
Luigi Lunari

A Love Story

Two acts

English text by Stella Spirito

The English text is a word-for-word translation from the original Italian and is not intended for stage production.

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Characters:

Walter

Claudine

Nino

The scene.

A modern flat furnished with great taste. It is an open plan, in which are contained a sitting room, a study and a small corner bar, separated by a small flight of stairs, with 2 or 3 steps, which can be used to alter the plan of the room.

There is also a large screen, which is part of the set, moreover, part of the furniture; although apparently not real, it dominates the set and the audience.

In front of the screen, with their backs to the audience, are the armchairs and sofa that make up the sitting room. Next to them, there is a small table with a remote-control. This controls the lights, the screen, the slides and a gramophone.

Act One

I.

Night time. The room is apparently empty, slightly lit by a lamp under a lamp shoot in the corner. A long silence. A clock marks the time, with an abstract sound: it is four a.m.

From the central armchair we merely notice, rather than see, the swift movement of somebody: a light tossing, an awakening, still confused and lifeless.

All of a sudden, there is an arm, underlined by intensified light that focuses on it, as in cinema detail. It stretches out of the chair, slowly, sleepily. A hand reaches the controls on the table: in a groping manner as a movement repeated many times. The hand looks for a button and pushes it. The painting that hides the screen opens up with a light buzz. The hand grabs a glass of whisky which was placed on the table but now disappears behind the back of the chair.

Again the hand reaches the remote control and pushes a few more buttons.

The lamp in the corner switches off, the room becomes dark and soon the screen is lit, even if still colourless. In the reflection of the screen, the hand pushes down other buttons. Slowly, from the silence, music springs out: eighteenth century music, sweet and solemn. On the screen appear unclear images, that slowly begin to come into focus. The intensity of the music grows, expands and invades the scene.

Now the image is clear: it is a young woman, beautiful, extremely feminine, with a natural and inborn elegance. These are the foregrounds that dissolve into one another, either static or with motion. The woman is -or at least seems- to be dressed in costume: she wears either horse riding gear, or an evening dress or a dress suitable for a picnic; but she could also be formally, conventionally dressed.

Her movements are slow, radiant, angelic; her images are of pure beauty; the woman seems happy, smiles, moves her lips as if talking to somebody, bends her head backwards and laughs, openly and frankly. Then, she turns her head on one side, as if furtively looking at an invisible interlocutor, in an ingenuously malicious manner. She sinks her face into a bunch of flowers, closing her eyes as if inebriated by the perfume... Suddenly, with a sad, faded, gloomy expression, her face turns into an awful, haughty, unpleasant grimace...

The arm, with both a swift and nervous -maybe intolerant- movement, stretches out to push the control buttons. The image stops, then becomes cloudy and disappears; the music itself becomes static in an unpleasant manner, before switching off completely.

After a short while, the chair turns, facing the audience. Walter is sitting on it; he is an old man, but still perfectly vigorous and fit.

His strength helps him to react to his deep, intimate tiredness, without any stress. He has a serious expression.

He stretches his hand towards the table, reaches a telephone, puts it on his lap. He dials a number, waiting for an answer that he never receives. We then hear the ringing of the telephone in the empty room next door, but nobody answers. The sound is mysteriously diffused into the hall, magnified, but still soft.

Walter appears disappointed and perplexed. He dials another number.

- WALTER Hello there. Is that the airport?... Has the flight from New York been delayed?... It landed forty-five minutes ago.... No, nothing else, thank you. Perfectly on time: surely! Thank you!
(He hangs up even more disappointed. He dials again the previous number and once again we hear the mysterious ring in the far, empty room. After a few rings, there is another sound: the door bell. Walter seems satisfied, no longer nervous and discontented. He pushes some other buttons of the remote control. The light in the room becomes stronger, the door opens. Nino walks in: he is about thirty-five, with airs and expression typical of a young executive. He is carrying a raincoat over his arm and a travelling bag.)
- WALTER I was trying to call you at home...
- NINO You didn't even give me the time to come back...
(He walks into the room, puts down his belongings and shakes Walter's hand.)
- WALTER Did you have a pleasant journey?
- NINO Yes, thank you.
- WALTER *(anxiously)*
So?
- NINO Fine.
- WALTER Fine... what?... How did it go?
- NINO Very well indeed.
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- WALTER 'Fine... very well indeed...!' Is it that difficult to tell me? Couldn't you have called me from New York, before leaving?...
- NINO Well: the film is going to be made. A practically unlimited budget. The Americans had no objections. They only ask for a well known American actor as the main star...
- WALTER What about her?...
- NINO No problem. Even the unknown one: it is fine by them. The distribution only wants to choose the star and a few other names as co-stars. The idea of an unknown female star to look for... they see it as an extravagant idea of the great master...
- WALTER And the screenplay?
- NINO Same as before: no objection. Indeed, they have realised that...
- WALTER *(briskly, with aggressive diffidence)*
What?
- NINO Well... that it is identical to your last film!
- WALTER Identical! It is a completely different thing!
- NINO Master, that it is a remarkable similar film... cannot be denied...
- WALTER *(sarcastic)*
It cannot be denied!
- NINO On 312 sequences...
- WALTER To say it is the same film is absolutely ludicrous! It means that you do not understand a thing! A film cannot be judged from the paperwork! What is a screenplay? 'A close-up of her'. However, how many close-ups of her I can do: different, opposite; beautiful, ugly, an angel, a monster... Indeed for the screenplay, they are all close-ups.
- NINO *(laughs as to lighten the discussion)*
It is not just this, though. The facts, the situations, the characters...
- WALTER Why did they approve it, if it is identical to my last film? My last film is there, everybody knows it: thanks to the critics, it is a part of the history of cinema: a masterpiece of the neo-idealism... So? Give me an answer! Or have all the Americans become idiots? Why would they have approved it, if this screenplay was, as you say, identical to my last film...
- NINO Because thirty years have gone since your la film!
(Pause. The statement seems to recall Walter to reality: it is a cold shower on his outburst, and he defends himself by a shrug of the shoulders.)
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- WALTER (in a dull voice, pedantic, not without sarcasm)
Thirty-two.
- NINO (having noticed the correction)
Thirty-two.
(Pause. The discussion has come to an end. Nino is sitting in an arm-chair, surrendering for a while to his tiredness, whilst Walter approaches the small table with the remote control and pushes down a few buttons. The screen is, all of a sudden, invaded by the image of the woman seen a few moments before, whom Walter stops to contemplate, forgetful of anything else.)
- NINO (talks, calmly)
Maybe the Americans have foreseen the business. A famous film of the past, remade today, by the same great director of then, who, in this occasion, goes back to the cinema, after thirty to thirty-two years- of silence...
- WALTER ...and fourteen in jail.
- NINO Even more publicity...
- WALTER And ... the scandal?
- NINO What was a scandal yesterday is news today. The time when Ingrid Bergmann was banished for having left her husband... This is publicity nowadays. It is a film that launches itself well, or so say the experts. The scandal eases the input, eases the briefing! ... Only one person said that maybe, remaking a film with an actress similar to Wanda Feurig ... could be a problem. An Italo-American, of course, Magliulo, Gargiulo ... something like that. A joke.
(He looks at the images, too.)
... She was beautiful ...
- WALTER (disturbed and distracted)
What?
- NINO Nothing. I said: ... she was really beautiful. I should dare say she was photographed in a marvellous way, too. Especially this one.
- WALTER Don't talk nonsense! ... She was extremely beautiful, ... but on the other side there was a poor idiot. On the other side, behind the camera, sitting on the director's chair, there was ... me!
(Nino laughs, shrugs his shoulders: these are all things he has already heard and to which it is pointless to disagree with. Walter shows him the new image on the screen: her face.)
Here she is: look! Is it possible to frame her in this way? And lose ... the moment of those eyes? She was his eyes. Only a stupid man could not realise it. Look at her! See? That idiot had not realised it! This was the way it had to be!
(A close-up of her eyes.)
Her eyes were large, deep... As the crystal sphere of a fortune teller: inside those eyes you could see the sky behind her. They would make you
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dizzy: they used to attract, persuasive, forceful, as the bottom of a well. The temptation to let yourself go, to throw yourself in was irresistible. The image had to communicate all this. Then, soon after the emotion, the dismay, the charming fear of those eyes... here it is! The image widens when we get to her face... and her eyes acquire a different sense... they lose their aspect of worrying charm, of doped dream and become a human oasis of peace... in her pale face... a sweet, innocent invitation... pure as a spring in the middle of a plain... whilst her smile denies them, through its light malice, its naive malice... And her face becomes a theatre: a large, clean, smooth stage, lit by a great light designer who is God himself... and where the two leading actors -her eyes and smile- meet up, confront each other, fight, overcome, transform each other, with all the weapons they possess: the sweetness of the eyes against the malice of the smile, ... or they invert their parts, as in an extraordinary theatrical production -because God himself wrote the script!- ... then the eyes become malicious and the smile sweet, and everything melts together, alternates: malice and charm, innocence, irony, in a great, endless love for life! ... I had not understood anything... How young I was! How stupid!...

NINO *(concludes, with smiling irony)*
How in love!

WALTER In love as you can be when you are young... without being able to understand... I understood 'later on'. When I had the chance to look at these images again: fourteen years later. Taking them out of the film one by one, dissecting them, dismembering them in all their details. Now, I have finally managed to understand her! Now I could finally take pictures of her, narrate her... Now that I have lived my life, that I am old... and that she is dead.
(With a brisk gesture, he switches the images off.)
However, it is not the same film!

NINO *(conciliatory)*
All right, master. Let's say that the story is similar.

WALTER The story is the same. All the rest has changed: I have changed, she has changed, the world has changed! A love story: a man meets a woman: they love each other... there are no traumas, no difficulties, nothing! Everything is fine! They love each other and they are happy! That's all!

Thirty years ago this was something: a film made by a young director, ignorant, irresponsible... in a world just recovering from the war, anxious to go on... Nowadays, it is a completely different thing: I am old, I have learnt. Cinema and life... and the world is tired, deluded; and it will receive a simple love story as a slap in the face!

NINO Well, surely ... the Americans put it slightly differently. For them - delving into the heart of the matter, or better of the business- the film is a sentimental proposal, which opposes the wave of sex and violence at present overflowing the screens ... as a reaction to all that, the public should prefer real story. The same as "Love Story".

- WALTER The Americans should only worry about laying out the money.
- NINO This has already been done!
(He stands up)
Well, I think I'll go to bed now.
- WALTER Wait! I want to show you something I found a few days ago. It is an old photo. I found it among the papers of an old aunt of mine who died last year. I had never looked at them, but the other day, all of a sudden...
(In the meantime he bustles himself around the projector. On the screen appears the portrait of a woman: it is a photo taken by a professional photographer for a particular occasion, among flowers and fake flowers following an old fashion. The woman -young and beautiful- looks like the star previously viewed on the screen; but the similarity is weak, made even fainter by the hairstyle, the clothes, the expression. Walter looks at her, but observes Nino at the same time, as to study his reactions:)
What do you think about it?
- NINO Who is she?
- WALTER Don't you recognise her?
- NINO No.
- WALTER Look at her carefully!
- NINO I have never seen her before in my entire life!
- WALTER Look once again! It's her, Wanda Feurig!
- NINO *(surprised)*
Wanda Feurig?!... It's true!
(He is not entirely convinced, he goes nearer, laughs, shakes his head.)
No, she doesn't even resembles her! She has nothing of her... Yes, maybe... her eyes... No, not even those:...apart from the fact that she, too, has two eyes!! Who is she, then?
- WALTER She is my mother.
(Pause. Nino looks at the picture once again.)
- NINO So why did you tell me she was Wanda Feurig?
- WALTER To see if you noticed that they are identical.
- NINO Well, truly...
- WALTER I only saw my mother once in my entire life. I was twenty-five. I had not met Wanda Feurig yet. I cannot remember anything about her physical appearance, apart from some expressions of her eyes... and her scent... but when I found this picture I was struck: I had never seen two women so much alike. This is Wanda, I thought. She was my mother.
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NINO The similarities ... are a matter of taste.

