. If they are puzzled and upset -- so am I. Even more than they are, perhaps. This painful, terrible uncertainty...

JUDITH: But there is no uncertainty, my dear! You'd better stop fooling yourself. -- When you entered this room, just a few minutes ago, I was re-reading the minutes of our recent séances. (Pointing at the papers she picked up from the desk,) There can't be any doubt that it was h e, the Master, who sent your vision. His message is as clear as it could be. He confirms expressly -- or almost expressly -- what you have known for weeks by instinct and intuition. The Day of Judgment is near...

VERA (tormented): I don't believe it -- don't w a n t to believe it, Judith...

JUDITH: You m u s t believe it, child. His word is beyond question.

VERA: But was it really h e who spoke to me? I'm not so sure... There was something peculiar about his voice, the last few times I heard it. It didn't ring quite true... Perhaps it was some demon trying to delude me?

JUDITH: How could you mistake a demon's voice for h i s ?

VERA: I don't know... Why did he sound so cold, so casual? "The world is coming to an end..." Such terrible aloofness! "The world is doomed, the world will go to pieces..." Just like that -- as if it were a minor accident, something without importance. I can't get over it -- his callous tone, his utter lack of pity!

JUDITH: Pity is weakness. They are hard, those in the higher spheres.

VERA: I'm sure they are; but I'm different. I look around, and my heart contracts with sorrow and compassion. (With a gesture towards the garden): How beautiful it is -- this poor, doomed world of ours! The trees, the little flowers, the leaves of grass, the birds -- they are so pretty, and so pitiful, so helpless in their beauty! They want to live, to grow, to multiply; but they must perish. The innocent adventure of their being here is coming to an end.

JUDITH: There is no end -- you know that. Or have you forgotten the fundamentals of the Master's teachings? Nothing is ever lost, the Master tells us; nothing is ever wasted -- no energy, no substance, no idea. Death is metamorphosis, a purification, a new beginning on a higher plane. Why should the death of our planet, the so-called "end of the world", be more terrible or more final than our own individual passing over?

VERA: Maybe you are right... And yet... (With a sudden outburst):

Oh, Judith, Judith -- I'm frightened...afraid...

JUDITH: Afraid -- of w h a t ? The coming Day of Judgment?

VERA: No, it's not that what worries me. Not the explosion -- no. It's h e . I'm afraid...

JUDITH: Of his materialization?

VERA: If I could be sure that he will really come!

JUDITH: But he has promised you...

VERA: I know he has. And still...

JUDITH: And still you doubt that he will keep his word?

VERA: ~~That's just what frightens me -- this doubt, deep in my heart. This agonizing, shameful, ugly doubt...But how can I trust him?~~ He's disappointed me too often. Oh, if you knew how desperately I kept begging him for a sign, a token! How fervently I asked him to appear, to materialize! But he never did. Why not? To punish me, of course.

JUDITH: To punish you -- what for?

VERA: There are so many things... You see, I've never been quite worthy of his love. At times he told me so. That last evening, for instance, in the sailing boat...

JUDITH: What happened? Did you make him impatient? Did you argue with him, maybe?

VERA: How would I have dared do such a thing? Oh, no!... But you know how difficult he could be at times. That evening, on his last trip, he was in one of his moods. So gloomy, so ill-humored, I didn't know what to do. I kept trying to cheer him up, but I got nowhere; he didn't even seem to listen when I talked to him. Just ignored me. And then that white boat came along.

JUDITH: What about that boat?

VERA: Nothing unusual, really. It was just an ordinary boat -- with white sails; nice to look at. There was a boy in the boat.

JUDITH: And how was he? Also nice to look at?

VERA: I don't know. I couldn't see his face. A silhouette -- that's all I saw of him; a dark silhouette profiled against a pale, silvery sky. He was tall and strong, and he was wearing a blue sweater. The kind of sweater sailors wear, you know; with a round collar.

JUDITH: How distinctly you recall these details! You must have been quite interested in that silhouette.

VERA: Naturally I was. A strange boat in this area -- imagine! Quite an exceptional sight -- isn't it? So of course I watched it. And when I noticed that the boy was waving at me, I waved back. The boy laughed, and so did I. That's why he was so cross.

JUDITH: Who? The boy?

VERA: No -- h e . He said that I had exchanged signals with the boy in the blue sweater -- had flirted with him. What an idea!

JUDITH: He was overworked and over-wrought. In such a state, even the wisest man is likely to exaggerate, to make mistakes.

VERA: Maybe he was not mistaken. I often wonder... Perhaps he was right, after all. Not about the flirtation exactly -- that was silly. But in a more profound, more subtle sense. Perhaps there was something in my attitude. I shouldn't have looked at the boy in the
~~in~~th

blue sweater. And I shouldn't have laughed. ~~There he was, my husband~~
~~ready to die! And what did I do? I laughed.~~

JUDITH: ~~You couldn't know what was going to happen later..~~

~~Vera: Still, I shouldn't have laughed.~~ If I hadn't -- he might not
have been drowned that night.

JUDITH: How do you figure that out?

VERA: He was angry at me about the boy in the boat and my frivolous
attitude. That's why we didn't talk for the rest of the trip. He
insisted on sailing out into the open sea. There was storm in the air:
old Jacob told him so. Old Jacob tried to warn him. I should have
warned him too. But I didn't. Yes, it was all my fault.

JUDITH: It wasn't, dear! Why torture yourself with painful, futile
thoughts? His time was up. The Powers wanted him. He had to go.

VERA: Why didn't he take me along? Why didn't I let myself sink, be
drowned with him?

JUDITH: Think of your mission, Vera. If you had gone with him -- what
would have happened to his work, his message? You are the intermediary
between him and us, you are his voice, his heir! What an inspiring
task! What vast responsibility! -- vaster than ever now, at this hour
of destiny, at this very moment.

VERA: Too much for me. I don't feel up to it. This fear -- it para-
lyzes, overpowers me... Do you know this anguish? No. I suppose you've
never experienced it -- this agonizing sense of dread and utter alone-
ness. You are strong and resolute. You've never been frightened, to
the roots of your being.

JUDITH: Not since I have found guidance and comfort over there, in
the spirit world.

~~Vera: What about the children? We'll have to tell them -- won't we?~~

VERA: I know, I know -- I, too, ought to have confidence... But how can I? If h e helped me, if I could rely on h i m -- yes, then I might regain my fortitude, my faith... Oh, I'm all mixed up. Go away.

JUDITH: You want to be alone?

VERA: Yes.

JUDITH (moving toward the door at right): I didn't mean to upset you, my dear...

VERA (follows her to the door; with a casual caress): Don't be cross with me, Judith.

JUDITH: Why should I be?

VERA: Because I'm so foolish. And want to be alone.

JUDITH (pointing at the bust): Alone with h i m ! That's only natural. (Exit.)

VERA (alone, walks slowly, with bent head, from the door to the foreground; stops in front of the bust. A long silence. Then, in a low voice): ~~I am, my love~~ -- Can you hear me^{Yan?} ... Yes, it's me again... You know what I'm going to ask you for... Do it, please... Appear to-night. Make yourself visible -- just for a little moment! P l e a s e, do it --- please, please, please... Whatever I have to know -- it's from y o u ~~please~~, I want to hear it! If the end of the world is really close at hand -- all right, but come and tell me so! Not that I like the idea... It's o u r world, after all; the world where you and I have been happy together... We h a v e been happy here -- haven't we, ~~my great love~~?... But if it has to be; if higher authority has decided to liquidate our planet; if the implacable Law requires the apocalyptic explosion -- I shan't complain or tremble, I'll try to be brave and philosophical and to prove worthy of your confidence. But you must help me, darling! You must tell me exactly what I'm supposed to do. You

must give me a sign. You must appear. Please, do!... If you don't, if you let me down -- oh, then that deadly fear will cover and submerge me like a huge, ^ablack wave: I'll go insane, I'll perish... That suffocating, murderous anxiety -- you know what causes it. I couldn't tell your sister; but you know. I fear you may not love me anymore -- or, which would be worse, that you have never loved me... Without your love, how could I go on living, in this world or in any other? How could I bear the burden of my visions, the curse and glory of my priesthood -- how? To you I owe whatever strength I have. I am weak. Forgive me for my weakness. So shamefully -- so unforgivably weak I am that I do need a sign, a token of your love. Be good, let me have it. Appear tonight. Please, do!... For mercy's sake... for love's sake... please... please... please... (She stands with her arms laid around the bust, her tearful face pressed against the stone, as the light dims and goes out.)

SCENE II

(Early evening of the same day. The palm trees and bushes outside, visible through the open glass door, are darkly silhouetted now against a quiet, silvery sea. Twilight inside the room.)

NURSERY MARY and KITCHEN MARY are busy preparing the place for the coming séance. The altar has been decorated with white flowers. In front of the altar, a heavy armchair, Egyptian in style, adorned with hieroglyphics. Around this central seat, a number of lower stools form a neatly arranged semicircle.)

NURSERY MARY (keeps a grim silence while dusting the throne-like chair. Suddenly she bursts out laughing.)

KITCHEN MARY (in the foreground, decorating the Master's bust with white flowers): What's so funny, Nursery Mary?

NURSERY MARY: Nothing, I was just thinking.

KITCHEN MARY: Must have been a mighty good joke you were thinking of.

NURSERY MARY: It was something funny, all right. Or don't you think she's a scream -- rolling about in her wheel-chair, all puffed up with pride and secrecy?

KITCHEN MARY: Who is all puffed up? Our Miss Judith?

NURSERY MARY: Imagines she's pretty smart, our sweet Miss, our darling little Judith! Wants to be smarter than everybody else -- smarter than her old nurse and governess! But she won't fool me -- not me! That secret of hers -- I know what it's all about!

KITCHEN MARY: What secret, Nursery Mary?

NURSERY MARY: There's something cooking...

KITCHEN MARY: Probably just your imagination!

NURSERY MARY: My imagination, eh? That just goes to show how little you know!... And what do you think those three weird visitors

from the outside world are doing here?

KITCHEN MARY: You've got me there. What are they doing here?

NURSERY MARY: And all that fuss about the gala tonight -- doesn't that make you suspicious?

KITCHEN MARY: Well, I suppose I'm not suspicious by nature.

NURSERY MARY: I'm sure you aren't. But I am. That's why I know that there's something cooking.

KITCHEN MARY: But you don't know w h a t .

NURSERY MARY: I do, too! Even a simple old woman can have enough sense to figure out a few things -- especially since our poor Madam talks so much in her sleep.

KITCHEN MARY: I don't get it. What has the talking of our Madam to do with Miss Judith's secret?

NURSERY MARY: Quite a lot. She says the most interesting things -- our poor Madam does, in her somnambulistic condition. You'd be surprised!

KITCHEN MARY: But she does her sleeping and talking at night when you aren't with her. How do you happen to know what she says?

NURSERY MARY: Usually she's still asleep when I come to her room in the morning, with a cup of sugared lotus tea and some Nirvana pap. Well, and then she prattles away -- and how! The fun I have, listening!

KITCHEN MARY: What does she talk about, mostly?

NURSERY MARY: Various things. You see, it all depends on what she's just dreaming. One day, she'll be a squirrel in her dream; next time, a cloud, or a bee, or an apple. And in each case she'll talk accordingly. Now, for the past few days she was dreaming that she was the earth -- you know, Mother Earth, the planet, the physical

plane we're living on.

KITCHEN MARY: Well, I'll be tied! And what did she have to say? I've always thought I'd have to be ploughed six feet under before I ever found out what Mother Earth sounded like.

NURSERY MARY: She was scared. "I'm the Earth, and I'm scared," she kept yelling. "I don't want to be blown up. Don't let me be shot to pieces."

KITCHEN MARY: What a crazy thing to say! Who on earth would be mean enough to shoot our poor Madam to pieces?

NURSERY MARY: But it wasn't our poor Madam who said those things -- it was Mother Earth! Don't you get that, Kitchen Mary? Mother Earth was scared; Mother Earth kept yelling that she didn't want to be blown up.

KITCHEN MARY: I don't want Mother Earth to be blown up, either. Why, if anything happened to our planet, that would be...

NURSERY MARY: That would be the end of the world. Catching on, Kitchen Mary?

KITCHEN MARY: Are you trying to tell me that the end of the world is near?

NURSERY MARY: If you ask me -- that's the great, big secret that makes our poor Ma'am so nervous and Miss Judith so arrogant.

KITCHEN MARY: Do you really think so...?

NURSERY MARY: I certainly do. Miss Judith and our Ma'am must have received some kind of information from the other side.

KITCHEN MARY: Oh, stop it, Nursery Mary! You're just trying to get me frightened.

NURSERY MARY: What's so frightening about it? Let the world go to pieces! Who cares?

KITCHEN MARY: Well, I don't know... I suppose I d o care, in a sense. It's o u r world, after all -- isn't it?

NURSERY MARY: A rotten world, a vale of tears, a place of misery -- that's what it is, particularly for poor folks like us.

KITCHEN MARY: Even poor folks are kind of fond of dear, sweet life.

NURSERY MARY: What has been about your life that makes you so attached to it? It hasn't treated you too ~~swell~~, as far as I can see. People like you and I -- we have nothing to lose!

KITCHEN MARY: And what about my life insurance? If I think of all those premiums I've been paying, year after year!

NURSERY MARY: Never mind your life insurance, you money-intoxicated old capitalist! All that matters is that we'll finally get rid of this foul, wicked planet and its outdated social order.

KITCHEN MARY: But maybe the end of the world will be even tougher on us than our present condition. I'm afraid it's going to be kind of painful...

NURSERY MARY: Fiddle-sticks! You'll have no time to get hurt when the cosmic explosion comes. There'll just be a big noise -- bum! Like that. And then it's all over. Wait and see!

KITCHEN MARY: It's going to be quite a shock, though, even if it doesn't take long.

NURSERY MARY: What's the difference? I tell you, the end of the world will be a good thing for us underprivileged proletarians. Why, it's going to be something like the world revolution we've been waiting for!

KITCHEN MARY: Don't be too sure of that. I reckon there'll always be two classes -- servants and masters; on the one hand, we, the ordinary folks; on the other, the -- what do they call it? -- the

"illuminarky," the ones in the know, people like Miss Judith and our Madam.

NURSERY MARY: Our Madam, indeed! She belongs to the exploited class, if anybody does. Poor thing! First she was at the beck and call of Master Jan -- his slave: that's what she was! --; and now she's under the thumb of our sweet Miss Judith.

KITCHEN MARY: I wouldn't say such things if I was you, Nursery Mary.

~~KITCHEN MARY:~~ It's dangerous to say such things, believe me. Our Miss Judith has a lot of pull, up there, in the highest quarters. Her word may carry quite a bit of weight when the Day of Judgment comes.

NURSERY MARY: We'll see about that. My conscience is clear -- what should I be afraid of? Haven't I always been a hard-working, Law-abiding citizen? There's no taboo or regulation Nursery Mary has ever broken; whereas our Miss Judith...

KITCHEN MARY: Hush! She may be listening...

NURSERY MARY: So what? I'm not saying anything wrong -- or am I? It's s h e who keeps offending against the Law, more and more openly! Take tonight's session, for instance. Do you think it's fair or just to allow simple Jane to dance with the other kids?

KITCHEN MARY: She's Master Jan's daughter, after all...

NURSERY MARY: To me, she's just a bastard. The illegitimate child of a crazy chambermaid has no business prancing about as an angel. It's an insult, a grave offense. And who is responsible? Our virtuous Miss Judith!

KITCHEN MARY: I'm sure she knows what she's doing.

~~NURSERY MARY: And what about those three foreigners she asked to sit in tonight? That isn't legal, either! Why, I wouldn't be surprised if Master Jan refused to come through tonight, with the vibrations of~~

NURSERY MARY: And what about those three foreigners she asked to sit in tonight? That isn't legal, either! Why, she's even shown them the way to the Rock of Devotion! Imagine! Those vagabonds know the secret path -- but we don't! If that isn't an insult!

KITCHEN MARY: Well, I suppose those three gentlemen were kind of chummy with our Master Jan...

NURSERY MARY: Chummy, my foot! His stooges -- that's what they were! You know how he treated their sort... No, I don't think Master Jan wanted those three to visit the sacred Rock. And as for the séance tonight -- just wait and see! I wouldn't be surprised if he refused to come through, with all those outlandish vibrations spoiling the atmosphere...

(THE THREE PROFESSORS, wearing long, black robes, enter the room from the right.)

UNCLE: All set for the great occasion? At what time do we start?

NURSERY MARY: Won't be long now.

UNCLE: I just happened to hear you speak about vibrations, my good woman. Are you versed in occult sciences?

NURSERY MARY: Even you would pick up a few things, mister, if you spent your whole life with a bunch of illuminati. I've been with the Vanstraatsens for about fifty years.

UNCLE: Fifty years! How I envy you!

NURSERY MARY: What do you envy me, mister? Fifty years of hard labor? Fifty years of loneliness and boredom?

LI TSO (to Kitchen Mary): And you, my friend -- have you also been in the Master's house for such an impressive length of time?

KITCHEN MARY: Fifty-three years and eight months. That is to say, in the beginning it was not yet Master Jan's house, of course, but the house of old Mynheer Vanstraaten in Amsterdam.

LI TSO: What an experience! You must have seen an infinity of wonderful things!

KITCHEN MARY (with great contempt): Oh, those! ... well, you see, that kind of goings-on is just routine to us; nothing to get excited about any more.

UNCLE (to Nursery Mary): Do you have any psychic talents, my good woman?

NURSERY MARY: In a sense. At organ-playing I'm pretty good.

UNCLE: Organ-playing? That would rather seem to indicate a musical disposition.

NURSERY MARY: Not at all. In fact, music gets on my nerves: I hate it. As for my organ-playing, that's supernatural, inspired -- if you know what I mean. Somebody moves my hands -- a very talented spirit, the ghost of an organist. Lived way back in the eighteenth century, in the German city of Bremen.

UNCLE: Interesting. (He produces a little note book and jots down a few words. Then, to Kitchen Mary): And what about you? I take it you had similar experiences?

KITCHEN MARY: I am the Kitchen Mary; I am not inspired. It is true, most of my cooking is done according to instructions our Madam gets from the other side. But that is not to say that I'm psychic myself. I just do what I'm told -- that's all.

UNCLE: Quite so. I appreciate your modesty. -- Now then... what time is it? I must admit that I am rather nervous. The suspense, the expectation... Have you girls ever witnessed a real materialization?

NURSERY MARY: What a question! After all, materializations are the speciality of our Madam. Sometimes it was great fun. For instance, that evening when President Lincoln showed up, quite unexpected,

after the end of the séance. There he was, sitting on the couch, with his high hat between his knees, looking kind of bewildered. My word, what a time we had!

UNCLE: The President's apparition seemed amusing to you? Interesting. (He takes down some more notes.)

KITCHEN MARY (laughing heartily): And that comical skin doctor, the late L. B. Blitzstein of Chicago, Illinois -- remember, Nursery Mary? He fluttered and hovered about, just like a little bird. In the end he flew through the glass door into the garden -- through the closed door, if you please! The cutest thing he was!

NURSERY MARY: Blitzstein was one of the best. But the one I liked most was that French actress, Sara Berman, or whatever her name was. She was so pretty to look at I could have kissed her! But of course, you never can tell what happens when you touch them...

KITCHEN MARY: Yes, we had many lovely visitors. But the one our Madam was waiting for, Master Jan, he never came. Kind of "frus-kraing," isn't it?

LI TSO: He will appear tonight.

NURSERY MARY: Well, you never can be sure. I wonder...

(JACOB, the fisherman, enters from the garden. White-haired and bearded, he is a venerable and picturesque figure, with strangely fixed, wide blue eyes in a weather-beaten, tanned face. Wears a black cloak and sandals.)

JACOB: She wonders. They're always wondering, up here, in the villa. But the sea is the way it is -- nothing to wonder about. The sea is powerful and wonderful. That's the way it is.

LARUE: Who is this man?

NURSERY MARY: It's Jacob, the fisherman. Don't pay any attention to him.

KITCHEN MARY: He lives all by himself, in a hut on the beach. Never shows up, except when there is a ghost party. Parties he's crazy about; hasn't missed one since the day Master Jan passed over.

NURSERY MARY: Not that we like having him around! We don't. It was in his boat, you know, that Master Jan... Jacob was navigating when it happened. No wonder he's a bit touched. (She points to her head.)

(The THREE PROFESSORS move shyly away from the fisherman.)

LARUE (terrified): He killed him...

LI TSO: This poor old man? Oh, no! He was merely a tool -- used by the Invisible; an instrument of dark, unknown powers.

