

I can't wait to work on you.

*(She exits. Versati reappears.)*

LOUISE

My husband is not back yet.

VERSATI

You must have some authority.

LOUISE

Would you like to know the rate?

VERSATI

No.

LOUISE

Oh. Would you like to see the room?

VERSATI

That's not necessary.

LOUISE

You would rent a room without seeing it?

VERSATI

Yes.

LOUISE

Why?

VERSATI

Because . . . because . . .

*(Blurts it out.)*

Your underpants! This morning, on the Grand Boulevard.

LOUISE

*(Shocked.)*

Oh my god! Who are you?

VERSATI

I am a poet. Unpublished—I am proud to say—but one who has now found his muse.

LOUISE

Please!

VERSATI

I will explain. By metaphor. No, by simile. No, I will not beat around the bush. Oh my god, what an inappropriate allusion. I am not the master of my soul. Though a few hours ago I was. It seems I am engulfed by the rising tide of my own humors . . .

*(He is pleased by his metaphor.)*

What a beautiful line . . . where is my pen!

*(He can't find it.)*

Damn. Society's loss.

*(Back to her.)*

You see I believe in miracles, and I finally had one appear to me under a linden tree. There you were, bathed in sunlight with panicked eyes and a quivering body and there I was, shaken by life. A momentous crossroads. In those few seconds when you bent down and collected your underpants, you tore my heart from the things that I thought I loved, and fixed it only on you.

*(Louise is breathless.)*

Ah, silence. Good. For silence is devotion.

*(He moves toward her.)*

LOUISE

I . . . I . . . don't know what to say.

VERSATI

*(He kneels on his upstage knee, downstage knee hiding his groin.)*

Then let me speak: From this day on, I will desire you with all the strength of my soul. Unwavering, disavowing all others.

LOUISE

Please, stand up.

VERSATI

I cannot stand, for my veins are stiff with certainty.

LOUISE

*(She looks between his legs, steps back, shocked.)*

For god's sake, if my husband comes!

VERSATI

The room you have for rent. How much is it?

LOUISE

Fifteen taler.

VERSATI

I'll take it. The discussion is over.

LOUISE

Who would believe an elegant gentleman living in this neighborhood?

VERSATI

I'll dress as a laborer. A wealthy, gentleman hod carrier.

LOUISE

And you would live here?

VERSATI

In the extra room.

LOUISE

What about my husband?

VERSATI

If he comes, just introduce us. I'm renting the room.

LOUISE

And you are . . . ?

VERSATI

Versati. Franklin, Angelo, "The Cat," Luigi, Versati the second. Sorry, the third.

LOUISE

You should get up. He'll be coming back soon.

VERSATI

Between the sound of his key in the lock and the opening of the door I will be fleet like Jupiter. Wait, Jupiter is not fleet. Make that Mercury.

LOUISE

Get up!

VERSATI

You'll agree, then?

LOUISE

I . . .

*(They play the pause.)*

VERSATI

In the ellipsis sounds a yes!

LOUISE

But my husband!

VERSATI

Think of him as a necessary part of the triangle. You are the flint, I am the fire, and he is the wet piece of wood. I'll be back.

*(He exits, leaving the door ajar. Louise goes into the guest room. The stage is bare. We hear a knock, and the door swings open from the force. Enter Klingehoff. He looks around, surveying the place.)*

KLINGLEHOFF

Hello?

*(After a moment, he exits. Louise reappears with a ladder. She climbs a ladder halfway to a high window. Gertrude enters. She looks around.)*

GERTRUDE

Louise?

LOUISE

Up here.

GERTRUDE

In the clouds. As usual.

LOUISE

What do you mean?