

Two Loves and a Creature

by

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*“It’s easier to disintegrate an atom
than a prejudice.”
Einstein*

Cast of Characters:

PAUL

CAROLINE

KAREN

Location:

City zoo

Music:

Beethoven's Piano Sonata 23 in F minor Op 57 "Apassionata." Mov 2 Andante con motto

"Two Loves and a Creature" had its first public reading at the Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival (George C. Wolfe, Producer), as part of the New Work Now! Program (NWN), on April 30, 2003, directed by Steven Cosson. The cast and contributors were as follows:

JAIME TIRELLI as Paul

PRISCILLA LOPEZ as KAREN

VANESA ASPILLAGA as CAROLINE

Directed by STEVEN COSSON

Shannon Polly: Stage Directions

Dramaturg: Rebecca Rugg

Stage Manager: Aquila S. Barnes

NWN Coordinator: Terence Dale

NWN Literary Assistant: Rebecca A. Wolf

1/ monkeys, before

The scene is a zoo with several cages, but also a living room in a house. The scene “moves” with changes in time and imagery. Three chairs and a television are the only elements on stage.

CAROLINE: The monkey cage reminds me how fifteen years ago Daddy was put in jail for forty days and had to pay a five thousand dollar fine.

PAUL: Nothing to be ashamed of, really. A short sentence, money I was saving for my own things. The lawyers took care of it all very quickly, so it wouldn't be hard on them.

KAREN: Our lawyers gave him the best advice: keep quiet. Even though he always insisted on doing the worst possible thing.

PAUL: I wanted to explain my case to the press.

CAROLINE: Mom, to my surprise, wanted to talk, like a parrot.

KAREN: Although he talked for the two of us. The three of us, because he talked for the victim too.

(Caroline picks up a basket of fruit. She sits next to her father)

CAROLINE: We visited him seven times in those forty days and he thought it wasn't enough.

PAUL: No one here loves me anymore!

CAROLINE: The first time I was crying when we got there. I saw him and all I did was cry. Not because it was a prison, it was really more like a county jail. But I knew that Dad was supposed to be serious, Mom sad, and me a crybaby.

PAUL: You were 8!

CAROLINE: I was 9.

PAUL: You were missing teeth.

CAROLINE: (*Annoyed*) I was not missing teeth!

PAUL: I enjoyed their visits. Not just because of the presents they brought, but the stories, the gossip, the things other people were saying.

CAROLINE: I took him chocolates and a book he wanted to read. Later, I visited him like someone at work, with his friends. Mom was happy because the days went flying by. Although that was fifteen years ago and I remember it all in slow motion.

(*Among themselves*)

PAUL: Did you miss me sweetie?

CAROLINE: A whole lot, Daddy. Do you think they'll make you go back there again?

PAUL: Not if I behave myself.

KAREN: Daddy's going to behave himself because he always does and this was all just a big misunderstanding. You understand, Caroline?

CAROLINE: (*Happy*) Yes! Welcome home, Daddy! (*Hugs him*)

PAUL: What do you think? I'm a criminal?

(*Paul hugs his daughter, happy*)

CAROLINE: (*to audience*) Time passed and I turned 24.

PAUL: (*Proudly, as though talking to friends*) She graduated from veterinary school.

KAREN: (*Proudly, as though talking to friends*) She works for the city zoo.

PAUL: A good job, a good work environment, doing what she likes.

KAREN: They've promoted her to the main clinic.

PAUL: She treats all the animals and her colleagues really respect her.

KAREN: The pay's no good, of course...

PAUL: But she's happy.

KAREN: Maybe she'll get married soon.

PAUL: Getting married's for your 30's. She's too young.

KAREN: You're jealous.

PAUL: She's dying for a grandchild.

KAREN: She's always calling her father to hear his stories.

PAUL: Her favorite thing is shopping with her mother.

KAREN: She's gotten so big, so beautiful...

PAUL: So cute, and she's such a chatterbox.

KAREN: Is she ever. All she wants to do is talk!

PAUL: You know how they are just after they graduate.

KAREN: They talk

PAUL: And they never stop talking.

KAREN: That's what the universities teach them: to talk.

PAUL: And to always be right!

(Caroline appears wearing a zoo uniform, like a doctor)

CAROLINE: And one Tuesday afternoon, just a few months ago, my parents came to the zoo to celebrate my first year at work.

PAUL: *(Waving, with a huge bag of peanuts in one hand)* Caroline, sweetie, here we are!

CAROLINE: We spent the day playing and laughing like always.

KAREN: We were having a good time at the monkey cage.

PAUL: We were happy as can be at the monkey cage.

KAREN: It was a gorgeous day and the monkeys were being very playful.

PAUL: And happy because I threw them a huge bag of peanuts! (*He does. Like a child, he watches the monkeys fight over the bag*) Look! Look how the big one got it away! And the one with the white tail is chasing him. Hahahahaha!!!

CAROLINE: And I was happy with my animals and my parents on a Tuesday afternoon when not many visitors come.

KAREN: Then, looking at the monkeys, just like that...

PAUL: Someone said something.

KAREN: About the monkey cages...

PAUL: Someone pointed somewhere...

CAROLINE: Someone said look over there...

KAREN: And there he was.

PAUL: The orangutan.

CAROLINE: In quarantine.

KAREN: In jail.

PAUL: Locked up.

KAREN: An orangutan separated from all the rest.

PAUL: In a filthy special cage.

KAREN: "Why is he there?" he was going to ask.

PAUL: "What did he do?" she thought.

KAREN: Instead of leaving the orangutan alone and listening to more of our daughter's stories.

PAUL: I admit it; I paved the way for what happened later.

KAREN: Because Mr. Stupid had to ask:

PAUL: What did he do?

KAREN: And Miss Know-It-All answered:

CAROLINE: He didn't behave himself.

KAREN: I swear it hit me then that that answer would send us over the edge.

PAUL: I admit it rubbed me the wrong way.

CAROLINE: I promise I tried to control my words.

KAREN: But words can't be controlled.

PAUL: Words have that potential to pop out and control you.

KAREN: And destroy everything.

PAUL: They should do away with words, or censor them or do something with them so they stop wounding and hurting innocent people.

KAREN: Words? More like knives, beasts.

PAUL: Words, goddamn words.

KAREN: Because it was words my husband used to ask the question no one wanted him to ask.

PAUL: Why didn't he behave himself?

KAREN: And more:

PAUL: What did he do?

KAREN: And then...

CAROLINE: Then, when I was going to explain...

PAUL: When I put on my I-want-to-learn-please-wise-daughter-enlighten-me face...

KAREN: Right then...

CAROLINE: I told him the orangutan was being punished because he'd bothered another male monkey.

KAREN: In alarm, I tried to change the subject.

CAROLINE: When I said “bothered,” I swear I was going to say something else.

KAREN: But then Paul uttered his momentous phrase, the phrase that was to turn all our words and gazes and souls toward what we should never ever have looked at.

CAROLINE: Then Dad said the phrase that triggered everything.

PAUL: I said:

CAROLINE: He said:

KAREN: He said:

PAUL: “You sure can tell that man came from monkeys.”

KAREN: (*Annoyed*) Man comes from monkeys!

CAROLINE: (*Suspicious*) Man from monkeys?

KAREN: No more, no less.

CAROLINE: And it was like...

KAREN: That Tuesday afternoon, a real Tuesday, when we visited our daughter at the zoo, at her work, and had such a nice family afternoon by the monkey cage with its thirteen chimpanzees and the one orangutan locked up in a special cage

CAROLINE: A big, sad orangutan.

PAUL: Young, but grown old.

KAREN: With a face like he hardly had a friend in the world.

PAUL: Because nothing makes sense to him anymore.

KAREN: An orangutan locked up.

PAUL: Who looks a lot like me.

KAREN: Because it was obvious that, suddenly, looking at that monkey, an orangutan, man's predecessor—but definitely not woman's—a monkey who'd been locked up and punished for bothering another male monkey...

