

SCENE 2

A wine cellar almost
in total darkness.
A long table; with two
chairs at either end of it.

CARDINAL

(Taking off hood and cloak)

Yes, my boy; it is his Eminence, Cardinal Munch. Nice disguise, eh? Well, what better way to get to know my flock? Relax. You'll be safe down here. You are in the wine cellar of Our Lady Of The Peasants. who is also Our Lady Of The Sacred Heart -- Heartless Heart -- Transplanted Heart. Not that, my boy, is responsibility.

(Looks up. Crosses himself)

Forgive me. Just a little joke. Where are you going?

INNOCENT

Looking for those tunnels that lead out of here.

CARDINAL

They don't exist. One does. And only I know where it is. And I'm not about to show it to you, yet.

INNOCENT

But they're after me and I need to --

CARDINAL

I said -- NOT NOW! Is that not answer enough coming from your Cardinal?

(Shift)

You're safe here. And perhaps, while you're here, a miracle will happen and your forces -- the forces of good, such as they are -- will overcome the forces of evil, such as they are. either way, your being here will put us in a better bargaining position.

INNOCENT

What? Are you planning to use me?

CARDINAL

(Lighting candles around cellar)

Just listen to the divine music. That practicing will go on well into the morning. And in a few hours the choir will begin rehearsing. One hundred heavenly voices. Heavenly. Even when they cry out in. . .pain.

(INNOCENT slumps over table)

Exhausting, this business of being important. Ah, but what you need, what we both need, in veritas -- is vino! Don't be bashful. You must be parched.

(Drinks, draining half the goblet)

Did you know your brother, Rudolph, was an altar boy? Oh, yes. A little saint as he served the Mass. Belonged on a Christmas card, with his rosy cheeks. From the fevers he was always having.

INNOCENT

Always?

CARDINAL

Very sickly. Ah, but no one could swing a church censer like Rudolph. You know, he once filled the censer with sulfur and caused -- you'll pardon the pun -- a mass exodus. But that was merely cute. He'd also instruct the altar boys in

(whispers)

impure and improper acts.

(Full voice)

I once caught one of his seminars. Right down here, in fact. Little boys and sometimes little girls and Master Rudolph, underneath the casks. Lord, but Rudolph was ingenious with spigots! . . .And another time I tracked down a blasphemous wall-writing campaign to your brother: "If God is not dead, then God is evil. Long live God." A non-believing snot, you know. God, I despise non-believers. I'm happy to say that my proving him the blasphemous wall-writer helped to send him on his way. Fortunately, the Mainlanders were on my side then. He had the last word, of course. Just before his boat-to-exile left, Rudolph had the nerve to shout to me, "Beware, Cardinal Munch. My country has betrayed me. Your God will betray you." Imagine? And he might take charge here --that ruthless, perverted--

(Sees INNOCENT dozing off)

CARDINAL

(Continued. Fires next series of questions
at INNOCENT)

Who made the world?

INNOCENT

God made the world.

CARDINAL

Who is God?

INNOCENT

God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things.

CARDINAL

Where is God?

INNOCENT

God is everywhere.

CARDINAL

Is God just, holy and merciful?

INNOCENT

God is all just, all holy, all. . .all—

CARDINAL

—MERCIFUL, as HE is infinitely perfect! Ah Ha! You don't know all your catechism! I knew it! I'd argue with your mother; let me instruct the boy! It is a Cardinal's job to instruct a Prince! "The Arcadia-Priest is good enough," she'd say. I should have taken that as a sign of the demise of my power! Because somewhere within me, something centuries old became enraged! But also — within me — a weariness . . . and an understanding that it really didn't matter . . . NONSENSE! I haven't lost parishioners. THAT'S RIGHT, BROTHER CONFIDENCE! Not a one! And they still kiss our ring! You could bet Rudolph never would have kissed my ring. But you did. And I thank you for that moment; because in that moment that centuries-old position was restored and --

CARDINAL

(Continued. Sees that INNOCENT
is dozing off again)

—Who made the world?

INNOCENT

God made the world!

CARDINAL

Who is God?

INNOCENT

God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things.

CARDINAL

What is man?

INNOCENT

Man is a creature composed of body and soul, and made in the image of God.