JACOB: Yes, the sea is dark and powerful... Look at it! How smooth it is! How quiet! Just as it was that evening... The same lovely sunset! That means storm... As if I hadn't warned him! But he didn't listen... (Suddenly addressing himself to Larue, aggressively): Do you know how to swim?

LARUE (starting back): I beg your pardon...

JACOB: I bet you don't.

LARUE: Mais c'est un fou...

JACOB: He didn't, either. Couldn't swim at all! That's why he was drowned. Landlubbers you are, all of you; cowards afraid of water; common rats, creeping things, ugly reptiles...

LARUE: What a tiresome old fool! Most irritating.

JACOB (sitting down near the glass door): Doesn't know how to swim! And there is storm in the air. Bad Weather, the kind we had that other night when my boat went down with the Master. Just as bad,

I tell you ...

LARUE: What is he talking about? Why should there be a storm? The sky is clear; no clouds...

JACOB: See that dark little spot, just where water and sky touch each other? Watch out, landlubbers! It may look harmless to you -- a tiny cloud, nothing to worry about. But just you wait a while! It's going to grow, that cloud -- and fast! It's going to darken the sky and the sea, and there will be a terrible battle between the dark, angry waves and the dark, angry cloud. Just as it was that other night, just the same kind of thing...

(The door at right opens noiselessly: the SIX CHILDREN enter the room, dressed in loose, black garments with silver wings on their shoulders. Each child carries a trumpet in his right hand and, under his arm, an angel mask. The white, smiling faces of the masks are turned towards the audience -- creating an uncanny impression in the lowering dark of the room. The procession moves quietly to the center of the stage.)

LARUE (with a nervous little outcry): What's that?

PUCK (with a high, silvery giggle): Just us... Just the kids...

LARUE: And I thought the psychic phenomena were already starting!

URSULA: We are the angels. Unfortunately, just six angels, so far.

(Jane, also wearing a long, black garment adorned with wings, stumbles into the room. The mask she carries under her arm looks like a sad caricature of the angelic pattern.)

JANE: Number Seven -- it's me...

URSULA (Contemptuous): Look at her! What a mess!

PUCK(giggles): Her wings are all crooked! And that funny mask of hers -- is that supposed to be the face of the seventh angel?

JANE: It's not my fault... Don't laugh at me... please, don't...

JACOB (mutters all by himself): Common rats, ugly mice -- even the little ones! Nasty vermin, bats... What do they have those wings for? Should have good, solid fins instead! Wings are no good in the water; wings won't help them when the sea is rough...

(JUDITH, from the right. The festive dress she wears resembles her usual costume in shape and color but is made of richer and heavier stuff.)

JUDITH: What's the matter here? Why are you people sitting in the dark? You there, Nursery Mary, light the candles, quickly! And you, Kitchen Mary, close the glass door, draw the curtain. It is getting chilly...

NURSERY MARY: All right, all right, Miss Judith -- don't you get all feathered-up.

JUDITH: You should know by now, Nursery Mary, how to prepare this room for a gala.

NURSERY MARY: What do you expect from a poor servant who isn't told anything?

(NURSERY MARY lights the seven candles on the altar, while KITCHEN MARY draws the heavy, black curtain over the glass door.)

JACOB: Go ahead! Just go ahead, you fools! Lock yourselves in! Creep into your hole! Hide in your molehill, so you won't have to see the sky. That little cloud over there -- you don't want to watch how it grows and darkens. Go ahead, hide from the storm, if you can...

JUDITH (to the Professors): I hope the queer old fellow hasn't been bothering you, my friends. He can be tiresome, but he's perfectly harmless.

UNCLE: We've heard of his terrible -- experience. We feel sorry for him.

JUDITH: Quite so. That -- experience has done something to his mind... Incidentally, did you find your way to the Rock all right, Professor?

UNCLE: Without too much difficulty. It was a wonderful walk.

LI TSO: The most wonderful one, indeed, I've ever had in my life!

LARUE: Coming from t h e r e -- from that most sacred shrine --, one feels so calm, so confident and fearless. All nervousness is gone.

UNCLE: Yes, now we're ready to hear whatever the Master may have to tell us.

JUDITH: It's about time to start.

JANE (to Judith, pointing to herself): "Is Number Seven pretty? Will Father be pleased with his new ^{little} angel?"

JUDITH: You're all right, child; quite all right. Don't you worry.

(She moves her wheel-chair to the center of the room; then clasps her hands and cries): Friends! May I have your attention!

(THOSE PRESENT gather around the speaker -- except JACOB who remains apart, near the covered glass door.)

JACOB (~~he~~ lifts a corner of the curtain covering the glass door to take a peep at the sky): Watch out, landlubbers! Careful! It isn't so small anymore -- the small, dark cloud over there! It's growing fast enough now. It's getting fatter and blacker -- just as ^{it} did that night when it swallowed the Master...

JUDITH: Hush, Jacob! -- And now, friends, I want to remind you once more of the extraordinary significance of tonight's meeting. As you know, we have reason to hope that our illustrious Teacher on the other side

may honor us with his personal visit...

(General nods of excitement and approval.)

PUCK: Is Dad going to bring us presents from over there?

DORIS: How long is he going to stay?

CHRISTOPHER: May we ask him some direct questions?

CASPAR: It's so exciting -- almost like Christmas Eve!

URSULA: But, Caspie! To me, Dad's first materialization is m u c h more exciting than Christmas and Easter and Santa Claus combined!

JUDITH (silencing the tumultuous chorus with the authoritative gesture of an experienced public speaker): Quiet, please! There will be no materialization, unless you children behave yourselves and concentrate on your dance. Tonight you really want to be at your best -- don't you?

URSULA: Of course, we do, Aunt Judith. But we're afraid Simple Jane may spoil our whole performance.

JUDITH: Nonsense. Jane is going to do a fine job -- I'm quite sure of that.

JACOB (peering through the glass door): There it is already -- the storm; there it is now...

JUDITH: Be seated, friends. Nursery Mary, let us hear some music.

NURSERY MARY (rushing to the organ): I pray my dear organist is not going to let me down...

JUDITH: Get ready, children! Your masks!

THE SIX CHILDREN (slip the masks over their faces and fall in line for the opening of the dance.)

JANE (stands apart, struggling with her mask. As she has finally succeeded in putting it on): Number Seven all set! Ready to blow the trumpet!

NURSERY MARY (with closed eyes, as if in a trance -- has started

playing at the organ; first just sporadic, disconnected chords out of which develops a fugue-like composition in the style of J. S. Bach.)

JUDITH (has moved her wheel-chair to the right side of the central seat in front of the altar. Inviting Uncle to join her): If you please, Professor! Right here, to the left of the medium...

UNCLE: Next to her heart! A privileged place. I appreciate your courtesy, Madam Secretary General. (He sits down -- followed by LARUE and LI TSO.)

JACOB (still near the glass door): Now it is getting wild, the sea! Look at those big, black waves with their white, angry heads... Just as it was that other night -- ~~the~~ just as wild, just as furious...

KITCHEN MARY: Let's go, Jacob! The sitting is about to begin. (She leads him to the semicircle of stools; both sit down.)

THE SIX CHILDREN (open the dance -- solemnly striding about to the rhythm of the organ music.)

JANE (stands apart, trumpet in hand -- waiting.)

(After a few moments of music and dance, VERA enters the room from the right -- her white gown adorned with white flowers, her face transfigured in pallid beauty under the white head-band. Her gait and expression are those of a sleepwalker as she strides slowly, with fixed eyes, from the door to the Egyptian throne.)

LARUE (whispers): The priestess...

JUDITH: Hush...

VERA (has reached the chair and sits down -- rigidly erect, her eyes sightless with concentration.)

THE SIX CHILDREN (continue their dance with growing intensity -- imitating pantomimically the horrors of the Apocalypse. They brandish invisible swords, fight imaginary dragons, pour out the vials of wrath over their victims. Finally all six of them form a row in

the middle of the stage and raise their trumpets.)

JANE (joins the others, summoned by a gesture from Ursula.)

PUCK (produces the first trumpet-blast, whereupon the other children cover their faces with their hands, in a gesture of horror.)

VERA (leans back and closes her eyes at the sound of the first trumpet.)

THE SEVEN CHILDREN (stand motionless, except the one who is just blowing the trumpet. After Puck, it is BETTY's turn; then, in fairly quick sequence, DORIS', CHRISTOPHER's, CASPAR's, and URSULA's. Each trumpet blast is followed by a hollow echo from the organ and, on the part of the dancers, by a gesture of horror. Now it is JANE who puts the instrument to her mouth. She blows, but there is no tone. She tries it again -- and is unsuccessful. The others stand motionless -- waiting. Finally the SIX CHILDREN take off their masks and stare at the desperate Jane. Unsmiling, with cold, merciless curiosity, the CHILDREN watch on as JANE struggles with her silent instrument.)

VERA (moves irritably, opens her eyes.)

JANE (has taken off her mask and stares helplessly at the recalcitrant trumpet; whispers): All shrunk away... It's not my fault... All gone..

JUDITH (with a sharp, hissing whisper): That will do. Join the circle, all of you, immediately. I'll talk to you later, Jane.

THE SEVEN CHILDREN (rush to their places around the altar -- JANE, a few steps behind the others, weeping noiselessly.)

VERA (whispers, almost without moving her lips): Close the circle... Quiet...

NURSERY MARY (who continued playing after the end of the dance, now gets up, careful not to make any noise, and blows out the candles on the altar, except for one light in the center of the candelabrum. Then she sits down on the only stool still vacant.)

VERA (mutters, almost tonelessly yet distinctly understandable in the profound stillness): Close the circle... close it ... I am ready...

THE "SITTERS" (now forming a semicircle, take each other by the hand. The two persons sitting next to Vera -- JUDITH and UNCLE -- touch with their finger tips the medium's wrists lying on the arm-rests of the throne-like chair.)

VERA (whispers): He is not far... I sense his presence... He is in this room....

(A long silence. The howling of the storm is heard from outside. Then):

VERA (always with closed eyes, in a trance-like state): Is it you, dear?

JACOB: No -- just the storm... Just as it was that night...

JUDITH: Hush...

VERA: Yes, it's you -- I know it... This breath of air touching my brow -- it's you: You are here...

URSULA (with a half-repressed outcry): I feel him too... The chilly breeze -- right here, on my neck...

OTHER SITTERS: Me too... Me too... He touches my hand... my forehead... How could he is! Icy...

JUDITH (whispers to her neighbor): They are in contact. He's coming through...

VERA (listening attentatively to inaudible voices): Yes, dear, yes... I can hear you... But you are far away... Why is that?... Speak up, dear... I can't get you...

LI TSO (whispers, awe-stricken): He is talking to her...

VERA (listening): Yes, I suppose now it's a little better... What

were you saying, dear?... No, I will not repeat that... Why not? Just because... Well, if you h a v e to know: Because I do not like that unkind, bitter tone of yours... That's right: I resent it... It hurts my feelings... yes... That's the way things are? I have to face the truth?... All right, all right... The world is bad... I know.. The human race will perish... Yes, you said that before... Always the same reproaches, the same threats! ... Stop it, dear... Enough! ... No, I don't want to hear it any more...

JUDITH (whispers): Be patient!

VERA (without paying attention to her): Words, words, words... And your voice sounds so strange again... Is it y o u r voice, dear? Is it really y o u who is speaking to me? ... Well, if it is you -- why do you not appear? Don't you remember what you promised me? All right then, make yourself visible. Do it, please! ... Just as a favor to me; just to make me happy... please, please, please...

URSULA (whispers): Please, Father, please...

THE OTHER CHILDREN (with the exception of JANE, join in, whispering fervently): Please, Father, please...

VERA: Do you hear them, Jan? Appear, appear! If you don't feel like doing it for me -- do it for t h e i r sake, do it for the children! They want s o much to see you. Are you going to disappoint them?... I don't understand you, dear. You used to be such a kind, thoughtful father. But the way you're acting now -- that's cruel... Yes, dear, you're being cruel...cruel... Oh, how very cruel you are!

JUDITH (hissing): Careful! You know how touchy he is.

VERA: Do it for your friends and disciples -- for those present here, and for the others scattered all over the world. In all their anguish and uncertainty, they are looking to y o u for comfort, guidance, help. Give them the sign for which they long and pray. It is the

Master's duty to be with his flock in the hour of danger and decision. Your duty, Jan Vanstraaten -- do you hear me?

JUDITH: Careful! Don't go too far...

VERA (with increasing intensity): Your duty, to inform us, to reveal your secret! You have told us so much that you are now obliged to tell us everything. We have a right to know what is in store for us. Come before us and speak! Appear! I have your word, your promise! You must appear, or else...

JUDITH: Control yourself, Vera, please...

VERA: Or else, your priestess will lose her faith in you. How can I believe in anything you say if you do not keep your promises? I shall no longer believe that you share the wisdom of the higher spheres; I shall no longer believe that the end of the world is near; I shall no longer believe that you love me -- : if you do not appear!

JUDITH: This is blasphemy...

VERA (getting up from the chair, with a great gesture): I demand ~~that~~ that you appear, Jan Vanstraaten! I insist on it! I order it!

(A gentle tapping is heard from the left.)

VERA (standing up, her eyes still closed): Is that you, Jan Vanstraaten -- you, knocking at the door? Make yourself visible!

(The knocking on the left side of the stage repeats itself -- this time accompanied by a rasping noise as if human hands were scratching the glass door from the outside. Some of the sitters -- UNCLE, LARUE, URSULA, CASPAR, CHRISTOPHER -- have jumped from their seats.)

VERA (with ecstatic intensity): Appear! Appear! Whatever you may look like -- appear, materialize! We can stand your sight, even if it is terrible! We are ready to receive you! We want you! Come!

Appear!

(The tapping and scratching noises increase. All those present, except JUDITH and JACOB, have jumped from their seats by now. The THREE YOUNGER CHILDREN, LARUE, and KITCHEN MARY run in panic to the door at right.)

VERA (with extreme fervor): I knew you would come, my beloved! You are here, you have responded to my call! Enter this room! Be visible! Appear!

(The glass door opens from the outside: a gust of wind blows into the room. In the flickering light of the single candle, the contours of a tottering human figure become visible behind the curtain covering the glass door.)

VERA (with a last delirious outcry): A p p e a r !!

(The human figure staggers, collapses, and falls his full length into the room. At the same time the candle is blown out by the wind. Complete darkness. A scream from the assembly.)

VERA (in a breaking voice): From...where...do you come?

THE VOICE OF THE UNKNOWN MAN: From down there... from the depths...

C U R T A I N

ACT TWO

SCENE I

(Next morning. The Egyptian throne and the stools have been removed. The glass door to the left is still covered with the heavy curtain. The dim light seems to be focussed on the couch, which is now placed near the glass door.

On the couch, a human figure -- lying motionless, covered with a blanket. VERA sits next to him.)

VERA (bent over the stranger, whose forehead and temples she strokes gently with her finger tips): Awake, stranger, awake... Let me see your eyes. Tell me who you are... Awake... Who are you?... I want to hear your voice... Awake... awake...

THE STRANGER (TILL) (stirs in his sleep)

VERA (starting back): You are alive... You breathe... Who are you? From where do you come?... Is it y o u -- disguised, rejuvenated?... No, it is not y o u ... You are not h e ... Who are you? Who has sent you here? Are you h i s messenger?... Tell me... Wake up, and tell me... Wake up... wake up...

TILL (raises his head a little; tries to open his eyes; speaking very slowly, with great difficulty): It's... me...

VERA (withdrawing from him, with horror): No, it isn't you... no, no...

TILL (stretching out a trembling hand for her): Don't go away... You are beautiful...

VERA (still withdrawing in the direction of the door at right):
... I am frightened... You are not h i s messenger... Your eyes are strange... You have a stranger's voice... I do not know you, stranger... Oh... (She escapes. Exit, to the right.)

Till (staring after her): Gone... vanished... Too bad... (He sinks back into the pillows; falls asleep again.)

(After a few moments, the SIX CHILDREN tiptoe into the room, coming from the garden.)

URSULA (whispers): He must be here, on the couch. I'd like to have a look at him.

CASPAR (whispers): Me too. But it's so dark you can't see anything.

CHRISTOPHER: Suppose we draw the curtain from the door?

CASPAR: Can we risk it?

PUCK: I can. (He removes the curtain from the glass door.)

(It is only now, in the full daylight, that TILL becomes plainly visible for the first time. He is a goodlooking, athletic young man of about 25 -- his features, for all their vigor and freshness, already marked by early adventures. Some seaweed is hanging in his thick, tousled hair. He wears a long, blue bathrobe of rough material -- now still covered by the blanket. Next to him, on a chair, lie his own clothes -- a blue wool sweater and a pair of old blue linen pants --, soaked with water and mud.)

URSULA (studying his face): What do you think of him?

CASPAR: Pretty nice, I'd say.

URSULA: He doesn't look like Dad, though.

PUCK: Not a bit.

CASPAR: Aunt Judith says he is Dad's messenger.

DORIS: Is he a ghost?

URSULA: I guess so. He was quite dead, you know, when he arrived last night. Mother woke him up by playing the magnetic game with him. The whole night she kept rubbing his forehead with her finger tips.

BETTY: Looks kind of heavy, for a ghost. Kind of grown-upish.

CASPAR: I suppose he's all right.

CHRISTOPHER: You never can tell. Maybe he is a demon.

CASPAR: But, Christopher! How should a demon find the way to our island? And just last night when we were expecting Dad's materialization!

CHRISTOPHER: That's just it. We were waiting for Father, but he did not show up. Why not? Because our Dance of Enticement was not good, not enticing enough. So Father, in his anger, went away -- leaving the house without protection. A demon took advantage of the opportunity...

URSULA: Chris has got something there. Maybe he is a demon, after all...

CHRISTOPHER: Maybe he is the Beast that rises up out of the sea. (He tries to scrutinize Till's face, peering intently through his eyeglasses.) He has got quite a mop of hair -- hasn't he. That's probably to cover up the names of blasphemy.

DORIS: And he hides his feet because they are like the feet of a bear.

BETTY: And his mouth, when he opens it, is like a lion's mouth.

CASPAR: I'm sure you are mistaken, -- all of you.

URSULA: Maybe they are. But then, we must not take any chances. Suppose there is something wrong with him, he is an evil power or at least a nasty poltergeist. Why, he might bewitch the whole place!

TILL (stirs in his sleep.)

THE SIX CHILDREN (frightened, withdraw from the couch; watch him suspiciously from a distance.)

URSULA: He has to be exorcised -- right now, before he wakes up.

CASPAR: I am against it, Ursula. If Mother wanted us to exorcise this ghost, she would have told us so.

CHRISTOPHER: Coward.

CASPAR: I have as much courage as you, but I don't want to do anything against the Law.

URSULA: But it i s n ' t against the Law, Caspie! Look, our little exorcism won't hurt him at all, if he is really good. And if he isn't -- well, then we have to get rid of him anyhow. So you see, there is no risk involved.

CASPAR: Well, I suppose that's true...

URSULA: Of course it is.

CHRISTOPHER (rummaging through the box of costumes): What do we wear?

URSULA: Full dress. The exorcising set number one.

PUCK: The masks with the big horns and teeth? That's dandy!

CHRISTOPHER: Whistles?

URSULA: Naturally. The screaming whistles and the Chinese gong.

DORIS: Hurry up! He's stirring again...

THE SIX CHILDREN (cover their faces quickly with the "exorcising" masks -- diabolical grimaces, painted in glaring colors, with long, pointed horns and tusks.)

PUCK: I want the Chinese gong. (He takes it.)

URSULA: All right, Betty, Doris, you two make as much noise as possible with the little flutes. The screaming whistles are for the big three.

CASPAR: Well, I certainly hope we aren't doing anything against the Law...

URSULA: Nonsense. We're just putting him through a test -- that's all. In a few minutes, we'll know what's the matter with him. And now, let's go!

THE SIX CHILDREN (begin to perform a wild dance around the couch -- producing at the same time shrill noises with their whistles and the

Chinese gong. While striding and gesticulating, they recite the following words): Demon, demon, fly away! -- Friendly ghost we want to stay.

TILL (awakens; sits up; stares at the disguised dancers -- flabbergasted.)

THE SIX CHILDREN (withdraw a few steps, but go on dancing and whistling.

CHRISTOPHER: He is a demon! Look, his awful eyes!

CASPAR: He is all right. The ritual has no power over him.

TILL (still speaking with difficulty): Hello... you there... you little devils! ... Where the hell am I?... In hell? (He stretches out his hand for PUCK, who has ventured too close to the couch.)

PUCK (dodges Till's grip with a horrified cry; escapes to the garden.)

THE OTHER CHILDREN (follow Puck, in panic.)

(THE SIX CHILDREN, exit to the left.)