CAROLINE: It made me think of the time when Dad was in jail for 40 days and had to pay a \$5,000 fine.

KAREN: Sure, it was only natural. From the orangutan to her father.

PAUL: I took a convenient stroll to the camel cage.

KAREN: I headed toward the zebras.

PAUL: I remember I said out loud that I wanted to see the arachnids.

KAREN: I talked about the virtues of the hyena.

PAUL: I pointed out the lizards and their 80 teeth, but she...

KAREN: But she...

PAUL: Didn't let it drop.

CAROLINE: And that's when I asked...

PAUL: Point blank

CAROLINE: Dad, why did you go to jail that time?

(We hear monkeys fighting in the distance. One throws the balled up peanut bag back out of the cage. It hits Paul)

CAROLINE: Dad went into like a coma. Then Mom looked at me and said:

KAREN: Don't talk nonsense! Dad was never in jail.

CAROLINE: She was lying.

KAREN: Why did she have to go and ask, after all those years, about that unpleasant affair?

CAROLINE: Mom: don't treat me like a child.

KAREN: You aren't a child, that's why I'm telling you Dad...!

CAROLINE: I asked a question and I'll ask it again and I want you to answer. Now I really, really mean it.
Why was Dad in jail?

PAUL: Sweetie, where are the Pandas? I want to see the Pandas. They're so cute.

CAROLINE: Why were you in jail?

KAREN: And then, for the second surprise of the day: Paul answered her...

PAUL: Sweetie: fifteen years ago I went to jail.

KAREN: He told her the truth.

PAUL: Because I killed a dog.

CAROLINE: You killed...?

KAREN: That's all in the past and we don't remember...

PAUL: (*Serious*) Kicked it to death. One December 24th in the afternoon I kicked a dog to death. His name was "General." That's why I was arrested. There was a quick trial and I was given 40 days in jail.

CAROLINE: How could you kill a dog?

PAUL: And a \$5,000 dollar fine.

KAREN: That's enough, Caroline! You're spoiling our afternoon, sweetheart.

CAROLINE: But...but...but... Whose dog was it? Was it someone's dog or a stray? How big was it? Why was it with us? What did it do to us?

KAREN: And especially...

CAROLINE: And especially...

KAREN: Most importantly...

CAROLINE: Why?

KAREN: Right. (*Imitating her*) "Why?"

CAROLINE: Why did you kill the dog?

(We hear monkeys fighting in the distance)

PAUL: *(To the audience)* I always knew that girl was going to be fresh. Ever since she was little she couldn't hold her tongue. She always answered back. She was just like me.

KAREN: Badgering her father in a way that even I never have!

CAROLINE: I was looking at them and beginning, not to understand them, but to know them. Suddenly I knew my mother and my father, who they were and why they did what they did. I'd never asked myself that question before: do I know them? Can I say what they think, they believe, the ideas they uphold, what they're like?

PAUL: Children are a threat left hanging in the air. A threat that's never quite concrete, flung at someone and then in shame we wish we could forget it, but by then it's too late. They're out there forever.

KAREN: "Forever" it turns out is a very short thing, "forever" is one of those things whose days are numbered

PAUL: That's asking for a final solution.

KAREN: "Forever" is so short.

PAUL: That it doesn't even seem like a word.

KAREN: Although it's serious.

PAUL: And even has three syllables.

KAREN: But there was nothing we could do anymore.

PAUL: Change the subject, hope for an announcement over the loudspeakers... or noise from the monkey cage.

KAREN: They could monkey around.

PAUL: The orangutan could faint.

KAREN: Monkeys never monkey around when you need it the most.

PAUL: Instead they sat there listening to our words, goddamn words. Like they were trying not to laugh at us.

KAREN: Or saying: “this is getting good.”

PAUL: Even though I looked her straight in the eye.

KAREN: Even though I took her by the arm.

PAUL: Even though I looked away and cast my glance into the void.

KAREN: Even though that pause was torment.

PAUL: Even though the silence blocked out the noise.

KAREN: Even with all that.

PAUL: Daddy’s little girl.

KAREN: My only child.

PAUL: Damn her hide.

KAREN: Didn’t hesitate to repeat the question I had never dared to ask.

CAROLINE: Dad, why did you kill the dog?

(We hear monkeys fighting in the distance. Beat)

PAUL: *(To the audience)* Apparently when a dog bites someone it’s not news, but if someone bites a dog, it’s different.

KAREN: Now if a dog kills someone even the walls talk about it, but if you kill a dog, it’s not such big news.

PAUL: Unless...

KAREN: Unless you did it for some unusual reason

PAUL: A special reason.

KAREN: More like an insulting reason.

CAROLINE: Dad...

PAUL: A reason is always a powerful weapon.

CAROLINE: Why?

KAREN: A reason that makes headlines.

CAROLINE: What did it do to you?

KAREN: Because the reason my husband killed that five-year-old Yorkiepoo kept curiosity seekers entertained on a day when, the truth is, there were other things to talk about that no one was interested in. That day the news was that a bomb had gone off at a school, destroying the entire front of the building, leaving a hole the size of a crater and more than 230 dead. One hundred thirty four children, 53 teachers, 22 parents and guardians, 10 employees, and 11 teenagers who were waiting for their siblings, for cousins, for their girlfriends and boyfriends, for life that was bearing down on them but never arrived.

PAUL: But that news wasn't important.

KAREN: No, what was important was that my husband confessed the reasons he'd decided to put an end to that dog's life. A dog that by the way cost us plenty and to make things worse cost us even more dead.

CAROLINE: It was our dog?

KAREN: It was HIS dog

CAROLINE: Dad's dog?

KAREN: He bought it, he raised it, he taught it its first tricks, and he himself killed it.

PAUL: I had every right to do whatever I wanted to with him, he was mine.

CAROLINE: You have to tell me what happened right now, Dad. Why did you kill the dog?!

(We hear monkeys. Beat)

PAUL: My daughter is looking at me.

KAREN: Who hardly ever looks at us.

PAUL: A daughter looking at me and an orangutan looking at me too. Why today? Really, daughter of mine, why do you care?

KAREN: When all year long she does her own thing.

PAUL: Boys, friends, dates, clothes...

KAREN: Embarrassed by the shirt her father wears and the color of my shoes and the style of my dress.

PAUL: The color of our blinds, the wallpaper, the living room rug, the book on the nightstand.

KAREN: And she still has the gall to ask.

PAUL: At the now famous monkey cage.

CAROLINE: Why did you kill it, Dad? What happened?

(We hear monkeys mixed with dogs. Paul moves to one side and reenacts killing the dog)

PAUL: When the neighbors got there, they yelled *(Kicking the dog)* but I didn't hear them.

KAREN: *(As a neighbor)* "Please don't kick that poor creature anymore!"

CAROLINE: *(As a neighbor)* "You're killing that dog!"

KAREN: "It's nearly dead already!"

CAROLINE: "Leave it alone!"

KAREN: "You're kicking its guts out!"

CAROLINE: "It can't breathe!"

KAREN: "It can't do anything anymore!"

PAUL: In the middle of all that shouting, someone called the police, and where the police go the press is not far behind. I must've been beating that dog for a long time because it took them a while to get there. Then, then, then, when I heard the sirens I realized what I was doing and of course, it was too late by then, because the poor creature was already dead. I stopped kicking it for a bit, to see if it would get up, to see if it growled, but nothing.

KAREN: The reporters took pictures.

PAUL: The dog was dead 20 minutes before anyone got to the scene of the crime.

KAREN: But the reporter wrote that he'd heard the last bark.

PAUL: When the truth is the poor dog didn't bark after the first minute.

CAROLINE: A minute's a minute. That's a very long time when you're dying.

KAREN: The reporters came and interviewed him.

PAUL: Not the dog. Me.

KAREN: Of course, the creature was dead. And the other creature wasn't.

PAUL: And that's when I said.

KAREN: And that's when he said.

CAROLINE: Why did you kill the dog?