WALTER Forget about her hairstyle, her clothes...

NINO It's pointless to discuss it!

WALTER It's incredible! They are identical!

NINO All right!

WALTER You don't seem to notice the similarity...

NINO Maybe it is because I am too sleepy, master. I am tired. I shall go to bed now and we can think about it tomorrow.

WALTER Tomorrow we'll also meet up with that unknown actress.

NINO At four o' clock sharp, here.

WALTER Where did they find her?

NINO In a circus. Cashier and starlette in a third or fourth class circus.

WALTER Does she look like her?

NINO *(ironically)*
I should say that she does. Naturally... she is unable to act...

WALTER *(shrugs his shoulders)*
If cinema actors also knew how to act, there would be more than a crisis!

NINO Goodnight, master.

WALTER Goodnight.
(Nino exits. Walter goes back to his chair and sits down. He softens the lights in the room, increasing the clarity of the screen. The image of the woman in the photographer's study stays on the screen for a short while, then Walter pushes a button on the control. The photo is enlarged to such an extent that the screen becomes entirely occupied by the sole detail of her eyes. But the image is old, ruined, the eyes seem nearly decomposed. Music plays softly in the background, whilst Walter remains motionless, contemplating the image that slowly breaks down and darkens.)

II.

Darkness lasts for quite a while, so as to underline the passage of time. Then a sun ray, neat and crisp, enlightens the face of a woman, slowly, in the centre of the scene.

The woman is to a certain extent posing, as if the sun ray was exposing her to an inspection. She is a beautiful woman, whose beauty is not at all aided by her clothes, or hairstyle, or pose. She is heavily made up and her attempt to appear elegant translates itself into evident vulgarity. However, she shows a certain similarity with the women seen before, in the images of the first portrayal: the film star and Walter's mother. Such similarity is at the same time absolute and thinkable, as if only for those who would wish to accept it or are determined to see it.

The woman looks around, attends to the invisible inquisitors around with various expressions of diffidence, embarrassment, sudden courage, fear...

In the darkness all around, coming from two opposite sides, Nino's and Walter's voices, strong and neat.

WALTER Who is this one?

NINO Claudine.

WALTER Who?

NINO Her name is Claudine... or, at least, this is her stage name.

WALTER Claudine?!

NINO It's her! Your unknown actress, your star.... The star of your film!.....
(Light reflects on the scene. It is four p.m. the next day. Walter and Nino are on stage, on the two opposite sides of the room, with Claudine in the middle. Walter is surprised, approaches her and, observing her, walks around. He stretches his arm as to touch her, but then gives up. Nino looks at him satisfied, interpreting his astonishment in the wrong way.)

WALTER This one?

NINO Yes! What do you think about her? Isn't it incredible, astonishing...?

WALTER *(his surprise slowly melts into a sort of incredulous happiness; he repeats her name many times, as if to taste its consistence, with various in-*

tonations, tossing and turning it on every side.)
Claudine!...Claudine?...Claudine...

NINO *(surprised by the unusual reaction)*
The name has to be changed as it is not even her real name... but I think that the similarity...

WALTER
Claudine!
(He starts laughing frankly, shaking his head.)
No. No... It's impossible!... Have you gone mad?... This one... this one... should be the star of my film?! This one should re-create Wanda Feurig?... Don't you realise what you are saying? Can't you see her?

NINO
...but, master: the similarity is incredible... look carefully at her.
(He goes near the woman, holds her chin up, makes her lift her face.)

WALTER
There is no need to look at her carefully. In a few words, there is no similarity... it is absurd!
Oh, God! I don't even know why I am laughing: it should be a catastrophe, instead of making me laugh! If this is what you have scouted, after months and months of research, ... it only means one thing: the film cannot be made!

NINO
...But, master...

WALTER
Master... master...! Come on! I should put myself behind a camera, frame this little girl and say: she is a woman with a capital W! This is Wanda Feurig!... Come on, Nino! What is this ? Can't you see?
(He goes near the woman, brutally moves her hair, opens up a few more buttons on her shirt, accompanying his words with gestures.)

NINO
Forget about the way she is made up and dressed now! Look at the line of her jaw, at her cheekbones, at the cut of her eyes...
(Nino accompanies his own words with concrete gestures, that reduce the woman for a short while to a simple object, to a merchandise to weight and value. The woman seems more astonished than offended, more scared than indignant. She suffers in silence.)

WALTER
What does this mean? Can't you see that my mother is the portrayal of Wanda Feurig ... and then you pretend that this stuff... Haven't you noticed the way she moves?

NINO
She hasn't moved yet!

WALTER
There is no need for it! She is a cadaver, a coat hanger! Two arms, two legs, one head... She also has an arse, I suppose! Let's have a look... Yes, exactly! Everything in the right place, as I had planned...: witty!
I am not saying that she is ugly: she is all right, quite pretty, if you wish... but this means nothing!
I am looking for the star of the simplest, clearest, most elementary love story ever written or lived! This is just a little girl! She can be at the most a bartender in a public dancing-hall. She is at the most a beautiful piece

of...

(The woman's anger increases: for as long as the discussions were about her similarity with the other woman, she did not seem to understand... but now the allusions and the definitions Walter uses ... With a hollow scream she flings herself against Walter, who has, in the meantime, turned his back to her, as to finally conclude the event. Claudine reaches him, hits him on his back. Nino is on her back, holds her and stops her.)

NINO Don't move...

WALTER *(astonished, he turns around, unable to realise what has happened)*
What is going on?

CLAUDINE *(angry)*
How dare he, that bastard! He doesn't even know who I am! He treats me like shit! He puts his hands on me! What the hell!
(She is about to hit him once again, but Nino holds her back. Claudine struggles to free herself, then, angry and helpless, she nervously bursts into tears, offended, humiliated. Crying makes her feel better: Nino lets her go and she keeps crying, motionless, restrained.)

WALTER *(astonished)*
What's happened? What's wrong with her?
(He looks at Nino who ... rebukes him. Walter finally understands and sincerely repentant, tries to make up for it.)
No, no, ... madam, miss..., what have you understood? It's nothing to do with you! ...we were only talking... from a technical point of view, are you following me? You are right! I apologise... give her something to drink, will you, Nino?
(Nino obeys. Walter holds the woman's hand, takes her to the sofa, sits next to her and talks to her.)
See, dear. We are looking for the star of a film. And... we are looking for her on the basis of a certain physical similarity... You are undoubtedly very beautiful... There we are, drink some of this... As I was saying... very beautiful... but this doesn't really matter... that was just to say something, do you understand?... In God's name... it was not meant to be a personal judgement on you! It is ...how can I put it?... relative to the type of person we are interested in. And you don't fit that description. That's all!
Anyway, we'll put your name on file, maybe on another occasion, for a small part... if you are interested in the cinema...
(The woman has calmed down. Walter is now looking after her, showing a little too much care towards her.)
What do you do in life, then?

CLAUDINE ...I work in a circus.

WALTER Good! Are you an acrobat?

CLAUDINE No.

- WALTER Good for you. I regard the acrobats very highly, but it is such as a dangerous job.
(He has an idea)
See... it is as if I had gone to a circus director... who is looking for an acrobat most probably he would think I was hopeless...He would be right, don't you think? And I would be wrong if I considered it as a personal offence... Do you understand?
- CLAUDINE Yes, I do...
- WALTER And, tell me, what are you doing in the circus?
- CLAUDINE A bit of everything, but nothing special. Once I used to sing: a comedy act, together with my husband, who performed as Punch.
- WALTER Punch! How interesting! A character of the great tradition! We can easily identify him with the ordinary people, mainly the children! If I had to be a clown, I'd rather be Punch than any other clown. For this reason alone: children like him. And the success in a circus is due to the children, is that not true?
- CLAUDINE True...
- WALTER What were you saying?
- CLAUDINE Nothing. When my husband died I was cut out of it... I tried to become a tamer... I had two performing dogs... but I am more useful in my actual job, when I come out on the track to bring out gadgets, I stand next to the magician, introduce the shows and pose when the horses come out...
- WALTER Well done!
- CLAUDINE ...because they say that I am beautiful.
- WALTER ...This is evident!
- CLAUDINE ...And I am also a cashier... I sell the tickets... and I work in the bar during the breaks.
- WALTER Good! All finished, then?
- CLAUDINE Yes!
- WALTER My friend will give you something for your trouble and will call you a cab.
- CLAUDINE A cab?
- WALTER Don't worry: he'll sort out the fare...
(Nino offers her an envelope, which she puts into her bag.)
- CLAUDINE Thank you.
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- WALTER Not at all. I shall accompany you to the cab. To be forgiven. Nino, could you please order one?
(He escorts her to the door, whilst Nino telephones.)
- CLAUDINE I have seen your films, do you know?...
- WALTER Really? Good! I hope that you liked them...
(They go out.)
- NINO Hello? Could I have a cab, please? Fourteen, Piazza Victor Hugo. Thank you.
(He puts down the phone. Then he goes towards the projector and works around it for a short while. He finishes just on time when Walter gets back; the engrossed way in which he walks away from the machines clearly shows that this mysterious manoeuvre has as the addressee Walter himself, who is too agitated to realise what is happening.)
- WALTER *(walking back in)*
Folly, folly, pure folly! The simpler, more linear, elementary a love story is, the more perfect and non contentious He and She have to be! I should have Adam and Eve! Or Romeo and Juliet; Tristan and Isolde, Pelleas and Melisande, Paolo and Francesca! Nothing, absolutely nothing! And -please!- you bring me a third class vulgar beauty, who has not even learnt a trade! You were not even wise enough to... I don't know... dress her up a bit. Send her to a hairdresser's, change her awful make up of a whore... What a bastard! I am so ashamed about the way I have treated her, prodding her, like fruit on a market stall! I swear, it was too forceful for me, and I didn't even think about her! I thought about the film... and it is clear that in these conditions it cannot be made. I am still asking myself what I had in mind when I thought I could...
- NINO Master, I don't know what to say. We have also interested an anthropometric centre, asking for a scientific judgement on the last group of candidates selected... requiring data that perfectly coincide with those of.... yes, those of Wanda Feurig. Measures, bodily structure, complexion, the shape of her ears, the line of her back... everything...
- WALTER Let the anthropometrists make the film. All right? You cannot reduce a human being to a clinical card: height, weight, particular characteristics... And the harmony of her face? ... And the rhythm of her body? And the light of her eyes? Who dares to reduce these elements to numbers? Who can compare them? Confront them? It is like weighting two brains to decide who is more intelligent.
- NINO *(after a pause)*
Shall we talk for real?
- WALTER What do you mean?...
- NINO I mean that all this is fine, but the cinema is something else and can do without it. The harmony of the face is a matter of shots, the rhythm of the body concerns the editing, the light of the eyes depends on the film, the
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angle of the shot, the spotlight, and from many other elements that can be decided beforehand, as if programmed into the direction.

- WALTER I know... Cinema is a great lie and make up can change everything... Alan Ladd was short, and kissed Sophia Loren standing on a bench that the camera was not framing. But there are limits to everything: no cinema make up could ever transform me into Adonis, no director could ever extract from that cashier the light of Wanda Feurig.
- NINO That's fine! I have nothing else to add. Truly, more than the cinema, something else manipulates reality and makes whatever it wants of it.
- WALTER What is it?
- NINO The memory. Cinema make up is nothing if compared to the special effects of memory! It is accessible to all: whilst only a director can play with films and frames, everybody can play with memory!
- WALTER I understand! You mean that my memory of Wanda Feurig is different from what she really was, this is why I cannot find her again in that young girl... the anthropometrists describe as 'her' made and finished... well, no! My memory is helped by those photographs, films... and, indeed I accuse myself of not having altered, manipulated, transformed them, to catch not only the data..., what she was outside, but what she had inside...! Flat images, as I told you last night, of a careless and stupid young man!... but for this reason they are also 'documents'! Incontestable, indisputable! Shut the windows!
- NINO Why?
- WALTER I want to show you something: then you'll tell me if they are idealised memories or real facts!
(Nino shuts the windows, Walter opens the screen and switches it on. It is dark in the room, there are only a few lights coming through. Walter pushes the control: on the screen appears the detail of two big eyes.)
Look! Her eyes, Wanda's eyes! And this is a normal picture, flat, badly framed, badly lit... But look! ...You can see, feel the power of those eyes!... She asks for some music! And here, in the evenings, helped by the music, I give her life! Music! Music!
(He pushes the control again: a vivacious eighteenth century music appears to animate the image.)
Here we go. It is better. I don't even remember where this picture is from... but, see? It is so flat, so meaningless that its objectivity is out of question! There are no lies here, no deformation! True, vulgar, naked reality! And if treated with much love, think what can come out of it!
(Pause. Nino stretches towards the control.)
- NINO May I...?
- WALTER What do you want to do?
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NINO Enlarge the frame.
(He actions a lever. Slowly the frame widens. From the detail of the eyes we move to a foreground of her face: it is Claudine's, with her vulgar hairstyle and her heavy make up.)