TILL (staring after them, terrified): I'll be damned... What am I saying?... I am damned, for all I know... This must be hell... To hell with it... (He sinks back, pulling the blanket over his head.)

(After a few moments, JANE enters noiselessly from the garden.)

JANE (standing a few steps away from the couch, she looks in silence at Till's covered figure. Then, in a shy whisper): Strange ghost...

Dear stranger... (As TILL fails to react, she sneaks to the box containing costumes and instruments, picks up the big drum she was using in the opening scene of Act ONE, and begins beating it.)

TILL (peeping out from under the blanket): Another little devil? Go away.

JANE: Not me... not me... Am not one of the little devils... Don't belong to the family... Not me...

TILL: If this isn't hell, it must be a madhouse. In fact, she looks mad as hell!

JANE (beating the drum): Don't be mad at me, strange ghost!... The trumpet didn't work... I couldn't help it -- honest, ghost, I couldn't! No tone: all gone, all shrunk away... Was it my fault? Is Number Seven guilty?

TILL: Well, I suppose you didn't quite know what you were doing, kid.

JANE (with growing anxiety): Yes yes, Number Seven is guilty; so she must do something nice to make good for the wrong she's done. Is there anything nice I could do for you, stranger? ^{Do you} Like my drum?

TILL: Frankly, I don't.

JANE: Or my shells? Number Seven gives you all her shells: that's nice of her -- isn't it? A nice thing to do. Here they are. (She produces a handful of shells and showers them over Till's head.)

TILL: That's very sweet of you, kid. But if you want to do something really nice, just tell me where I am and how I got here.

JANE (withdrawing shyly toward the glass door): Don't ask poor Number Seven... Poor Number Seven does not know, can't tell you... Ask the shells! They know... Magic shells: know all the answers... all the stories... stories of storm and sea... Ask the shells -- not me... (She disappears into the garden.)

TILL (alone, puts one of the shells to his ear): All the stories of storm and sea... That doesn't help me, either... (He drops the shell, discouraged. After a silence): If I only knew...

JANE (appears once more in the frame of the open glass door. With a coyly coquettish smile:) Number Seven will think of something even nicer to do for the nice stranger -- something so terribly nice that it makes the stranger forget all about Number Seven's guilt. Yes, ^{she'll} think of something to make good for the nasty trumpet... (Exit.)

TILL: Poor, crazy thing ... Crazy place... How did I ever get stuck here? ... Oh, my poor head is spinning... (He closes his eyes.)

(OLD JACOB enters from the garden -- carrying a garland of seaweeds, algae and aquatic flowers.)

JACOB: Prince of the waves...illustrious nix... stately son of Neptune...

TILL (opening his eyes): God, another lunatic...

JACOB: I am Jacob, the fisherman: It was in my boat that the Master went down to your watery kingdom. (Pointing to the garland): This is my offering to you. Or would you rather have some crabs and jellyfish?

TILL: No jellyfish, for God's sake!

JACOB: You speak of God -- and are a god yourself! That's funny. (Looking at him admiringly): I enjoy looking at you, lord of the ocean. How godly you are! How handsome! How powerful, even while resting here -- your bed adorned with shells, your mane full of pretty little things from the depth...

TILL: Pretty, little things...? (He removes a piece of seaweed from his hair and examines it): Very pretty!

JACOB: Wait, I'll make you even prettier. (He puts the wreath of aquatic flowers around Till's neck; then, beaming with satisfaction):

You couldn't be prettier. Divine and wild: just perfect!... Yes, the sea is divinely wild, wildly divine, the most dangerous lover. I tried to warn him, but he did not listen. How is he getting along, down there?

TILL (covering his forehead with his hands): If I have to take much more of this, I'll go mad myself!

JACOB: And last night again -- the same story! I knew there was going to be heavy weather. Didn't I tell them all about that cloud? But no, they wouldn't believe me! Just ignored my warnings -- landlubbers, rats, ugly reptiles they are!

TILL: Sure, Grandpa, sure! I believe every word you say...

(NURSERY MARY and KITCHEN MARY enter from the right -- the former, carrying a tray with pitcher and glass; the latter, presenting a covered dish.)

NURSERY MARY and KITCHEN MARY (stop a few steps away from the couch): May the Powers guide and protect you, entity.

TILL: Good morning. You are nurses, I presume?

JACOB: Landlubbers -- that's what they are! Vermin, ugly mice, cowards afraid of water! Look at them, how they tremble! Are afraid of you -- look!

NURSERY MARY: Not exactly afraid; but a poor old servant had better not take any chances -- especially when it comes to dealing with unknown visitors from the other side.

JACOB: Jacob, the fisherman, finds it impossible to stand the presence of these two wretched hags. Old Jacob prefers to get out. Farewell, dear prince of the waves, handsome deity, my stately nix -- farewell!

TILL: So long, Grandpa. Take care of yourself. (To the two woman servants): I'm surprised you let him walk around without a guard.

JACOB: I'll be back with jellyfish and crabs. Don't worry. I'll be back as soon as possible. (Exit, to the left.)

TILL: Jellyfish, of all things! That kills me... (To the two women): Well, and what is it you're bringing me, my beauties? Something good, I hope.

NURSEMARY MARY: Doctor Vanstraaten has sent us with the libation.

TILL: Medicine? But your doctor doesn't even know what's wrong with me.

NURSEMARY MARY: It is the Osiris punch. Our finest mixture.

KITCHEN MARY (presenting the covered dish): And here you have a dish of Orphic pancakes -- the latest intuition of our Madam.

TILL (examines distrustfully the offered drink and food; then): And what about a real, ordinary breakfast? Hot coffee, fried eggs with bacon, and some buttered toast -- that would do the trick!

NURSEMARY MARY (quickly): Coffee is against the Law.

KITCHEN MARY: To say nothing of bacon and eggs! Practically everything is forbidden, these days. The diet regulations from the other side ~~stars~~ are getting so tough it isn't even funny.

TILL: Seems to be a mighty difficult man, that doctor of yours. Is there no way of getting around his silly regulations?

KITCHEN MARY: To begin with, our doctor is not a man but a very distinguished lady -- namely, our Miss Judith.

TILL: A woman doctor in charge? That explains everything.

NURSEMARY MARY: Besides, you have no business calling our regulations "silly". We resent such irreverent talk. The Master certainly knew what he was doing when he ruled out bacon and eggs.

TILL: O.K., O.K. -- let's forget about the bacon and eggs. But a cup of coffee and some toast couldn't do any harm -- or could it?

NURSERY MARY: Coffee! Toast! Since when are such profane things mentioned in our sacred parlour?

KITCHEN MARY: And just now of all times, with the Day of Judgment so close at hand!

TILL: The Day of Judgment...? -- There we go again!

NURSERY MARY: I wouldn't be so hoity-toity, if I were you, strange spirit. Even if you belong to the ruling class over there...

TILL: To the ruling class? That's interesting. Why don't you tell me what kind of rank I have?

NURSERY MARY (examining him with a sharp, penetrating look): A ticklish question. I don't want to say anything wrong or offensive.

TILL: Just go ahead. Make a guess. Quite unofficially; off the record.

NURSERY MARY: Well, suppose Miss Judith is right about your being Master Jan's special messenger... Why, in that case you ought to be at least an astral cherub second grade. Or maybe even one of the first category.

TILL: An astral cherub of the first category? Not bad. But even so I can't have any coffee?

NURSERY MARY: Coffee, coffee, coffee! -- that's all you're thinking of! A spirit of your distinction! You should be ashamed of yourself!

TILL: Now don't you get excited, nurse, or whatever you are...

NURSERY MARY: Who wouldn't get excited, with that kind of sacrilegious talk going on, right here, in front of the altar? I know perfectly well what you're up to, entity; you can't fool me: I'm quite equal to your tricks. It's not the forbidden coffee you're really after -- not at all! Trying to tempt a poor old servant -- is that the idea? Probably working hand in glove with our sweet Miss, our class-

conscious doctor -- huh? Why, if that isn't the meanest, most reactionary maneuver I've ever heard of...

KITCHEN MARY: You'd better calm down, Nursery Mary. Don't insult the strange intelligence: maybe he has a lot of pull on the other side.

NURSERY MARY: I don't care. I've fought the bigshots on this planet for the past fifty years -- and I'll probably go right on doing it in the next world, too. The class struggle is permanent.

KITCHEN MARY: Let's get out of here, Nursery Mary. This influential spirit is probably hungry and thirsty after his long trip, and wants to devour his sacrificial meal without being watched by us two miserable mortals.

TILL (to Kitchen Mary): You there... you seem to have more sense than your girl friend. Will you do me a favor before you go?

KITCHEN MARY: If it's nothing against the laws and regulations...

TILL: Not as far as I know. (Pointing at his clothes on the chair): See this stuff here? Awful mess, isn't it? Must have fallen into the water, or something. Be an angel and see if you can fix it up.

KITCHEN MARY: It's not me who is an angel, if you please...

TILL: Well, anyway, just have it dried in the sun, and go over it with a brush. Okay?

KITCHEN MARY (to Nursery Mary): Think we can risk it?

NURSERY MARY: That's up to you. If you feel like doing any extra work...

KITCHEN MARY (touching the clothes in a gingerly way; to Till): Are your things made of ordinary material, like our own mortal clothes? Or...?

TILL (laughing): Why, as long as I have an ordinary mortal body, I'd better wear ordinary mortal pants. They don't melt in the sun:

you can be sure of that!

KITCHEN MARY (picking up the clothes, not without distrust): Well, of course, I wouldn't like to have the whole astral wardrobe fade away on me, like one of those flimsy materializations.

TILL: Don't you worry, sister.

NURSERY MARY (near the right-hand door): And no more of that foul language, spirit! Bacon and eggs! I can't get over it.

(NURSERY MARY and KITCHEN MARY exit to the right.)

(TILL (alone, bursts out laughing): Astral cherub of the first category! That's a good one! Oh boy, oh boy! (He jumps from the couch and paces the room -- still laughing, barefooted, with the garland of seaweeds around his neck. Standing before the Master's bust): What do you say, buddy? Looking mighty arrogant -- aren't you? Who do you think you are, anyhow? A super-cherub, or something? I don't like that haughty expression of yours. Let's see a nice little smile now, mister! Come on, come on... (He pulls the bust by the nose, then continues his inspection. In front of the altar, reading the inscription on the rear wall): "Beloved spirits, guide and protect us, lest we go astray." ... Am I a spirit? Maybe I am, without knowing it... (Touching his own body): No no, I seem to be all right; it's all there -- solid stuff, nothing ghostly about it. (He moves on; pauses in front of the Boecklin painting, becoming more serious): "The Island of Death"... Is that what this place is called? What a name! Slightly on the clammy side, I'd say. (He shudders, then continues his wandering, now at a slower pace. Lingering before Vera's portrait -- now quite serious --): "The Priestess" ... Haven't I seen this face before?... But when?... And where?...

(He stands absorbed in the sight of the portrait, when the THREE PROFESSORS enter the room from the right. They are still wearing their long black robes.

THE THREE PROFESSORS (hesitate respectfully near the door)

(A silence; then):

UNCLE(clears his throat.)

TILL: What's the matter? Are you guys judges, or what?

UNCLE: On the contrary, we are ready to be judged.

TILL: What are you wearing these long robes for, then?

UNCLE: Our festive garb -- only for festive occasions, like the present one.

TILL: All dressed up -- in my honor? Very nice of you.

UNCLE: Don't mention it, illustrious Messenger.

LI TSO: We are waiting, full of awe and eagerness, for the message you will graciously reveal to us.

LARUE: The fate of our planet...

LI TSO: Man's future...

UNCLE: Let us hear the worst.

TILL: I have nothing to tell you.

UNCLE (perplexed): Nothing...?

TILL (quickly): Well, of course, I c o u l d tell you quite a few things, if I wanted to. But I'm not in the mood -- that's all.

UNCLE: Only too understandable. You must be exhausted, dazed. A sudden reincarnation, like the one you just experienced, is undoubtedly a tremendous shock.

TILL: That's right. The whole thing happened rather suddenly. To tell you the truth, I'm still feeling kind of shaky.

UNCLE: Have you taken any material nourishment yet? You will find

it indispensable, on this physical plane of ours.

TILL: You've got something there, brother. A bite to eat, once in a while, does you a lot of good. Suppose I try some of this Orphic pudding... (He does so; then, pleasantly surprised): Not so bad! In fact, not bad at all... (He eats and drinks with increasing zest.)

LARUE: We thought this particular dish might please you. A new receipt, just communicated from the other side.

TILL (speaking with a full mouth): Tastes all right. The punch too; quite refreshing. -- Now I'm feeling up to some polite conversation again. Will you guys tell me who the hell you are, anyhow?

UNCLE: My name is Uncle -- H. F. Uncle of Boston, Massachusetts. In the days before my illumination, I was active as a professor of psychology.

LARUE: I am le professeur Hector Larue -- formerly of the Académie des Beaux Arts at Paris. I used to be known as one of the last representatives of the decadent-symbolistic school. That was, of course, b e f o r e the Master gave me a new faith, a real raison d'être.

LI TSO: If I, too, may introduce myself --: Professor Li Tso, in former times professor of philosophy in Shanghai.

TILL: Three scholars! I'm delighted.

LARUE (with a wry smile): Scholars! What scathing irony!

TILL: Not at all! Why should I try to be sarcastic? I have the greatest respect for learned people -- honest, I do! Psychology, philosophy, aesthetics -- I wished I knew a little more about those things!

UNCLE: What is psychology? Bluff and swindle!. Our psychic life is ruled by unknown, unfathomable laws. To scrutinize the secrets of the soul, you have to be free of all material bondage -- have to be

soul yourself. You spirits look through the complexities of our human mind. As for us, our eyes are untrained, dull and clouded. Mortal Man is blind.

LARUE: What is beauty? It is not without bitter shame that I recall my past career as an artist and aesthetician. Thirty years of striving for aesthetic values! Three decades of self-delusion! As if there could be anything like beauty on this vulgar, perishable plane! It is in y o u r sphere, Messenger, in the spirit world, that grace and harmony are to be found -- not here below. Mortal Man is ugly.

LI TSO: What is wisdom? Maybe we Orientals are somewhat closer to the light of Truth than western barbarians and materialists. But East or West -- what is the difference? The same ignorance, the same illusions everywhere! Mortal Man is stupid.

LARUE: The human intellect -- quelle blague, quelle barbe, quelle honte!

UNCLE: Common sense -- what obsolete prejudice!

LI TSO: We proclaim the end of enlightenment, the bankruptcy of science!

TILL: In other words, the tree of you are bankrupts.

UNCLE: Not exactly. We represent the greatest occult movement of all time -- the Vanstraaten Society.

TILL: What's that? Some kind of spiritualist club?

UNCLE: The international organization founded by the Master for the purpose of intensifying and deepening the contacts between our two worlds -- your spiritual sphere, illustrious Messenger, and our physical plane,

TILL: Now, let's get down to earth! What's your special racket?

Table-rapping, or what?

LI TSO: We use all sorts of methods and techniques to communicate with the other side.

TILL: And what kind of news do you receive from over there?

UNCLE: It's not news we're after; it is the Master's teachings.

TILL: All right then, what does he teach?

LI TSO: Renunciation of all worldly desires and ambitions....

LARUE: Spiritual peace attained through contemplation of the higher spheres...

UNCLE: The goal is sanctity.

TILL: A beautiful goal, all right. Pretty hard to reach, though.

LI TSO: He shows the way.

UNCLE: All we have to do is, to live according to his Law.

LARUE: His instructions are simple, clear, specific. He tells us how to educate our children, what to eat, what kind of clothes to wear, what books to study. He is our doctor, our cook, our financial advisor, our paternal friend, our lover. Whatever he says is accepted as the ultimate law by thousands of followers in five continents.

TILL: In five continents? Sounds impressive.

LI TSO: The success of our movement is impressive, Messenger, if you allow me to say so. We appeal to the masses -- which means that we are needed, that our message responds to a universal demand.

UNCLE: Ten or twelve years ago, our group consisted just of a handful of loyal friends; today, the Vanstraten Society boasts 260,000 registered members -- 182,000 of them in my administrative zone, the United States. We maintain local branches in 51 different countries; our financial situation is more than satisfactory, our moral prestige increases from year to year. Moreover, we control five monasteries in India, twelve

training schools for young mediums in Europe and the United States, onehundred-and-fourteen public eating houses -- Vastraten restaurants with special diet --, eighteen hotels, forty magazines, three publishing houses, two department stores, and one radio station.

TILL: Quite a setup! Pity it isn't being used for more sensible purposes...

UNCLE: I beg your pardon...?

TILL: Never mind. I'm really quite impressed, you know. You three guys seem to be damned clever, in your own way.



UNCLE: It is not we who deserve your praises, Messenger; we are just humble agents of the magic cult. The brain of our enterprise is the Master's sister, our Secretary General, Dr. Judith Vanstraaten. This sacred island -- inaccessible even to the most faithful friends -- is the center of operations and of authority. From this headquarters Dr. Vanstraete directs the activities of two-hundred-and-twenty-seven local groups. She plans and organizes; she interprets and distributes the auguries of her illustrious brother.

TILL: Is she a psychic too? I mean, does she receive those messages herself?

UNCLE: Another woman whose name I hardly dare pronounce serves as intercessor. During the Master's lifetime, none of us was allowed to lay eyes on her. It was only yesterday, on the occasion of the historic séance, that we made the acquaintance of that great clairvoyant...

LI TSO: ... the Master's widow, our Priestess...

LARUE: ... The most distinguished medium of all time...

UNCLE: ... Madame Vera Vanstraaten.

TILL (pointing to the portrait): That's supposed to be her picture?

LARUE: An inadequate attempt...

TILL: What's her name again? Vera?

UNCLE: You do not know her?

TILL: I was just wondering when you came in and disturbed me. Yes, she does look familiar -- definitely. Then again, I'm not sure...

LI TSO: It is only natural that her features should seem at once strange and familiar to you, Messenger. You do not know her temporal appearance but are acquainted with her astral body. The vibratio

which led you to this island -- she sent them forth, she emanated them. It is thanks to her that we are now enjoying your glorious company. Her call summoned you to this place.

TILL: She summoned me?

UNCLE: To be quite exact, it was the Master whom she tried to conjure. You came instead -- in his behalf, as we presume, as his personal representative.

TILL: Quite so. Whom should I represent, if not the Master? I am his messenger, that's understood. Now then, as for my message -- he wants me to deliver it to this young lady here. (He points at Vera's portrait): To her personally. Where is she at? I wish to see her -- now, immediately!

UNCLE: She is... well... I don't know...

LARUE: The exertion of last night's séance left Madame Vera in a state of extreme fatigue. She has retired to her private rooms.

TILL: Ask her to come here. Now, at once. What are you waiting for?

UNCLE: You will forgive me, Messenger, but I am not quite sure if our Priestess is prepared to see you right away...

TILL: How is that?

UNCLE: You understand: the shock, the disappointment...

TILL: Disappointment...?

UNCLE: She has been looking forward to the Master's visit with all the fervor of a loving wife...

TILL: Loving wife or not -- I want to see her.

LARUE: Nous sommes navrés...But, frankly, we are not authorized...

TILL (stamping his foot; very threatening): That's enough! Enough, I said! My temporal appearance may seem harmless; but don't you

feel yourselves! One more word out of you, and I'll change, make myself terrifying, belch flames, blow up this place, devour your wretched dwarfs! Get out of here! Bring me your priestess! Hurry up! Or else...

THE THREE PROFESSORS (withdraw towards the right-hand door, shaking with fear): Of course...Certainly... We will try our best... Don't be angry at us, illustrious Messenger... (Exit.)

TILL (alone, continues muttering, but already with a grin on his face): You phonies, fools, impostors -- I'll teach you a lesson! Sanctity, my foot! Detachment! Renunciation! Hot air! A lot of wind -- that's what it is! (He paces the room; then stops in front of Vera's portrait): And as for you, my sweet, I have a little bone to pick with you. The loving wife was disappointed -- huh? The lady is too proud to say Hello to me? You should be spanked for that, angel-face. A nice little spanking would do you a lot of good...

(The door at right opens: JUDITH rolls into the room -- followed by VERA, who lingers on the threshold.)

JUDITH: Illustrious Messenger...

TILL (without turning his head): Is it you, Madame Vera?

JUDITH: My name is Judith Vanstraaten.

TILL (turning around abruptly): Now, what's the idea of... (Noticing Vera): Oh, there you are at last!

JUDITH: I've brought her.

TILL (to Vera): So you had to be forced to come -- is that it?

JUDITH: I persuaded her. Vera had doubts at first whether you are indeed h i s Messenger.

TILL (always looking at Vera): You did not trust me?

JUDITH: She was upset and frightened...