PAUL: (*Loudly, but not dramatically*) I killed him because he was homosexual.

KAREN: He said it!

CAROLINE: Mom?

PAUL: The orangutan was there for the same reason. For bothering other male monkeys. You see? They punish them for that, going against nature, for doing whatever they feel like.

CAROLINE: Dad? But... but... How could you?

KAREN: (*To the audience*) Now my daughter's afraid. Before she was asking out of curiosity, but now her world is about to be blown to smithereens.

CAROLINE: It can't be... it can't be... I don't remember any of it...!

KAREN: A world that until that day, that Tuesday afternoon, watching the monkeys monkey around and telling us about their monkeyshines and her stories, it was a perfect world where everything had an explanation. Until that moment, when her unmerciful Father tells her what she never ever wanted to hear.

PAUL: I killed it because it was homosexual. The dog was a fag, that's why I killed it.

KAREN: Deep down, I felt good. Not because of him, but because I saw my daughter's face, because after doing and saying all the things she saw and did, suddenly she felt like a frightened nine-year-old again, taking books and candy to her father in jail.

CAROLINE: Oh my God... My God... Daddy... Daddy.

KAREN: And I sat down to watch her, a nine-year-old, and him, an ogre who without a word, threw himself on a helpless Yorkiepoo like a bomb that explodes in a school and blows it to smithereens. Like a house turned upside down by assailants, like a wife who answers his lover's call and hangs up.

CAROLINE: I don't remember any... anything...

(She moves to one side, lights down. We hear Beethoven's piano sonata no. 23 op. 57 "Apassionata," Second Movement, Andante con Moto)

KAREN: These are my two loves and my two stories: the one about the girl who holds all the cards and has every chance of winning and suddenly finds that, not only are her cards blank, but she doesn't even know how to play cards. And his: A man who began the afternoon with a family outing to the zoo and now has begun to see that the sentences we leave unfinished always end up getting said sometime. And words are there to fill a vacuum.

PAUL: Two stories that met one family Tuesday at the zoo. Two stories that speak to a subject that everyone spoke about once and later no one could ever speak of again.

KAREN: Two loves and a creature that open and close the story. *(She takes out a yellowed newspaper clipping. Reads)* "...the jury convicted Paul Stevens of antisocial behavior and cruelty to animals. Stevens was accused of beating his dog to death because he thought the animal, a five-year-old Yorkiepoo named General, was homosexual..."

(Caroline watches her father in terror)

KAREN: "Witnesses to the event reported that Paul Stevens, 38, grew incensed when his dog General tried to have sexual relations with another male dog, a Jack Russell Terrier named Bandit, owned by his wife..."

(The stage is dark except for three spots on Paul, Caroline and Karen)

KAREN: For all those years, two unanswered questions. First, and foremost: did he kill his dog just because he was doing it with another male dog, or because that dog was mine? And second: do I have something to do with that incident? Those are the questions that came to light today on a gray afternoon one crappy Tuesday, after seeing a wretched orangutan locked up and dying of sadness and from the flies that were eating him alive.

CAROLINE: Daddy, how could you do something like that?

(Caroline sobs, disconsolate. Runs off stage)

PAUL: *(To his wife)* How do you think she'll take it?

(He disappears as his spot goes out)

KAREN: We don't know.

(She disappears as her spot goes out. A newspaper clipping appears: "134 children, 53 teachers, 22 parents and guardians, 10 employees, and 11 teenagers died in the explosion.")

2/ zebras, penguins

Zebra area. We see what could be a zebra, although we don't see either the head or rear of its body, just a white space crossed by black lines.

KAREN: Of course, there are those who said that, as his wife, I should have kept quiet.

CAROLINE: Always keep quiet; the ones who talk are always guilty.

KAREN: But I was nervous too.

CAROLINE: We all were.

KAREN: And they asked me.

CAROLINE: Little questions.

KAREN: Well-meaning questions.

CAROLINE: Is your husband in a homosexual relationship? Were you cheating on your husband with the dog? Was your husband jealous of the dog, the other dog, or you?

KAREN: And you ask yourself, what should I do to help him? What should I say? *(To someone in the audience)* Sure, you would've done it all differently, but we all do the right thing until it happens to you. Then, you get lost and to hell with the right thing. Your thinking gets all mixed up and you say the first thing that comes into your head. Nothing is black and white, you see? Besides, sooner or later they always end up blaming the wife.

CAROLINE: *(Reading a newspaper)* "According to statements made by Karen Stevens, wife of Paul Stevens, the two dogs had been having sexual

relations for some time and she did not understand why her husband reacted that way.”

KAREN: They did it all the time. It was ugly, but I never thought it was abnormal.

CAROLINE: “...that her husband’s dog, a Yorkiepoo named General, was always chasing after other dog, named Bandit.”

KAREN: He sniffed him and followed him everywhere. My husband didn’t realize it at first because he always went out for lunch and got home late. But they were doing it all the time. The dog would mount him and the other one would let him. But like he didn’t care, more like something normal, routine, like mealtime or getting excited because he was going out to do his business. It happens in every family.

CAROLINE: Can you give me an example?

KAREN: No, actually I can’t think of anyone. The neighbors maybe.

CAROLINE: “His wife stated that, even though it was unnatural behavior in the murdered dog...”

KAREN: They were dogs, for God’s sake! Animals! Who can possibly care about all this!

(Caroline puts on glasses and a vest, plays Woman)

WOMAN: We do, Mrs. Stevens, the Society for the Protection of Animals. This is no longer just the case of a domestic accident; it’s become a matter of public concern.

KAREN: How could this happen?

WOMAN: Because there are reporters and people are concerned.

KAREN: It’s just a dead dog.

WOMAN: We’re all very sensitive here.

KAREN: With all the real crime there is in the world and here we are with a nothing little situation that must happen in every home.

WOMAN: It doesn’t happen in every home.

KAREN: I thought it happened all the time.

WOMAN: In fact, it's the first time I've ever heard of something like this.

KAREN: Maybe I've got the wrong idea about other homes.

WOMAN: If this was a repeated behavior in the two dogs, why on that day in particular did your husband decide to kill it?

KAREN: He lost control. He went crazy.

WOMAN: Why?

KAREN: He was watching the news and he was angry that people had died.

WOMAN: Who?

KAREN: Children and teachers. A bomb in a school, like 300 dead, I don't know.

WOMAN: And then?

KAREN: He was furious. He was shouting about terrorism and death. Then, he saw the dogs, what they were doing, you know, and then, he lost control and...

WOMAN: Killed his own dog.

KAREN: Kicked it to death.

WOMAN: Do you consider your husband a violent man?

KAREN: No, not particularly. As violent as the next.

WOMAN: The next who?

KAREN: Like all men.

WOMAN: Not all men are violent.

KAREN: No? Maybe I've got the wrong idea about men.

WOMAN: He killed it because it was homosexual?

KAREN: That's what he says.

WOMAN: He says. Is it true?

KAREN: Ask him. *(She gets out of her chair, moves to one side)* And I left it like that, halfway. I didn't say yes, I didn't say no. I said nothing that could be taken as definitive, I confirmed nothing. Not just because I thought it was the best way to help him, but because I've always thought that nothing is what it is, that what seems to be could be something else and that, most certainly, nothing is black and white.

(Paul appears, sits down in a chair)

PAUL: Except zebras.

KAREN: Zebras?

PAUL: Zebras are black and white. *(Pensive)* And pandas. *(Intelligent)* And penguins.

(Karen leaves, ashamed of her husband)

WOMAN: Good afternoon. I'm from the Society for the Protection of Animals. Your wife wasn't open in answering our questions, so we'd like to repeat the interview with you. So let's begin. Tell me: what exactly happened?

PAUL: It all happened at Christmastime. December 24th. I was watching TV, the news. Then, my wife reminded me that the Christmas lights hadn't come on and that I needed to fix them. *(He acts out the scene as he recounts it)* I'm always the one who does the lights while my wife makes the meals, the calls, our plans. Our daughter was playing. The TV was talking about the story of the day... I don't remember it now.