NINO This is the third class vulgar beauty, master!

*(Walter has no more words. After a short while of surprise, he stands up goes nearer the screen, charmed, to look at the image from as near as possible. Nino is behind him. Without moving, shrinks the frame once again: he takes a close-up of the hairstyle and the lips, goes back to the detail of the eyes. Walter is now underneath the screen; we notice his dark shape against the light of the screen. He is astonished, with his mouth open, studying the image that is slowly disappearing...

darkness.)*

III.

From the darkness comes out the large screen on which we see -always accompanied by the eighteenth century music- the image of the star. She is dressed as an amazon, she is riding a horse, or standing against a fence. These surely are the images of the first portrayal. She smiles. Other images, dissolving one inside the other, show her always radiant, happy.

After a short while, a cone of light attracts our attention on the centre of the stage, where Claudine is standing, motionless. She is dressed like an Amazon, too. She is very different from her first appearance, and now the similarity with the star on the screen is more manifest, at least in her outer appearance. Movements and gestures, instead, are still far from it. In this weak light, that only allows us to see these two women -Claudine and the star- the first exchange of lines.

CLAUDINE Does this suit me?

NINO Why do you keep asking if things suit you?

CLAUDINE Because I am scared.

NINO Of what?

CLAUDINE Of not looking like her.
(Lights on stage. We now see Nino in a corner, observing Claudine. In his hands, a complicated camera, with which he takes many pictures. Claudine observes the star, adapts her dress so as to improve her similarity with her. Bending on her knees, in front of her, a tailor is holding a mirror: Claudine looks at herself, then turns towards the screen and confronts herself with the star.)

NINO You look like her... Stay calm!

CLAUDINE How can I stay calm? You have obsessed me! She used to do this... she used to laugh like this... she did not move like that... Do you know, I even dream of her at night? A few days ago it happened to me, all of a sudden... I had a bad dream, a nightmare... All the people around me were dead, and I was left alone, on a rock, in the middle of the sea. The waves were swelling... and I woke up in a river of sweat... do you know what was my first thought? I did not think 'thank God it was only a dream'... I thought 'did she use to have such dreams?'

NINO I am telling you again: don't worry! And, more than anything else, don't exaggerate. You still have a long time ahead of you... and everybody thinks that you are great.

- CLAUDINE Not HIM!
- NINO He is hard to please... but he isn't unsatisfied. I know him well!
- CLAUDINE *(moves, walks a few steps ahead, looking at the screen)*
I wish I could move more freely... be myself.
- NINO In God's name, Claudine, don't start with these complaints. Leave them to theatre actors instead.
- CLAUDINE Yes, but at least...
- NINO In order to move more freely you must be able to act... and you cannot act. She knew how to perform: so, copy her, even brutally. When you are able to move in the same way as she did, without any effort, that will mean you will move freely. And you will feel yourself, if you really want to.
(With a gesture, as to invite her to move.)
Now, walk!
- CLAUDINE *(takes a few steps)*
Like this?
- NINO You look like a German tourist with a large rucksack, doing the autostop. Did you use to walk like this when you were at the circus? Try again!
(Claudine starts walking differently: now she has put one hand on her hip, showily waddling, as rough as a circus walk-on. Nino covers his eyes, with humoristic despair.)
- CLAUDINE It's no good, is it?
- NINO Give me the book that's on the table!
(Claudine obeys; she gets the book and takes it to Nino, who throws it onto another chair, without even looking at it.)
- NINO See? You walked really well then. As all the non-actors, you are yourself when you are not acting. Then you are spontaneous, and everything is fine... but an actor must learn to pretend to be himself when he is performing!
- CLAUDINE My God! That is so confusing! Acting pretending, being... I have to imitate her. Be spontaneous!...
- NINO You must learn, you must build yourself up, that's all! It's for him to do the rest.
(He nods, looking at the screen.)
She, too was a made up character, you know.
- CLAUDINE He said she was able to act.
- NINO Indeed, she was made up by him.
-

- CLAUDINE He denies it. He says she was like that.
- NINO *(shrugs his shoulders)*
He, too, like everyone, needs his myths. You can get changed now.
(Helped by the tailor, Claudine takes off the horse-riding gear to wear an elegant -wide and white country dress with a large straw hat. On the screen Nino substitutes the image of the Amazon with another one, in which the star appears dressed in an identical gear, an olden day lady on a country trip. This, too, is one of the images already seen. On this occasion, Claudine confronts herself with the image on screen, checking herself out in the mirror which the tailor offers her. In the end, she lets her hair loose on her shoulders. During the action, follows this dialogue:)
- NINO *(taking a picture of her, jokingly, whilst she is getting undressed)*
He needs his myths... but do not forget that he was in love with her, too. She was his great passion. Surely the woman he loved the most. Maybe the only one. Indeed, the only one. She was beautiful, but... as many others: as you, as others!...
- CLAUDINE Then, it's true: it was his love that transformed her.
- NINO *(laughs)*
Where did you read this? In a tabloid? *(he explains to her:)*
She was photogenic. And he was good. That's all! A photogenic woman is a photogenic woman, no matter if she is the most loved or hated in the world. ...And a beautiful frame is a beautiful frame, no matter if the author is madly in love, or if he is a skilled professional, who knows how to take a good shot.
- CLAUDINE However, he always says that...
- NINO What he says now is of no importance. And, what does he say? He says that at the time he did not know how to portray her. Because he wasn't good, he says, and not because he wasn't enough in love with her. Now, instead, he says, he would be able to, and not because he is more in love, but simply because he has improved. Today, he says that he would how to portray her.
- CLAUDINE God! How complicated!
- NINO But be careful: it is not true. Thirty years ago he was as good as he is now... and you have been photographed really well. The problem is a completely different one.
- CLAUDINE Stop it. Please! You make me feel dizzy! Are you cinema people all so complicated? You all seem like... elephants! Do you know who is the most complicated animal in the circus, in personality, psychology? The elephant. There is no comparison with horses, lions!... Monkeys ... are exactly like us. When we cannot understand a person at all, we say ... he is an elephant.
(She observes, she lets the audience observe her.)
-

- CLAUDINE Does it suit me?
- NINO It does.
(Claudine looks at herself, helped by the tailor: one look at the mirror, one at the screen: she tries on the straw hat.)
- CLAUDINE It cannot only be as you are saying: she was photogenic, he was good. There must be an interest... he has to feel something...
- NINO Maybe.
- CLAUDINE Then, you see ..., it cannot be the same thing with me. He doesn't even notice me!
- NINO *(without giving any importance to the statement)*
It is not true!
- CLAUDINE I notice it! I do not exist . He uses me, but he is not interested in me. I can see it!... He looks at me as if he could not see me: as if his eyes go through me, from side to side, searching for something over and above me ... searching for her.
- NINO *(acting annoyed)*
God! He has put these ideas into your mind, hasn't he? These are things said to stimulate you to look more like her.
- CLAUDINE It is not only that...
- NINO However, you must forget about one thing that is, if you ever considered it: that he may fall in love with you. If, by any chance, you have some plans ...
- CLAUDINE You have strange ideas about circus people...
- NINO What has the circus in common with this?
- CLAUDINE One may think that if a woman works in a circus, she has to fall in the arms of the first man that arrives ...
- NINO I wouldn't say that he is the first man that has arrived... *(Pause)*
Mind you, I didn't mean to be offensive. An actress who is interested in a well-known director, in a man like him... isn't necessarily a bitch. You have strange ideas about cinema people.
(Claudine is now wearing the hat.)
- CLAUDINE Does it suit me?
- NINO Yes, it does.
However, what you have told me is right: he doesn't even see you. You are simple matter for him: terracotta, marble, paper... but don't worry! Think about yourself: about the film and about the luck you have had.
-

CLAUDINE Do I seem like her at all?

NINO You do, you do.
There is one thing that may be useful for you to know. Despite what he may say now, he did not even notice her in those days She used to say it too, that his eyes seemed to go straight through her and from side to side! The same words you have used: she wrote them too in black on white... He was looking for something over and above her...

CLAUDINE What?

NINO Who knows?

CLAUDINE Another woman?

NINO I don't know... No... maybe... yes. He used to torment her as he torments you; he used to correct every pose, every tone, every gesture. He used to push her continuously towards something else ... He wanted her to look like... an image maybe... but these are only words, Claudine, words! Just to tell you that what you are feeling now... she felt it, too. A man can fall in love with a woman; but if he is a director -whilst he is directing- she is only matter. Matter for an idea, the idea of her, her for the idea... or maybe the idea he had in his mind.

CLAUDINE God, I mustn't talk about these things any longer! It makes me mad!

NINO You are right. Don't think about it and follow my suggestions.

CLAUDINE Listen! Can I ask you one thing?

NINO Tell me.

CLAUDINE Was he really in love with her?

NINO Yes, he was.

CLAUDINE Then, why...?

NINO What why?

CLAUDINE Why?

NINO Why?...

CLAUDINE Why did he kill her?

NINO *(after a pause, indifferent, taking a photo)*
I am not sure it was him.

CLAUDINE But he was condemned.

NINO True... but he always denied it.

- CLAUDINE I also read that he never defended himself...
- NINO That is true, too. Apart from denying the charges, I cannot say that he defended himself. He ...just let himself go.
(Pause)
- CLAUDINE Does it suit me?
- NINO For Goodness' sake, stop asking if things suit you!
(Walter walks in. He is holding a collection of photographs. Claudine, smiling, approaches him, exhibiting the dress she has just worn. She turns herself around, letting the wide skirt lift, with sudden coquetry. Walter seems perplexed. He is about to say something, then he seems to change his mind and talks in a general way.)
- WALTER We are making some progress.
(Then he forgets about her and with indifference, he goes towards Nino, gives him the photos which is holding.)
These clothes... say very little.
- NINO Why?
- WALTER I don't know: it seems to me that they are coming out of nothing. I have seen these photos...
- NINO *(indicating Claudine and the dress she is wearing)*
This one is perfect!...
- WALTER It does not mean anything. *(shows him the photos)*
I want them enlarged. Life-size.
- NINO Can't you project, as the others?
- WALTER No. I want to see them around here. All together.
- NINO They will all come out of focus! They will be absolutely indecipherable!
- WALTER That's even better.
- NINO Okay. As you wish. Back in a tick.
(He goes out. Long pause. Walter looks at another collection of photos located somewhere. He gives Claudine a glance. Switches off the image on the screen. Goes back to the pictures, then to Claudine, who is now motionless, embarrassed, maybe also deluded by his indifference.)
- WALTER Try to move a bit...
(Claudine obeys)
Lie against that chair... With your hands behind your back... Lie forward a bit... Close your eyes...
(He approaches her and looks at her)
You are not helping me!
-