TILL: The High Priestess -- frightened? That's bad.

JUDITH: Forgive her, Messenger. These last weeks were very hard on her...

TILL (his eyes fixed on Vera): I'll try to forgive you.

JUDITH: And may we hear your message now, dear spirit?

TILL: My message is for the Priestess o n l y .

JUDITH: Well, I should think that I, in my capacity as Secretary General of the Vanstraaten Society...

TILL (sharply): I said for the Priestess only, Miss. That will be all. Goodbye.

JUDITH (moving to the door at right): All right, all right... May I at least expect to be consulted at some later point?

TILL: We'll see about that. Goodbye.

(Exit JUDITH.)

(A long silence; then):

TILL: So you were scared?

VERA: Yes. A little.

TILL: Scared -- of m e ?

VERA: Also of you.

TILL: But now it's all gone, your fear?

VERA: I don't know... Not yet a l l gone; but it's not so strong any more.

TILL: At least you should have understood by now that I am the one you called for.

~~VERA: Why did he not appear himself?~~

~~TILL: What's wrong with me? Not good enough, or something?~~

~~VERA: He does not love me any more? Tell me, please...~~

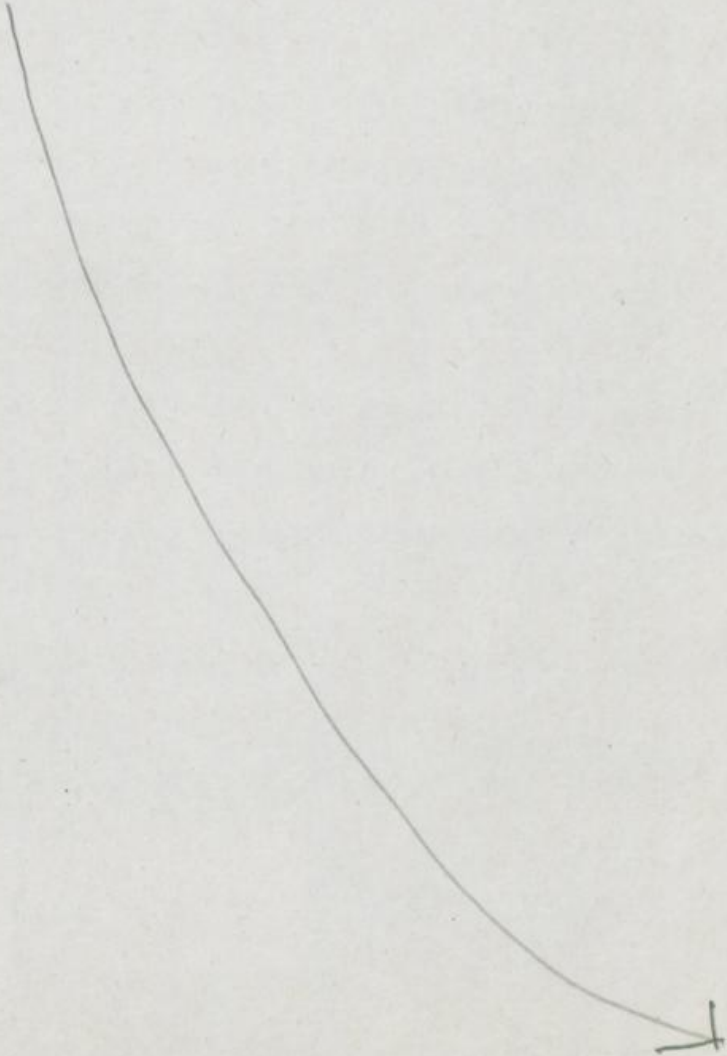
VERA: If he still loved me -- if he had ever loved me, he would have come himself!

TILL: Quit thinking about him, just for a little while. He is not here; I am. Look at me -- not at his marble face!

VERA (looking at him): Yes... you are here. It was good of you to come. I thank you, Messenger.

TILL: So you do trust me at last? That's better.

VERA (looking at him): I suppose I do... Yes, now I trust you, Messenger. I want to hear your message.



TILL: My message...Yes...of course...

VERA: Is it true? No hope left? We are doomed?

TILL: What are you talking about?

VERA: The end of the world -- what else?

TILL: The end of the world -- that's all you have in mind, you funny people here. What's the matter with you folks, anyhow? Why are you so impatient to see our world go to pieces?

VERA: Impatient?... No... On the contrary...

TILL: I've heard them talk, those strange birds around here! They're burning to have the universe smashed up. And I know, why! Because they are so old, and all fed up with life. Your whole household consists of mummies who want to fall to dust. But you are different. You are young.

VERA: I wish I were a little older. Old people are detached and wise. I am not. I am frightened.

TILL: Well, if the end of the world frightens you -- why discuss it?

VERA: It behooves the Priestess to overcome her fear. Tell me everything. (She sits down on a bench in the foreground, ready to listen to him.)

TILL (paces the room, stops, scratches his ear, seems embarrassed.

A silence; then): Now then, to make it short... Well, you see..

I don't quite know how to put it. That human language of yours --one

kind of forgets it in the spirit world...

VERA: Take your time, Messenger.

TILL: To tell you the truth, Priestess, I don't feel so good, right now. The sudden reincarnation was quite a shock, you know. Leaves a man kind of flat; kind of dazed and exhausted, if you know what I mean. This new body of mine seems so heavy: it's hard to get used to it... Say, Priestess, would you mind if I joined you there, on your bench?

VERA: If it helps you to recover from the shock...

TILL (sitting down next to her): Thanks, I appreciate that. (A short silence; then):

VERA: What do you have to tell me?

TILL: The paint of the matter is... Well, as you know, the world, the universe... it doesn't look so good. There is danger ahead, no doubt. One of these days, your whole planet may blow up -- like that!

VERA: The cosmic explosion... My vision, then, was genuine, sent to me by highest authorities?

TILL: What vision...?

VERA: You know, my terrible day-dream about the towers and the lightnings! So it was no delusion?

TILL: Unfortunately not. As a matter of fact, it was only too genuine, that terrible dream of yours.

VERA: And what about the silence before the seventh call from above?

TILL: Was there a silence? Frankly, I didn't notice anything...

VERA: But, Messenger, try to remember now! Before the seventh "Woe," there was a pause, a prolonged interval. What did it mean? I have to know, it may be most important...

TILL: I'd be glad to tell you, Priestess... if I only remembered. But

my poor mind -- you see, it's going all blank again. This fatigue, this awful weariness -- I can't get over it...

VERA: Do you think there might be some kind of connection between that silence and the failure of the seventh trumpet at last night's gala party?

TILL: Could be; not impossible... The trumpet... The pause before the seventh party... I don't seem to find the proper words...

VERA: I implore you, Messenger, try to remember! Pull yourself together!

TILL: I'm getting dizzy... Things are beginning to blur in my mind... That always happens to me when I am very tired or excited... Want to help me, Priestess?

VERA: If I can...

TILL: Well, you see, this morning, just before waking up, I had a dream. A pleasant dream it was; something about a hand -- a nice, cool, soft little hand -- rubbing my face, right here... (He puts her hand on his forehead.) It felt wonderful -- just like a massage in heaven...

VERA (caressing his forehead with her finger tips): Like this...?

TILL (with closed eyes): That's right... Go on, go on... Oh, that feels good...!

VERA: Just relax... Forget the burden of your new appearance... Forget and relax, my tired Messenger...

TILL: May I put that tired head of mine on your shoulders, Priestess?

VERA: Just relax, and remember... Forget about the burden... Recall the message... Tell me everything...

TILL (With his head on her shoulder): Good... Just go on rubbing my temples... Yes, that's fine, that's perfect... Just go on...

VERA: Relax... Forget... Remember...

TILL: I do remember... yes... My lovely dream this morning...
Was it y o u r hand, Priestess?

VERA: Recall the message! Why did he order a dance with seven
angels, seven trumpets, when he knows quite well that I have just
six children?

TILL: Are you trying to tell me that you've got six kids?

VERA: Your message! Relax... Remember...

TILL (always with closed eyes): You don't look as if you had six
kids. You certainly don't, Priestess. -- Don't take that hand
away! How do you expect me to remember -- without your hand?

VERA: Will you tell me everything?

TILL: I promise! As long as you keep your hand right where it is...

VERA: Why did he ask for seven angels when there are just six? What
was the meaning of the silence before the seventh call?

TILL: Wait... yes, of course, that's it! I've got it now... The
silence before the seventh call -- that means a kind of merciful
delay, a reprieve, a last chance for you mortals. There is still
hope, as long as there is one angel missing. But with the coming
of the seventh angel, all hope is gone...

VERA (caressing his forehead): Relax... forget... remember...

TILL: The seventh trumpet blast announces the end of the reprieve --
did you get that, Priestess? The seventh angel brings death and
disaster.

VERA: And how much time is left...?

TILL: That depends on you mortals here below.

VERA: But we depend on invisible, unfathomable powers.

TILL: Not altogether. You are free to act.

VERA: How can we act, unless the powers guide us?

TILL: How can the powers guide you, unless you cooperate? This last chance you're getting now -- what do you think it is for? You are supposed to use it -- understand? Take advantage of the short reprieve. Get busy.

VERA: Busy -- how? What is the order from the other side?

TILL: Something has to be done -- something big, important! Let's launch a vast campaign, a last-minute effort to prevent disaster! Yes, let's save the world! I have plenty of ideas, you know...

VERA: Remember...

TILL (taking her hand from his forehead; rising): Stop that now. I do not need it any more. The whole message has come back to me. -- Look, this mystic club of yours seems to have quite a machine at its disposal. That kind of set-up could be mighty useful, employed for a good cause. But you folks of the Vanstraaten Society don't preach the right things. All that talk about "detachment" and "sanctity" doesn't help anybody. What people need, at this point, is practical advice -- some kind of program that tells them how to cope with their immediate problems. Let's have a program, a constructive plan! And that's exactly what I have to offer.

VERA: A program -- designed on the other side...?

TILL: I got it from the powers -- word for word, just the way I'm going to tell it now. Listen, Priestess! I've been around and studied conditions on this temporary plane -- an abstral cherub of my rank has to keep his eyes open. Believe me, the things I've seen weren't so very pleasant. I've seen people go hungry, almost starved to death, in Europe, in Asia, everywhere. And I've seen the powerful and the

rich profit by the misery of others -- bad, irresponsible leaders, exploiters, war-mongers. I've seen what war is like, and I know that a bunch of selfish men in high positions are quite prepared to risk another slaughter, rather than give up any of their privileges or money. How much longer are you mortals going to stand for this kind of social order? Do away with it! My program shows you, how. My program will bring peace and justice and prosperity for all people, all over the world...

VERA: Tell me everything...

(The light dims and goes out, as TILL continues to gesticulate and speak -- now without being heard by the audience -- and VERA sits absorbed in listening.)

SCENE II

(Early evening of the same day. The sky, visible through the open glass door, is a pale, hazy blue.

The group in the foreground seems not to have changed since the end of the preceding scene: VERA is still sitting on the same bench, with TILL standing next to her.)

VERA: Have you told ^emy everything, Messenger?

TILL: Not nearly. But I feel the moment has come for me to make a little break.

VERA: I could listen to you for ever.

TILL (laughing): What an awful idea!

VERA: Your program is wonderful. So simple, so convincing! Our great campaign to prevent the end of the world should be launched immediately -- better today than tomorrow! But who is to be the leader?

TILL: You, Priestess! Who else?

VERA: Am I strong enough? Maybe -- if you stayed with me...

TILL: I'll be with you, Priestess, as long as I am needed.

VERA: Thanks. With your help, Messenger, I feel equal to any task. What am I to do first? What will be the initial step?

TILL: Now, let's see... Unfortunately, my orders are a little vague, so far as this early phase of our operations is concerned. Suppose I make a quick flight back to the spirit world and ask my home office for more specific instructions?

VERA: You want to leave me?

TILL: Just for a little while. The whole trip won't take me more than a few minutes.

VERA: Promise?

TILL: I promise.

VERA: Remember, Messenger, I'd be lost without you!

TILL: Don't you worry, Priestess: I'll be back in practically no time. And now close your eyes: I mustn't be watched by any mortal when I transform myself and take off for the other side.

VERA (her eyes closed): Don't be long.

TILL (walking backwards, on his toes, to the glass door): No, I won't... (Exit, into the garden.)

(VERA, alone, is sitting motionless, with closed eyes. A silence; then the door at the right is opened carefully, and JUDITH appears on the threshold.)

JUDITH: He is gone?

VERA (opening her eyes): He will be back.

JUDITH (moving closer to VERA): Has he told you the message?

VERA: Most of it. He will continue later.

JUDITH: It took him long. A whole day! And he is not yet through.

VERA: A whole day, you said?... Yes, you are right, we started in the morning, and now it's getting dark. Curious, how quickly the hours passed...

JUDITH: Don't you want to tell me about the message?

VERA: Yes, of course, with pleasure... It's only... Well, you see, he has not yet quite finished it...

JUDITH: Then you will kindly repeat to me what you have heard so far. May I invite our friends to join us?

VERA: What friends?

JUDITH: Our guests, the professors.

VERA (with a gay little laugh): Oh, those queer little men -- I've forgotten all about them! Why, of course, call them in, if you want to; they won't disturb me. In fact, nothing could disturb me, the way I feel now. I am so happy, Judith...

JUDITH (calling to the right): You may now come in, gentlemen, if you please.

(UNCLE, LARUE and LI TSO -- wearing their street clothes again, instead of the long black robes -- enter from the right.)

UNCLE: Is the Priestess ready to give us a full report?

VERA: I'll try, friends, to explain to you in a few words...

JUDITH: To begin with what is most important: Has he confirmed the authenticity of your vision?

VERA: Yes, my vision was genuine.

UNCLE: In other words, the end of the world is near?

VERA: Not necessarily. The situation is critical, to be sure. But do not lose hope, my friends! The seventh angel has not appeared as yet; the reprieve is still in effect. The cry of woe that reached me from above was not the final malediction -- just a warning. Now it is our turn to warn the blind masses.

JUDITH: Will they listen? How often, how fervently have we admonished them to turn away from idle worldliness, to concentrate on spiritual values!

VERA: That's just it. The new message sounds different. No longer do the powers want us to look down upon profane affairs; on the contrary, we are advised to face the great political and social issues of our time, to turn worldly, active, practical.

JUDITH: A completely new line -- most surprising...

VERA: Surprising or not -- that's the way it is! According to the

The spirits, concerned about Man's predicament, are sending us a program -- almost an ultimatum. It's our last chance, says the Messenger. If the people accept this final proposition and act accordingly, they can be saved. Otherwise...

JUDITH: And what kind of program is it supposed to be?

VERA: A comprehensive scheme covering all the aspects of human life -- moral, social, political, economic. The Messenger says that a sweeping campaign will have to be launched at once to prevent disaster.

JUDITH: An inspiring idea; but not without confusing implications...

VERA: Don't you see? The apocalyptic crisis we are passing through can be overcome with the help of the other side. The powers have chosen us as executors of their generous project. I, for one, am determined to live up to this enormous task. I will appeal to the nations all over the world...

JUDITH (quickly): You must not leave this island. Never! Remember your vow.

VERA: I'll make myself heard, wherever I may be. Besides, my voice will be joined by another -- a more powerful, more persuasive organ. The Messenger stays with me, as my collaborator, mentor and adviser.

JUDITH: He stays with you? I thought his incarnation was not per-

manent...

VERA: He has agreed to stay as long as he is needed.

JUDITH: So many unexpected changes -- I don't know what to say.

(To the three professors): What is your opinion, gentlemen?

UNCLE: We do not have any opinions, my dear Secretary General. As faithful agents of superior intelligences, we carry out orders without questioning. It is true, this "completely new line" -- as you put it so aptly -- comes rather as a surprise. One might almost speak of a sudden reversal of policy. Confusing is the word.

LARUE: I'll have to study economics. No easy thing for a veteran of the decadent-symbolist school!

LI TSO: We will be forced to revise some of our basic ideas and principles. But if it is the Master's will and order...

VERA (quickly): It is his will, there can't be any doubt!

UNCLE: Then it behooves us to accept the new directives, to accustom ourselves to these bold innovations.

JUDITH: Let us be cautious, friends! The Messenger has not returned as yet...

VERA: He'll be back any moment now!

JUDITH: As for his program, we know little about it...

VERA: What has been revealed, so far, is quite enough to indicate the general direction.

(TILL appears on the threshold of the glass door -- now wearing his blue sweater and linen trousers.)

TILL (in a low voice): Vera...

VERA (turns around; sees him as a silhouette against the evening sky -- tall and slender in his sailor-like outfit. She starts, represses an ~~outburst~~)

outery -- and runs away, leaving the room through the door to the right.)
JUDITH (following her towards the door): What's the matter, dear? Any-
thing I can do for you? Wait a little... (Exit, to the right.)

THE THREE PROFESSORS (whisper in low, worried voices among ^{themselves} ~~each other~~):
Very strange... alarming... her nerves... some kind of shock... Let's see
how she's doing... (They follow Vera and Judith; exit to the right.)

TILL (alone, contemplates the closed door to the right; then he shakes
his head, shrugs his shoulders): Too bad... Poor girl... poor little
woman...

(THE SIX CHILDREN, having followed Till from the garden, appear in the
frame of the glass door -- watching the stranger with silent, wide-eyed
curiosity.)

TILL (noticing the presence of the children): Look at that! The little
devils are after me... What do you say, little devils? Going to do another
one of your lovely dances?

URSULA: We're sorry we bothered you this morning, ^{Messenger.} ~~stranger~~.

TILL: That's quite all right -- don't mention it, young lady.

URSULA: It was a mistake. We took you for a demon. That's why we tried
to exorcise you -- see?

TILL: Tried to exorcise me -- huh? But I'm a tough customer -- not easy
to get rid of. So, naturally, your little trick didn't work.

URSULA: It would have worked, though -- if you were a demon. But you are
not. You are good.

TILL: Are you so sure of that?

URSULA: Quite sure. Only a good entity can survive the great exorcising
ritual Number One.

CASPAR: One can ^{see} ~~that~~ you're good, ~~stranger~~ -- it shows in your eyes and
all over your face. You wouldn't do anything bad to us or to Mother --

I know you wouldn't.

TILL: Right you are, son. I won't do anything bad to you kids or to your mother. Maybe I meant to, at first. But I've changed my mind. I won't.

PUCK: Tell us something nice, ^{Messenger}~~stranger~~. Tell us about the end of the world.

TILL: What's so nice about that?

PUCK: It sounded nice, the way Dad described it. With all those funny dragons and earthquakes, and what not.

TILL: Aren't you afraid of what's going to happen to you?

URSULA: Why should we be? Dad will take care of us.

CHRISTOPHER: The end of the world is good for the family. All of us will become rather important spirits.

TILL: Maybe so. But don't you think it would be quite a pity if our world -- y o u r world got all smashed up?

URSULA (with great contempt): O u r world, indeed! What do we have to do with this nasty world of the grown-ups? We don't even know what it looks like.

TILL: No, I suppose you don't...

CHRISTOPHER: Nor do we care to find out.

DORIS: Because it's a world full of strangers who do not belong to the family. We do not like strangers.

BETTY: Grown-upish -- that's what they are!

DORIS: And their smell -- phew! The thought of it makes me ^(feel)sick.

CASPAR: Strangers are pitiful. I feel sorry for them because they're in for trouble. But then, Dad says they don't deserve any better. They're vicious, he says, and keep fighting among themselves, and playing dirty tricks on each other.

URSULA: So we figure it may be better for them to be killed by the earthquake and the seven plagues. Otherwise they'll get meaner and meaner, and in the end they'll die, the whole lot of them, from sheer meanness and stupidity.

CHRISTOPHER: Therefore, in the interest of those mean, unhappy strangers, the end of the world should come as soon as possible.

TILL: Well, I suppose there's something in what you say... But again, aren't you a little too hard on the poor bastards, out there in the world? Don't you think there are a few decent strangers? After all, I'm a stranger myself...

THE SIX CHILDREN (burst out laughing.)

TILL: What's so funny now?

URSULA: What you just said, Messenger -- about your being a stranger. If that isn't funny!

DORIS: You're just trying to tease us.

PUCK: Because you are n o t a stranger! You belong to the family.

TILL: Do I?

PUCK: Sure!

CHRISTOPHER: Since you're not a demon, you can only be Dad's messenger -- what else?

CASPAR: You are here because Mother called you. So how could you be a stranger?

DORIS: We don't like strangers, but we do like you. That just goes to show you that you are no stranger.

URSULA: ~~You're a friend -- Mother's friend, and ours. Not a stranger! A friend. Get the difference?~~ ↓

TILL: ~~I suppose I do.~~ Thanks, kids. I'll try not to disappoint you.

