

Act Two - Scene Eight

(Karlaboy, 1953. KARLA is pacing absorbed in thought. HAROLD is at the bar, pouring himself a stiff drink. From his manner, it is clear he's had quite a few drinks this night.)

YOUNG HAROLD. How about it, darling? I can't drink this bottle by myself. You have to help a bit.

KARLA. I'm too damn nervous.

YOUNG HAROLD. Tomorrow our names will be read twice. First, for their respective nominations, then as the winners. This is fate. This will be. Do you understand?

KARLA. What's happening to me, Harold? I don't know who I am anymore, what I want. I'm terrified about tomorrow night. Terrified that I'll finally get just what I want and I won't know what to do next except... I don't know... die or something

YOUNG HAROLD. Fear of Nirvana. That's why we of The West stay away from it. Contentment isn't good for anyone. Discontent is what gives us a reason to get up in the morning. Always steer clear of what you truly want in this world, Karla, because you just might find it, God forbid.

(With that, he raises his glass to KARLA, and downs the rest of his drink.)

KARLA. This is no joke, goddamnit!

YOUNG HAROLD. I'm sorry.

KARLA. Just go to bed. You're a fucking drunk.

YOUNG HAROLD. If you insist, but if I find you down here for more than five minutes brooding, I'll be down in my chicken costume, dancing like an imbecile.

KARLA. You won't have to come down.

(HAROLD heads up the stairs.)

BILL. You said that was the last time you saw her alive.

(As BILL narrates KARLA's actions, she performs them.)

BILL. After you passed out upstairs, she took the gun you kept...scribbled her note... and shot herself. That's what woke you. You came down the stairs and found her. Her tear-stained note was on your chair. "Forgive me, my love. It's all too much. It always was. I blame no one but myself. Think only of the good. Love, kisses, and tears - Karla"

(There is a long moment of silence, then:)

So what the hell was that?! Nothing you've told me tonight explains that woman. I mean, Christ, if I'm supposed to believe you, you have to account for her.

HAROLD. I can account for her...you've read the.. it's all...

BILL. It's all what? Either your statement to the police is a lie or everything you've told me tonight is. Which is it? Come on, you're the one Karla called "Keeper of the Truth."

HAROLD. *(dazedly, lost in a fog)* I'll wear the title proudly, my lady.

BILL. Harold, I know this is hard for you to accept, but every word I wrote was motivated out of love for Karla. I was one of those people who she communicated with in the dark, like you said. I'll book came out the way it did because that's the trail you left for me to follow. If there's a different trail, you've got to tell me about it.

HAROLD. I can't...

BILL. Tell me and I'll do what you want. I'll be fair. *(a beat)* I'll stop those trucks.

HAROLD. What if you can't?

BILL. If I can't, then, I'll, I'll print an addendum setting the record straight. Even though it means public humiliation, I'll do that for her. Karla is who's important here. To both of us. The Truth about Karla. Your Truth.

HAROLD. My truth...

BILL. Tell me, Harold. You can trust me. I swear to God.

HAROLD. You know, Bill, I was never any good at the real emotional moments of my stories. Never could get the meat right. All the delicious gravy, but no meat. That's what everyone loved about my movies - they didn't have to use their teeth. *(a pause)* You're right. That story is not worthy of Karla.

BILL. What do you mean "story"? That's not how it happened?

HAROLD. *(a finger to his lips)* Shhhhhh. You can't be here tonight to listen to my grand joke. Have the decency to be quiet for the punchline.

(Just then) the clock tolls three o'clock in the morning.)

Scene Nine

(Karlaboy. 1953. KARLA, sleeping, is wakened by the chimes. She spots YOUNG HAROLD, sitting beside a nearly empty bottle of scotch.)

KARLA. Will you go to sleep, Harold? You're not solving anything by staring at that clock. *(a beat)* That bottle was full an hour ago - did you drink all that? *(No answer from HAROLD.)* Fine. I'm going back to sleep. This rug is more comfortable than you'd think.

YOUNG HAROLD. I'm going to kill myself.

KARLA. Will you stop?

YOUNG HAROLD. I mean it.

KARLA. *(back to sleep)* Fine. Good.

YOUNG HAROLD. You think I'm joking?

KARLA. No. I think you're melodramatic.

YOUNG HAROLD. You don't think I'm capable of taking a gun and shooting myself?

KARLA. Go to sleep, Harold.

YOUNG HAROLD. Nothing goes wrong for you, does it? Nothing disappoints. You'll just walk in there tomorrow night and be handed that award.