- CLAUDINE *(discomforted, with sincere apologies)*
Why are you saying this?
- WALTER I feel that you are far away from me, even hostile towards me...!
- CLAUDINE It isn't true! It isn't true!
- WALTER I can feel it! It is a veil, an ice screen, that comes down on me and you. Sometimes it is only indifference, sometimes it is something else, that I can scent, that hits me... As if you were pushing me away, as if you hated me, as if my presence bothered you...
- CLAUDINE *(distressed)*
No, no, it isn't true! I swear!
- WALTER This film must be born from something. We cannot meet as if we were in an office, or a mountain range. You, instead...
- CLAUDINE It is not true! When you came in, I walked towards you! And you hadn't even seen me, master!
- WALTER I told you to call me by my Christian name.
- CLAUDINE It is really hard for me, but I shall try.
- WALTER Why is it so hard?
- CLAUDINE ...because you are a famous man... and I am nothing: a poor woman...
- WALTER A poor woman who acts precious: who denies herself, withdraws into herself.... I know nothing about you...
- CLAUDINE God! ...because there is nothing to know... A poor woman as many others... Why are you telling me these things? Why are you making me feel guilty...? You mustn't feel neglected by me... It isn't my fault if I am not telling you anything... It is not my fault if I don't resemble her. It is you! You: she is inside you.
(Pause. Claudine burst into tears. Walter goes near her, lifts her head, kisses her sweetly, slowly.)
- WALTER If I asked you to sleep with me?
- CLAUDINE I would do it.
- WALTER Mind you: I would only do it for the film.
- CLAUDINE Me too. For your film.
- WALTER What if I asked you to love me?
- CLAUDINE I don't know... I would try.
- WALTER ...but... sleeping with me... that's fine...
-

- CLAUDINE Loving... is not the same thing...
- WALTER Pretending, then... but not what matters to me... Here we go: can you feel it? The ice screen...?
- CLAUDINE God! What have I done wrong? I am embarrassed! I have been living for two months in a world I don't belong to, doing things I have never done before. I want to go back to the circus! ...among the acrobats, the clowns the animals... at least they are normal people... they speak and I understand them... You cannot ask me more than I can give you.
(Whilst she talks she assumes a strange position: he lifts her arm, bends it so as to touch the back of her head and rests her face in the cavity so created, so as to hide it. The gesture strikes Walter, who stops and attacks her, with accusation.)
- WALTER Where did you get that movement from?
- CLAUDINE Which movement?
- WALTER That one, just now: why did you do it?
- CLAUDINE This one? Goodness, I don't know: it is one of her gestures. One of the many you forced me to learn... that now I do... spontaneously.
- WALTER ...that wasn't one of her gestures...
- CLAUDINE Yes, it was...
- WALTER I have just told you it wasn't...
- CLAUDINE *(without being able to understand)*
I'll never do it again...
- WALTER Where did you get it from?
- CLAUDINE Why "Where did you get it from"...? A gesture like many others...
- WALTER Where did you get it from? Where did you learn it? It wasn't hers!
- CLAUDINE I saw it there! In that photo!
(She shows him the framed picture on a piece of furniture. Walter seems to be freed by an inner tension and he is on the point of opening himself up completely:)
- WALTER This one is not her! It's my mother!
- CLAUDINE *(without being able to understand)*
I didn't know it!
(Nino enters)
- NINO They'll be ready by the day after tomorrow.
(He realises there is tension)
What happened?
-

- CLAUDINE Nothing.
- WALTER I can't find my camera...
- NINO *(indicating the camera, very visible on the sofa)*
It's there!
- WALTER I need some more foregrounds.
- NINO Before you came, I took at least a hundred pictures.
- WALTER I don't care!
(Talking to Claudine)
Stand there!
(He points out a place and Claudine stands there.)
- Sit down! Cross your legs... Stand up!
Nino, go near her.
(Nino goes near her)
Lie against him... You! Don't hide your face... Now, careful! Hold her...
(Nino holds her)
Turn around so that I can see her...
(To Claudine)
Close your eyes... Now open them up...
(Claudine, held by Nino, opens her eyes and looks at Walter over his shoulder. All of a sudden she seems to see him: she screams with fear, moves away from Nino, pushing him away with violence. Walter lets the camera fall, and steps back a little, throws down a vase, that breaks with a great noise.)
- “CLAUDINE” Walter!
- “WALTER” Wanda!
(He walks into the area which remains illuminated. He turns towards “Nino”, with a controlled sense of anger.)
You, go away!!
- “NINO” Ecoute, Walter!... Je comprends bien, mais je peux bien t'expliquer...
- “WALTER” I told you to go away... Go!
- “NINO” Mais voyons, ce n'est pas le cas...
- “WALTER” *(shouting)*
Go away!
(“Nino” hesitates for a little longer, but Walter throws himself against him. Before letting Walter reach him, Nino runs away, coming out of the lit area and sits in some dark, forgotten corner.)
- “CLAUDINE” *(after a pause)*
I can explain everything to you, Walter... I mustn't believe... We were here...
-

- “WALTER” I saw you were here! There is nothing to explain, Wanda!
Then, it is true what I felt in the air, and that I refused to understand.
Yesterday, on the set, the cameramen were laughing when you were film-
ing with him! And I, what an idiot... “More passion, Wanda!...More...
truth...” Instead, there was passion, and truth too, both things where true!
...But in the cinema... it is right that they don’t come out! There, all is fic-
tion, and fiction is convincing... and truth is false! But out of there, it is
all a different thing! It is quite the opposite!
- “CLAUDINE” In God’s name, Walter! Don’t start with your discourses again... right
now! It is not true what people say! It was a moment, I must admit it, but
this is all, Walter, I swear!
- “WALTER” I would have sworn on your eyes, once, Wanda, I swear! It is impossible,
I used to say, when I wanted to prevent myself to see... With those eyes?!
How can it be possible that she is a bitch?
- “CLAUDINE” *(with an annoying gesture she degrades his line to melodrama)*
Walter, please! I am tired myself, I am exhausted! This film has worn out
all of us, not only you. Then, let’s talk calmly: I love you Walter...
- “WALTER” Shut up! Think about how everything is becoming clearer in my mind!
Now I understand what is the ice screen I always feel between us! Do
you remember, I have told you since the first day we met? I feel that you
are distant, I told you: indifferent, hostile ... I have felt pushed away.
Now everything is clear! It has always been as if my presence was both-
ering you...
- “CLAUDINE” No, no... what are you saying! It is not true...
- “WALTER” A film that had to be born by the meeting of two human beings...
- “CLAUDINE” *(tormenting herself)*
Stop it! Stop it! Why are you telling me all these things? Why are you
trying in any way possible to make me feel guilty? It is not me. It is you,
you! That ice is inside you, Walter! It is something inside you!... I love
you, Walter, but...
- “WALTER” ...but what?
- “CLAUDINE” ...but you put all the weight on my shoulders ... You asked me once - you
asked me very soon after our first meeting - if I would sleep with you. I
said I would...
- “WALTER” Then?
- “CLAUDINE” Then I am asking you, Walter. Why didn’t we end up sleeping together?
Why? Who has stepped back? I was here: I loved you. I waited for you.
We were alone. I came to your house. You came to mine. We lived to-
gether for a whole year, Walter: a whole year! We worked together, trav-
elled together... and lived... Why didn’t we ever sleep together? Was it I
-

who said no? Was it I who blew you out? I, who tried to rip this ice screen off?... or it is you, because you are impotent?

“WALTER” *(angry, tries to control himself)*
You know it isn't true.

“CLAUDINE” Not with the others, are you? Just with me! Why, Walter: why?
(Pause. Calmly, but more determined.)
Listen to me: there has never been anything between me and Giscard, all right? Nothing! Only what you have seen: a kiss... a moment. Maybe one day there will be something... but this is none of your business.... because between me and you there cannot be anything else, Walter. I waited until the film was over: now it is! I can talk now. I don't want to tell you - I don't care - what I feel for you, what I feel for Giscard... It is you I no longer want. There is something in you I cannot figure out. And that ice you feel around, is inside you; just inside you! It is something I cannot understand, and that scares me. I want to get out of it, so, please, leave me alone! I tried but I can't. Leave me alone, Walter! Let me go without arguing. I ask you only this: let me go! You cannot ask me for more than I can give you!
(Whilst she says this last sentence, she lifts her arm, bends it so to touch the back of her head, and rests her head in the cavity between the two, the same gesture as before. Walter is once again struck by it.)

“WALTER” Why did you do that movement?

“CLAUDINE” Which movement?

“WALTER” That one: why did you do it? Where did you get it from?

“CLAUDINE” This one... for Goodness' sake, Walter, stop it, please! I cannot stand it any longer!

“WALTER” Did you do it on purpose?

“CLAUDINE” On purpose... what? Please don't start again with your discourses. The film is over, do you realise it?

“WALTER” Shut up!

“CLAUDINE” The film is over, over, over...

“WALTER” Shut up! Shut up!

“CLAUDINE” *(hysterically, screaming)*
It is over! Everything is over! Everything is over between us!

“WALTER” Shut up!
(Shouting, he attacks her, grabs her, closes her mouth with one of his hands. She tries to scream, to free herself, but he threatens once again to keep quiet ... then, “Claudine” all of a sudden, falls motionless into his arms.)

“WALTER” Wanda!... Wanda!.. In God’s name, stop acting!...
(He slowly lets her go and she falls on the ground, dead. Walter bends over her.)
Wanda!
(With terror and distress)
No, God!... My God!
(He stands up and calls)
Help! Help me!
(“Nino” runs on stage, enters the designated area and stands there, lining against a piece of furniture.)
Mother! Mum! Oh, mum!
(“Nino” in the meantime lifts Claudine up, carrying her from her under-arms, throwing her arms on his shoulders. At one stage, the pose the two have assumed coincides with that of Nino and Claudine before the flashback. The lights return as before, too. Walter, confused, has collected the camera and now goes back to his work.)

WALTER Open your eyes... move slightly away from each other... Claudine, try to look at him... smile... More passion, Claudine, ... more truth...
(On his words and the clicks of the camera, end of Act One.)

Act Two

I.

Night time. Nothing has changed in the furniture of the room, apart from the addition of some large, full body photographs of Claudine, hung here and there, on the walls and the furniture, in an evidently temporary way. As at the beginning of Act One, the scene is apparently empty and only lit by a discreet lamp in a corner. An initial silence, then a sort of deep breath comes out - amplified - from the armchair with a high back that hides Walter.

Walter seems to wake up from a brief sleep, and stretches his arm over the table with the controls - once again, a light underlines the cinema detail.

Walter pushes one button, then many others. The screen opens up and fills in with the image of the omnipresent woman. We understand that she is Claudine from the fact that the images are all coloured - differently from those of Wanda's film - in weak pastel colours, delicate and only slightly drawn; then, the woman's expressions, that unlike Wanda's solar and unconditional happiness, are the declaration of a composed, intimate, melancholic serenity. They are not translated in an open laugh, but in a slightly drawn smile in the corners of her mouth, in a wrinkling of lips, in a slight half closure of her eyes.

Her movements seem slower, too, less easy going and youthful, more composed, unreal, as under the effect of "ralenti".

Apart from this, all the scenes are identical to those with Wanda.

After a short period of mute images, the arm stretches again, pushes another button, which inserts the music; it is, however, no longer the 16th - 17th century music that accompanied Wanda's images. It is 18th century polyphonic music, sung by 4-5 voices, endeavouring to sound like instruments, altered, in falsetto, with intriguing effect. Such music seems to belong to a superior, almost superhuman aristocracy, almost free from passion, controlled, deep. It is to the 18th century music exactly what these serene images of Claudine are to the radiant happiness of Wanda. All of a sudden, images and music should appear to us even nobler. If we were to see again the thoughtlessness of Wanda and listen to a baroque concert, they should appear to us, next to these, as a decay of atmosphere, as the abdication from an absolute rigour, from a deep and "high" aristocracy.

After a few seconds the arm stretches again, pushes another button, stops the image and stills it, but lets the music go on.

Walter stands up, goes to a piece of furniture, opens a drawer, takes something out of it -a photograph- inserts it into the controls of the table. He sits on the armchair, pushes a button: the image of Claudine disappears, and the screen is invaded by the picture of Walter's mother, the same that he once showed Nino. Walter stops the music. Silence. Once again, the photo-stop of Claudine, then the photo of the mother. The music again, from a light pianissimo, to a crescendo, to a mezzo-forte. Walter pushes a button, but this time nothing happens; Walter tries again, gets up from his chair and strongly pushes the rebel button. The music grows up to a fortissimo, whilst Walter seems to panic. He keeps fighting against the button and we hear his hurried breath amplified. Finally, after a last violent attempt, almost a punch, the music stops.