WOMAN: The bomb in the school.

PAUL: Right. They were having a Christmas party and there were four hundred dead or something like that...the whole front of the building destroyed...

WOMAN: Yes, but that's not our case.

PAUL: No one knows why they put a bomb in that school.

WOMAN: Back to our case.

PAUL: The board blamed the media.

WOMAN: What board?

PAUL: The school board.

WOMAN: And what does that have to do with us, you, and the dead dog?

PAUL: Nothing, nothing at all.

WOMAN: So?

PAUL: So, I finished with the lights on the tree, and that's when I saw the dog.

WOMAN: Your dog.

PAUL: General.

WOMAN: General.

PAUL: (*He uses two chairs to reenact the scene*) He was after Bandit again.

WOMAN: The other dog.

PAUL: Yes, he was after him and I'd told him not to do that. I'd warned him not to do it. I'd just spanked him with the newspaper a few days before, I gave him a kick the last time I saw him trying to do it with the other dog and he looked at me like he understood.

WOMAN: Were they always doing it?

PAUL: Lately, a lot.

WOMAN: And you didn't approve.

PAUL: They were two males!

WOMAN: And you didn't approve?

PAUL: No, of course not, I didn't like it and neither did the other dog, because he'd run away, you see. Bandit was suffering; he'd always look at me like asking for help, like he was saying, "How long do I have to put up with this? Why don't you do anything? Why do you let this stupid dog do it to me whenever he feels like it?"

WOMAN: The dog said that?

PAUL: He didn't say it, of course not. It was like he was saying it. He looked at me with that thought in his eyes and I felt sorry for him, I agreed.

WOMAN: With the dog.

PAUL: The situation felt uncomfortable, my 9-year-old daughter there seeing everything and my wife hanging her head each time it happened because she didn't have the guts to do anything. And the dogs panting and the one drooling and the other trying to run away and General not letting him and then...

WOMAN: Then?

PAUL: Then, then I saw Bandit as a victim, helpless, and I went over to General and I yelled at him and my daughter started crying. She doesn't like it when I yell because she loves animals. She says when she grows up she wants to be a veterinarian or something like that. So, I hit General, but the dog wouldn't stop doing it, and then...

WOMAN: Then?

PAUL: Well, it happened.

WOMAN: What happened, Mr. Stevens?

PAUL: Something happened to me, I lost my composure, I didn't know what I was doing.

WOMAN: You attacked the dog.

PAUL: I started kicking it.

WOMAN: Until you killed it.

PAUL: Yes, I think.

WOMAN: You think?

PAUL: I kicked it but I don't know if to death.

WOMAN: You think it was alive afterwards?

PAUL: I mean, maybe it was already dead and I went on kicking it.

WOMAN: You sick bastard!

PAUL: Excuse me?

WOMAN: You're a sick bastard! You would've done the same thing to a gay couple walking in front of you and holding hands! You would have killed them. You hate homosexuals.

PAUL: No, no, they can do what they want, but in my home...

WOMAN: Are you homophobic?

PAUL: It was the dogs, just the dogs that bothered me. People don't bother me, I understand people, I like people...

WOMAN: But you killed the dog because of its homosexual activities.

PAUL: I'd warned him not to do it.

WOMAN: And they kept on doing it.

PAUL: Yes...

WOMAN: So, when someone does something you don't like, you become enraged. (*Paul shakes his head*) And you become violent.

PAUL: No, not at all.

WOMAN: If you'd do that to a dog, wouldn't you do it to a human being?

PAUL: Never!

WOMAN: How can we be sure that if you get off scot-free, you won't turn around and commit another crime?

PAUL: I've never committed a crime.

WOMAN: You killed a dog.

PAUL: That isn't a crime.

WOMAN: There are laws to protect animals.

PAUL: But dogs aren't the same as...

WOMAN: As us?

PAUL: Humans.

(Woman moves over to him)

WOMAN: That dog, when it died, it didn't hate you. Because they think if you punish them, it's because they did something to deserve it. While that dog was dying, it was thinking: I deserve it, because I didn't obey. Dogs think we're good. But we're not. That's the truth. The truth is humans are beasts. So, since I'm human, I think I'll do to you what you did to that dog. I'm going to kick you to death in my own way. I'm going to show you my hatred, which is what your dog should've felt while he was in agony as you kicked him to death.

That's what I'm going to do.

I'm going to bare my teeth.

So you can see how it feels.

I'm going to recommend that they send you to jail for 40 days and a fine of \$5,000, to be donated in full to the Society for the Protection of Animals. Now what do you have to say: do you hate me?

You want to kick me to death? Why don't you?

(Both stand)

PAUL: I killed the dog because it liked other male dogs. That's why I killed it. It was my dog and I could do whatever I wanted with it. But they gave me 40 days and a \$5,000 fine.

Not because of the dog, because the law isn't really all that harsh when you kill an animal. They did it because of the report from the Society for the Protection of Animals, which said I was dangerous, and because of the press, which quickly forgot the bomb at the school and focused on me. There on the front page, a picture of the dog and one of me. Me, at my worst, after 36 hours of no sleep. The dog—not the dead one—but one that looked a lot like him, was a groomer's poster dog, all cute and frisky, to inspire tenderness. And people hated me.

They hated me instantly, easily, gratuitously, with a hate that was just waiting for something to happen to load it on me.

(Woman takes off her vest and glasses. She speaks to the audience, as Caroline)

CAROLINE: When we say something is black and white, we never distinguish the various shades of gray that make everything that is white and everything that is black possible. That's why a zebra and a penguin and a Dalmatian aren't the same even though they're black and white. Zebras, penguins and Dalmatians aren't the same, but with people we don't notice that difference. And it's strange that we don't. Because in the end, pen-

guins and zebras and Dalmatians probably have more or less the same thoughts: hot, cold, hunger, sex, sleep, affection, look how white or look how black.

But, us? We can't even agree about God!

(Music. The zebra moves, but when we see its whole body, it is not just white with black lines. There is a red line running through it, a noticeable, angry red line)

3 / *bird*

Bird cage. Bird noise takes over the scene.

CAROLINE: Night falls, hours pass, you go to bed and all you can hope is that, the next day, you'll wake up with the relief of someone who leaves behind a dream. Only that night I didn't sleep. Still, in the morning I went to work at the zoo like every day and there was my friend Veronica.

(The actress who plays Karen appears onstage in a veterinarian's coat, as Veronica. She is straightening up the office)

VERONICA: It's been a long time since I've seen you like this.

CAROLINE: Like what?

VERONICA: Worried. We all feel the same way. With the terrorist attacks, everyone's in that mood, gray, discouraged, that shade more like shame and pity.

CAROLINE: What happened?

VERONICA: Thirty dead at a mall, car bomb. It was parked there and BOOM! Didn't you hear it? A lot of people said they heard it miles away. They're beasts. They deserve to die. I know, I don't support the death penalty, but sometimes we need it. Like for exceptions. Don't you think?

CAROLINE: *(Concerned that she hadn't heard about it)* I hadn't heard anything about it.

VERONICA: And you know everything.

CAROLINE: I'm always know about things.

VERONICA: *(Hands her a cup)* Here, have some coffee. Or do you want to take the day?

(Caroline chugs it, like water. Veronica watches in amazement. Caroline pours herself some more and downs it like juice. She pours again, but Veronica stops her. Caroline realizes)

CAROLINE: I saw my parents yesterday.

VERONICA: I saw you by the monkey cage. Is everything ok?

CAROLINE: Yeah, everything's fine. *(Pause)* I found out my father made a mistake fifteen years ago.

VERONICA: Want to talk about it?

CAROLINE: No, it's all right. It was a mistake. *(Pauses like someone who will leave it at that, then suddenly)* My dad went to jail for killing a dog.

VERONICA: Good God!

CAROLINE: An accident.

VERONICA: Of course. What happened?

CAROLINE: He kicked it to death.

