

Versati/Louise/
The Underpants * 77
Cohen/Theo

COHEN

This is exceptionally unhealthy. Everyone knows a room facing northeast is subject to unnatural winds and arctic breezes. This could exacerbate my condition, whatever it may be.

THEO

Oh, for god's sake. Put the bed opposite the window. You'll be facing southwest.

COHEN

I never thought of that.

THEO

Here, I'll help you.

(They exit to the bedroom. Louise and Versati are left alone.)

VERSATI

(To Louise.)

You and I will be together tonight. It is written in the stars.

LOUISE

How can we?

VERSATI

I have a plan. I will take Theo out to the boulevard, get him drunk, and return alone. I will convince him to come with me.

LOUISE

How? He doesn't seem to like you very much.

VERSATI

At the dinner table I will engage him in a battle of wits and then lure him into a drinking bout.

LOUISE

(Excited.)

He cannot win a battle of wits!

VERSATI

Exactly. I will return in a few hours and make you mine. Will you be ready for me?

LOUISE

I will.

VERSATI

You must take care of Cohen.

LOUISE

But how?

VERSATI

You'll figure out a way. Your participation will heighten your ardor.

LOUISE

Is it wrong what we're doing?

VERSATI

It was God who gave me my passion; it is the devil who prevents it from being spent.

LOUISE

Let's go with God.

(Theo and Cohen reenter from the bedroom.)

THEO

You know, I have a friend with the same complaints as you and he knows his body like an office manual. I asked him about his ailments.

COHEN

What did he say?

THEO

He seems to think it's nerves. But the nerves affect the other organs. The liver, the lungs, the kidneys . . .

COHEN

Liver, lungs, and kidneys?

LOUISE

You're making Herr Cohen nervous, Theo.

THEO

Exactly my point. Nerves. Too nervous. Affects the liver, lungs, and kidneys.

LOUISE

But he doesn't think he has anything serious.

COHEN

(Nervous.)

I don't have anything serious.

THEO

Then it is my duty to point out the list of possible serious diseases you might have . . . gout, emphysema, whooping cough, mumps, aphasia . . .

COHEN

Stop!

THEO

Meningitis, shingles, measles . . .

COHEN

(More nervous.)

Is there a draft in here?

LOUISE

The window's open a bit.

er,

COHEN

Could we close it?

LOUISE

Here, wear your scarf.

COHEN

(To Louise.)

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

VERSATI

May I speak?

THEO

Your rent is paid.

VERSATI

That is the subject of poetry.

(He gestures toward Louise and Cohen.)

See the way a woman's tenderness comforts the sickly and diseased?

THEO

He's not comforted; he feels awful.

COHEN

I am comforted.

VERSATI

My point.

THEO

He's only comforted because he's sick. If he were healthy, he would just be annoyed.

LOUISE

You're not annoyed when I serve you dinner.

THEO

That's because it's a function of duty. It's why when I go off to work you are not annoyed, because I'm doing my duty. And when I am home, it is your duty to serve me dinner. If everyone just did their duty and nothing else, the world would be a better place.

VERSATI

Duty? Is that all you think about? What about the softness of the serving hand? The warm cradle of the female caress? Frocks with frills and polka dots?

THEO

You know what, Versati? You sound like a woman. These are not manly thoughts. A man does not think of polka dots.

VERSATI

I am a man who lives on the poetic side of life.

THEO

A man wields an ax. A man hews wood. He pisses against a wall. He shoots birds from the air with pellets. He does not put on brocaded cuff links and stroll off into a garden to write poetry.

VERSATI

Many men have.

THEO

Yes, I've seen these sensitive "men" singing their hearts out on the stage, crooning love songs, weeping over their lady loves. Why would a woman want a man who acts like a woman? Let women go off and write poetry and stand on the stage singing of their broken hearts. Men, strong, vital men, should be at their desks, stamping documents, filing files and going home at five o'clock.

VERSATI

Monotony!

THEO

Continuity!

VERSATI

Tedium!

THEO

(Rhapsodic.)

Regularity!

VERSATI

It's barbaric!

COHEN

(Indignant.)

How dare you insult barbers!

THEO

Versati, I like where I am. In the middle. I'm proud to have done no better.

VERSATI

Theo, is the woman next to you not enough to motivate you to a higher place?

THEO

How could I be motivated by a little housewife?

LOUISE

I am not a little housewife.

THEO

That's no embarrassment. I have descended from a long line of government clerks. You have descended from a long line of little housewives.