Walter, his back to the screen, bending on his knees in front of the little table, lets himself fall onto it, momentarily tired out because of the tension coming from the fight against the music that wouldn't stop. Evidently, not meaning to do so, he pushes some other buttons with his body. At his back the image of the mother "burns" out slowly, increasing the contrast between black and white, until it gets completely corrupted and becomes entirely unreadable. Walter's breathing has nearly become a lament, and when the photo is at the maximum of its explosion, it is interrupted by the realistic bell ring of the entrance door. Walter is shaken, and we just about hear- always amplified- the banal exclamation which makes him come out of his short nightmare.)

WALTER

Oh, mum!

(He passes his hand over his face, and quickly pushes some other button to erase everything.)

Just one moment.

(He goes back to the armchair, sits down, gets a glass and pushes the button that opens the door.)

(Nino and Claudine enter. They are both elegantly dressed, evidently back from a worldly occasion. Nino enters first, followed by Claudine, who, as soon as he steps inside the doorstep, switches the light on. She seems transformed, elegant, sure of herself.)

NINO

Good evening, Master. We are back...

WALTER

Do you know what time it is?

NINO

Slightly after one o' clock.

WALTER

Slightly before two o' clock. You shouldn't be so late when we have to film the next day.

(He goes out, without even looking at either two.)

NINO

I knew he would have waited for us, and I knew he would have moaned.
(Walter walks in again, almost immediately, after having gone out only to strive a certain attitude.)

- CLAUDINE *(calmly)*
I am filming late in the afternoon tomorrow. My make up is at two o'clock.
- WALTER Please! It is not a matter of bags under your eyes. It is a matter of concentration!... of having on your mind one thing instead of another. Nobody seems bothered about this film! You don't give a damn about it! You are doing it just because you have to do something, you have to waste some time in one thing or the other... If I were to say "Stop" tomorrow, all of you would feel relieved.
(After a pause)
Are there still many of these things?
- NINO Master, we have just begun. You know what Americans are like... It is written in the contract: a precise clause and a penalty applied to it! Claudine must be launched. It is a proper launch. There are fifty public ceremonies, established by common agreement: at least five of them in London, five in Paris, ten in New York... before the release of the film. I know them by heart.
- WALTER *(indifferent)*
So, what was it tonight? The Red Cross? The philatelist's day?
- NINO You don't know? It was the Strega Prize.
- WALTER Ah, the intellectuals! Were there many of them?
- NINO All of them! At the Ninfeo in Villa Giulia, all together, nymphs and paranympths.
- WALTER At least, was it a nice evening?
- NINO It was great! Claudine was perfect: she spoke very little, smiled a great deal ...
- CLAUDINE I didn't talk very much? I wasn't talking at all!
- WALTER You could have talked; surely you wouldn't have come out with any worse rubbish than you normally do.
- NINO She was noticed very much, photographed, filmed... Very much admired...
- CLAUDINE *(whirls happily, showing her dress)*
Does it suit me?
- WALTER Why haven't you just said: "Do I look like her?"
- CLAUDINE Because I chose this dress myself!
- WALTER Well done, it's very nice!
-

- CLAUDINE *(next to the bar)*
Nino, would you like something to drink?
- NINO
Yes, please. A whisky, then we can go!
(to Walter)
I... was saying that Claudine is extraordinary. She must have a real sixth sense: she never made a mistake, a wrong gesture, never said a wrong word... when she was introduced to a minister, to a gigolo, a cardinal... she always had the right tone, the right smile -or serious expression-... You would think she had always lived among the people who were there tonight!
- CLAUDINE
Well, what did you think? I have always lived among circus people, haven't I? Would you like to know what I was reflecting about tonight, ... whilst I was listening to all those discourses I was unable to understand and greeting those famous people I had never heard of before? I was thinking that, in the end, your world is not any different from my circus. Maybe it's the same thing. There are clowns, acrobats, tamers, fierce beasts, trained animals in your world ... they have no costumes... or better, they have different costumes: they all are well dressed, but their real nature is very well concealed. I thought about it tonight, whilst those people were talking, partying, each performing their own acting part. This is my circus, I thought. Oh, God! Jesus! Holy Mary! ... poor people! They were all there! The fat lady, covered in jewels, who was giving the prizes out ... she was the trained seal, playing with the envelopes as if she had a balloon on her nose!... And the president of the jury, -always the first to clap his hands- ... was the bear, the one who plays the dishes and the drums to me. The writer who got the prize seemed like a juggler, throwing his words into the air and then catching them again ... they were all laughing, and saying: "Well done"... I looked at all of them, one by one, and thought: "This is an acrobat, that one is a clown"...
- NINO
And if you don't mind me asking, what are we in this circus? What about the master?
- CLAUDINE
For the others he may be the tamer! In my opinion, he is the elephant!
- NINO
And I? What about me?
- CLAUDINE
The nicest of the trained dogs.
- NINO
And the producer of our film? Mr Warton?
- CLAUDINE
The director of the circus.
- NINO
And the photographers?
- CLAUDINE
A group of monkeys.
- NINO
And your partner?
-

- CLAUDINE Burt? The lion, surely! Who arrives on the set, roars and everybody says: "My God!"... but who, with just one look of the tamer, goes back to his place and behaves as a cat.
- WALTER And what are you?
- CLAUDINE You should be able to tell me.
- WALTER You're the one who knows the circus!
- CLAUDINE *(after a pause)*
I am... the one who brings food to the animals. Animals don't fear her but love her.
(Pause. Coquettish and as in a tale.)
But the director of another circus, a lot bigger and more important, has even asked me to be an Amazon who opens a show.
- WALTER An important character.
- CLAUDINE Well, yes and no... Much of it is appearance.
- WALTER Why did you accept, then?
- CLAUDINE Because you can never refuse to move from a small circus to a big one, if you are fine there or not. And, maybe, going ahead, you can find some other reasons...
(Pause)
- WALTER *(just about smiling)*
You are my peace... thank you, Claudine.
(Pause)
- CLAUDINE I am tired. My shoes hurt. I would like to get changed and wear my slippers.
(She goes towards the door that leads to other rooms. She stops at the doorstep, next to one of the large portraits of herself. She stops.)
Can I throw this photo away? I have never liked I really ... cannot stand it!
- WALTER *(instinctively)*
...but it is the one that represents her.
(He interrupts himself, wit a mutated tone)
All right. Throw it away, then.
(Claudine smiles, satisfied and rips the picture off the wall, letting it to fall onto the ground. Then she exits. Pause. Walter slowly pushes a button that fills the screen with the images of Claudine: these are the sequences already seen before.)
- NINO Last week's material?
(Walter nods. For a short while the images run on the screen, accompanied by the music Walter introduces. Nino observes them, fascinated.)
Truly, she's beautiful!
-

- WALTER *(disturbed and distracted)*
What?
- NINO I said: she is really beautiful.
(Pause)
And I would also say, portrayed in a great manner. Especially this one.
- WALTER Don't lie!
- NINO What? Oh, sorry! I was forgetting... she is gorgeous ...but behind the camera or sitting on the director's chair, there was an idiot who couldn't take photos. That's it, am I right?
- WALTER No, that was valid for my other film. That idiot has now learnt to take pictures! But being behind the camera is not enough: the one in front of it mustn't deny herself... and she doesn't let me catch her!
(He points his finger at the image, angrily.)
Look at her! Do you ever see her smile? She denies herself, that wretched woman... And it is always like this! I ask her to smile, to laugh, as the other used to do... to open that mouth, wide, to show her teeth....but, no! She refuses to smile!
- NINO ...but we have filmed hundreds, thousands of metres... with Claudine smiling!
(Points at the enlarged pictures)
As in those photographs! You cannot tell me she is not showing her teeth there!
- WALTER *(shrugs his shoulders)*
True! But how many ways there are to laugh? Hyenas laugh, too... and Dracula shows his teeth... It is a superficial, vulgar, silly smile! She is a cashier in a circus! This (and it doesn't help to deny it!) is not Wanda Feurig's happiness! This one doesn't know the reason why she is laughing! This is foolishness. She has not understood anything! She laughs! ...but why? Why does she laugh? What is there to laugh about? What is there to be happy about?
- NINO Listen! Do you remember that on that close up of Wanda's and Claudine's eyes you were unable to distinguish between the two? Well! I bet that if I put on a sequence in which both of them are smiling, once again you won't be able to tell me which is which.
- WALTER Don't be so silly!
- NINO Shall we bet?
- WALTER All right, then!
(Nino starts to handle the various machines. Walter lets him do so for a few moments.)
What a shame that the film with Wanda Feurig is in black and white and this one is in colour. Apart from being stupid, I am also colour-blind.
-

*(Nino hits his forehead with his hand, as to recognise his own stupidity .
He stands up and leaves.)*

NINO It's impossible to discuss anything with you. Goodnight!

WALTER Where are you off to?

NINO Home. It's past two o' clock.
However, listen to me: it is of no use to keep getting annoyed with Claudine. Claudine is perfect! She is extremely good when she imitates Wanda Feurig... extraordinary when she copies herself. Everybody says that... and when she laughs, she has nothing that resembles Dracula! It is you, master, who wish not to see her laughing!

WALTER ...I ask her nothing else but to laugh, ... laugh!

NINO Surely you do, with your words! But where do the sequences in which she laughs end up? All there, in the rubbish!

WALTER ...because it is an idiotic smile! Otherwise, in your opinion, why should I?

NINO I have no answer for that. My job is the cinema, not... Psychoanalysis will find a reason why!
Goodnight, master.
(Claudine has appeared a few moments before on the doorstep of the room. She has got changed, and now wears a long, white dressing gown and a pair of slippers. She has made no noise whilst walking in, and the two men have not noticed her. She has stopped to listen, interested, but evidently distressed. Now she closes the door behind her, making a noise on purpose to attract their attention.)

CLAUDINE Goodnight, Nino... and thank you very much for everything.

NINO Goodbye, darling, and goodnight.

(Claudine escorts him to the door. He kisses her on her cheek and exits.)

WALTER *(after a pause)*
A really good chap... but awfully stubborn.

CLAUDINE Nino is a real darling! What would I do if he were not here! When he introduces me to somebody, his tone of voice or the way in which he touches my arm or holds my elbow, are enough to make me realise what to do. We comprehend each other perfectly well.

WALTER Could I ask you something? Have you ever slept with him?

CLAUDINE *(after a pause)*
No.

WALTER I don't think I have the right to forbid you to do so.

- CLAUDINE No, equally...
(Pause. Claudine is next to him, standing up. She holds his head in her hands and with affection brings it towards her lap.)
Are you tired?
- WALTER Yes, I am. But I am happy here with you. You are my peace...
- CLAUDINE I heard what you and Nino were saying...
- WALTER I am sorry... but it was a 'technical' discourse...
- CLAUDINE You always make technical discourses...
- WALTER *(laughs, slightly embarrassed)*
As it happened the first time, do you remember? You were standing there, motionless, without knowing where to keep your hands. And I: "What's this stuff? She would be good in a public dance-hall! She is a.....like many others! This is a nice bit of ..." And you?
- CLAUDINE "What a bastard!".
- WALTER You took it as a personal matter.
- CLAUDINE Instead, it was only a technical discourse.
(Walter forces a laugh, as forced, as the brief recall of past events. He laughs just to avoid the discourse Claudine had started, but Claudine, having condescended for a while, starts again.)
What Nino was saying, Walter, is true. Why don't I ever laugh? All the scenes have been filmed hundreds of times... you were telling me to laugh, to be serious, to smile... but those in which I was laughing have all been rejected.
- WALTER *(annoyed, defending himself)*
That's not true, Claudine. Some of them have. Because the way you were smiling wasn't convincing me... or because it was too evident that you were copying the other one...
- CLAUDINE ...but for months you tormented me to copy her ... every time I made a different gesture, you shouted at me not to act as a star, not to invent anything, to stay at my own place, to do like her, like her, like her!
- WALTER To look like her, not to be her!
- CLAUDINE Then, who am I to be?
- WALTER *(annoyed, escaping)*
God, you are too like her! Always the same question: "Who am I to be? Be! Simply be! Open up, do not deny yourself, don't make me feel this ice wall that I always feel, with you, ... with her. When I frame you -it is a love act. Why do you reply to me "why"? Why is it the more that warmth there is from my side, the more need for help, the more prayer... the colder becomes your reply, the more insuperable your silence?"
-

CLAUDINE Walter, please stop it! Don't always reply like that, do not hide yourself behind words! It is your usual habit to run away from things, ...what you don't want to see? You deny it... You defend and sustain absurd opinions, throwing your faults onto other people.