THE SIX CHILDREN (laughing again): A stranger...!

(VERA enters from the right.)

TILL (to the children): You'd better beat it now, kids. I have to talk to your mother.

PUCK: If you were a stranger, Mother wouldn't even talk to you. ~~She~~
She never does, you know. Oh, you're funny!

(THE SIX CHILDREN, exit to the left.)

(TILL is standing a few steps away from VERA, who avoids to look at him. A silence; then):

VERA: Did the children bother you, Messenger?

TILL: On the contrary, we had the most pleasant chat.

VERA: ~~About what?~~ What about?

TILL: Just small talk. The end of the world, demons, exorcising rituals -- you know, the usual stuff.

(Another silence; then):

TILL: What did you run away for?

VERA: A silly delusion -- just one of those optical tricks the mind sometimes plays on one. Where did you get these clothes?

TILL: It's what I was wearing when I arrived here last night.

VERA: It must have been that blue sweater... Yes, your sweater startled me a little. Forgive me, Messenger.

TILL (irritably): Cut out that "Messenger" stuff, for Christ's sake! This has gone far enough. I'm through with the whole game.

VERA: I don't understand, Messenger.

TILL: So you really believe that I am some kind of emissary from the other side?

VERA (with a smile of perfect innocence): How could I doubt it, Messenger? After all, it was I who made you come!

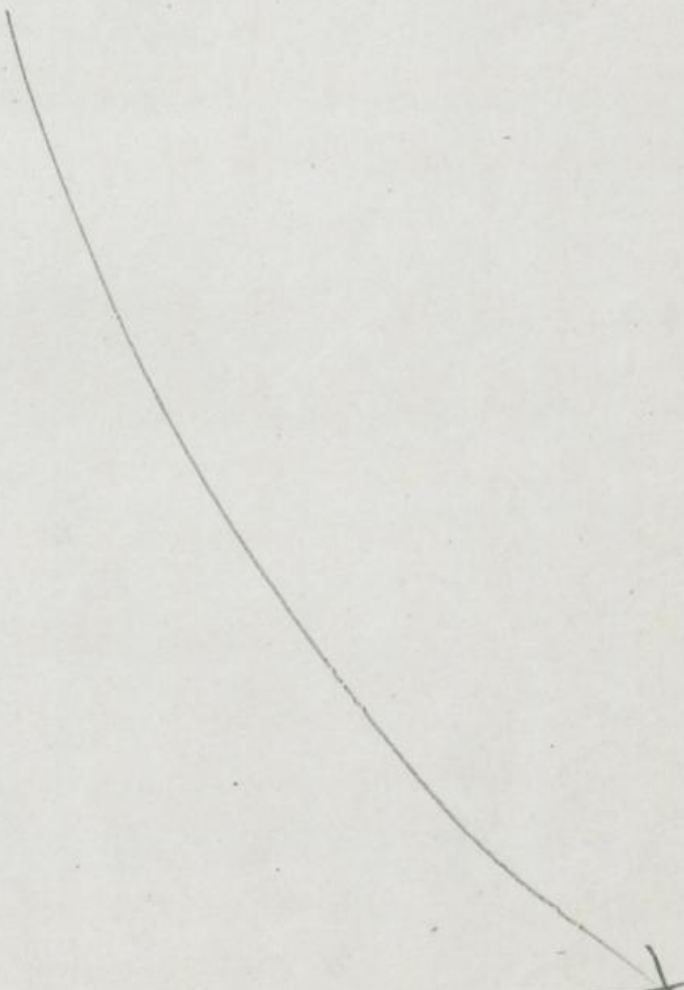
TILL: It's bad enough to hear such things from the kids. But from you... What a mess! What a shameful, sickening mess!

VERA: What's wrong with you, Messenger? Why do you speak in riddles?

TILL: I a m no messenger, Vera -- that's what's wrong with me!
I am no ghost at all -- neither demon nor cherub. Just an ordinary mortal.

VERA: I know quite well that you are mortal in your present form.
For my sake, to help me in my task, you have assumed this human masquerade: I know it, and am grateful.

TILL: Vera! Try to understand! I have nothing -- absolutely



n o t h i n g -- to do with your spirit world, up there...

VERA: That I also know; you have not descended from above but come to me from the depths. He whom I called, the Master, disappeared in the sea. From the very waves that devoured him, his messenger has emerged. What is amazing about that?

TILL: What amazes me is just your stubbornness! -- Now listen: I emerged from the water because I had previously fallen into it. Is that clear enough? What happened was that I got caught in the storm, out there, in my sail-boat. That's a hobby of mine, you know -- to cruise about all by myself in the sea. It may be a silly habit, and a little bit on the dangerous side; but I get a kick out of it. Last night it was too much of a kick I got: it almost cost me my life.

VERA: Why are you telling me this fantastic story?

TILL: Don't you believe me?

VERA: Not one word.

TILL: You're driving me nuts... Have you never heard of sudden storms in this particular area of the Pacific?

VERA: Yes, I know. Storms come up suddenly: I've experienced it myself.

TILL: All right. Now, the storm that came suddenly up last night did funny things to my little sail-boat -- you see? The sudden storm broke the mast of my boat and tore the sails to pieces. Finally the great big waves threw the poor, helpless wreck, including my poor, helpless self, against the rocks of your enchanted island. And that would be the end of my story -- if it were not for the fact that I happen to be a pretty good swimmer.

VERA: I don't believe it. Not one single word.

TILL: Do I look as if I didn't know how to swim? But last night it was almost too much for me. Down I went with the waves -- I don't

know how deep, but too deep to be healthy --; then they carried me upwards for a staggering moment, and then down again. I couldn't think any more; I just felt, it's all over. "It's got you this time, boy," that's about how I felt when that awful undertow began to drag me down. I stopped struggling, just let myself sink. It didn't hurt at all; in fact, it was sort of pleasant. So now I know something I didn't know before: Death doesn't hurt; at least death in the water doesn't.

VERA: And then? What happened next?

TILL: I don't remember. A wave must have washed me ashore. I was unconscious. But even so I managed to see that light. Funny, isn't it?

VERA: What light?

TILL: Yours. The light of the Island of Death. Now I remember even what it looked like, the candle light from this room: a pale, uncertain glimmer, like a light in a dream. So I followed that dim guiding star -- still half-dazed as I was; crawling from the beach through the garden, up to this house... (With a short laugh): Nice manners! -- to roll into the parlor of a strange house, knocked-out, drenched to the skin, soaked in water and mud.

VERA (after a short pause): So that's the way you remember the story of your reincarnation. While assuming this mortal form, you forgot your past in the spirit world.

TILL: How often do I have to tell you that I have never been a spirit -- at least not for the last twenty-five years.

VERA: You are the Messenger. I have called you.

TILL: But w h e n did you call me, Vera? Twenty-five years ago? For that happens to be my age. I was born in Brooklyn, New York;

altogether uncalled-for; not even my mother wanted me to come. She was a waitress in a restaurant -- penniless, sickly, not very attractive. My father was a Norwegian sailor, as far as I know. I was never introduced to the gentleman; he left my mother before I was even born. Quite a prosaic story, isn't it?

VERA: You want to confuse me, want to test my faith. I don't know what you are driving at; all I know is that you are the Messenger.

TILL: My name is Till. You must have heard about my patron-saint, Till Eulenspiegel or Owl-glass, the famous good-for-nothing, always up to tricks and practical jokes. Now, what kind of a chance in the world has a guy with such a name and such a patron-saint? Naturally, I became something like a bum myself. How could I help it? When I was a kid of eleven I had to make my own living. When I was thirteen or so, I run away from my boss and took to the road -- knocking about the country like a tramp. Later I got mixed up with a travelling circus, which was a lot of fun, while it lasted. When the circus went out of business, I joined the merchant marine. That wasn't so bad, either. I've always had a liking for the sea and faraway places and things like that. Yes, and then the war came along. They made me kill a few Japs, but I don't know if it was worth the effort -- the way things look now. Well, anyway, with the dough I saved overseas I bought myself that little sail-boat. And now the boat is gone, too. So there you have the life story of an astral cherub, first grade.

VERA: I called for h i m -- and he sent you. You came at the very moment I invoked his spirit.

TILL: There is such a thing as coincidence, I'm told.

VERA: No, there is not! Events of such importance do not occur accidentally. And besides, if you were not the Messenger -- how could

you have known the message?

TILL: Now, really! Do you take me for such a fool that you think I can't even make up a little message, if it has to be?

VERA: But w h y ? Why...?

TILL: Why^{did} I pull that trick on you? Frankly, I don't know. Maybe it's just the Till Eulenspiegel blood in my veins -- the old weakness for playing practical jokes.

VERA: No, it is not just that. Impossible... There must be something behind it...

TILL: It all came over me before I knew what I was doing. They kind of talked me into it, you know -- all those weird characters who came to see me this morning. First I figured that I'd got stranded in an insane asylum; but then I understood what kind of place this is, and what I was being taken for. An astral cherub of the first category! It was too much for me.

VERA: This is a nightmare... I hear words, and they make no sense...

TILL: Of course, I ought to have stopped in time. It was wrong to get you involved -- I know that, Vera. It was a dirty thing to do. I'm sorry.

VERA: The fear -- there it is again! The abyss of fear -- bottomless... (She buries her face in her hands; sits motionless.)

TILL: I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Vera -- honest, I didn't! On the contrary, I rather meant to help you. Yes, that's it! I meant to help you, wanted to be your friend. But if you had known that I am just a mortal -- what chance would I have had? So I went on pretending. I h a d to! Can't you see that, Vera?

VERA (remains motionless, her face covered.)

TILL: There were moments when I got all mixed up, and hardly knew who

I was -- Till, or the Messenger, or Till the Messenger, or what. For instance, when I was sitting with you on the bench over there -- that was such a moment. I was getting so I almost fell for my own gag: ~~taking myself for the one you wanted me to be. Sounds kind of crazy -- doesn't it? But that's the way it was!~~ I really thought I was the Messenger. And that fancy program I explained to you -- the last-minute campaign to prevent disaster --, it seemed to me a mighty clever idea, quite easy to carry out. I was pretty sure, at that point, that you and I together, Priestess and Messenger, would be strong enough to save the world. Are you listening, Vera? You have to listen to me! (He shakes her shoulders.)

VERA (groaning from behind her hands): Don't touch me.

TILL (takes his hands from her shoulders. A short silence; then): My self-delusion didn't last very long. As soon as I was out there, in the open air, I saw my way clear again. Everything became so obvious -- the childishness of our so-called program, the frivolity of the whole game. My first impulse was, to beat it -- to leave this place and forget all about ghosts and ghost-seers. But I couldn't. I had to come back to you. Vera, I am here to offer you an apology -- and also to warn you, seriously, as a friend.

VERA (always with her face buried in her hands): Bottomless -- the abyss of fear... I am falling...

TILL: I won't annoy you much longer, Vera. But I can't go without telling you how worried I am. It's you, Vera, I'm worried about.

VERA: Words -- unintelligible... A strange, terrible idiom...

TILL: You are on the wrong path -- believe me, Vera! Watch out, or else you may actually fall into that abyss you keep talking about -- the abyss of madness... You believe in ghosts. Well, maybe there

a r e ghosts: I don't know. But I d o know that we must not expect any help or comfort from them. Those spirits of yours, if they exist at all, have nothing to offer to us. They are far away. They don't care.

VERA: Oh you, my guides and protectors in the other world, you immortal powers -- why do you inflict this torture on your humble servant?

TILL: Wake up, Vera! Come to your senses! Look around! This is reality: A house, a room, and in the room two simple human beings -- a woman and a man: Vera and Till. Nobody else. No ghosts, no powers.

VERA: Forgive him, spirits, for his blasphemy! He does not know, is blind...

TILL: The spirits you invoke are products of your fancy; they will not answer you. We are alone. Man is alone on this lonely revolving star.

VERA: He is blind... blind... blind... And I wanted to save the world with him!

TILL: Do you finally realize the absurdity of it all? No world-salvation is going to fall from heaven: no mystic messenger boy is going to present ^{it} to you on a silver platter. We'll have to solve our own problems, or else face the consequences of your stupidity and laziness. If this world can be saved, it will certainly not be through the oracles of some illuminated ghost husband broadcasting kitchen recipes from the other side...

VERA (rising from her seat; trembling with indignation): Go!

TILL: Yes. I'd better go now. (He does not move.)

VERA (in front of the Master's bust): He has insulted you, Master! Do not allow him to stay another moment!

TILL: I'll go, if you want me to. Of course, it won't be easy to find transportation from the island to the coast -- especially at this hour. It's quite dark already.

VERA (kneeling before the bust): Mercy!... Guidance!... Give me a sign of your presence, Jan! Let me hear your voice! I need you... need you more than ever...

TILL: Will there be any boat available? I wonder...

VERA (on her knees): Do not punish me, Jan, for what the stranger said! I did not encourage him to say those terrible things -- you know that!

TILL: Well, maybe that crazy old fisher will take care of me -- the one who promised me the jellyfish.

VERA (always addressing the bust): Why don't you answer me, Jan? Where are you?... Answer! Don't abandon me! Do not leave me alone! The abyss -- it will engulf me...

TILL: Yes, I suppose the fisherman is my best bet. Or do you think he may already be asleep? Well, even so -- I'll wake him up, that's all.

VERA (to the bust): I don't know what to do, Jan, if you don't answer me... I'll be blind -- as blind as he is, the stranger --, if you don't answer me... Speak to me, Jan! Just one word! I implore you!

TILL: Maybe he will, once that I'm gone. Goodbye then, Vera. Forgive me, if you can.

VERA (to the bust): One word! One sound of your voice! This silence is too much... I can't bear it...

~~TILL (looks at her with pity and bewilderment. For one moment, he seems inclined to rush to her help, but then he changes his mind and disappears into the garden.)~~

TILL: I hate to leave you in such a state, Vera. I hate to leave you...

VERA (still on her knees before the bust): No answer... Silence... Something has happened -- something terrible... I am cut off, out of contact...

TILL: Don't you want me to go? -- Vera! (He is now standing close to her, trying to scrutinize her face): Say something! Tell me what to do...

VERA (turning her tearful face away from him): Silence... I am alone... He is no longer with me...

TILL: But I am with you, Vera! Look at me! Listen to me! Touch me! You are not alone.

VERA (~~with~~ her face still turned away from him): ~~He is gone -- who~~
~~will protect me now?~~ The abyss -- there it is... the fear... (She weeps with increasing violence.)

(A silence: VERA -- sobbing, on her knees; TILL -- bent over her, worried and bewildered. Then):

TILL: Come on, Vera, Let's get up. (He helps her to rise from the floor, leads her to the bench in the foreground.) Sit down... That's the good girl... And now tell me: Do you want me to go, or do you want me to stay?

VERA (whispers, her face always turned away from him): Stay.

TILL: That's better... And now go on and cry, if it makes you feel better. Have a good cry, poor little Vera. Don't be ashamed: just let them flow, your tears... Wait, I'll cover the glass door, so nobody'll see you crying... (He draws a curtain over the glass door, then lights some of the candles on the altar.) Look, how nice and friendly it's in here now! Just as though we were going to have a séance. But a ✕

séance without ghosts, if you please! (He has returned to the foreground, sits down next to her.) They're all gone, your ghosts. Let's hope they'll never come back!

VERA: They must come back! They will!

TILL: You'd be better off without them -- believe me, Vera.

VERA: They'll be back. I need them. They are my life.

TILL: You do not need them, they are not your life! A drug -- that's what they are! A fixed idea, an obsession; crutches you got used to but can do without. What do you want crutches for? You are strong, Vera!

VERA (turning her face slowly towards him): What do you know about me, stranger?

TILL: Don't call me "stranger", please -- I don't like it. My name is Till.

VERA: You do not know me, Till. You are a stranger.

TILL: But I'm a little bit of a clairvoyant, too -- in my own way. I can look through people. When I was young...

VERA (with the faintest smile): Are you old now?

TILL: The way I sometimes feel...

VERA: I'm older than you.

TILL: But I'm more experienced.

VERA: Could be. My experiences were indeed of a somewhat -- one-sided nature.

TILL: Naturally -- there always was your drug, your fixed idea, your crutches.

VERA: My profession. Yes.

TILL: Some profession! How did you ever get mixed up with spiritualism, Vera?

VERA: My parents were killed in a car accident -- I was just six, at the time. Two days after the funeral, I heard their voices. That's

how it began: my innate mediumship had been discovered. From that moment on, I had no peace any more. I was the infant prodigy of psychic science. My uncle hired me out to spiritistic clubs all over the world. My whole childhood was an endless series of occult experiments.

TILL (caressing her): Poor little Vera... How lonely you must have been!

VERA: I had visions and hallucinations; I prophesied, hypnotized, magnetized, moved distant objects, had phosphorus-banded trumpets floating through the air, produced ectoplasmic ^{images} ~~phenomena~~, conversed with otherworldly Controls. Materializations, tone phenomena, telepathic stunts, supersensory exercises -- that was my life, that's all I ever knew.

TILL (pointing to the bust): And then he came along...?

VERA: He booked me for some séances in London and New York. We made an enormously successful team. So we stayed together.

TILL: Sounds like business partnerships, rather than romance.

VERA: He needed me. He was an eminent scholar, the founder of an esoteric sect; but he was not a medium. Thanks to my psychic talent, he was able to communicate with the other side.

TILL: You were in love with him?

VERA: What a question! Of course I was -- and still am.

TILL: Are you really? I think you're just afraid of him -- not in love.

VERA: I am in love with him, and will always be. Always!

TILL: Why then doesn't he answer you any more?

VERA: I don't know...

TILL: But I do! He doesn't answer because you do not really want him

to. Something has changed -- something has happened to both of us.

VERA: What are you talking about...

TILL (with increasing intensity and enthusiasm): I knew it this morning when first seeing you; I knew it when you touched my forehead with your finger tips. I was dead: you recalled me to life.

Your fingers are magnetic -- so is your smile, your look...

VERA: Stop it. I don't want to hear another word...

TILL: Vera! You did trust and like the Messenger -- why don't you trust me? Why don't you like me, Vera?

VERA: All this is absurd, impossible...

TILL: It isn't! You belong to me, Vera -- not to him any more! He's dead. I'm alive. I am stronger.

VERA: You are a demon sent by hostile spirits to humiliate and destroy me. Go! Go! Go!

TILL: You've called me, Vera! Was it a demon you meant to conjure up? Maybe so -- I can't help it. I am what I am, and what you wanted me to be. Don't you recognize me, Priestess? (Stretching out his arms for her): It's me!

VERA (moving away from him): I warn you, stranger! Beware of the sacred powers! I am their instrument, their property, their victim! I am singled out, marked, untouchable! I warn you, Till -- don't violate the taboo...

TILL (close to her): I touch you... feel you... hold you...

VERA (escaping): You will not hold me -- no one ever will! I slip away, fly off, I have no weight, am nowhere, everywhere... Beware! Out of your arms I'll escape to other spheres -- faraway, inaccessible! I am evasive, airy, treacherous...

TILL (trying to catch her): I want you the way you are...

VERA (escaping): How am I? I don't know... I have a thousand forms, am formless, nebulous. I transform myself, I turn into an animal, a cloud, an element, a flower -- taking on ever new shapes and hues. I have no character of my own -- no identity, no name, no soul, no will. My speech echos otherworldly voices, my thoughts are molded by strange intelligences. I am the tool of unknown energies, the antenna of mysterious vibrations. I am nothing and everything...

TILL: If you were nothing -- how could I love you, Vera?

VERA: You cannot love me. I am in love with the dead, death is my element, my very kiss is deadly.

TILL (follows her): Kiss me.

VERA (in his arms): I've warned you! Are you not afraid?

TILL: Afraid -- of what? I love you.

VERA: Afraid of me ... of my curse ... of my love...

TILL: You do love me, then?

VERA (in his embrace): The will of the powers is unfathomable. They don't permit me to love any mortal -- and yet, they've sent you to me from the depths, and make me recognize your hair, your lips, your smile... and make me fall in love... in love with you...

TILL: Your smile... your lips... your hair... Oh, this is heaven... This is the abyss... This is the end of the world...

C U R T A I N

ACT THREE

SCENE I

(Next morning. The scene is much the same as at the opening of Act Two: the glass door almost completely covered with the curtain; half-dark, with a dim light surrounding the couch. But now it is VERA who is resting on the couch, while TILL sits next to her -- caressing the sleeping woman's hair and brow.)

VERA (talking in her sleep, in a strange, singing voice): I am so lovely, so peaceful... In love with sea, storm and clouds... Fond of the winds when they tousle my palm-like hair... Fond of the waves when they caress my rock-like feet...

TILL: Vera dear, what on earth are you talking about?