VERONICA: What an animal! Sorry.

CAROLINE: I didn't sleep last night because I knew I'd dream about the dog.

VERONICA: So, why'd he kill it?

CAROLINE: He thought it was homosexual.

(Veronica drops the cup. It shatters)

VERONICA: Maybe you better not tell me anything. And go home. There's nothing for you to do here today.

CAROLINE: Yeah, you're right. I should go. *(Preparing to leave)* Remember to keep a special eye on the black goat; it could be her day. Don't forget to talk to the students. They can't let anyone touch the babies. We're expecting 2 goats, alive and kicking. And tell them not to forget the mandrill's vaccination. And check the bird cage, to see if they're getting better.

VERONICA: Ok, ok. Go. Everything's under control. We don't need you here today.

CAROLINE: Maybe it's a virus.

VERONICA: Go on, get out of here. You look beat. Whether it's a virus or whatever, nothing ever happens to the birds. They're the strongest of all.

CAROLINE: Parrots are like lions.

VERONICA: They get sick less than elephants.

CAROLINE: And they get themselves in all kinds of trouble...! *(Leaving)*
Don't forget to let the orangutan out.

VERONICA: I'll take care of it. Bye.

(Caroline is about to leave, but comes back. Veronica looks at her, knowing what's coming)

CAROLINE: What do you think I should do?

VERONICA: You can't do anything about terrorists, Caroline. Wish them dead or that their car bomb blows up on them, or their machine guns jam and backfire, that they make a mistake and kill each other. Or their families, let their families die too.

CAROLINE: Veronica!

VERONICA: I'm sick of them!

CAROLINE: I meant about my father. What should I do?

VERONICA: That was years ago.

CAROLINE: I just found out yesterday.

VERONICA: I don't meddle in family matters. Your father's your father. So, it's bed for you, and work for me. And as for the terrorists: death. See you tomorrow.

(Veronica disappears in the dark. Caroline remains on stage. She takes her bag. Walks)

CAROLINE: I left the office, but I didn't go home. I went walking around the zoo. Everything was normal. Not many visitors. I stopped at the bird cage, because they're very sick and we don't know why. It's such a strange disease they have. Really unusual.

(Caroline goes into the bird area. We hear birds)

They don't fly. They don't want to or they can't. We've run every test possible, but we didn't find a pathology.

They just sit there, with no desire to fly.

And all I do is watch them every morning, completely powerless, because I was used to being able to do something for them and now, well now I can't.

Then, while I was watching the birds I realized someone was watching me. It was him. He was there. It was Dad.

(Enter Paul. He tries to hug her. She doesn't let him)

PAUL: Do you remember when I used to bring you to the zoo?

CAROLINE: How old was I?

PAUL: You were little. Maybe 9. You didn't have all your teeth. You'd stay here all day long watching the animals. And you'd say you wanted to take them home with you. "Daddy, can we take the giraffe home with us? Can I keep the elephant...?"

CAROLINE: Can I take the zebras to bed...?

PAUL: But sweetie... Wouldn't you rather have a grasshopper? Wouldn't you like to raise cockroaches? How about taking the ants in our backyard to bed? They're animals too. They're not in the zoo, but they're all God's creatures. And they're smaller.

(Both to the audience. We hear Beethoven's Appassionata, Second Movement, Andante con Moto)

CAROLINE: They say that when we know our father, that's when we really lose him.

PAUL: When we stop being heroes and become monkeys, when we stop being Gods.

CAROLINE: When they don't wear long pants anymore or have the best job.

PAUL: Or the biggest car, or the most money, we're not the strongest, or always right.

CAROLINE: When they no longer seem immortal.

PAUL: Suddenly, our children remind us that we're already at the end of the road.

And that makes us sad.

Because, in those circumstances, backed into a corner, without the prestige or admiration we once had, how do you expect us to remember the past?

How do you want us to explain it?

CAROLINE: It was late when I got home and I still felt that terrible desire not to sleep, to talk to him, to do something, to stay awake, as if I was in an emergency. I looked for news on every channel and in all the papers about the terrorist attack. I read every article, some I memorized.

All day with my father and we both avoided the most important subject:

Why did he hate the dog so much?

Who was my father?

Why didn't he ever talk to me about himself?

(The phone rings. Music stops)

CAROLINE: Hello? *(To the audience)* It's Veronica, from the zoo. *(Enter Veronica)*

VERONICA: Caroline, I've got bad news.

CAROLINE: What happened to the goats? Were there complications?

VERONICA: No, the goats haven't been born yet.

CAROLINE: They're past due, but...

VERONICA: The problem's the birds.

CAROLINE: What's the matter?

VERONICA: I'm calling to tell you they're dead.

CAROLINE: All of them?

VERONICA: All of them. There's not a single one left.

CAROLINE: But... but... what did they do to them? What happened?

VERONICA: We don't know. I'm at the zoo and it doesn't look like they were attacked. I think it was an epidemic. They all died at once.

CAROLINE: But... but... I don't understand.

VERONICA: Neither do I. I know it's late, but why don't you come to the zoo and help me?

CAROLINE: Right, I'm on my way.
(*Caroline quickly gets ready*)

The city was empty and dangerous. I got to the zoo and it was the police who met me at the gate. The police? That's odd, the police, what do they have to do with all this?

VERONICA: It's because of the birds dying. They consider it suspicious. They're calling it "unusual circumstances..."

CAROLINE: Did you tell them they were sick?

VERONICA: They're investigating. There've been so many attacks, they think...

CAROLINE: That's ridiculous.

VERONICA: But they're interrogating us all the same. What do we think? What could've happened? How much do those birds cost?

(*We hear Beethoven's Appassionata, Second Movement, Andante con Moto*)

CAROLINE: (*Picking up birds*) While they were questioning me, I couldn't stop looking at them all, there on the damp, gray floor of the great bird cage. They were so many and so beautiful, they looked like a carpet. I started to pick them up, one by one, the way you'd lift the bodies of your brothers in arms. And after the sadness, a real worry hit me. I suffer when animals die and I admit I haven't felt the same sadness over human beings. Could that be a sin? Will I go to hell for preferring animals to men, because I'm only moved by the weak? I still don't know what I did wrong, but I made a mistake somewhere, just look at the end result: 64 birds dead in a single day. Somewhere I went wrong. How could this happen? How will we ever replace them? And most of all, where has God been for the last 24 hours? Because so much has happened, his absence is getting suspicious. (*Holding the birds she was able to gather*) Where is he when so many things happened and he didn't stop them, he didn't intervene, or warn us, or lend his strength to the side of beauty, harmony, innocence? Where is that damned God who's never here when we need him most? Where is he hiding? What the fuck is he doing to justify that he's not here with us tonight,

helping us gather up this tremendous tapestry of feathers blanketing the
largest cage in the zoo with the chill of death?
Where is he? Where is he?
I've got a few things today I need to straighten out with him.

4/ tigers, now

Big Cat Area. Paul and Karen at the tiger cage. Karen has a balloon. To one side, a stroller.

PAUL: Ah tiger... Grrrrgrrrrgrrrr.
Ah tiger. Grrrrgrrrr.
Here kittykittykitty. Grrgrgrgrrrr.
Look at those paws.

KAREN: They're enormous.

PAUL: Fifteen years ago a tourist fell into this cage. He was taking a picture. He leaned right here. The tigers were playing, biting each other and all. Then, the tourist tried to take a close-up of them. He didn't realize these bars are a little loose. *(He tests them. They're still loose)* And he fell into the cage.

KAREN: And what happened to him?

PAUL: To who? The tourist or the tiger?

KAREN: The tourist.

PAUL: Nothing. Nothing happened to him. Nothing ever happens to tourists. The tigers went to the shore, but not to attack him, just to stare at him. Maybe they thought a tourist is nothing much, not good enough for prey, a joke.

The tourist could barely swim. Really all he did was float. And scream like a maniac, he was hysterical.

KAREN: Two tigers were waiting for him!