WALTER *(recurring to an expression of fastidiousness and boredom)*
Oh, mother.

CLAUDINE Are you sure that you know what you want?

WALTER *(as above)*
Oh, mother.

CLAUDINE *(with kindness)*
Walter, you need to love the woman of this story.

WALTER *(sincerely)*
But I love you, Claudine! How many times have I told you! I am grateful to you for your youth... you are my peace... I love you...

CLAUDINE Then, Walter, why?

CLAUDINE Why?
You once asked me if I would sleep with you. I said yes, and I did.

WALTER For my film, you said. Not because you loved me.

CLAUDINE Yes. Wasn't that a way to love you? Instead you treated me with indifference... like one of the many...

WALTER It is true. At that time I had not yet fallen in love with you.

CLAUDINE Then, one day you asked me to stay here! And I did. No longer for the film, but for you and for me... because the person asking me wasn't the great director, who scared me, ... but a man! Who had started to love me, and who, maybe, needed me... It had not been the tamer, but my elephant...

WALTER *(after a pause)*
So what then?

CLAUDINE Then, why?

WALTER Why?

CLAUDINE Why has nothing else ever happened? Why have we never slept together again?

WALTER Is this what you are upset about?

CLAUDINE *(firmly)*
No.
No, Walter... I want to know if you feel rejected, if you feel that ice wall

even here...

(Walter does not reply).

Because whilst you tell me everything for the sake of the film, I refuse to reply: I don't know what to say. That is work. Cinema, it is not my world. Maybe, it is only because I cannot act, that I am no good, that I cannot understand you... and all your words can assume a meaning, and you would be right. But this is life, Walter; this is neither work, nor art, and the actress or the ability to act matter nothing. This is life and I can cope with it and I know how to reply; it is not me pushing you away. There is no coldness in me. I do not deny myself... This means that the ice wall is inside you, between us two, man and woman... and maybe also at work, between you behind the camera and I in front of it, Walter... then I am sorry, Walter, because I don't know how to help you, and I cannot do anything...

- WALTER *(after a pause, once again refusing, but now more tired than annoyed, without opposing himself, without attacking, hiding his face between his hands)*
You too, you too...
(Then, giving up, as to propose a truce)
I am tired...
- CLAUDINE *(smiles, caresses his hair)*
My elephant, my poor elephant!
- WALTER *(slowly)*
Go to bed, Claudine... it's late.
- CLAUDINE Yes, I am going to brush my hair, then we can go to sleep.
(Walter remains seated, whilst Claudine goes towards the mirror and starts undoing her hair and brushing it. Walter, after a few seconds, pushes a button on the controls table. We hear the polyphonic music that accompanied the images of before.)
- CLAUDINE Is this the music for the film?
- WALTER Yes.
- CLAUDINE It is different from the other. It is nice, I like it, but... it is a bit less cheerful!
- WALTER *(softly)*
...it doesn't laugh...
(Claudine hasn't even heard. She carries on brushing her hair. Pause. Suddenly, Walter turns towards her, goes near her and observes her with growing intensity. He lifts his arm, "bangs" against a wall or a piece of furniture, whilst a sudden mutation of light insulates -as it had already happened in Act One- the designated area. Music interrupts soon. "Claudine" springs up, surprised and scared.)
- "CLAUDINE" Who are you?
-

- “WALTER” Don’t shout, please.
- “CLAUDINE” What do you want? What are you doing here?
- “WALTER” I came in. There was nobody there... I went up... are you the lady?...
My name is Walter... I am twenty-five ... My father’s name was Paolo.
(“Claudine” is surprised, at the limits of terror.)
- “CLAUDINE” You?
- “WALTER” My father died a few days ago. I thought it was the right time to meet...
my mother...
- “CLAUDINE” (*almost imploring silence and prudence*)
In God’s name!...
(*She then calms down, goes back to normal tones. In the embarrassment,
she cannot say anything but.*)
Please, sit down...
- “WALTER” Thank you.
(*He walks forward, as he thanks her, not without bitter irony.*)
Could I hold your hand?
(“Claudine”, without saying a word, offers him her hand.)
It is strange to hold hands with your own mother, after you have seen
her...for the first time...
- “CLAUDINE” Please, forgive me... I am surprised...
- “WALTER” Surprised?
- “CLAUDINE” And distressed! All... so suddenly...
- “WALTER” Could I ask you to call me by my first name?
(*He steps backwards very quickly, in front of her expression of uneasi-
ness*)
No, you’re right! We have just met... Maybe in a short while...
- “CLAUDINE” Don’t misunderstand me, please. Above all... I don’t even call by first
name my sons’ friends.
- “WALTER” ...but I am not one of your sons’ friends...
- “CLAUDINE” (*nervously bursts into tears, submerged by emotion and by her inability
to strike an attitude.*)
Forgive me, forgive me, please!...
...You are twenty-five, Walter. Your father, one evening, took me to his
house, then to bed, with an excuse, hurrying, violent, whilst my twelve -
years old- sister was waiting in the entrance hall, reading a children’s
newspaper he had given her saying “Read it!”... I was fifteen, Walter!
Fifteen! I didn’t know anything, didn’t realise anything... and then I
didn’t even want to see you! Like a child’s illness, ... to forget as soon as
possible. I got married, I had a life, three children, a husband... This can
-

help you to understand... I would lie if I told you that I have missed you!
(Pause. "Claudine" tries to smile, to seem welcoming towards the non guilty newcomer.)

But I heard that you work in the film industry.

"WALTER" True.

"CLAUDINE" I have heard that you are really good.

"WALTER" *(taken by sudden hope)*
You asked for information about me?

"CLAUDINE" *(suddenly cold, as fearing to have said too much).*I heard it.
(Pause. The long moment of embarrassment is broken by Walter, who tries, as a strange form of advance, veiled irony.)

"WALTER" Mother!

"CLAUDINE" *(astonished)*
Please!...

"WALTER" I am sorry! I just wanted to try!

"CLAUDINE" My husband is on his way home...

"WALTER" And he does not know anything...

"CLAUDINE" He knows... but we have never spoken about it...

"WALTER" You have literally crossed me out then!

"CLAUDINE" *(escapes the embarrassment with a banal approach)*
Tell me something about you, instead. Are you married?

"WALTER" No. I believe I have received as inheritance... a distorted image of women... My father...

"CLAUDINE" *(as stopping him)*
I have known your father...

"WALTER" *(as before)*
Mummy!...

"CLAUDINE" Please!...

"WALTER" It is only a word, madam! And I realise that I have missed somebody to say it to...
I grew among my father's women: a legion of women, always different; and the scene of the sister or the cousin waiting in the entrance hall, well, I know it, madam... as a child I used to play with them... going out of my father's room, some girl used to give me a sweet, some other used to take me out for an ice-cream. Growing up -without little sisters to play with- I started looking through the key hole. I felt the first, strange emotions;

some woman, going out seemed to realise it and stopped to chat with me, or used to come back, once my father had gone out. Women seemed to like me, so my father's women were often mine, too. Maybe, I didn't need what they were offering me; maybe it was another of my father's women I was looking for. I understand it only now, and now I know it. A woman for the other part of me, for another type of love, that I have missed, that I have never known... Love for me has only one tone...

“CLAUDINE” *(emotional, begging him)*
Please!...

“WALTER” *(sincerely, without any irony)*
Mother!

“CLAUDINE” Why did you come here?

“WALTER” I shall never come back. I swear. Only... for the last time, the last or the first... before I go, hold me in your lap...
(“Claudine” stiffens, “Walter” corrects.)
Let me hug you...
(“Claudine” does not reply; “Walter” goes near her, but it is “Claudine” who hugs him, sitting down, whilst he kneels down in front of her. She holds his head against her bosom, touching his lips with her hair, with a sudden, sincere impulse.)

“CLAUDINE” My little baby...

“WALTER” Mummy...
(He stands up and in a very affectionate manner he helps her to stand up too.)

“CLAUDINE” *(briefly laughing, in a moment of new found, maternal happiness)*
Careful! You're strangling me...
(“Walter” lets go slightly, he looks at her into her eyes and, as if captivated, caught by her words and attitude, he kisses her on her lips, whilst his hand instinctively runs down her cleavage and breast. “Claudine” briskly, violently rejects him with a disgusted scream.)
What are you doing?

“WALTER” *(astonished)*
Mother...

“CLAUDINE” You are crazy! You should be ashamed of yourself! You are the same as your father..

“WALTER” *(with ironic and bitter coldness)*
Maybe... nobody has ever thought anything else, madam.

“CLAUDINE” Go away!
(“Walter” slowly leaves where he is and goes back to his armchair. The previous music starts again, in the background, whilst the change of

lights underlines the return to the present, and Claudine -freed from the tension of the scene- ends adjusting her hair. Walter sits down. A long pause.)

CLAUDINE

Here we go, finished!

(She has just finished combing her hair. She reaches Walter, she is at his back. She looks at him, smiles, shakes her head, caresses him with kindness.)

My little elephant... My poor, mysterious elephant...

(The lights go down, until it is completely dark.)

II.

An empty room. It is night time. The room is only slightly lit by a weak light coming from outside, through the windows. The large pictures on the walls have disappeared.

After a short while, the entrance door opens and Nino enters. He runs towards the centre of the stage, leaving the door open behind him. He bustles around a camera, and he points it towards the door.

On the doorstep, after a while, we see against the light Claudine's shape.

NINO Stop! Pose on the doorstep, triumphant, like that!

CLAUDINE Like this?
(She stands against the door, her arm lifted, her hip bent, in a melodramatic gesture of triumph.)

NINO Perfect!
(He takes two or three photos with the flash)
One, two, three! Here we go! You can come in now!
(Claudine enters, switches the light on, closes the door.)
The return home of the film star has been immortalised. A kiss!
(Claudine throws herself into his arms.)
Are you happy?

CLAUDINE Of course I am.

NINO And tired.

CLAUDINE That too.

NINO Then sit down, and I shall give you something to drink... We are now in the finishing straight. Did you realise? Now I can tell you one thing: we were all waiting for this day as a kind of casting out nines. The most difficult, the most famous day; the one that made the 'other' film celebrated: a piece of history. The best known photograph of Wanda Feurig, the one everybody knows, comes from there. When we drew the production plan, Walter wanted to keep it as last the sequence in the movie, to give you slightly more time as well as for good luck, but the producer didn't seem to agree, for logistical reasons. However, we all insisted on keeping it. There was the risk of ruining the entire production ... and to film it again ... God only knows how many times, ... messing up the technical time, letting thousands of people down...

CLAUDINE *(fishing for compliments)*
And what then?

