

Touch of Rapture

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Fengar Gael
135 West 70th St. (2C)
New York, NY 10023
Phone: (646) 707-0903
Fengar@aol.com

Representation:
Bruce Ostler
Bret Adams, Ltd.
448 West 44th Street
New York, NY 10036
Phone: (212) 765-5630
bostler@bretadamsLtd.net

*“I believe! I believe in you, divine mother,
Sea-born Aphrodite! Oh! the path is bitter
Since the other God harnessed us to his cross;
Flesh, Marble, Flower, Venus, in you I believe!
Yes, Man is sad and ugly, sad under the vast sky.
He possesses clothes, because he is no longer chaste,
Because he has defiled his proud, godlike head
And because he has bent, like an idol in the furnace,
His Olympian form towards base slaveries!”*

Arthur Rimbaud

*“Do not forget the hand of the artist in these days
of computer art, video art, minimalism, multiples and the rest.
The touch of a great artist on paper, canvas, wood, or stone
is a miracle of humanity which I hope will not be totally
lost in the strange new world we are entering.”*

Eugene V. Shaw

CHARACTERS

QUINCE DILLINGHAM, a middle-aged London gallerist

CLOVIS MINTON DILLINGHAM, Quince's wife; a sculptress

GINGER MINTON, Clovis's younger sister; a barrister

ROSEMARY MINTON, the cousin of Clovis and Ginger

Note: Clovis and Rosemary should be played by the same actor.

TIME

the present

PLACE

A stylized set represents a parlor and bedroom on the estate of Fennfield in Hampstead Heath, and Shallots Gallery in the West End of London.

Positioned around the stage are Grecian goddess statues composed of artfully draped fabrics.

ACT I

(The estate of Fennfield in Hampstead Heath, England. A mournful drone is heard as lights reveal a shadowy sickroom where CLOVIS languishes beneath a crimson sheet trailing to the floor. SHE slowly lifts her arm, beckoning to her husband, QUINCE, who speaks to the audience with a refined British accent.)

QUINCE

When Clovis spoke her last words, she said...

CLOVIS

Will you...? Will you take my hands?

QUINCE

Yes, she definitely said,...

QUINCE

...“Will you take my hands?”

CLOVIS

Will you take my hands?

(QUINCE walks to the bed and grasps her hands. As CLOVIS expires, QUINCE releases her, and the bed drifts off, leaving behind the crimson sheet. As QUINCE continues speaking, HE drapes the sheet over hooks, creating a decorative swag in a parlor furnished with several figurative statues.)

QUINCE

I thought she was asking if I'd take her hands in my own, if I'd hold and caress them, but she was really asking if I'd take what they can do, what they can feel and create. You see, Clovis was a sculptor, and when we touched she truly gave me her hands -- so now I can do what Clovis could do. It's her gift to me, and it's changed my life.

(The door bell chimes, and QUINCE answers to greet GINGER, a fastidiously dressed barrister.)

GINGER

You Judas! You bastard! You sodding son of a bitch!

QUINCE

Good to see you too, Ginger.

GINGER

I'm going to have you arrested! I'll see your gallery disgraced, your reputation ruined!

QUINCE

I was waiting to hear from you.

GINGER

It's bad enough you stole Clovis's work, work which rightfully belongs to me, but to display it in your gallery under a false name -- the unmitigated gall! You're shameless! You've no conscience! No scruples!

QUINCE

No need to get hysterical; if you'll let me explain...

GINGER

Oh, you'll explain all right -- to the judge, jury, and the whole bloody world when I expose you as the deceitful, lying rotter that you are!

QUINCE

Give me five minutes, just five minutes.

GINGER

I've been to the gallery! I've seen them with my own eyes! I studied them; they're hers!

QUINCE

I admit they're similar but they're mine. I made them, and used another name.

GINGER

You!? You can't sculpt! You can't even draw! (*gesturing to several statues*) What are these doing here?! She willed them to me! They're mine!

QUINCE

You can have them -- every one! I'll give you anything you want if you'll hear me out.

GINGER

How do you live with yourself?!

QUINCE

Clovis gave me her hands.

GINGER

What?!

QUINCE

Remember when Clovis and I gave our first dinner party -- a week after we married?

GINGER

No!

QUINCE

I was chopping chilies, but was so blotto the knife slipped and slashed the tendons on all four fingers of my left hand -- bloody awful mess. Surely you remember?

GINGER

Vaguely.