PAUL: All they did was watch; they weren't going to hurt him. A tiger in a zoo is like a big cat. With a full belly and a sad heart.

KAREN: Two tigers are two tigers!

PAUL: More like two scared cats.

KAREN: Big ones, with claws and teeth. No, thank you.

PAUL: The tourist paddled over to the shore. The tigers, when they saw him coming, they ran away. They went to the other side. The biggest tiger even started batting around a ball they threw him to distract him. Like saying: "It's ok, we don't care. We're kitties. We play with balls and all that..." Until security came and shot them.
Right in the head.

(The little girl in the stroller cries. Karen looks at her and murmurs affectionately)

KAREN: You scared the little boy *(To the mother, who we don't see)* Sorry... He's a beautiful boy.
A girl? What's her name?
She's beautiful...
(The girl stops crying)
You made the little girl cry with your story.

PAUL: You think she understands me?

KAREN: Little girls understand everything.

PAUL: Like animals.

KAREN: Your story made her cry.

PAUL: That's no story. I was here. They shot the tigers right when the tourist had reached the shore. When the tigers had moved away, at the precise moment the tourist was safe on the other side of the fence.

(The girl starts to cry again)

KAREN: *(Comforting the girl)* There, there, don't get upset. There's nothing to cry about...

(The girl stops crying)

PAUL: Bang bang! Dead. But, who cares? Two big, beautiful Bengal tigers in danger of extinction, just bought at an astronomical price, and then

they're bagged by the hunter's bullet, taken out in their own cage, while playing with a ball.

(Karen takes a balloon and ties it to the girl's stroller very sweetly)

KAREN: Did you see the panda bears yet, sweetheart? Did you see how cute the panda bears are?

PAUL: The thing is what's important here isn't the animals. It's the cages. If you really look the cages are in better shape than the animals.

KAREN: You didn't see any birds? The cages were empty? And no zebras? Hippos? Monkeys? There wasn't an orangutan?

PAUL: The animals here are dirty, hairy, flea-bitten, tick-ridden, sad and alone.

KAREN: *(To the girl in the stroller)* New baby goats are on the way and they're going to bring birds, lots of birds and we'll come to see them...
(To Paul) What a beautiful little girl.
I've thought about having another baby.
I'd like girl... another little girl.

PAUL: At our age, we'd be better off with a cat or a...

KAREN: No, I want a daughter. You can have the animals. You hate them anyway.

PAUL: I don't hate animals. Remember I've been coming to the zoo since I was a little boy.

KAREN: I think you just do it to feel superior to these creatures.

PAUL: Anyone is superior to these creatures. These in here aren't animals at all.
You put them in the jungle and the jungle would eat them. Because they'd be foreigners. Piece of shit animals, sniffing their own asses, 'cause it's where they smell best.

KAREN: Remember the little girl can hear you.

PAUL: She's not my daughter.

KAREN: But she's a little girl.

PAUL: Well then, let her learn.

(Karen is now facing Paul)

KAREN: I want to have another baby girl. But not with you. That's all.

PAUL: With...with... with someone else?

KAREN: Whoever. I want a divorce.

(A tiger roars)

PAUL: Where... where... Are you with someone? Are you seeing someone else?

KAREN: I've been thinking about what you did to the dog fifteen years ago. I'd forgotten about it, I'd stopped thinking about it. Then, it all came back into our lives again. And then thinking about it, I remembered why you did that to the poor dog.

PAUL: Because it was homosexual.

KAREN: I'm not talking about that.

PAUL: He was bothering your dog and he was sad.

KAREN: You killed the dog because, maybe, who you really wanted to kill was me. Men like you dream of killing their wives.

PAUL: Are you seeing a psychiatrist? How humiliating! Are you telling him about us?

KAREN: No, but it's not a bad idea.

PAUL: Are you sleeping with a shrink, huh?

KAREN: Leave me alone!

PAUL: So let me see if I have this right: instead of asking you for a divorce or disappearing, my best option was to kill you. And since I couldn't, then I killed the dog. Is that how it goes? Simple as that? Is everyone so simple or is it just me?

KAREN: It's entirely possible.

PAUL: So I could say it's just the opposite. Maybe it's you who saw an opportunity to leave me using something that happened fifteen years ago.

Now you want to be alone or with someone else and you want it to be my fault, because supposedly I'm a monster.

KAREN: I didn't say you were a monster.

PAUL: But it's true. I am. I am a monster.

KAREN: Why?

PAUL: Because I did what I did and I'm doing what I'm doing.

KAREN: What are you doing?

PAUL: (*Loud, furious*) Roaring!

(*Tigers roaring*)

KAREN: Before you weren't like this.

PAUL: Before I didn't know what I was saying.

KAREN: Before I fell in love with you.

PAUL: Before I fell in love with you too. And what happened?

KAREN: You died.

PAUL: I'm not dead, Karen.

KAREN: Aren't you?

PAUL: No!

KAREN: Then, how come I don't recognize you?

PAUL: It's me!

KAREN: How come you look like someone else?

PAUL: I'm not someone else.

KAREN: How come you don't seem like you're here? Like you're a ghost. Like they replaced you with a copy of yourself. Like you aren't who you were before.

PAUL: That's why you're leaving me for someone else?

(Animal noises. The noise rises until it thunders. Then it calms. Karen looks at Paul, frightened)

PAUL: It happens sometimes. Suddenly, for no reason, they all start shouting. They all start shouting at once, like they're saying: "Let me out," "I want to go home," "I don't belong here." *(She looks at him, making it clear he's talking about himself. He moves in on her, dangerous, a hunter, like a tiger)* A real man is basically a wild animal, an untamed soul. Competing for prey, marking his territory, doing what he wants, dominating others.

It's an instinct, Karen. A reflex that makes us resolve everything through violence. *(He looks at her, like she was prey. Karen escapes him)*

KAREN: What... What are we going to do?

PAUL: About?

KAREN: A divorce.

PAUL: Leaving me for someone else!

KAREN: For whoever I feel like!

PAUL: *(Suddenly, looking around, like a tiger)* Where is he?

KAREN: Who?

PAUL: The man you're sleeping with.

KAREN: I'm not...

PAUL: Huh? Is it that guy over there? The one looking at us? *(To the person)* Is it you?

KAREN: No, it's not him.

PAUL: Where is he? What does he think of me? Maybe he's not a man. Maybe he doesn't get it. Why doesn't he show his face? Why won't he let me see his teeth? Why is he hiding?

KAREN: No one's hiding, Paul!

PAUL: Maybe he's homosexual. Does he like swans?

KAREN: He's not...!!!

PAUL: You have to be careful. There's so many of them now; they pretend to be men, but they're really fags. Pay attention and bring him to the zoo. If he watches the swans, then you can be sure. He's homosexual.

KAREN: *(Leaving)* You know you're an ass?

PAUL: No, I'm not an ass. It's just I'm a tiger.

KAREN: Well, you sure smell like one!

(Karen leaves that area. She is still lit by a ray of light)

PAUL: Faggot! He's a faggot!
He walks like a fag and he dresses like a fag.
Faggot.
They should hang them all.

(We hear a loud, hard thump. The stroller that was beside him, falls and disappears from the stage. We hear a distant scream and other people yelling. Karen looks toward the tiger cage in terror)

KAREN: A little girl just fell into the tiger cage!!! Please, somebody help her!!!

PAUL: *(Anxious)* Help! A girl...! Security!
(Paul doesn't take his eyes off the cage)
(Loud) A girl's in the tiger cage, please, call someone! A girl!!!!
(Softer) Oh, tiger... Grrrrgrrrrr Come on tiger!
(Loud) A girl's in danger, help, we need help!
(Hushed) Oh, tiger... Grrrrgrrrrr Come on tiger...
Kitty kitty kitty...Grrgrrrrr

5/ *rhinoceros, now*

Rhinoceros cage. We see the legs of a sleeping rhino. At times he stirs a little. On stage, Paul. To one side, the police woman, played by the same actress who plays Caroline.