- NINO Instead, you were great! A production plan perfectly arranged. Half of the scene already filmed and tomorrow the conclusion.
- CLAUDINE *(after a pause)*
Nino, can you show it to me?
- NINO But... we still haven't got it!
- CLAUDINE Not mine, the other one.
- NINO *(with enthusiasm)*
Now there is only you and the other no longer exists.
- CLAUDINE Please!
- NINO I don't even know where it is!
- CLAUDINE *(showing the machines)*
But it is there, still up there! We saw it yesterday...!
- NINO All right, madam!
(Plays with the machines)
It must be a kind of sadism or masochism, I don't know. Or maybe you want to see where you are better than her ...?
- CLAUDINE It is a different thing, you know!
- NINO Or whether you look more beautiful?
(The images of Wanda Feurig start. After a while...)
He hasn't even let you laugh here, isn't it true?
- CLAUDINE *(concentrating on the images)*
It is true!
(All of a sudden)
Stop, stop it is here!
(Nino stops the image.)
Here: I didn't do that gesture! That's just what I wanted to look at! I haven't done it! Now you can switch it off!
(The screen is empty again.)
I did this instead!
(She does a different gesture.)
I did it different on purpose. That's a gesture I used to do when I was at the circus. This is the reason why I am happy, because on that occasion he told me: "Well done!" He said it softly, not to me, but to himself! But he had the megaphone on his mouth, so I, as well as everybody else heard it. Do you understand? He didn't stop me. Nor did he tell me, as he always used to: "No, that's no good. She didn't use to do it! Do not invent, don't act as a star, look at your part again..." That gesture was not there, Nino, and he told me "Well done!".
- NINO Well, he has told you 'well done' so many times...
-

- CLAUDINE Yes, but it is different! Today... it came from inside him! We were filming, but he didn't stop me, and when I did that gesture ...-it was mine, do you understand? I wasn't copying her!- he said "well done", he thought "well done", softly, to himself: not to me! I don't now if I can explain myself, Nino...
- NINO Yes, but now calm down. Otherwise you'll sleep badly, you'll have bags under your eyes, and the second part of the scene will be a nightmare... here you are...
(He offers her a drink.)
- CLAUDINE What is it?
- NINO It's camomile tea.
- CLAUDINE It's disgusting!
- NINO Drink it!
- CLAUDINE Just one moment!
(She leaves the glass, stands up, runs towards the door that leads to the other rooms, opens it and looks inside).
- NINO Where are you going?
- CLAUDINE I feared that Walter might have come home before us.
- NINO No, he always stops to look at the material. Drink, and stay calm. You worried all of us when you fainted.
- CLAUDINE It was only for a second. Burt supported me, and I soon felt better.
- NINO Not that soon. Did you realise that the master didn't interrupt the filming? You did a second shot, but he filmed your fainting anyway. What was it?
- CLAUDINE *(uncomfortably)*
I have no idea... Nothing. I felt dizzy. What time is it?
- NINO Seven o' clock. He'll be back in a while...
(With a change of tone, after a pause).
Listen, Claudine, can I ask you something? Are you really in love with him?
- CLAUDINE I love him, yes, I believe so. To a certain extent... yes.
- NINO You have been living together for two months.
- CLAUDINE Surely, or at least, this is what the newspapers write.
- NINO Why are you saying this?
- CLAUDINE Well, it's a strange thing.
-

- NINO Claudine, I know Walter inside out, and now I start getting to know you, too. He... is an incredible egotist, Claudine; ... for him, only his films matter. Do not delude yourself! I have already told you once. Without wanting it, he may hurt you.
- CLAUDINE I wouldn't say so, from what I can judge so far...!
- NINO I am not talking about your career, even if you have been lucky here, too. If he chose you, it was because he needed you, not because of you... According to this point of view, you owe him nothing. I am now talking about your life... He destroyed Wanda Feurig! I am not saying he killed her... this is a different matter and I never believed it. I am saying he destroyed her. And he could do it with you, too.
- CLAUDINE So? What should I do?
- NINO You should be careful: stay away from him: you as a woman and him as a man.
- CLAUDINE It seems a bit late for this.
- NINO I don't know. You told me yourself that between you and him there is a different relationship. Why?
- CLAUDINE Nino, it's not easy to explain such things...
- NINO You don't have to answer, if you don't want to. Do you sleep together?
- CLAUDINE Yes.
(Pause. Nino looks at her, a bit surprised, if not incredulous.)
- NINO Well, if these are the facts, it is different! I withdraw my objection... and apologise... Evidently...
- CLAUDINE *(after a pause)*
It is true, Nino. We slept together once, but at the very beginning, four months ago. Since we have been living together, since it has become - let's say- a serious relationship... it hasn't happened again.
(Hurrying, as to prevent his words)
However, it's fine for me like this... That's why I don't feel the threat of being destroyed... His egotism... if this is what you call his egotism...
- NINO Well, I think it is...
- CLAUDINE ...it agrees with my egotism. When I say it's a strange thing, I mean that... even if it is a different thing from what it should naturally be... it is fine by me. It is a tender, sweet, calm thing. It reminds me of my trained dogs. After my husband's death, it was sufficient for me to stretch my legs out, from time to time...to perceive them. They used to make me feel calm, safe...
-

- NINO A young and lively girl like you cannot only live on calmness and safety. I also worry for him, Claudine. He is terribly lonely in his egotism, he is ill inside. He needs you.
- CLAUDINE *(smiling)*
Are you afraid I am going to find myself a lover?
- NINO How long ago did your husband die?
- CLAUDINE Four years.
- NINO And since then you ..never ...?
- CLAUDINE Yes, indeed. I tried... sometimes...
With Walter, too, but...
- NINO *(interpreting her grimace)*
You didn't enjoy it!
- CLAUDINE *(laughing at his expression, nods)*
Exactly. I didn't enjoy it!
- NINO And with your husband?
- CLAUDINE With my husband it was different... once.
- NINO Once? What about the other times?
- CLAUDINE Nothing. That's it!
(She defends herself through a slightly ironic tone at the painful difficulty of her memory.)
No, towards the end I didn't enjoy it with him either.
- NINO *(after a pause, perplexed)*
You enjoyed it at first, then you no longer did. So... you are not frigid!
- CLAUDINE No, or maybe I have become so!
(With a serious and sincere tone.)
I don't like talking about it, Nino.
- NINO It was just to try to understand, Claudine.
(Joking:)
Who knows it? Maybe one day I could film with you: with you and... about you.
- CLAUDINE *(going along with him)*
Nino, it would be wonderful!
(She laughs, but Nino doesn't give up.)
- NINO *(after a pause)*
You can tell me more, if you wish...
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- CLAUDINE *(serious)*
Then, one day...
- NINO One day...?
- CLAUDINE One day I had an abortion...
- NINO *(he doesn't seem to understand too well. After a pause)*
So what?
- CLAUDINE *(with sufferance and anger)*
God, Nino, so what! Those who speak of abortion as of taking an laxative... don't know what they are saying...
- NINO I am sorry.
- CLAUDINE We were about to go on a tour. I got pregnant. It was a long, important tour, in Eastern Europe: Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland... I would have been unable to perform with my husband... I would have had to stay behind in Italy. He should have substituted me with somebody else for the show. He didn't want to... and I was scared, because I knew how these things work: two start working together, get on well, she would have surely been better than me...I was jealous. I was proud of my show, which had been my only real success in life.. So, for a long series of reasons, I had an abortion. We decided it together; but, in the end I was the one who had to have the abortion. The weight of it was mine only. He... died soon afterwards. When I found him in front of me, squashed by the elephant... do you know what was my first thought? Coward, I thought; you run away! He was like that: he was an awful egotist, he used to refuse any worries. Whatever happened, he used to shrug his shoulders, ... laugh and just ... go!
- NINO In these circumstances, I feel that it's a bit unfair to judge him in such a way.
- CLAUDINE Poor Armando, you are right! It was the first thing I considered... Coward, I thought, coward! Actually, we had sorted all our problems out! We didn't go on tour, we didn't perform the show, he didn't need to substitute me... but for me it was the ...void... Perhaps you cannot understand, Nino. A man cannot understand, neither can a woman, until she reads of such events in a newspaper. Since then, I have had a son, but my son is not here, because I sent him away, and I am still waiting... but he cannot come back and he won't. A void; I live, work, laugh in this void... always having this shadow behind my back. And if I go near a man, something stops me, doesn't allow me....
- NINO And him?
- CLAUDINE Walter? I love him, I told you. I am grateful for what he did... and also for what he doesn't do. Sometimes, when we are in bed, he holds me next to him, rests his head here, on my shoulder, or even on my lap. These are the only moments when I don't feel that void, when I don't see that
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shadow...
(*Pause.*)

NINO Have you ever asked him why?

CLAUDINE Yes, once, but... we were talking about something else... I don't want to know, Nino. For the time being, I do not wish to find out... This is my egotism, Nino. I am telling you again: I am happy this way.
(*Her tone is definitive, conclusive.*)

NINO (*after a pause, decisive, even aggressive*)
Do you know where is he now?
(*Claudine looks at him, without being able to understand the question.*)
If I told you that he is, at this moment, having sex?
(*Claudine looks at him, controlling every possible emotion, as refusing to be provoked by the brutality of his expression.*)

CLAUDINE (*after a pause*)
Why "if I told you"?

NINO Would you be jealous?

CLAUDINE No.

NINO Well, it's the truth! He does it quite often. When he feels in good shape, or when he's tired...; when work went well, or when it went badly. It's a way to relieve himself, I suppose. Didn't you know it?

CLAUDINE I thought we would stay to look at the shots...

NINO Indeed, he does that, too.

CLAUDINE Who with?

NINO He has his circles.

CLAUDINE Prostitutes?

NINO No, not prostitutes, or at least not in a technical sense. Unknown mediocre actresses, extras, fans...

CLAUDINE Why did you tell me?

NINO ...because I think that truth is always useful. ...You mustn't hate him for this...

CLAUDINE I don't.

NINO Nor be jealous!

CLAUDINE My jealousies have already been punished, Nino. I am not jealous. I am telling you again, it is still fine by me as it is.

- NINO *(he is near the window)*
Here he is, he is coming! Do not let him know what we are talking about, please. When he is working, he must be left on his own...
- (He starts the screen, which is soon lit-up and fills with the image and the smile of Claudine. Claudine, as if she were embarrassed or unable to face meeting Walter, runs almost towards the door that leads to the other rooms. From there, she turns towards Nino.)*
- CLAUDINE Nino, Nino, today when I fainted... I know what it was...
- NINO What was it?
- CLAUDINE Nino, I ...
(There is no more time to say anything else, as the entrance door is opened and Walter enters. Seeing Nino busy with the shots, he gives him his assent to carry on. He goes nearer and observes. In the meantime, Claudine is motionless, as paralysed, next to the door.)
- WALTER Yesterday's material?
- NINO Yes, it seems very good.
(Walter does not react.)
- CLAUDINE Where were you?
- WALTER Watching some of the shots.
(To Nino)
Would you mind switching it off?
(Nino switches it off.)
- CLAUDINE Are you satisfied?
(Walter does not reply. He goes near a tray on the table, where there is the correspondence, and starts opening the various letters. Claudine asks again.)
- CLAUDINE Are... you satisfied?
- WALTER *(showing no emotion)*
Enough.
(He opens a letter, quickly reads it, then hands the paper to Nino.)
You reply to this one.
(He opens other letters; immediately he pulls some off, putting some others aside and handing some to Nino. He keeps replying to Claudine without ever glancing at her, with apparent indifference.)
Sometimes you are a bit too stiff... not very natural... at other times, you look really good... Your face looked really beautiful when you fainted... A shot we shall have to use... But be careful: if it happens when you are riding a horse...
(He hands Nino another letter.)
This one, too ... it can be dangerous...
My impression is that sometimes you worry a bit too much about copy-
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ing the other one. Sometimes, instead, you follow your own inspiration a bit too much... you use too much imagination... and it's no good.

(Among the various letters, there is a telegram.)

You should bring me the telegrams on the set. They can be urgent messages.

(He opens it, reads it. No emotion shows on his face.)

NINO

Is it an urgent matter?

(Walter replies with an incomprehensible grimace.)

WALTER

Who knows what is urgent in life?

(Short pause. Walter looks at the telegram.)

We are not going to film tomorrow.

NINO

(astonished, after an exchange of glances with Claudine)

...but tomorrow, Master. There is the mill scene that ought to be finished...

WALTER

(impassibly confirming what he has just said, without looking at them)

Tomorrow we are not going to film. I must go to Geneva... for a funeral. My mother died.

(He rips up the telegram into little pieces. He does it again. However, he doesn't throw it away. He hurries towards his room. He exits, whilst the stage slowly darkens.)

III.

Three days later.