VERA (asleep): I am not Vera. She is just one of my guests, living on my hospitable shores. Poor little Vera! She's such a tiny, puny thing -- made of perishable, flimsy stuff, all fear and misery, the most pitiful creature... But I am made of earth and stone and grass; I'm solid and durable. And how handsome I am, with all my palm trees and blooming bushes! Don't you know me, stranger? I am the island.

TILL: What island, dear?

VERA (asleep): I used to be the Island of Death, the Master's floating tomb, the mausoleum of the most illustrious spirit. But now I am changed, transfigured, under another spell. The Island of Love-- that's what I have become; the oasis of tenderness, the haven of an enchanted couple. The stranger really should contemplate my new loveliness -- the loveliness of love, the splendor of supreme joy...

TILL: You want me to inspect your beauties, my sweet island?

VERA (asleep): Take a walk along ^{the} beach, climb up ^{the} rocky

mountains. But be careful not to hurt the island's precious, vulnerable soil. Your feet are heavy, stranger. ~~You'd better~~ Tiptoe lest you hurt my soil.

TILL: I'll be careful, Island. Where am I supposed to go?

VERA: Go to the Rock of Devotion -- it's a magnificent spot. Poor little Vera used to sit there every morning; to her, the Rock was a sanctuary, a hiding place, the most beloved retreat. Up there, no one would interfere with her memories, dreams and visions. For the sacred cliff is inaccessible to all but the initiate...

TILL: So I don't seem to have much of a chance to find it.

VERA: You'll find the secret path, stranger -- I'm sure you will. Go to the Rock of Devotion, I tell you -- you'll get there, all right. You'll get there, and find poor little Vera sitting all by herself... No, she is not all by herself...

TILL: Who is with her, if I may ask?

VERA: The Seventh Angel... yes... the bringer of destruction, the token of happiness... her seventh child -- she has conceived it, it is now with her -- her first child of love, her ^{most} beloved ^{son} ~~child~~...

Go to the Rock, stranger, and join poor little Vera -- ~~rich~~, happy ^{little} Vera waiting for her child...

TILL: That's enough now. Wake up.

VERA (still asleep): Go to the Rock of Devotion...

TILL (shaking her): Wake up, Vera, wake up!

VERA (awakening): Who's speaking to me...?

TILL: It's me, darling -- it's Till!

VERA (recognizing him, with a blissful smile): It's you... Why don't you kiss me? What time is it? Is it still night?

TILL: No, it's late in the morning. Look... (He draws the curtain

from the glass door -- letting the bright daylight into the room.)
... what a beautiful day!

VERA (nestling up to him): Beautiful...

TILL: You've been dreaming, Vera. Crazy stuff.

VERA: You mean, I've been talking in my sleep? That's one of my awful habits.

TILL: Don't you know any more what you were dreaming about?

VERA: Not the faintest idea. I always forget my dreams.

TILL: You dreamed that you were the island.

VERA (with a vague, mysterious smile): I was the island. Yes.

TILL: You said curious things about poor little Vera sitting on the Rock all by herself...

VERA: What did I have to say about poor little Vera?

TILL: Your voice sounded strange; almost frightening.

VERA: I've frightened you? Forgive me... (She holds him in her arms. A short silence; then VERA takes her arms from Till's neck and shoulders, gets up, paces the room, finally stops near the couch. There is another pause before she addressed herself to him with great urgency): Till, my love... We have to go! At once! We can't stay here any longer!

TILL: What's that, Vera? You might...? You would be willing...?

VERA: We have to, dear! There is no other choice.

TILL: I've been thinking about it; but I wouldn't have dared ask you...

VERA: We have to escape right now! It would be suicide to stay here another hour. Don't you see? We are criminals, under the Law of the island. Our love is blasphemy, here in the Master's house...

TILL (hugging her, overjoyed): So you're ready to leave this place?

You'll stay with me -- always?

VERA (in his arms): Always.

TILL: Oh, that's wonderful... You're going to be my wife!

VERA (moving away from him): Your wife?... Yes, I suppose I'm going to be your wife...

TILL: I'm so happy... so happy... I'd have never thought that there is so much happiness in the world!

VERA (looking shyly around): Hush, Till! Don't say such things! Not here, where he is listening! His revenge...

~~VERA (putting the palm of her hand over his mouth): Ti~~

TILL (in high spirits): Let him hear it! So what? (Addressing the Master's bust): Listen you, stone-face, long-nose, marble-brow: We are happy! Vera and I are happy... happy... happy...

VERA (putting the palm of her hand over his mouth): Till!

TILL: Aren't you happy, Vera?

VERA: I don't know... Not as long as we are here.

TILL: Let's beat it, then! When do we go?

VERA: Today... now... immediately...

TILL: Where to?

VERA: I don't care. As far as possible... We have to hide from him; he must find us...

TILL: I guess San Francisco will be our first stop. Ever been in Frisco? It's a grand little place, you know. From Frisco, boats keep going to all parts of the world... (He stops, suddenly pensive. A short silence; then): There's one thing, Vera, I want you to realize: I don't have any money.

VERA: That's all right. We'll manage.

TILL: Of course we will. But it's not so easy as you may imagine. It's pretty tough to be poor.

VERA: I'm not afraid. We'll make a living, somehow.

TILL: The trouble with me is, I haven't learned anything.

VERA (with a little laugh): Well, then you're just the right kind of man for me. I haven't learned much, either.

TILL: I've always been kind of restless -- moving about, looking for I-don't-know-what. But now I've found what I was looking for -- I know I have! Now I'll settle down, and stick to one job -- wait and see!

VERA: There was only one job I could do; but now I'm through with it. My psychic forces are gone -- I know that. I will not be able to communicate any more. I've betrayed the Master -- betrayed the spirit world.

TILL: Your crutches gone? All the better! I'll teach you how to walk without them.

VERA: It will not be easy... The Master will persecute us with his hate; we'll be in danger wherever we are... But no other place can be as dangerous to our love as this house, this island. Let's hurry, dear...

TILL: What about the children?

VERA: They are h i s children, they belong to h i m .

TILL: They're going to miss you, Vera.

VERA: I'm not so sure. It's h i m they love -- not me. The father ghost directs their games and studies, he shares their secrets, shapes their characters. If they like and respect me at all, it's only because of my connection with the other side.

TILL: I feel sorry for them. This is no place for youngsters. What's going to become of them -- what chance do they have-- now, with their mother gone...

VERA: Let's make haste! We have no time to lose...

TILL: You know, I think it might be a good idea to have the kids follow us, once we settle down somewhere. It would be murder to leave them here, with their sweet Aunt Judith...

VERA (nervously): That's impossible. The children belong to the island -- to h i m ... I can't take them away. ~~from him~~

TILL: Frankly, I don't quite see...

VERA: We'll talk it over, dear -- later, in San Francisco... You must not spend another moment in this room -- I implore you, Till! You'll be safer outside -- on the beach, in the garden...

TILL: What about you, Vera darling?

VERA: I have to pack some things and change clothes for the trip. Probably I won't find any decent dress to wear. It has been such a long, long time, you know, ^{since I've been} ~~that I wasn't~~ out there, in the world...

TILL: Don't you worry, darling. You'll be pretty enough for me.

VERA: Thanks. Well, we'd better hurry then...

TILL: I hate to leave you alone. Let's keep together, Vera! Why can't I go upstairs with me? ^{you?}

VERA (more and more agitated): No no, you couldn't -- never! That's quite out of the question.

TILL: But why on earth shouldn't I...?

VERA: Don't you understand? The room where h e and I used to live together... o u r bedroom... Not even Judith dares enter it. And you, in your blue sweater... Impossible! It would be too much of an insult!

TILL (laughing): Now really! What's insulting about ^{my} ~~that~~ good old ^{blue} sweater of mine?

VERA: Don't laugh! Go! Wait for me in the garden. I'll call you as soon as I'm ready.

TILL: Okay, I'll wait outside, if it makes you feel better. In fact, I may as well take a stroll ^{around} ~~through~~ the island, while you're busy packing. That's what you told me to do -- remember?

VERA: Did I really? Maybe so... But don't walk too far. And promise ~~me~~ not to enter this room as long as I'm upstairs.

TILL: I promise. (He makes for the glass door, then comes back to kiss her.) Love me?

VERA: I'm afraid I do.

TILL: That's all I wanted to hear. So long, dear. And do hurry! (Exit, to the left.)

VERA (alone, stands motionless; then, in a low voice, smiling): Yes, I do... I do... I'm afraid I really do... Oh, I am afraid... (During the last words, the smile has disappeared from her face which seems to be suddenly darkened as if by the shadow of a passing cloud.)

(JUDITH, from the right.)

JUDITH: I hate to interrupt your meditation, Vera...

VERA: That's quite all right -- in fact, I'm glad to see you. I was just about to go up to your room.

JUDITH: Where is the Messenger? Have you come to any definite conclusion with him?

VERA: Yes, everything is settled. (A short silence; then): Judith, I have to go. For good.

JUDITH (perplexed): What was that...?

VERA: You heard me, Judith. I have to go -- with him.

JUDITH: With w h o m ...?

VERA: With him whom we have called "the Messenger." He is no Messenger, though. He is... Oh, I don't know how to put it... You see, he does not come from the other side, he's a man, I am in love with him!

JUDITH: This is madness...

VERA: That's ^{just} what I thought at first... But then everything changed ... He changed me -- it's a miracle! I'm a new person now -- transformed... I love him, I want to live with him! I want to l i v e , Judith -- isn't that clear enough?

JUDITH: And w h e r e do you intend to live? Out there, in a doomed, guilt-laden world? What kind of life would that be, in the shadow of impending disaster?

VERA: I don't care what may be in store for us -- as long as I am with him...

JUDITH: He will not be with you when the Day of Judgment comes. Are you not afraid?

VERA: I am not. I love him.

JUDITH: The Apocalypse is near. You will have to face it alone, unprotected. And you are not afraid?

VERA: I am not, I am not, I am not... And even if I were -- there's nothing I could do about it. Don't you see, Judith? I h a v e to go -- my staying would be an unforgivable offense, a sacrilege...

JUDITH: There is only o n e unforgivable offense for you to commit, Vera Vanstraaten: desertion! Your sacred vow compels you to serve the Master h e r e , in this house, on this island. Here is your place, *Priestess*. And here you ~~stay~~ will stay.

VERA: I can't... Impossible...

JUDITH: You have no choice, Priestess! You will stay!

VERA (with a ^{short} laugh): Priestess? That sounds funny now...

JUDITH: Why, you must be out of your ^{mind} senses...

VERA: But I'm no longer a priestess, Judith -- I wish you'd get that straight! I'm no longer a medium, I'm no longer Jan's wife. There's another man -- see? His name is Till, and I belong to him. Here, on this couch...

JUDITH: Stop it! Not another word! How dare you...

VERA: You don't want to hear the truth -- that's just like you.

JUDITH: It was not Vera who just spoke to me. An evil spell, a demon...

VERA (with a violent outburst of irritation and disgust): And evil spell indeed!... Oh, if you knew how sick and tired I am of these catchwords! Don't tell me now that I'm possessed of some ^{malicious spirit} poltergeist.

I am not! I am in love, if you know what that means; I'm going away with the man I love, I worship.

JUDITH: It was not you who spoke those shameless words -- not the real Vera...

VERA: It's me, Judith! Finally I am my real self, the real Vera at last! In this house, I've never had a life of my own: I was your slave, your prisoner, the instrument of your insane ambition. Oh, the insults I had to take! The humiliations!

JUDITH: What are you talking about? Who's ever insulted you?

VERA: Don't you remember, Judith -- the way I was treated here? How you and your brother had me locked up and watched and spied upon -- do you forget all that? Well, I don't! Unfortunately, I can't forget those awful weeks when Jan's little romance with the chambermaid was

going on, right here under my eyes; or those long, painful months each year when I was left behind on the island, all by myself, while you and Jan were traveling about. Yes, he was having a good time -- *building up his following* ~~organizing his fame~~, making love to his lady admirers... But I -- what did I have? Always alone in this house, always alone with the dead...

JUDITH: And with your six children.

VERA: My children? Do they belong to me? He wanted them as a king wants heirs for his throne; they were born to continue the Vanstraaten tradition... What do they need a mother for? I wasn't even ^{supposed} ~~allowed~~ to talk to them! I wasn't supposed to do anything -- not supposed to be human... *Oh*, you and your brother -- what have you made of me? An automaton repeating dicta from the other side, a dummy oracle, a mediumistic robot! But all this is over now. I'm through -- do you hear me, Judith? Through, through, through with it all! (She rushes to the door at right.)

JUDITH (blocking her way to the door with the wheel-chair): Where do you want to go?

VERA (tries to push her aside): Let me pass. I have some packing to do in my room...

JUDITH: You will certainly not do anything of the kind.

VERA: I'm off...

JUDITH (with great authority): You will not leave this island. Not for one day; not for one hour.

VERA: And what, may I ask, is going to prevent me...?

JUDITH: The Law! The Powers!

VERA: I tell you I'm through -- through with ~~the~~ ^(Your) Law, through with your Powers...

JUDITH (pointing to the bust): Are you through with him too?

VERA (hesitates near the door): I told you -- didn't I ...?

JUDITH: I want to hear it again. Are you through with him -- yes or no?

VERA: He's through with me, for all I know. Last night, I tried to appeal to him, but there was no answer. There was no contact at all.

JUDITH: Because the demon was with you -- the evil one, the impostor. Try it again. He will answer.

VERA: It's too late now.

JUDITH: He will answer, I tell you. ~~Just~~ Try *it*.

VERA: I don't want to try, I don't want him to answer. And I don't want you to call Till a demon. I love him, we're going to live together.

JUDITH (pointing to the bust again, with an even more imperative gesture): Look at the Master, and then repeat what you ² just said. Why don't you look at him, Vera?

VERA: I don't want to, that's all.

JUDITH: You don't dare. You don't even dare look at him -- and still pretend that he's lost his power over you!

VERA: Yes, he's lost his power over me -- believe it or not: it's true!

JUDITH: It is *n o t* true -- why fool yourself, Vera? You know you will not get away with your absurd, criminal plan; you know the powers will destroy the demon who tries to destroy our work; you know you will stay on the island and do your duty and obey *h i s* will.

VERA (in a very low voice): Do you really think he would... he might forgive me...?

JUDITH: He will -- if you promise never to see the false Messenger again.

VERA: How could I promise such a thing? I love him...

JUDITH: You will think it over. Go to your room now -- go. I know you will not do anything rash or foolish.

VERA: What makes you think that I've changed my mind?

JUDITH: Your eyes tell me that he is with you again; he will release you from the evil spell. Go, Vera, go. Repent. Ask him for mercy. Whatever punishment he may impose on you -- accept it. Follow his advice. Make your peace with him.

VERA: If only Till came back... I don't know what to do...

JUDITH: You know quite well what to do, my dear. Go upstairs, to your room. Meditate. ~~Concentrate~~ Communicate with the other side. ^{Try to} Come in contact with him. You will be safe, once that you are in contact.

VERA: Stop talking to me, Judith -- will you, please? There's something about your voice -- something hypnotizing...

JUDITH: His voice will comfort you. And while you listen to him, the evil one, the demon, will be taken care of. Go.

VERA: I'm so confused, so weary...

JUDITH: You'll feel better soon.

VERA: As soon as Till is back... I suppose I may as well wait upstairs. ~~For a while~~ (Exit, to the right.)

(JUDITH, alone, her face stony as she sits absorbed in thought.

A silence; then UNCLE, LARUE, and LI TSO enter from the right.)

UNCLE: Good morning, my dear ^{Madam} Secretary General. How are you today?

JUDITH: Good morning, gentlemen. I'm fine. Just fine.

UNCLE: My colleagues and I spent most of the night discussing the

new situation.

JUDITH: The new situation. I see.

LARUE: Our talks were indeed most fruitful and stimulating. We have come to certain conclusions as regards the coming campaign...

JUDITH: What campaign?

LI TSO: The campaign to prevent the end of the world. First the idea struck us as not quite in keeping with the Vanstraaten tradition; but we have come to realize the superior wisdom of the Master's plan.

UNCLE: Speaking practically, as an organizer and impresario of the occult, I must say that the new scheme is indeed pregnant with the most exciting possibilities. The world-saving drive will certainly increase the popularity of our movement...

LARUE: The presence of the Messenger is in itself a sensation...

UNCLE: We'll have him broadcast, address mass meetings, preach in our temples...

JUDITH: Friends, I appreciate your enthusiasm, share your hopes. But, unfortunately, I'm in no position, at the present moment, to concentrate on your interesting ideas. To tell you the truth, I am a little bit preoccupied this morning. A disturbing incident has taken place in this house.

UNCLE: Nothing serious, I take it?

~~LARUE: A demon.~~

Serious enough!
JUDITH: ~~A~~ A malignant spirit of the lowest order is

attempting to bedevil our community.

LARUE: Quelle impertinence!

JUDITH: What is worse, the evil ^{is trying} one ~~tries~~ to bewitch the Priestess.

LI TSO: Without any success, of course?

JUDITH: On the contrary, his spell ^{is proving} ~~proves~~ most efficacious.

UNCLE: Incredible!

JUDITH: Not really -- considering the fact that the vicious entity even succeeded in deceiving such experienced old occultists as ourselves. Far from ^{seeing} ~~looking~~ through his obvious masquerade, we took him for what he pretended to be -- the Master's personal agent and messenger!

UNCLE: The Messenger -- an impostor?

LARUE: He made such a pleasant impression. So trustworthy and straightforward.

JUDITH: Quite so. That's why Vera fell in love with him.

UNCLE (terrified): In love -- the Priestess...?

LARUE: Quel désastre!

JUDITH: Disaster is right. Clearly, the demon has been sent by dark powers to interfere with the Master's ~~educational~~ work. You know how bitterly, how implacably they hate him -- and now more so than ever. At this critical juncture, the wholesome influence of our Teacher irks those sinister spirits who hope to profit by the apocalypse. Hence their determination to break his power.

LI TSO: Diabolical...

JUDITH: With the Master ~~being~~ out of reach -- invulnerable, inaccessible --, Vera seems to be the logical target for the fiendish

attack. If the evil entities succeeded in silencing Vera's voice, the Master's message would not be heard any more.

UNCLE: That must not happen! Never!

JUDITH: It will happen -- unless we act quickly and effectively.

UNCLE: If we can be of any assistance to you, my dear Madam Secretary General...

JUDITH: You can -- in fact, I depend on your help, my friends. We have to get rid of the demon.

UNCLE: Naturally. He'll have to be exorcised.

JUDITH: That will not do. You can't drive out an embodied entity by means of magic gestures. The exorcising ritual works only against ghosts.

LARUE: But he still is a ghost, isn't he? -- however human he may look right now...

JUDITH: Even so -- having taken on human form, the intruder will have to be liquidated as though he were a mortal. Is that clear enough?

UNCLE: Perfectly clear.

(A silence. Then):

UNCLE (in a low voice): And we are supposed to do it?

JUDITH: I would do it myself, if it were not for my physical condition. You know what is at stake -- the Master's lifework and ours! Vera is indispensable to the Vanstraaten Society. If we allow the demon to take Vera away from us, we may as well give up altogether.

UNCLE: There can be no doubt, he has to be -- liquidated.

LARUE: But how...? Ça sera un peu difficile...

JUDITH: On the contrary, it's quite simple. I presume you gentlemen will still be able to find your way to the Rock of Devotion?

UNCLE: I daresay we'll never forget that picturesque secret path. Besides I kept the road map you were kind enough to draw for our convenience -- a very neat little job.

JUDITH: All right then. You just take the so-called Messenger for a walk through the island, and go with him to the Rock.

LARUE: And then...?

JUDITH: Then you have him stand at the edge of the cliff to admire the glorious view. Facing the abyss, he's likely to be overcome by a sudden spell of giddiness.

UNCLE: And if he doesn't get dizzy...?

JUDITH: Well, in that improbable case you may have to take the initiative. A very slight push will be sufficient...

LI TSO: A push...

JUDITH: You just touch him with your finger tips -- like that --, and he'll lose his equilibrium, if he stands at the very brink. The abyss will attract him, his bad conscience will pull him down...

LARUE: Even so -- the idea of pushing him... après tout... tout-de-même... c'est trop fort... c'est terrible...

JUDITH: Don't forget he's a demon, friends! And he wants to kidnap the Priestess. We have to dispose of him!

UNCLE: Quite so. It may be an unpleasant job, but it has to be done. As for me, I'm ready, Madam Secretary General.

LI TSO: So am I -- for the sake of the Master's cause. You may count on me, Doctor Judith Vanstraaten.

LARUE: I suppose I, too, will overcome my nervous inhibitions. Of course, I am afraid my finger tips will tremble, at the decisive moment; but I'll try my best.