POLICE: Sir, we're conducting a routine inspection and we'd like to ask you a few questions. Sir... sir.

PAUL: What a magnificent animal! And yet, there he is, humiliated. Did you know that if he was in his natural habitat he'd have killed us both by now? And not because he's hungry or a dangerous animal. No. He'd have killed us because we didn't pay him the necessary respect.

POLICE: Sir, I'd like to speak to you.

PAUL: (*Realizing she's a police officer*) Oh!

POLICE: Officer Lyons, Josephine Lyons, state police.

PAUL: I didn't know you were...

POLICE: We're conducting an investigation and we need the cooperation of people who are regular visitors at the zoo.

PAUL: What happened?

POLICE: We're looking for information. I've seen you at the zoo before.

PAUL: I come a lot.

POLICE: Does your profession involve observing animals?

PAUL: My daughter works here.

POLICE: And what is her name?

PAUL: Caroline Stevens.

(The officer writes it down)

POLICE: Do you come to see her?

PAUL: I come to see the animals too.

(Paul waits for her next question, but it's obvious the officer is waiting for him to volunteer more information) Um... I live nearby and I like to come watch the animals. I take pictures. Some of them know me.

POLICE: They know you? How's that?

PAUL: Well, they look and they know it's me. They've seen me so often. Like this rhino. He's seen me for years. He knows who I am and he says hello. He moves his head when he sees me.

One day I was sad and I came to see him. But he was in the water, he didn't want to come out, it was hot. But I started talking to him anyway, telling him why I was sad. And just the way you'd stop doing something you're enjoying to listen to a friend, he got up out of the water and walked over to me.

A rhino his size, pacing back and forth, understanding my loneliness. He came and stood in front of me, in the blazing sun. Just to listen to me.

POLICE: *(Looking at the rhino in amazement)* And to think I thought all animals were the same. Monkeys or lions. They smell awful.

PAUL: Because they're here. But if they were in their natural habitat, they wouldn't smell bad. Like you and me. If we were where we really wanted to be maybe we wouldn't be what we are or look the way we look.

POLICE: I always wanted to be an engineer.

PAUL: Me, a vet.

POLICE: You look like a vet. You really know the animals.

PAUL: Not all of them, but that rhino, for example, I do. You know they're in danger of extinction? It's an ancient species, much older than man, older than a lot of mountains and seas. But they're disappearing. There was a time when they mistook them for unicorns. Marco Polo, on his voyages, was the first to see one. Instead of calling it by its name or making one up, he decided to use a name he already knew: Unicorn.

POLICE: Name?

PAUL: Rhinoceros. Rhino-ceros...

POLICE: Not it's name. Yours. What's your name?

PAUL: Paul Stevens.

POLICE: Mr. Stevens, listen, I'd love to hear all your fascinating stories, but I've got a job to do. And maybe you can help me. We're looking for someone.

PAUL: A man or woman?

POLICE: We believe it's a man. He's been frequenting the zoo in the past few weeks and he's killing the animals.

PAUL: Killing them? But, how? Which ones?

POLICE: He started with the birds, but then he moved on to the tigers, three penguins, a goat—that by the way was about to give birth. He killed the hippos and murdered several monkeys too, like Titi, three chimpanzees, other monkeys whose names I don't remember, and an orangutan.

PAUL: The orangutan!

POLICE: You knew him?

PAUL: He was in a special cage.

POLICE: We think his next target will be the panda bears.

PAUL: Those bears cost a fortune!

POLICE: And they're everyone's favorites.

PAUL: Kids, kids love them.

POLICE: That's why we think he'll go for the pandas.

PAUL: Something has to be done about that delinquent!

POLICE: We haven't made it public because we know the perpetrator comes to the zoo every day. We think he's some kind of terrorist or fanatic.

PAUL: So, how does he kill them?

POLICE: With a special virus. A virus that destroys their defenses. First they get sick for a few days and then they die. They drop like cards, all of a sudden. They just get sad, stop making any sound at all or doing what they're supposed to do.

PAUL: Son of a bitch.

POLICE: That's what we think. He's a son of a bitch. And that's why we want to stop him. You come to the zoo a lot, you know the people.

PAUL: I know the animals better.

POLICE: The animals know you.

PAUL: Not all of them. The turtles are tough.

POLICE: What I'd like is for you to remember if you've seen anything or anyone suspicious. Here's my number. You see anyone suspicious, give me a call.

PAUL: Actually, I think the rhino's acting a bit strange.

POLICE: You think so?

PAUL: He looks sad, like he's weak. *(Raising his voice)* I think he's falling down!

POLICE: *(Alarmed)* You're right. I think he's... Wait here. *(To the radio)* Attention, Rhinoceros Cage... Rhinoceros Cage... *(Leaving)* I'm going to get the doctors...

(People shouting)

PAUL: A true monument to the jungle. And to think Marco Polo mistook it for a unicorn, no less. And unicorns never existed. And rhinos did.
(We hear an extraordinary boom)
 He's falling. The rhino is falling.
 God! How magnificent!
 He's falling! God! How beautiful!
(Admiringly) What a death!

(We see the rhino's legs turn over, as though it had fallen. People shouting in the distance and police whistles. Music)

6/ pandas, today

The panda cage. Paul and Karen enter. They carry shopping bags. A Christmas tree appears on stage.

PAUL: It was fifteen years ago. It was December 24th and a domestic incident caught the attention not only of the public.

KAREN: But ours too.

PAUL: Though there are things I never said and never will.

KAREN: Like how we're all the consequence of something.

PAUL: Just like December 24th, too, whether you like it or not, is a consequence of something.

KAREN: Like, December 23rd

PAUL: Or the 22nd

KAREN: And especially the 21st

PAUL: Right. That December 21st.

KAREN: Every day comes with another behind it.

PAUL: That day we'd gone out

KAREN: We went shopping in the afternoon on December 21st while our daughter.

PAUL: And the dogs.

KAREN: Spent the day with her grandmother in the park.

PAUL: We browsed through the stores, each going his own way.

KAREN: I was barely speaking to him anymore.

PAUL: I was thanking God she didn't say a word to me.

KAREN: I barely spoke to him because that morning.

PAUL: She'd found out.

KAREN: He had a lover.

PAUL: Younger and prettier.

KAREN: Than me. But I thought, "Could he really leave me or is he just doing it because he's afraid?"

PAUL: Afraid of death.

KAREN: Of being with me.

PAUL: I don't know.

KAREN: I don't know. (*Beat*) We got back late that day.

PAUL: And when we got back.

KAREN: I went to open the front door and...

PAUL: And the door was open.

KAREN: We'd been robbed!
(*Lights up on whole stage*)
Oh my God, what happened here?!

PAUL: Did you leave the door open?

KAREN: Paul, look, what's everything doing on the floor?

PAUL: Someone broke in!

KAREN: We've been robbed!

(*They rush inside, desperately*)

PAUL: Where's Caroline?

KAREN: She's with my parents. They're at the park.

PAUL: And the dogs?

KAREN: They went too.

PAUL: Thank God no one was here!

KAREN: Oh my God, what a mess!

PAUL: I'm calling the police.

KAREN: They took the TV!

PAUL: (*Dialing*) Fucking, fucking thieves.

KAREN: They slashed our paintings. Why would they slash the paintings?

PAUL: Go check the rest of the house.

(*Karen exits*)

PAUL: Police. This is an emergency. I just got home and there's been a robbery. Someone broke in and they tore up everything. They took... the TV... (*Looking around*) ...and the stereo and some decorations from the living room. What? (*Pause*) I haven't checked. I mean, we just got here and I just picked up the phone to call to... Are the thieves still in the house? Is that possible? (*He panics. Paul is frightened to death*) I... I... I didn't check... My wife... You have to come here now! Karen!!!! (*Karen enters. Paul is startled*) The police say they could still be in here.

KAREN: I thought the same thing and I froze in the hall.

PAUL: What should we do?

KAREN: Don't ask me. You tell me what you want me to do.