There is only Claudine on stage. She is asleep on the sofa, rolled up in a blanket. We can hear the amplified noise of her restless sleep. Claudine is shaken by the sound of the clock, that shows us that is 5 a.m. She wakes up, stretches her arm out, gets hold of the telephone and dials a number. Still amplified, we hear the telephone ring in the empty house next door, where nobody is answering.

Claudine hangs up. She has a look around, shivers or is astonished, rolls herself up in the blanket once more, then tries to fall asleep again.

Suddenly the door opens. Nino enters, preoccupied by some hidden trouble. Claudine is shaken again.

CLAUDINE I called your house...

NINO Did you really think I could have been home?

CLAUDINE Where have you been?

NINO Everywhere: at various police stations, hospitals... I called all his friends... at least those I could remember,I rang his house, his seaside apartment... I even rang Geneva to find out if he had left. Nobody knows anything... His name is not recorded at the airport... but, on the other hand, he often travels under fake names... He enjoys it!...

CLAUDINE What can have happened to him?

NINO I had to keep the Americans calm, too. For them, two days lost are a catastrophe: they wanted to inform the press, the media... to find him now, no matter at what price... I just about managed to persuade them to wait, at least until tonight... Nothing can have happened to him... Maybe, he just wants to stay on his own...

CLAUDINE Yes, but at least call, let us know...

NINO That's part of his egotism, Claudine. Maybe, I don't know... his mother's death has... I don't mean distressed, but...

CLAUDINE But if he had no contact with her; if he never spoke about her! I didn't even realise she was still alive...!

NINO On the other hand it is impossible that in these conditions he could start working straight away. The Americans have to grant him two or three days at least, for God's sake! To bury his mother...

- CLAUDINE The funeral was two days ago...
- NINO Maybe he had things to sort out, to organise... the inheritance, or something similar...
- CLAUDINE What if something has happened to him?
- NINO Something like what? And why? We would have found out by now...
(In a changed tone:)
Listen, go back to sleep. There is no need for you to stay here and worry... I'll take you to bed: then I'll make you a cup of camomile tea, and I shall sleep myself for a while, here, on the sofa. ... Come here!
(He lifts her, helping her to stand up, than walks with her towards the bedroom. They exit. After a short while, the entrance door opens. Walter enters: he is holding under his arm an open file, with papers coming out of it. He leaves it somewhere. He looks around the room for a short while, then throws himself towards the controls table. Whilst he is trying to make something start, Nino enters. At the noise, Walter turns towards him, and uses his moment of surprise to ask, almost whispering:)
- WALTER Claudine?
- NINO ...in the other room...
- WALTER Leave her! Is she sleeping? Let her sleep...
- NINO Is it possible to know where have you been?
- WALTER I wanted to be on my own...
- NINO What about us here... and Claudine...?
- WALTER I needed to stay on my own...
(He goes near him:)
Nino, I have understood an awful lot of things in these two days...!
(In a different, more practical tone:)
Are you tired?
- NINO No! It may seem strange to you, but I am a bit tense. The Americans are extremely pissed off!
- WALTER Well, they shouldn't be!
- NINO Could I call them at least? To say that you have come back, that you're fine...
- WALTER No, not now...later! Let me just recover for a while... I need to talk to someone... Give me something to drink, whatever you want!
(Nino gets him something from the bar. Walter sits down. Pause.)
I saw my mother burning, Nino... a woman I had only see once before, nearly forty years ago... Don't look at me like that, Nino...; it is nothing of what you may imagine, nothing dramatic... She had left it written, that
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she wanted to be cremated... a sort of will, put there, and perhaps forgotten more than thirty years ago! I tried to say that a thing, said or written thirty years before, had no validity whatsoever. It needed not to have any value... In thirty years a human being changes completely... they say that the cells that compose our body are changed in thirty years... You can imagine what happens to the spirit, the will, feelings...that live completely different experiences of the body... However, these are useless arguments... Her sons -my brothers, an entrepreneur, an architect, an accountant, you can imagine! Hiding behind the “passed away’s” will -they didn’t call her mother- must have thought I was mad, or maybe stupid! So, I had to get used to the idea of seeing my mother -whom I saw, I don’t know if I ever told you, only once in my life, at the age of twenty-five, forty years ago!- burning and disappearing in an oven. The religion that she, her husband and sons used to practice has this... lovely usage: if a believer, or a follower or whoever else decide to be cremated, the relatives have to attend the cremation. They have to stand there and look, in front of the oven ... which has a large glass door ... You have to stand there and look at the dear... that consumes. And I was imagining, in my absurd optimism, a gradual, solemn disappearing in the invisible heat, a dismembering into nothing ... But, no! It was a fight, an indecorous struggle, a farce, between the terrible heat, invisible as a virus, and my mother’s body which did not seem to want to be consumed ...; it contracted, it moved frantically, whilst her face assumed a strange grimace ...; she tossed and turned, and her clothes disappeared first, showing bits of naked flesh ... which quickly became black ... At one stage, when her lips started to be burnt, she showed her teeth and started laughing ... In that precise moment, so as to escape the impact, I looked around my relatives, and I saw then all, including myself, lined up into two rows in front of the door, with folded arms, concerned, watching my mother die without being able to understand the sacredness of the event. Nino, I started laughing ... I laughed my head off, without being able to hold back ... and I must have said something too -I don’t know what- because my brother -the architect, the eldest- came near me and said: “You should be ashamed!” and “Go away!”, or something similar. Indeed I went, and I waited outside ... but I did not feel ashamed, because the scene was too funny, Nino, ... you should have seen it!... Too funny!

(He laughs, dries his eyes and cries out:)

My God! It was so funny!

(The door opens. Claudine enters.)

CLAUDINE

Walter!...

(She runs towards him, kneels down, hugs him, while Walter hides his face between his hands and in his handkerchief, and his laugh has become an uncontrollable crying.)

WALTER

His precise words were: “be ashamed” and “go away!”...
What a terrible thing! What a terrible thing!

CLAUDINE

Walter, my love!

(Walter controls himself, dries up his tears, tries to smile.)

- WALTER It's all over now, Claudine. How are you?
- CLAUDINE *(troubled)*
I'm fine. But what about you?
- WALTER Do you know that you were right? She was right, Nino! When I used to ask her to laugh, she refused to do so ... You were right, Claudine! Laughter is a terrible, awful thing! It is not happiness ... it is a caricature of it ... Those who laugh have not understood it yet! They know nothing! They don't know what is awaiting them! Have you understood me, Claudine?
- CLAUDINE *(patiently)*
I have, Walter ... but now ...
- WALTER No, you have not understood anything. You cannot have understood. I'll explain it to you, later on ...
- NINO *(intervenes, being pragmatic)*
That is all ... Do be quiet now! Try to rest ... please. I am going home, so that I can call the Americans too.
(Walter has not even listened to him: he starts talking again, excitedly, carried away by his own thoughts.)
- WALTER Nino! Do you know what I did, all day yesterday? I went around art shops, galleries, shows, museums ... and I bought all the reproductions that I could find on the theme of the "Holy Mother with the Child" ...
(He lifts his bag and empties it on the table, the sofa, the floor. It contains a vast amount of cards in various shapes and sizes.)
Look here! This is a "condition" that humankind has taken as a perfect example of happiness ... The Holy Mother's maternity, the mother of God with the son of Men! Mother and Son. There ... there are many: Raphael's ... a naive Yugoslavian painter ... a fifteenth century reproduction ... Bellini's ... Leonardo's ... But none of them is smiling!
(Suddenly and childishly.)
Didn't I not ask for something to drink?
(Nino offers him a glass of water, which he drinks in one go, as if to quench.)
Maybe the Holy Mother smiles ... sometimes ... But she never shows her teeth! Everything is inside her. She is serene ... with a serenity that is not shown, not manifested ... which does not assail other people. It is useless to laugh! Because happiness does not need smiles ... it is not a stupid happiness, that believes itself to be eternal! It is peace: human, limited, destined to end ... Wanda Feurig used to laugh because I used to make her laugh; because I was young, a poor fool, and the world was full of illusions for me. Now we have all changed, and I have, too! I have learnt, lived, and the greatest possible happiness is inner and outer peace ... and nothing else! I don't care if you can or cannot understand me, Claudine! Don't laugh! You are right! It is the most beautiful love story of all ... A man meets a woman and they love each other ... with no difficulties, obstacles, clouds ... Everything is fine. They love each other and say it at
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every opportunity... and they are happy. They live their happiness without showing it off to the others ... and they don't know how it is going to end ... they only know that everything in the world is destined to an end, therefore they are happy and sad together ... because all this is an essential part of life ... and the human condition ... half way between perfection and limitation, between God and monkeys! This is our film, Nino! We don't need to explain it to the Americans ... And if they ask questions, just say to them that I was once thirty, now I am nearly at the end...!

(Breaths.)

Claudine, I am tired! Come and hug me!

CLAUDINE

Poor love!

(She hugs him with tenderness and he hold her, overtaken by a sudden tiredness.)

(Pause. Nino feels useless and has nothing more to do.)

NINO

Well ... I am glad about all this ... When shall I tell to the Americans about the beginning of the? Tonight? Tomorrow?

WALTER

Neither tonight nor tomorrow, Nino. Let's say ... on Saturday.

NINO

On Saturday? They are going to get extremely annoyed, master ...

WALTER

(Yawning)

Tell them not to worry! I shall make up the lost time. I have understood how it works: we'll soon film the good scenes.

NINO

That's fine. Oh, I wanted to tell you...: I put a sleeping tablet in your glass. Don't be worried.

WALTER

(Closing his eyes for a moment)

I know, I know. I know you well. As soon as you gave it to me I understood ... but I have already drunk it!

NINO

Well! Sleep tight, because we are filming tomorrow ... not on Saturday! Good night ...

WALTER

(eyes closed)

Good night, Nino, and thank you!

(But Nino has already gone out. Walter opens his eyes again and stretches towards the controls table.)

CLAUDINE

What are you doing?

WALTER

I want to show you something I prepared as soon as I in

(The screen is lit and is filled with a close up of Claudine, with an almost invisible smile as before. Polyphonic music in the background.)

There we are: this is the smile of the Holy Mother ...

(Sits on her lap.)

You were right, Claudine! When I used to say "Laugh, you stupid bitch!..." You used to say nothing.

- CLAUDINE You were right, Walter, when you used to cut out all those scenes in which I was laughing.
- WALTER *(abandons himself in her arms)*
If I had not meet you, if I had not seen my mother showing her teeth ... as I saw her, the day before yesterday ... I would have not understood. Do you know what, Claudine? After the funeral, as it has happened many other times, I felt inside me a furious wish to live. However, before ... I used to end up in some restaurant, eating with many other people ... then in bed with some woman. I believe that life wants its revenge on death, showing itself in the most elementary of its forms ... eating, drinking, making love ... But yesterday ... no. I thought of you. I wanted to be with you. Whilst everything became clearer inside me... I felt ready to make a film as it deserves ... to love you as you deserve.
(Nearly falling asleep.)
Nino is a good man ... but he is extremely stubborn!...
- CLAUDINE *(softly)*
We have all the time in the world, Walter...
- WALTER Yes, yes, ... but we are not eternal ...
- CLAUDINE I know...
- WALTER I'm tired.
- CLAUDINE Sleep...
(Pause. She holds him, his head on her lap, slowly caressing his hair.)
I have something to tell you, too.
I'm pregnant. I'm expecting a child. He is yours.
- WALTER Mine?
- CLAUDINE Yes. That time ...
- WALTER *(weakly, but happy)*
Why didn't you tell me?
- CLAUDINE Because "that" time was not enough, Walter. I was waiting for your love to come too.
- WALTER *(as before)*
It's true. You are right...
This is a beautiful piece of news, Claudine!
I have made something of my life ... A son ... it is not a film. I have to say it to the Americans!
(He laughs, almost asleep.)
Well ... It is all so beautiful...
(He sleeps.)
- CLAUDINE *(tenderly)*
My elephant! My poor little elephant!...
-

(She him.)

How nice it's being happy!

God, how nice!

(she cries, sweetly but without stopping. The image on the screen slowly fades into the darkness, then disappears, just having a title.)

The End