JUDITH: I thank you, friends. I knew I could depend on your courage and loyalty. The decisive moment is near. Our enemy is now in the garden, brooding over his nefarious plans. He may be here any moment.

(During the second part of the preceding scene, JANE has been standing outside in the garden, near the glass door -- visible to the audience but not noticed by those present on the stage. While JUDITH and the PROFESSORS were talking, JANE seemed occupied with her shells -- holding them to her ear, smiling, nodding, as if enchanted by mysterious music. Now she begins to wave at someone she has noticed in the garden.)

JANE (addressing herself to the person in the garden who is not yet visible to the audience or to the others present on the stage): Hey, you... strange ghost... listen to Number Seven!

JUDITH (noticing Jane): What are you doing here, Jane?

JANE: Nothing. Just playing with my shells. Trying to think of something real nice I could do to make good for the wrong I've done.

UNCLE (whispers to Judith): I hope she wasn't around, just a few minutes ago, when we were discussing -- certain delicate matters...

JUDITH: Even if she had been here, it wouldn't make any difference. She's a ^{bit simple} half-wit, you know.

UNCLE: I'm happy to hear that... or rather, I'm sorry...

JUDITH: That's quite all right. ~~nothing more~~

JANE (to the invisible person in the garden): Don't go away, strange ghost! Number ^{Seven} has something to tell you... something she learned from the shells...

JUDITH (to Jane): Who_n are you talking to, child?

JANE: It's the stranger -- the nice one, the one Number Seven likes...

He's walking out there, in the garden...

JUDITH: Oh, that's interesting! (She moves briskly to the glass door, calls into the garden): Hello, Messenger! How are you this morning?

TILL'S VOICE (from outside): Thanks, Miss Judith -- I'm enjoying myself. A lovely day, isn't it?

JUDITH: It certainly is. Why don't you come in and join us?

TILL (appears on the threshold ^{left} ~~of the glass door~~): I shouldn't come in, really... Well, I suppose it won't do any harm. (He enters, somewhat reluctantly.)

JANE (whispers to Till): There's something I have to tell you, strange ghost...

TILL: What is it, kid?

JUDITH: Don't bother the Messenger, Jane. (To Till): You've been taking a stroll? A good idea, to get some exercise in the morning. How do you like our island? Lovely landscape -- don't you think?

TILL: Very nice. But, as it happens, I didn't find the spot I actually meant to visit.

JUDITH: And what spot is that?

TILL: I think you call it the Rock of Devotion. Vera told me to go there.

JUDITH: Vera told you to visit the sacred Rock?

TILL: That's right. One gets the finest view of the island from that cliff, she says.

THE THREE PROFESSORS (exchange suggestive glances.)

JUDITH: Yes, indeed; the view from that particular point is quite extraordinary -- something you shouldn't miss! I'm sure our friends here would be only too glad to show you the way, if you feel like any more exercise.

TILL: I'd certainly not mind a little mountain-climbing. What about you fellows?

UNCLE: It will be a great honor for us to show the Messenger to the Rock of Devotion.

LI TSO: We will enjoy walking the secret path with the illustrious spirit.

LARUE: This promenade is going to be a great experience for all of us.

TILL: I'm sure it will. But we'll have to walk pretty fast -- I'm in a rush, you know.

UNCLE: Messengers always are.

LARUE: The faster, the better! Besides, the Rock is not far.

TILL: Vera may call for me while I am away... Would you do me a favour, Miss Judith?

JUDITH: Of course, with the greatest pleasure.

TILL: Tell Vera I'll be back pretty soon. Tell her I'm going to the place the Island sent me to. She'll understand.

JUDITH: ~~She will, no doubt. Yes,~~ I'll certainly tell her.

TILL: Thanks a lot. Well then -- all set, gentlemen? Let's go!

(He goes to the glass door, followed by the THREE PROFESSORS. At the door, he hesitates, bows to Uncle:) After you, Professor...

UNCLE: After y o u , Messenger, if you please...

TILL: But you're older than I...

UNCLE: All the same, a spirit has precedence.

~~JANE (to Till): Let Number Seven go with you to the Rock, strange host! Number Seven wants to come along!~~

~~TILL: Why shouldn't you? You're perfectly welcome, madam.~~

JANE (begins suddenly to cry and whimper as TILL passes by, making for the garden): Don't go, strange ghost, don't go!

TILL: What's the matter, kid? Why shouldn't I go to the Rock?

JANE: It's so high and steep -- the nasty Rock! Number Seven is scared...

JUDITH (sharply): You shut up, Jane -- will you? I told you before not to bother our distinguished guest.

JANE (crying): Number Seven -- scared...

TILL (patting Jane's head): Don't you worry, kid -- the high, steep rock won't bite me. I have to go there because your mother... I mean, your stepmother... I mean, the Priestess wants me to. See?

JANE (opens her mouth as if to say something, but is interrupted by...)

JUDITH: That will be enough from you, Jane. You'd better keep quiet, anyhow -- after what happened the other night, at the séance.

JANE (weeps with increasing violence -- and runs off, into the garden.)

TILL (looks after her, shaking his head): Poor thing...

JUDITH: Well, I wish you a pleasant walk, gentlemen. ~~Don't be too long. Very may be waiting for the messenger.~~

~~LARUE: We'll consult your road map, chère amie -- just to be on the safe side...~~

~~JUDITH: Right you are! Safety above all!~~

(TILL and the THREE PROFESSORS, exit to the left.)

JUDITH (alone, looks after them; then turns her wheel-chair and moves to the door at right): He's going to the place the Island sent him to... She'll understand... Yes, I suppose she will... She'll understand, all right... (Exit, to the right.)

(The stage remains empty for a little while; then the SIX CHILDREN enter from the garden, with the weeping JANE in their midst.)

DORIS: Simple Jane -- always crying!

PUCK: And without any reason!

CHRISTOPHER: That's just like her. Ignorant little thing!

URSULA: What are you crying for, Jane?

~~CHRISTOPHER: Still about that missing astral body of yours? You won't get it back by weeping, you know.~~

~~BETTY: Maybe she's just crying because she doesn't belong to the family. That would make sense.~~

~~URSULA: Or maybe she remembers the trumpet -- the way she messed up our dance.~~

~~JANE (has shaken her head after each suggestion.)~~

~~CASPAR: Well, what is it then, Simple Jane? Who's hurt you this time?~~

JANE (still sobbing, stammers): The strange ghost... ~~the nice one~~

CASPAR: Are you trying to say that he's hurt you -- the Messenger? I don't you believe you, Jane.

JANE: Not hurt me -- not h e ... No no no!... But t h e y are going to hurt h i m -- see? Number Seven knows -- the shells told her so...

URSULA: Now, let's get that straight, Simple Jane! W h o 's going to hurt w h o m ?

JANE: The nasty little men -- the three black ones... going to hurt the good ghost... Want to push him from the Rock, with their finger tips... Number Seven has heard it all... knows everything...

CASPAR: Push him from the Rock...?

PUCK (with one of his silvery giggles): With their finger tips?

Like that...? That's funny!

URSULA: I don't think it's as funny as all that, Puck.

JANE: They say the strange ghost is bad; but that isn't so -- Number Seven knows it isn't!

CASPAR: Simple Jane happens to be right, for a change. The Messenger is not bad -- we've found out that much. We think he's pretty good.

JANE: Strange ghost is good, but the three black ones aren't. Want to push the good stranger with their black finger tips. He has to be saved -- the good one!

CASPAR: You've got something there, Simple Jane!... The good one has to be saved.

JANE: Number Seven would like to do it; would like to do something real nice to make good for the wrong she's done.

DORIS: How smart Simple Jane is today!

CHRISTOPHER: She makes almost sense -- it's amazing. Must be the Messenger's good influence.

JANE: Number Seven would like to be good but can't, because she doesn't belong to the family, doesn't know the secret path to the Rock... But the six others -- they do know the path... So why don't they run, and ~~save~~^{warn} the good, strange ghost, and tell him what Number Seven learned from the clever shells -- tell him all about the finger tips, and how they're going to push him...

CASPAR: A brilliant idea!

CHRISTOPHER: Well, I'm not so sure. Maybe Mother wants to get rid of the Messenger, and has asked the professors to give him a little push.

URSULA: I don't think so -- in fact, I believe Mother is rather fond of him. She's already spent two nights in his company -- the night after the gala, playing the magnetic game with him; and the

following night, just talking. Now, I suppose she wouldn't do that, if he were giving her trouble.

CASPAR: He has to be saved -- I quite agree with Jane.

CHRISTOPHER: Shouldn't we first talk it over with Mother or with Aunt Judith?

URSULA: No time -- we'd better hurry! They must be almost on the Rock by now...

PUCK (with a giggle): Maybe they're already tickling him with their finger tips...

URSULA: Don't say such things. Let's go!

CASPAR: I suppose we may as well ~~we~~^{we} wear the masks.

DORIS: The exorcising masks again?

CASPAR: Of course not, silly! The angel outfit, with trumpets and wings and all.

CHRISTOPHER: The angel masks? A little exaggerated, I'd say.

CASPAR: ~~After all~~, We're supposed to save a friendly spirit -- aren't we? So why not look as friendly as we can.

URSULA: All right, boys -- don't ~~be~~ argue, we're in a rush.

Let's get those masks out of the box -- and more quickly than that!

THE SIX CHILDREN (rush to the box of costumes, and in practically no time ^{they} are transformed into angels -- complete with trumpets, silver wigs, etc.)

URSULA: But we should be seven, on an occasion like that!

CASPAR: Let's take Jane along -- I don't call her "simple" because she's turned out to be pretty bright. ~~After all~~, After all, we'd never have thought of saving the Messenger -- if it were not for ^r bright little Jane!

THE SIX CHILDREN (dancing around Jane): Come along, Jane! Come with us to the Rock of Devotion, bright little sister!

JANE: Not to the Rock! Please not... It's so high and steep -- Number Seven is scared...

URSULA: Never mind how high and steep that Rock is, Simple Jane -- we'll take care of you!

JANE: Number Seven -- scared... will get dizzy...

CASPAR: But we need you, Jane -- don't you see? We have to be seven to save the Messenger... Didn't you want to do something real nice to make good for the wrong you've done? All right then, there's your chance...

JANE (nods -- her eyes widened with fear): Something real nice -- yes... Number Seven comes along to the high, steep Rock.

URSULA: That's more like it!

CASPAR: There's your outfit. Quick! (He gives her a complete angel costume -- including the trumpet.)

JANE (with an outcry of fear): Not the trumpet -- no! Number Seven must not touch the trumpet! No tone -- all shrunk away... It's not my fault... want to make good for it... But not touch the trumpet!

CASPAR: You don't have to touch the trumpet, Jane, if you don't like to. Take the drum instead. (He gives her the drum.)

(JANE begins beating the drum in a soft, gingerly manner, as the OTHER CHILDREN intone a solemn fanfare, while marching to the door at left.)

URSULA (leading the procession): May the good spirits be with us.

(THE SEVEN CHILDREN, exit to the left. The drumbeats are still being heard -- quite distinctly at first, then dying gradually away in the distance.)

Space

(A silence; then VERA enters from the right -- followed by JUDITH.)

VERA (rushing to the glass door; very agitated): I don't understand a word... Where is he?

JUDITH: You heard me, Vera. He's gone to the place to which he was sent by the Island.

VERA: ..sent by the Island... yes...

JUDITH: Who is the Island?

VERA: It's me... I dreamed I was the Island... I am the Island. Where did I sent him to?

JUDITH: Don't you remember?

VERA: No, I don't... I told him to take a walk -- that's all I know...

JUDITH: Didn't you tell him to go to the Rock of Devotion?

VERA: Maybe I did... Could be...

JUDITH: You told him to go to the Rock, even though you knew that, by doing so, he would offend against the Law of the Island. You sent him there -- knowing it would be his end.

VERA (with a cry of horror): His end....? What are you trying to tell me...? (Standing at the glass door, with her back to Judith, she begins to call): Till... Till... Don't you hear me?... Till... Where are you, Till?

JUDITH: You know where he is. You know he will not return.

VERA: Till... Till... I'm ready to go... Don't you hear? ... I'm waiting, dear, I'm waiting for you...

JUDITH: He does not hear you.

VERA: Till... Till... It is not true -- it can't be... She's lying to me... You did not go to the Rock... I never told you to go there...

JUDITH: He did. And the powers have punished him.

VERA (turns slowly around; in a wearily dragging voice): The powers are cruel... Oh, how cruel the powers are!

JUDITH: As if I hadn't experienced it myself... Vera, there is no use in struggling and complaining. The Law directing our lives is inexorable, inescapable. What is the price we have to pay for our insights and privileges? Not less than -- everything!

VERA: Everything... Yes, all I had has been taken away from me... Do you think he's -- over there, Judith? On the other side?

JUDITH: Why don't you try to find out?

VERA: How could I? My psychic faculties are gone -- didn't I tell you? Besides, he wouldn't like it...

JUDITH: I'm sure he's waiting for your call, over there.

VERA: I don't know what to do... Oh, I'm so tired... (She staggers, seems on the point of fainting. Propped against Judith, she slides down to the floor.)

JUDITH (bent forward in her chair, supporting Vera's head and shoulders): Take this cushion... there... Make yourself comfortable...

VERA (resting on a cushion in front of the wheel-chair): So tired... so worn-out... If I only knew what to do!

JUDITH: You know what to do, my dear -- you know perfectly well. You're going to communicate again -- that's your life: what else?

VERA: No, I will not... I shouldn't...

JUDITH: You certainly will, my dear. You will have him again -- transfigured, purified, a beloved voice from the better world. His voice will fuse with the Master's voice -- the two voices are one... And you, listening to the twofold appeal, the double greeting, will be happy... You will have peace, my dear, and will be happy -- so happy...

(VERA rests with closed eyes, as the light dims and goes out.)

SCENE II

(Early evening of the same day.

NURSERY MARY and KITCHEN MARY are busy preparing the place for the coming séance, as they were at the beginning of SCENE II, in ACT ONE. Once again the altar has been decorated with white flowers, and the low stools form the traditional semicircle around the central armchair. The glass door is open. Twilight inside the room.)

NURSERY MARY (mutters to herself in a low, angry voice, while dusting the throne-like armchair): A disgrace -- that's what it is! ~~What a shame! What a scandal!~~

KITCHEN MARY: Come on, Nursery Mary, don't lose your temper again!

NURSERY MARY: An extra séance -- just like that! Without even consulting us! That's the way two faithful old servants are treated in this house!

KITCHEN MARY: Always cross, always grumbling! I'm just as tired as you are; but if our Ma'am feels like a little chat with the other side...

NURSERY MARY: They're having their whims and intuitions -- those illuminatés of the ruling class! But for us poor folks it always boils down to the same thing: more toil, more drudgery... That's how it goes: Our Ma'am feels like a chat with the spirit world, and we have to ~~be~~ work over-time!

KITCHEN MARY: Well, you never can tell what it's good for. Maybe we'll get some useful information about the end of the world...

NURSERY MARY: You're not a class-conscious proletarian -- that's

the trouble with you. So let's go on slaving! -- but not for a long time any more. The Day of Judgement is the day of liberation...

KITCHEN MARY: Right you are. But I still think good contacts may help a lot when it comes to facing that apoplectic explosion. After all, it's useful to know high-ranking personalities like our Master Jan and the Messenger.

NURSERY MARY: "Apocalyptic," Kitchen Mary -- not "apoplectic"! How often do I have to tell you that? And as for that so-called Messenger, I have my doubts, you know. He hasn't shown up all day, and our poor Ma'am is crying. There's something cooking, Kitchen Mary -- wait and see!

KITCHEN MARY: Oh, go away -- I don't believe a word! The Messenger is a very nice, correct spirit -- except that he asks for ham and eggs, once in a while...

(JUDITH moves into the room, from the right.)

JUDITH: Everything ready? We'll begin in a moment.

NURSERY MARY: But the children are not yet back from their walk.

KITCHEN MARY: And the professors aren't around, ~~where~~ either.

NURSERY MARY (rather pointedly): Nor is the Messenger, for that matter.

JUDITH: We're not going to wait for anybody. This is an informal séance -- just an improvised little affair.

NURSERY MARY: Not even candle light?

JUDITH: No, leave the glass door open -- the Priestess likes the pale colors of dusk.

NURSERY MARY: Okay -- you're the boss.

JUDITH: Yes, I still am -- am I not?

NURSERY MARY: Music?

JUDITH: Just a few chords. Very soft, if you please.

(NURSERY MARY settles down in front of the organ and begins to play, while JUDITH moves her wheel-chair to her usual place next to the medium, and KITCHEN MARY sits down on one of the low stools.)

(After a few moments, VERA comes from the right -- wearing her white priestess gown with head-band, but no flowers. She walks to her chair and sits down, her eyes closed, her face taut with concentration. JUDITH, sitting next to Vera, holds her hand. NURSERY MARY has stopped playing and joined the group in front of the altar. A silence; then:)

VERA (opens her eyes, shakes her head -- discouraged): No contact... No response... It's hopeless.

JUDITH (holds Vera's hand with a stronger grip -- whispering):

Don't give up! Try! You must go on trying, Vera!

VERA: It's wrong... I shouldn't ^{be doing} ~~do~~ it...

JUDITH (whispers): Try to contact the Master -- remember, he's your Control, you won't get anywhere without his help!

VERA (groaning): I don't want to... I can't...

JUDITH: Appeal to the Master, Vera! He'll put the other spirit through.

VERA: I don't need any mediator, if Till is over there and wishes to communicate with me. (She closes her eyes again. Another silence; then): Till... Can you hear me, Till? Where ^{are} ~~you~~ are you?... I don't know where you are -- I don't know anything, don't feel anything... I'm empty, numb... It has been too much for me -- too much pain, too much anguish... I am so tired, dear..... But if Judith is right and you're actually over there, please answer! I know you

don't believe in spiritualism -- or rather, you didn't when you were here, with us... I know I promised you I wouldn't communicate any more... Don't hate me for doing it -- please, don't hate me, Till!... I did not send you to the Rock -- not consciously, not deliberately... ~~If I told you to go there, I was speaking in my sleep~~... I didn't mean any harm -- believe me, Till, I didn't!... So why don't you let me hear your voice? Why don't you tell me that I am forgiven?... I love you, Till -- wherever you may be, I am in love with you! Wherever you ^{are} are -- I want to live with you, want to be yours! Don't leave me! (The last outcry is followed by a short silence. Then she jumps up -- shaking with violent sobs.) No answer. I am out of contact. No way of reaching him... Oh, this is unbearable!

(TILL appears in the frame of the open glass door, followed by the SIX CHILDREN in angel costumes.)

TILL: What the hell is going on here?

VERA (in a breaking voice, her eyes closed, with tears streaming over her smiling face): There you are... alive... (She totters, is about to collapse.)

TILL (holding her in his arms): What's the matter, darling?

VERA (clinging to him): You didn't fall from the Rock... You are alive... Oh, Till... (She faints in his arms.)

TILL: My poor darling... My poor, beloved Vera... (He carries her to the door at right.)

(TILL exit with VERA.)

(The SIX CHILDREN, still wearing their masks and wings, have in the meantime entered the room.)

NURSERY MARY: Now, if that isn't the craziest séance I ever witnessed!

KITCHEN MARY: Was that supposed to be another matematization, or what?

NURSERY MARY: Didn't I tell you there was something cooking? By the way, the word is "materialization" -- not "matematization."

KITCHEN MARY: Why, of all things...

JUDITH (he face frozen with surprise and anger; to the children): What happened?

THE SIX CHILDREN (shrug their shoulders -- silent.)

JUDITH: Tell me at once what happened, or else...

URSULA: We'll tell Mother.

JUDITH: (hissing with anger): How dare you...?

URSULA: Sorry, Aunt Judith. That's how it is.

JUDITH: This is rebellion... I'll have you punished...

PUCK: What for?

JUDITH: For your insolence -- and for what you did!

PUCK: We saved the Messenger -- wasn't that a nice thing to do?

URSULA: Mother ~~was~~ seemed very pleased.

JUDITH (with an outburst of violent fury): Oh, you vicious, impudent little fools! Who on earth told you...

~~NURSERY MARY (laughs loudly.)~~

~~JUDITH: What do you find so very humorous, Nursery Mary?~~

URSULA: Simple Jane told us that the Messenger was in danger. So we thought it a good idea...

JUDITH: A good idea! You're driving me mad... It's outrageous...

URSULA: Was Jane mistaken? Was the Messenger not in danger at all?

JUDITH: Shut up -- I can't stand any more of this!

CASPAR: I am sure Jane was right -- and we did the right thing.

CHRISTOPHER: Where is Jane? We lost her.