CARDINAL

(Grabs INNOCENT by the shirt,
pulls him up)

Blasphemy! Are you saying that God steals?! Stinks?! Sobs?! Stuffs his face?!
Slobbers?! Cheats?! Betrays?! Hurts?! Farts?! Lusts?!

INNOCENT

(Almost choking)

The next one — the next one answers it! — Question: Is the likeness in the body
or in the soul?

CARDINAL

And the answer?!

INNOCENT

The likeness is chiefly in the soul!

CARDINAL

OH, AN ESCAPE CLAUSE, EH?!

(Throws INNOCENT back into the chair,
Laughs, then goes into a terrible coughing fit.
INNOCENT, runs to the CARDINAL;
pats him on the back)

GET AWAY! DO YOU THINK I'M AFRAID TO DIE?! . . . Oh, I'm sorry. forgive me. I'm out of sorts myself. Well, it's not going to be easy for me if that non-believing snot does come to power. Then, too, you're not the only one being pursued, you know. Brother Confidence and his mob are out to do me in. I know my parishioners go to him, too. And what about those ghosts of the heavenly voices, eh? Ah, but that's no excuse. Here you are, weary from fleeing the evil ones -- a guest in God's sanctuary -- and I scream and holler at you. No! No! No! It's not right! Now you just sit there and . . . I know. I'll confess you. Yes. These are uncertain times and uncertain things can happen to one. One must be prepared.

INNOCENT

I went to confession before I left Arcadia. I haven't sinned since I got here. In fact —

CARDINAL

You're more sinned against than sinning. No doubt. Still, at this moment are you not — perhaps — beginning to doubt God?

INNOCENT

When things were good, God was good. Now . . .

CARDINAL

You see? Is there anything more? for example, is your heart completely pure? Is there nothing but good will there?

(Pause)

INNOCENT

Before. . . When I met my "subjects". . . I wanted to smash them.

CARDINAL
You mean you felt rage.

INNOCENT
Feel. Like I've never felt before.

CARDINAL
What else?

INNOCENT
Superior. I felt -- feel superior somehow. Is that a sin?

CARDINAL
Terrible sin. You know we're all shit in the eyes of God!
(smacks his own mouth)
Filthy mouth! See? Even I sin --Ah! That's how we'll pass the time. First--
anymore sins?

INNOCENT
No.

CARDINAL
Good. I absolve you. and for your penance, you'll confess me.

INNOCENT
What?

CARDINAL
Not really, of course. But you are a Prince. It wouldn't be such a blasphemous
game and--

INNOCENT
I could never--

CARDINAL
Ah, well, let's just say you'll just listen to a tale concerning me and your country
men. Now, there's no harm in that. Is there. You'll be the first who ever heard it
this way and, in a way, you'll have to judge.

INNOCENT

I can't.

CARDINAL

YOU DAMN WELL CAN! Why do you think I saved you?! Because you're a victim?! --Who isn't?! No! I did it because I saw in you someone who would listen and maybe understand and --! Oh, why waste words?! I'm giving you sanctuary AND I DEMAND THAT YOU PAY ME BY LISTENING! . . . please.

. . .Good.

(Long pause. HE says the next as if HE's quoting someone and the quote is coming to him in bits and pieces)

The essence is . . . compassion.

(Breaks from it)

I saw Miss Emmy in a tavern. On one of my nocturnal swoopings. She was a plain woman. Sat by herself. Stared ahead. But saw nothing. There was something in that stare . . . something that attracted me. A frenzy? Madness?

(Pause)

Soon she stumbled out. I followed her into the countryside. She staggered to the cliff overlooking the beach.

(Pause)

What a night that was. Pitch black. Foggy. You could only hear the waters breaking below.

(HE drinks)

She was going to jump, of course. I stopped her. Talked about God and how what she attempted would be a sin against Him. I don't know if that did it. I doubt it. But, that's the only pitch I know.

(Drinks)

She was going to kill herself. Because she was pregnant. The young man refused to marry her. But, there were some unusual touches. He was also very plain, she said. They had come together out of a need, she said. Very articulate, this plain woman. Out of a need, she said, to avoid. . .guess?