QUINCE

Two doctors spent three hours stitching me up, and after that my chance to experience the world through touch was diminished -- until now. I didn't realize it until hours later when I felt a strange tingling, and look! (*fluttering his fingers*) A concert pianist couldn't ask for better mobility!

GINGER

Stand back, damnit!

QUINCE

Naturally, it struck me as portentous to suddenly -- on the very night Clovis passed away -- to have my touch back, so the next day I went straight to Doctor Curry who called it a minor miracle, a gift of spontaneous healing. That's when it occurred to me -- when he said "gift" -- that's when I remembered Clovis saying, "take my hands," and that's when she gave me her gift.

GINGER

My god, I've never heard such rubbish! And don't tell me you're so grief stricken you've lost your mind!

QUINCE

Ha! Very nearly, because you see, after this resurgence of feeling, the hands became restless, the digits wanted to dance -- tippity tap tap! Skimming surfaces, stroking textures -- they possessed a will of their own, a will to create!

GINGER

I hope this isn't the story you're going to tell the police.

QUINCE

Why not? It's true! I suppose you think it's ironic that Clovis gave her gift to me.

GINGER

What I think is that the trauma of losing her has affected your mind, and this is your perverse way of getting her back.

QUINCE

Look at me, Ginger: a man my age doesn't suddenly find himself in the thrall of a talent he's never even aspired to. When I wanted to be an artist, it was a painter, then a composer, and briefly even a poet, but *never* a sculptor. This is from Clovis. She had powers -- incredible, unspeakable powers. How can I make you believe me?

GINGER

You can't!

QUINCE

But look at my draped damsels, my swagged hags, ha! I can weld armatures; I can mix and mold; I brandish chisels, files and rasps; and slowly, very slowly, I'm introducing my work into various nooks in the gallery. I'm calling myself Francis King in honor of Clovis. You see, Clovis was the first king of the Franks. Rather clever, don't you think?

GINGER

It's a despicable, flagrant lie! Clovis was born on Good Friday, and was named for the cloves in the Easter ham.

QUINCE

Really? Ha, ha!

GINGER

Quince, you need help, immediate psychiatric help. Everything you've said strikes me as dead wrong, unscrupulous, and unjust to Clovis.

QUINCE

What about me? It's exhausting being enslaved to her hands, all her frills and flounces looping this way and that. Of course, it's marvelous just to be able to do it, but I haven't slept more than three hours a night. The trouble is I'm mostly on my feet...

GINGER

And off your trolley! Listen, Quince: people can't pass talent like a tray of hors d'ouvres. Talent stems from heredity, craftsmanship, years of arduous labor. What you've done is hoard her sculptures -- sculptures that should have been loaded on my lorry six months ago! But you won't get away with it! I won't let you steal the glory which by rights belongs to Clovis. She never even had her bloody fifteen minutes!

QUINCE

She didn't miss much.

GINGER

I've met with my solicitor and Chief Inspector Sorrel You can expect to be arrested by the end of the week.

QUINCE

Arrested?!

GINGER

Then you'll be arraigned, prosecuted, and confined at Sudbury Prison.

QUINCE

Prison?!

GINGER

I'm also filing a civil suit.

QUINCE

You're what?!

GINGER

By April the gallery will be closed;...

QUINCE

No!

GINGER

...your property confiscated;...

QUINCE

Oh, Ginger...

GINGER

...you'll be bankrupt!

QUINCE

I never knew you could be so vengeful. You really want to ruin me?

GINGER

You'll manage. Parolees are placed in various trades.

QUINCE

Trades?!

GINGER

Tailoring, tarring roads, stuffing sausages,...

QUINCE

What?!

GINGER

...shoveling manure.

QUINCE

How can I make you see?

GINGER

You can't!

QUINCE

Ah! I know, I'll prove it! I'll demonstrate; I'll sketch your portrait! (*snatching a pad and pencil*) The least you can do before wrecking my life is give me three more minutes, just three. Now sit! Sit in that chair!

GINGER

I will not!

QUINCE

Then stand! (*sketching at a manic pace.*) Look how deftly I'm drawing! Clovis said a good sculptor must above all be a good draftsman, capable of generating lines, and not just any old lines, but lines that lead towards depth. Think of it: without depth we'd all be exposed, our features flattened like platters. Let's take your nose for instance: the flawless Minton nose! It's juxtaposition to the lacrymal fossa at the corner of the eyes is purest poetry. And now I'm drawing your ear! More than any feature, it varies infinitely, and as a rule the measurement from ear to ear equals the measurement from chin to brow. Don't move! I keep wondering: if I have Clovis's hands, do I also have her brain? I mean, our tactile feelings are mapped onto our minds from infancy, so really, I'm a child again. I even removed the signs in the gallery that said "don't touch" because they might as well be saying, "don't feel, don't breath, drop dead!"