URSULA: Has Jane not come back, Aunt Judith? We lost sight of her, in the mountains.

JUDITH: I don't care where she is... If she were here -- I'd kill her. Jane, of all people! She would have the temerity to interfere with my plans! That little bastard whom I've tried to help and protect -- whom I mistook for the Seventh Angel!

(The THREE PROFESSORS enter from the left -- looking most pitiful and despondent. Their clothes are torn, their faces bruised and dirty under the disheveled white hair. UNCLE has a black eye, LARUE limps, LI TSO wears his arm in an improvised sling. The SIX CHILDREN, NURSERY MARY and KITCHEN MARY burst out laughing at the sight of the three battered men.)

JUDITH: Stop laughing! Immediately!

PUCK (giggling): I can't... They look too funny!

LI TSO: I suppose we do.

UNCLE: I don't feel funny, though. My poor aching eye!

LARUE: And my ankle!... I'm sure it's broken.

JUDITH: Never mind your wounds, gentlemen. You owe me an explanation. Why did you let the evil one escape?

UNCLE: He did get away, then?

JUDITH: He did indeed. At this moment, the impostor is upstairs -- with the Priestess.

UNCLE: This is the end. We are lost.

JUDITH: I couldn't agree more with you, Professor.

LARUE (whinily): It isn't our fault -- croyez-moi, chère amie...

JUDITH: Well then, what do you have to say for yourselves?

UNCLE: This terrible island...

LARUE: Everything was against us...

LI TSO: We lost our way, were unable to find the Rock.

JUDITH: In spite of my road map? Extraordinary.

UNCLE: Most extraordinary indeed! We found the place without any difficulty, when going there yesterday. But this time everything seemed changed -- as if touched by an evil spell.

LARUE: Naturellement, on était un peu nerveux -- vous comprenez, chère amie...

UNCLE: There was not o n e secret path -- there were dozens, hundreds of them!

LI TSO: A whole labyrinth of narrow roads, ravines, gorges, rocks -- a wilderness as rugged and forbidding as I ^{have} never seen one in the heart of Asia.

JUDITH: You must have been at the northern extreme of our island -- far away from the cliff you were supposed to find.

UNCLE: Maybe so. The Rock of Devotion seemed ^{to have} completely vanished. Yet everything might have worked out all right, if it had not been for that terrible music.

JUDITH: What music?

UNCLE: The trumpets and the drum. The Messenger -- that is to say, the evil one, the demon -- insisted on following that mobile music band. They knew the way, he said, while we didn't. So he began running after them.

LARUE: And how fast he ran! We tried to keep up with him -- impossible! After all, one is not quite so young any more as one used to be.

UNCLE: That's how I got that black eye of mine -- I fell while chasing him.

LARUE: So did I -- more than once!

LI TSO: We had no chance. He was determined to join the musicians -- and that's just what he did, most probably.

THE SIX CHILDREN (giggling): Most probably.. yes, yes... most probably he joined us...

URSULA: We took him up to the Rock...

CASPAR: We enjoyed the beautiful view together...

CHRISTOPHER: But we did not push him...

PUCK: Not even with the finger tips! (They laugh uproariously.)

UNCLE: Why, you little devils...

LI TSO: The Master's children sabotaged our action, saved the demon! This is monstrous!

PUCK (giggles): "Monstrous"! What a queer word to use!

DORIS: Typically grown-uppish!

JUDITH (furious again, moves her wheel-chair towards the children -- brandishing her cane at them.) I'll teach you...

(Before JUDITH has quite reached the frightened CHILDREN, TILL enters from the right.)

TILL: Stop it, Aunt Judith! Don't you touch these kids!

JUDITH: Who are you to tell me what to do or not to do, young man?

TILL: Just calm down, Auntie, just take it easy. You'll soon have plenty of reason to get excited -- just wait a little!

JUDITH: What are you trying to tell me...? (With a sudden apprehensive intuition): Where is Vera?

TILL: Upstairs, in her room. Changing clothes. We're leaving, you know. Vera has decided to leave this place with me.

NURSERY MARY: What's that...?

LARUE: Quelle audace!

JUDITH: Quiet, please! (To Till, with forced calmness): And when do you expect to ~~leave~~^{go}?

TILL: Right now -- in a few minutes. As soon as Vera is ready.

JUDITH: I have to talk to ~~her~~^{her}. (She moves swiftly to the door at right.)

(JUDITH exit -- followed by the THREE PROFESSORS, NURSERY- and KITCHEN MARY.)

(The SIX CHILDREN -- now without masks -- look at TILL, who seems a little self-conscious. A silence; then):

URSULA: You're not going to take Mother away from us, Messenger?

TILL: Quit calling me "Messenger;" I told you my name is Till.

URSULA: Answer my question, Till.

TILL: No, I'm not going to take your mother away from you. I want you to come along.

URSULA: All of us?

TILL: Naturally -- all of you kids.

CASPAR: Simple Jane too?

TILL: Yes, of course, she may also come along, if she wants to.

URSULA: I think she should, because she gave us the idea of saving you, Messenger Till. Besides, without Jane we would be only six, when we are supposed to be seven.

PUCK: Where ~~do you want to take us to, anyhow?~~^{are we going, Till?}

TILL: Well, you see, Puck, there are so many places... It's a big world, you know.

DORIS: Are you trying to tell us that we'll live with you out there in the world -- the big, nasty world of the strangers?

TILL: It isn't as nasty as all that -- and after a little while it won't seem so strange to you any more. You'll get used to it.

CHRISTOPHER: But what are we supposed to do -- out there, in the world?

TILL: That's up to you, children. You'll have to figure out some kind of program for your future life; in other words, each of you will have to pick a profession.

DORIS: What's that -- a profession?

BETTY: Sounds awfully grown-uppish.

TILL: Well, I suppose you'll grow up eventually, whether you like it or not.

CASPAR: Do a l l grown-ups have a profession -- out there?

TILL: Most people are kind of busy -- making or selling things, doing some job or other. Wouldn't you like that too -- to do a job, to get around and go places?

PUCK: Yes, I'd certainly like to go places! And I suppose I wouldn't mind lhaving a job.

URSULA (after a short silence): There's one thing that puzzles me, Till. If the world is coming to an end so soon -- what's the use of having a profession?

TILL: Maybe the world will last a little longer than we think, right now. The old thing has already survived many a crisis, you know.

URSULA: But Father says there will be a great explosion in a couple of months or so.

TILL: Could be; but you never can tell... Don't forget your father is far away; his idea of time may be different from the one we mortals have, here below. What seems like a couple of months from his point of view, is perhaps two-hundred years for us -- or two-thousand.

CASPAR: In that case, it would really be worthwhile to pick a profession and go places -- wouldn't it, though?

TILL: It's always worthwhile, I guess. As long as we are here and have to go on living, it's always worthwhile to make the best of it. Don't you think so, son?

PUCK (with a chuckle): Funny -- your calling him "son". As if you were our father!

TILL: Yes, that's funny, all right. I suppose I don't look very fatherly. Not dignified enough. But would you kids mind having me as a big brother or just as an older pal?

URSULA: An older pal would certainly comeⁱⁿ handy -- especially with Father being so far away, these days. We haven't heard from him for quite some time...

TILL: I'm afraid you won't hear from him again -- not the way you used to.

CHRISTOPHER: Why is that?

DORIS: Dad is not cross with Mama, by any chance?

TILL: No, not exactly. It's just... You see, your father can't be always with you. He has now withdrawn to an even more remote region of the other world -- a very distant place where he's quite out of reach.

CASPAR: I understand. That's why he has sent his messenger, so Mother won't be alone.

TILL: That's one way of looking at it... Yes, I suppose ~~there~~^{there} you've got something, sonnie.

(JACOB appears on the threshold of the glass door -- carrying JANE's body in his arms.)

JACOB: Prince of the waves... illustrious nix... stately son of Neptune... Look what I've found in the sea.

TILL: What is? -- Jane! Is she dead?

THE SIX CHILDREN (surrounding Jacob, looking at Jane's dead body):
Simple Jane! Look at her -- how ~~what~~ she is! And her poor face -- how white!

PUCK (touches her face, and shudders): And how cold! Brrr...

TILL: Leave her alone, children. She's dead -- poor thing.

URSULA (staring at Jane): So that's what they look like -- the dead. They ^{don't} look nice, the way ghosts do. They look bad. (She begins to cry -- quietly but bitterly.)

TILL: Don't cry, little Ursula. She wasn't happy here -- you know that. May^{be} she's better off now.

CASPAR: She wasn't happy here because we didn't treat her right. We said she didn't belong to the family. But in a sense she did.

URSULA: It was she who told us about the professors -- the nasty ^{tricks} ~~things~~ they were up to. She told us to save you, Till. So we took her along... But she couldn't walk as fast as we -- and she was frightened, too. That's how we lost her. She must have fallen from one of the cliffs, up there.

TILL: Where did you ~~see~~ find her, Jacob?

JACOB: On the beach -- the surf washed her ashore, not far from the Rock of Devotion.

TILL: That's where it happened, then -- on the Rock of Devotion. She was probably looking for us, but we were already gone. ~~W~~ I can imagine how terribly scared she was -- all alone in the dark, up there in the wilderness. So she got too close to the abyss, made a wrong step -- and fell. Poor kid.

JACOB: You must not feel sorry for her, mighty son of the depths. Do I have to tell you how pleasant it is, down there? She was anxious to join her father -- that's only natural. Clever little thing! She landed right on the spot where our Master was drowned.

CASPAR: I feel sorry for her all the same -- I can't help it.

THE OTHER CHILDREN: So do I... so do I... (They cry.)

(VERA comes from the right. She is dressed for the trip -- wearing a simple, white, tailor-made costume of tropical style, a white little hat, and a white veil covering the upper half of her face.)
VERA (smiling at Till): I'm ready, dear. You see, it didn't take me long.

URSULA: Look at Mother! She looks different!

PUCK: She's ^{wearing} ~~wears~~ a hat!

CASPAR: She's beautiful!

VERA (noticing Jacob): What's that?

TILL: It's Jane, darling. She's dead -- drowned in the sea. She went with her brothers and sisters to rescue me, you know. It seems she lost her way and fell from the Rock of Devotion.

VERA: From the Rock of Devotion... The sacred cliff wanted a victim today.

JACOB: The sea wanted a victim today, Ma'am -- the sea always wants victims. That's the way the sea is -- powerful and wonderful. It gets what it wants -- and keeps it.

VERA (close to Jane, caressing her soaked hair and forehead): How pretty she is... Much prettier than I've ever seen her.

JACOB: She'd better look pretty, Ma'am! This is her great day: she's going to see her father again, down there in the watery realm. This is a day of happiness and reunion.

VERA: Yes, he'll be glad to have her -- you're right, Jacob: he'll be overjoyed.

JACOB: Let us not keep him waiting -- you know how the Master is, Ma'am: a little impatient at times. It's time for us to give little Jane back to the powerful, wonderful sea.

VERA: Do that, Jacob. She wants to go home. She needs ^{a good, long} rest.

URSULA: But we'll hear from her -- won't we, Mother? She'll speak to us, once in a while?

CHRISTOPHER: And when we have a great, big gala, she may even materialize -- don't you think so, Mother?

VERA: No, she will not. There will be no more galas, children -- you

may as well know it right now. In fact, there will be no more séances at all.

THE SIX CHILDREN: But, Mama -- w h y ?

VERA: I'll explain ~~you~~ later -- tonight there's no time.

TILL: Right you are, honey. Let's get out of here! I hope my friend Jacob will be good enough to take us over to the coast in ~~your~~ ^{his} sail-boat?

JACOB: I'll do whatever you say, illustrious prince of the waves. But first of all I have to return my lovely burden here to the flood to which it belongs.

TILL: All right, you take her down to the beach, and then come back here -- is that understood, Jacob?

JACOB: I'd do anything to please the gallant son of Neptune.

URSULA: May we go down to the beach with Jacob, Mother? We'd like to watch ~~return to the waves~~ ^{the funeral}.

CASPAR: Say Yes, Mother! We want to bid her farewell.

CHRISTOPHER: We'll ask her to remember us to Dad. She'll do that for us -- won't she, Mama?

VERA: I'm sure she will. Yes, you may go with Jacob.

URSULA: It's going to be a real ~~funeral~~ ^{gala}, with flowers and candles and all. May we use the candles and the flowers from the altar, Mother?

VERA: Yes, you may, children. Make it a nice ~~funeral~~ ^{ceremony}. Each of you takes a candle.

(It is half-dark in the room by now. The CHILDREN lighten the seven candles of the candelabrum on the altar. They remove the white flowers from the pedestal and adorn Jane's body. Then each CHILD takes one candle -- leaving one on the candelabrum.)

JACOB: Well done, children, well done! Look, how lovely she is now! All the nixes will be delighted. Yes, children, it will be quite an occasion -- the home-coming of the Master's little girl! (The SIX CHILDREN, wearing the angel masks again, have now formed a cortege behind JACOB. Each CHILD carries in one hand a candle, while manipulating the trumpet with the other hand. The monotonous tones they produce have the rhythm and expression of a simple funeral march. The procession moves slowly, solemnly into the garden and disappears in the darkness.)

(VERA and TILL -- he with his arm around her shoulder -- look after them, in silence. Then):

VERA (in a very low voice): There is one candle too many.

TILL (after another silence): You said something curious this morning, Vera -- out of your sleep, you know.

VERA: What did I say, dear? Won't you tell me?

TILL: First I thought I shouldn't. But now I may as well.

VERA: What was it, Till? What did I say in my sleep?

TILL: You said that poor little Vera was sitting on the Rock of Devotion -- not alone but with the Seventh Angel. Her first child of love, you said, her most beloved son -- she has conceived him, he is with her now...

VERA: Did I really say that, dear? Are you quite sure I did?

TILL: Of course, I am. What's so exciting about it?

VERA: But, darling.., Till, my love... don't you realize? I'm never wrong when speaking in that kind of somnambulistic state!

TILL: Come now, Vera! Please! None of these superstitions! Haven't you promised me...?

VERA: I know I have -- and I'll keep my word. No crutches any more! When I tried to communicate with your spirit, a little while ago -- that was my last relapse: can't you forgive me for it? I don't know how it happened... You were gone, and there was the fear again -- the threatening abyss...

TILL: Well, let's forget about it -- that's all over now. But why go you on believing in dreams and inner voices?

VERA: That's different -- don't you see? All right, I lost my psychic powers -- and am glad about it, too! But that is not to say that I'm now without any intuition or sensitivity. Believe me, Till, it's t r u e ! (She embraces and kisses him -- radiant with joy).

TILL (half-pleased, half-embarrassed): Well, if you think so, darling... it's quite possible, of course... I wouldn't be too sure, though, at this early point...

VERA (still beaming with happiness): I a m sure, Till my love! I am! ... Oh, isn't it wonderful! (Suddenly pensive): The seventh... Don't you remember what you told me about the seventh, Till?

TILL: I? How could I have told you anything...?

VERA: "But with the coming of the seventh angel, all hope is gone: he brings death and distaster..."

TILL: That doesn't ^{sound} like me.

VERA: And yet, it was y o u who said those words to me; it was the Messenger who disclosed to the Priestess the meaning of the seventh trumpet blast. The end of the reprieve -- that's what the seventh blast announces. When the Seventh Angel appears, then the time is come -- the time of the great wrath, and the hour of the dead that they should be judged.

TILL: You're dreaming again, Vera. All this is quite fantastic...

VERA: Maybe it is -- who knows? We do not know, Till, why you were sent to this island, or why you had to fall in love with me, or why I have to love you. Am I destined to give birth to the death of the world? Or is it ^{to be} a saviour? ~~Or is it a saviour? Or is it a saviour?~~

TILL: Or ^{maybe} ~~Or~~ just another child -- a baby among millions?

VERA: I hope that's what it is -- just another baby!

TILL: Except, of course, that we want it to be a little more intelligent and more handsome and more attractive than the average!

(The door at right opens: JUDITH appears on the threshold. Behind her wheel-chair huddle the THREE PROFESSORS, NURSERY- and KITCHEN MARY. During the following scene, the group advances a little further into the room, but keeps near the door at right.)

JUDITH: For the last time, I implore you, Vera.

VERA: It's no use, Judith -- your tricks won't work any more. I am leaving.

NURSERY MARY (sobbing and lamenting): You can't do that to us, Ma'am.

JUDITH: For the last time, Vera, I warn you...

VERA: You can't frighten me any more. I've made up my mind, once and for all. I am leaving.

JUDITH: How selfish you are! How cruel! Don't you realize what you're doing to me? Without your mediumship, I'll not be able to communicate with my brother any more. Without communication, my life will be devoid of all its sense and purpose, will be unbearable.

VERA: The Law directing our lives is inexorable, inescapable -- have you already forgotten what you told me this morning, Judith? We have to bear it.

JUDITH: Yes, for you it may be easy to go on living, to enjoy life -- communication or not; you have children, you're healthy, young and beautiful. But what about me? Look at me, Vera! Look at a poor, crippled old woman who has nothing in the world -- nothing, nothing, nothing -- if you deprive her of the only thing she ever possessed and cherished!

VERA: I don't want to deprive you of anything, Judith. But I have to obey the powers who plan and direct my life. I have to leave the island.

NURSERY MARY: (sobbing and lamenting): You can't do that to us, Ma'am, you can't! To run away like that -- leaving two faithful old servants behind: it just isn't ~~being~~ done! It's wrong, it's unfair, it's against the Law!

KITCHEN MARY (also weeping): Don't go, Ma'am, please don't! Who will take care of us when the end of the world comes along? Don't leave us in the lurch, without help or protection!

UNCLE: Don't go, Priestess! Think of the Vanstraaten Society! If you desert the Cause, our organization is doomed, the Master's life=

work ruined!

TILL: You'd better shut up, Professor. Another word from you, and I push you with my finger tips -- just hard enough to give you another black eye!

UNCLE: How dare you...

TILL: Cut it out! I don't have too much patience with a guy who tried to kill me -- see?

LI TSO: All we meant to do was, to serve our beloved spirits. If we have been doing wrong, if we have transgressed against the Law -- it was for t h e i r sake! (With a gesture towards the altar.)

UNCLE: And for the sake of mankind! Don't forget, Priestess, what the revelations from the other side mean to millions all over the world!

VERA: If you have so much faith -- if you believe in your mission, why do you not carry on without me?

UNCLE: You know quite well that is impossible.

LI TSO: The Society will not survive your loss.

LARUE: Not to mention the scandal! Figurez-vous! -- the high-priestess of an esoteric cult marries a nobody, an ignorant vagabond, an impostor!

TILL: You've got something there, you funny little man. I a m ignorant and a vagabond, and at times I may even have been a little bit of a crook. But -- figurez-vous! -- I'll make Vera happy.

VERA: I a m happy, dear. And will always be, as long as I am with you.

JUDITH (bursts out laughing -- a fierce, hysterical, convulsive laugh.)

(While the last lines were being spoken, the SIX CHILDREN -- still holding the candles, but without masks -- have appeared in the frame

of the glass door. JACOB stands behind them.)

JUDITH (still shaking with evil, desperate laughter): Did you hear that, children? Your mother says she's happy! She's betrayed her husband and her work, she's about to run off with a reckless adventurer, she's ruining her career, ^{by} abandoning her children, murdering her ^{(her best friend} sister-in-law ^{),} -- but she's happy! Oh, what a joke! What a joke!

URSULA (very calmly and seriously): But she ^{can't} ~~doesn't~~ abandon ^{ing} us, Aunt Judith. We're going with her.

CASPAR: And will be happy with her. Look how happy she is -- she smiles!

JACOB: Look at them! Behold the Prince of the Waves and his lovely bride! The landlubbers, the blind rats don't see it; but old Jacob sees it -- the glory around their heads!

JUDITH: The glory will fade away, the smile will vanish; they will suffer, will hate each other -- haunted by my malediction, persecuted by revengeful ghosts!

TILL: We are not afraid of your malediction, Aunt Judith, and we do not believe in ghosts.

JUDITH: You will believe in ghosts and in revenge, and you will be afraid! Your whole life will be fear -- unending torture, constant punishment. That foul, materialistic world to which you want to belong -- it is directed, ruled, subjugated by fear. Trembling with fear, blinded, paralyzed, tormented by fear, it waits for its own disintegration, the final ordeal, the apocalyptic disaster. And you, Till and Vera, will wait and tremble with the masses of doomed, sinful mortals -- and will perish with them! And will perish!

VERA: Don't listen to her, children. Life is not terrible; we will master it. Even if there is so little time left to us here below,

we can try to be happy; even if the Day of Judgement is near, we can try to be cheerful and confident. For us, there is only the trying. And in the end all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. Fear not.

CURTAIN

T H E E N D