. . .The abyss. Her word, not mine. The abyss. She talked about how they had witnessed it. And how they had somehow found each other in their of it. The abyss. And it was a terror of such dimensions that it superseded another terror. For her: The bringing forth a monster child. Most of her adult life she feared this. Felt that there were forces in the air that were conspiring for women to bring forth monsters.

CARDINAL

(Continued. Laughs)

But still they came together. I was tempted to ask if coming together wasn't another kind of abyss. And I was also tempted to ask why, if she feared the having of a baby, she didn't insist on some precautions. I guess one doesn't conquer one's fear of the abyss by taking precautions, eh? And it is a sin to take precautions. I persuaded her to tell me who the man was. I went to him. Talk about madness in the eyes. He was all mad eyes and sunken cheeks. Oh, he thought he loved her, and did feel responsible --Ah! I latched onto that. Talked to him about his responsibility to Emmy, to himself, to the child -- to God! Of course, I also talked about God's infinite mercy. In short, I pestered them into doing the proper thing. They got married.

(Drinks)

INNOCENT

You don't have to tell me this.

CARDINAL

On the day the baby was born, I gave confirmation to a hundred angels of Peasantmania; forcing the Holy Ghost into their dear little heads. Afterward, I got into my Duisenberg to hurry to Emmy's house.

INNOCENT

I don't want to hear this. I can feel that I shouldn't hear this.

CARDINAL

I got into my Duisenberg to hurry to Emmy's house. Somehow, while stepping on the brake to avoid a line of the angels I had just confirmed, the car, instead of stopping, lurched forward! . . . No one killed. But many of the children couldn't have done such a monstrous deed. Machines fail. right? And then there's always Fate. Destiny. Them. "Not Allah?" No. Never Allah or His messengers on earth. But, even in my fever I was tempted to push them -- the parents of the maimed -- to seek out the real culprit. Allah! That's right. You see, He must have had something on those little lambs and rode my foot, sat on it and, with extra pressure on his ass, sat down lambs and rode my foot, sat on it and, with extra pressure on his ass, sat down hard and instead of stopping,

CARDINAL

(Continued)

He made me give it gas. Zoom! Zoom! ZOOM! Screams and broken bodies! So I had to have one success that day and a warm manger scene of a fine healthy baby and happy parents would be it. But Allah overloads His work with absurd implications. Have you noticed that? Well, Emmy died in childbirth and the baby was born with the head of a bat. I swear to God --the head of a bat! And the father . . .he just stood there holding the infant in his arms . . . looking at me with all that madness and perplexity and hurt . . .And I'll never forget this . . . He said -- "Whose responsibility is this?" Then he ran with that bat-baby to the same cliff and threw himself and it over the edge ... down . . .

(HE sinks to his knees
in front of INNOCENT)

. . .down into the abyss.

(A long pause. The organ can still be heard,
but it is now being played in a less
expansive mood)

Who can blame anyone . . .?

(Exhausted, HE looks up, some kind
of expectation on his face)

Right?

INNOCENT backs away from
the CARDINAL)

INNOCENT

Show me the way out of here. Do you hear? I don't want to stay in the same room with a lie.

CARDINAL

Lie? what lie?

INNOCENT

You're a non-believer! Believing you believe!

CARDINAL

Not true! What?! That story I just told? . . . I made it up!

INNOCENT

My priest on Arcadia was like a spirit! Materializing from the waves of heat between the palm trees. As I needed him. He didn't even have a name. He was my conception of a saint; smiling, always smiling. And simple. And sober. Nothing of the "abyss" about him. But you -- you're all mouth and gut and slobber. -- And PAIN! And you make me feel that pain. And I hate you for that. WHERE?! --Where is that tunnel?!

CARDINAL

(Rises. Stumbles after INNOCENT
who wildly looks for the tunnel)

No! It's that story that's making you say all this! I told it to you just to . . . to pass the time . . . Good heavens, you don't really believe such hideous things can really happen in this life? . . . in this comedy? . . . in this kingdom? . . . It's my grotesque sense of humor! I'm a joke maker! You mustn't believe a word of it! It's not true! Now, now I'm allowing you to forgive me . . . You will! You will forgive meeeeeeee!

(CARDINAL stumbles back to the
table, collapses at another
chair and sprawls across the
table, knocking goblets onto
the floor)

INNOCENT

How can I forgive you? . . .

(INNOCENT finds the tunnel.
Exits)