PAUL: Me?

KAREN: Yes. You. What should we do? If you're going to die, don't die of fright. Tell me what we should do!

PAUL: I... I... I don't know.

KAREN: (*Taking matters into her hands*) It doesn't seem like anyone's here. Maybe they left. The house was empty, they broke in, they took eve-

rything, and they left. A clean job. I don't think anyone's here. What about the police?

PAUL: They're on their way.

KAREN: Did you give them the right address?

PAUL: I forgot!

(Karen looks at him in disappointment. Paul sees)

PAUL: I'm a nervous wreck!

(He dials again)

KAREN: *(To the audience)* He called the police and I started picking up the broken glass, cleaning the floor, putting what was left back in its place. And meanwhile he talked to the police, then the neighbors, he called his mother, his sisters, his friends. He told everyone what had happened.

PAUL: *(To the phone)* It isn't safe here, we need more police, they should put those bastards in jail and throw away the key!

KAREN: By his sixth call, I had the house picked up again. No TV, no stereo, no decorations, no money I was saving for a trip, no wedding ring. But everything ready. Spic and span.

PAUL: *(To the phone)* Forget jail! They should kill them! That's it! They deserve to die! Fucking with people who worked their whole lives! If I see them, I'll kill them myself!

KAREN: I wanted to get cleaned up. *(To Paul)* I'm going to take a shower.

PAUL: *(To the phone)* Excuse me. *(To Karen)* Why don't you wait to pick everything up?

KAREN: It's already done, Paul.

PAUL: *(Looking around, displeased)* You're fast.

KAREN: I'm going to take a shower.

PAUL: *(Now alone. He pauses. We feel his fear, slightly. He dials again)* The cops never come when you need them... Hello... hello... Police? Yes, I'll hold.

(Beat. We understand Paul is listening to music on hold. Suddenly he bangs the telephone. He turns desperate. He has a panic attack. The panic attack comes with shouts and sobs, gasping for air, as if a monstrous animal were about to eat him. After this reaches a climax, Paul falls to the floor. Karen comes out in a towel. She revives him. Paul responds well. He calms down)

KAREN: *(To audience)* Paul has panic attacks when he can't handle reality.

(The music and lights change. Paul gets up. He changes clothes)

He looked like a little boy lost, looking around and seeing that everything was taller, bigger, more mysterious.

(The music and lights change. Karen gets dressed) By December 22nd he had calmed down.

PAUL: I bought a TV. A better one. A bigger one. I missed the sound of the TV. It gives the house more life.

KAREN: On December 23rd our daughter was happy because she'd lost a tooth. And that same day the terrorists set off a bomb during a school party.

(The TV comes on. We see a program on public television. A Beethoven concert. Paul changes the channel violently. He channel surfs)

PAUL: All this democracy what it's doing is making people uncontrollable. Here everyone has rights but the working man. Freedom's turned into a free-for-all. What this damn country needs is a good crack down!

(He changes channels. Now we see the ineffable gazelle fleeing the ever swift tiger)

KAREN: On December 24th the house was like before. I was cooking and the lights on the Christmas tree weren't working. *(To Paul)* Paul, why don't you fix the lights? *(Paul does)* What do you want to do tonight?

PAUL: Stay home with Caroline and the dogs.

KAREN: What's the TV saying?

PAUL: The terrorists blew up a bomb at a school. They were having a party. Almost 100 dead or more.

KAREN: *(Looking at the TV)* And who's that?

PAUL: She's the principal.

KAREN: She looks familiar.

PAUL: Yeah, she looks like one of us.

KAREN: Poor woman. Look at her eyes. What a shame!

(Suddenly, we hear barking)

PAUL: What are they doing?

KAREN: They're at it again.

PAUL: *(Angry)* I told them I don't want them doing that!

KAREN: It's all right. It'll be over soon.

PAUL: In front of Caroline, she can see everything!

KAREN: Here, Bandit, come, get away from General.

PAUL: Filthy mutt!

KAREN: Here, Bandit... Leave him alone, General... don't do that. It's natural, Paul, don't get mad.

PAUL: How is that natural?! What are you saying?! That's for sickos! That's not normal! No way is that normal!

KAREN: I think these dogs need to meet other dogs and...

(Then, Paul has the same panic attack he had at the beginning of the scene. But instead of fear, he feels hate. An extraordinary hate. Paul shouts as though he were an animal. He goes over to the dogs and we see how he begins kicking one of them)

PAUL: Son of a bitch! Son of a bitch! Can't you leave him alone?! Can't we have a little peace?! Someone's always fucking someone! Leave him alone, you goddamn faggot dog! Terrorist dog! Thieving dog! Son-of-a-bitch dog!

(He kicks him until the barking stops. Music. The lights begin to dim)

CAROLINE: Someone was killing the animals in the zoo because they thought they should be in the jungle instead of cages. People stopped com-

ing and we ran out of money. No money meant no new animals and personnel cuts, so we no longer had security.

KAREN: Then, people came, other people. A mass of people. They came when they wanted and killed the animals that were left.

CAROLINE: They ate them.

KAREN: They were hungry, they said.

CAROLINE: Horse meat, lion's belly... they say ostriches are very tasty.

KAREN: And no one did a thing.

CAROLINE: Crowds in the street, people, the whole country. And no one did a thing. They devoured the tiger.

KAREN: They ate tiger!

CAROLINE: They ate tiger and they ate turtles, they ate the giraffes and if they didn't eat the alligators it's only because the creatures sensed it and didn't come out of the lake. They made like fish and never came out. They say they drowned.

Then the people got tired of waiting and went after the big catch.

KAREN: The pandas?

CAROLINE: The unicorn. (*We hear Beethoven's Appassionata, Second Movement, Andante con Moto. The lights dim*) They wanted to try something they'd never had before. Something new, exciting, something innocent.

KAREN: I never knew there was a unicorn.

CAROLINE: It was in that cage. The Unicorn Area.

KAREN: You say it was big? It had thick legs?

CAROLINE: It loved walking around the cage and going under the water.

KAREN: That was the rhino.

CAROLINE: No, the rhino is very different. The rhino is like an enormous pig. This was like a horse, it liked to whinny like a horse. (*Then we see the silhouette of the unicorn, which takes up the whole stage*) Like a mis-

treated horse, but a horse. It had a silver horn and everyone called it by another name because they'd never seen one like it before.

KAREN: What happened to the unicorn?

CAROLINE: A bomb blew it to pieces during the Christmas festivities.

(Music. The image of the unicorn disappears. Paul enters and sits.)

PAUL: At first, you feel like you're on trial all the time. People come with their questions and their answers about your life, about who you are, about what you think.

CAROLINE: We think we know people because we learn to think in commonplaces. In prefabricated platitudes. In neatly wrapped ideas.

PAUL: In those moments, you start to lose your memory. At first, it's once in a while. A little one day, a little more next week, until you find it again, in bits and pieces, as though it were old photos narrating the life of someone else like you. A life where you can no longer place the dates or the times or the people.

KAREN: They call it a "Panic Attack" and it's an incurable disease.

CAROLINE: Others call it "Hatred" and it's also an incurable disease.

PAUL: Or the "Panda Bear Complex." When you fall in love with death just because they look at you with pity.

(The lights dim completely. Only three spots remain, one for each character)

CAROLINE: Fifteen years ago, I went over to the dead dog and started to cry. Like now, seeing Dad all alone, I feel so sorry for him and for me. *(She looks at her mother and father)* I hope the two of you will always be with me. *(Caroline disappears in the dark)*

KAREN: After fifteen years I was finally able to make my life different. All because of two loves and a creature that open and close the story. *(She looks at her daughter and Paul)* I hope the two of you will always be with me. *(Karen disappears in the dark)*

PAUL: *(Resigned, ashamed)* In the end, I hope the two of you will always be with me. *(Before the blackout, terrified)* To help me face the beasts.

*(Animal noises again.
The image of the unicorn is all that remains)*

Blackout.