(She sits up, starting to get pissed off)

KARLA. I wish I wasn't even up for that damn thing! If I knew it would bring out this response - this asinine, petty ego thing - I would have been the first person in history to decline the nomination!

YOUNG HAROLD. Ego?! That fucking statue is not some game to me, Karla. It's not just five names on a ballot and fingers crossed. It means that somewhere in this pathetic life - this pathetic lie - somewhere in this make-believe art I kid myself I'm performing, somewhere in this sewer, I can come out on top. I can float. In spite of the compromises, the humiliations, the repressed passions that I cannot express on that screen or in my life - I can win! Don't you see?!

KARLA. *(gently)* Harold, no one thing should ever - or could ever - be all that.

YOUNG HAROLD. Look at you. Just lying there. Unaffected by it all, by everyone, by your nearing mythological hold on the American public. Hell, why limit it to America. Let's not forget about the Arab Sheikh who nailed you in his suicide note or the British Duke who invited you to share his forty million dollar estate! *(a pause)* Tomorrow night you will be holding this... thing that would - yes - finally lend balance to my life, and to you it means nothing. How did you once put it? "I never expected this to go anywhere."

KARLA. Can't you be happy for me if I do win? Can't you ever just see me without all your shit getting in the way?

YOUNG HAROLD. All my shit...

(HAROLD reaches into the drawer of the end table beside him and pulls out a gun.)

YOUNG HAROLD. Does this look like I'm bluffing?

KARLA. How did that get down here?

YOUNG HAROLD. I brought it down when you curled up so peacefully and quietly and happily. My, you're such a happy person, aren't you, Karla?

KARLA. Please, Harold, you're drunk and you don't -

YOUNG HAROLD. Wanted to be a sexy actress -you're a sexy actress. Wanted the world to love you - the world loves you. Wanted recognition for your work - and tomorrow that too will come. All of it completely without effort. Practically between yawns. What do you want that you don't have?

KARLA. Leave me alone.

YOUNG HAROLD. Come on - there must be something, dollface?

KARLA. Stop it!

YOUNG HAROLD. There's nothing, is there? You are everything you ever tried to be and have everything you wanted to have, and that's all wonderful, Karla. Yes, I'm very happy for you. But do you have to be flaunted in front of my eyes, every day and every night - a monument to self-satisfaction - while I live in this studio-owned prison, in a studio-owned life, married to a woman I could never possibly love!

(KARLA stares at him. Taking in the enormity of what he has just said.)

KARLA. I wonder, Harold. Do you say things sometimes just

to hurt me? To see if you can push me so hard that I'll fall into that horrible place where you spend your time? That place filled with so many words that there's no room for life. *(HAROLD has no response.)* What does he want from me, I ask myself every day. Maybe he doesn't know just yet...maybe someday he will. But I'm no closer to the answer, Harold. Not the one I want to hear. If anything, I'm further away. Further than that first ridiculous night when I tried to kiss you. Are we any less ridiculous tonight? *(a pause)* Oh Harold... what are you so angry about all the time? *(Still no answer from HAROLD.)* I can't take many more nights like this. But I do know that I want you by my side tomorrow night. To hug each other whether we win or lose. *(a pause)* Who am I kidding?... The only person you can express genuine emotion for, real sorrow or real joy.. is you.

(She turns to leave, heading for the stairs.)

YOUNG HAROLD. Then how do you account for the terror I'm feeling right now at the thought of losing you?

(KARLA thinks about this before answering.)

KARLA. Fear of an empty theatre.

(She continues to ascend the stairs.)

YOUNG HAROLD. Are you leaving me?

KARLA. Haven't you listened to me? Do you even have the capacity to listen? I said I'd only leave you when I fell in love with someone. Well, I fell in love a long time ago, Harold. So I guess it's time for me to go.

YOUNG HAROLD. Karla, if you leave, I don't know what I'll do.

(KARLA looks at HAROLD. Sees him totally vulnerable for the first time in a long while. She descends the stairs and goes to him, engulfing him in her arms as he sobs.)

KARLA. *(torn between her love and her misery.)* It's all right...

I'm here...you're not alone... We'll... figure something out...someday.

(She gently takes the gun from his grasp and lays it down on the floor beside them.)

KARLA. You'll never have to use this.

YOUNG HAROLD. I'd never have the courage to shoot myself. It was all for pathetic show. Pretty sad, eh? Besides, -

(He picks up the gun from the floor.)

YOUNG HAROLD. No bullets. See?

(He points it at her temple and pulls the trigger-)

(Blackout as a tremendous explosion sounds in the darkness.)