GINGER

That's it! Enough!

QUINCE

No, stay! Just one more minute. Did you know that primitive men sculpted their own images before they ever made pots?

GINGER

Oh, shush! I'm leaving!

(QUINCE whips his sketch off the pad.)

QUINCE

Voila! *(pause as Ginger stares)* Well...? Now do you believe me? It's *your* face -- the way Clovis would have drawn it!

GINGER

(pause, collecting herself) Yes,...yes it is. Apparently, losing Clovis has caused more than a breakdown; it's caused a *breakthrough* -- to your own talent. You've repressed it all these years, now it's finally emerged, but don't deceive yourself -- it's a rip off, and you're nothing but a degenerate thief!

QUINCE

At least you believe these sculptures are mine!

GINGER

It's...possible.

QUINCE

Let me take you to the studio; let me show you how I work!

GINGER

Even if you convince me, you're still just a copyist, a trifling forger who's appropriated the style of a woman you lived with for twenty years and never thought worthy of a single solitary exhibit!

QUINCE

That's not true; it's not that simple. The trouble is you've never appreciated my position.

GINGER

I most certainly have: you're a demigod! You proclaim "The Chosen," then they're instantly exalted, make heaps of money, while Clovis languished in utter obscurity.

QUINCE

Dealers who exhibit the work of their wives are perceived as nepotistic, and the wives are invariably subjected to ridicule. It's a conflict of interest, a question of honor.

GINGER

It's not honor; it's fear -- of the petty prejudices of petty people, all of whom you value more than you ever valued Clovis, which is why she left all her sculptures to me!

QUINCE

You're her sister!

GINGER

And I'll do all I can to make the whole world see how splendid they are!

QUINCE

Believe me, my dear, the world sees what it's told to see and *how*, and it won't give a damn about Clovis and her sculptures.

GINGER

Then I'll tell them; I'll show them!

QUINCE

Where and with whom? Besides, most dealers can't tell a work of art from a butchered cow. Truth be told, the art world's a swamp of faddist toads who can't see beyond what's hyped or most likely to induce vomiting.

GINGER

You're the toad, Quince; you're the king of toads!

QUINCE

Let's try to be civil, shall we? This isn't easy on either of us, but you're wrong about Clovis: She preferred obscurity. Recognition only matters if you question your worth, and Clovis never did.

GINGER

You supercilious ass! What do you think destroyed and devoured her? Doubt, the pain and poison of doubt!

QUINCE

What melodramatic drive! What Clovis had was cancer; the cancer won and that's that. If she had doubts, she never stopped working long enough to indulge them. And stop looking so bloody sanctimonious. What did you ever do for her career?

GINGER

I praised her, encouraged her, took a genuine interest.

QUINCE

And how many sculptures did that sell? I once told Clovis the art world would need a seismic leap of taste for her work to be accepted much less esteemed. Now I'm learning it first hand since I haven't sold a single piece.

GINGER

Good! Because I won't stand idly by while you profit from her work!

QUINCE

I never expected you to. I was hoping we'd share the profits.

GINGER

What?!

QUINCE

Well, why not? I know you need the money. Clovis told me about your investments -- Sussex poultry, wasn't it?

GINGER

None of your damn business!

QUINCE

The point is, once I convince the public to appreciate the statues, we could make a tidy fortune.

GINGER

(pause) God, you never cease to amaze me -- to think I once admired you. You're the vainest, most repulsive man I've ever met!

QUINCE

Look, I don't expect you to like me, but perhaps you might learn to tolerate my creations. Look, here, my very own Pandora. Isn't she splendid?!

GINGER

She looks exactly like Clovis's Pandora!

QUINCE

From a distance she's light as pastry, and yet when you touch... Please, Ginger, touch her. Clovis said her sculptures could be used as a kind of meditation. She wanted people to touch them, to lose themselves in the hills and hollows.

(A haunting melody fades in as GINGER succumbs to the sensuous forms, stroking Pandora's curves.)

QUINCE

You'll find they're very...consoling. Every fold has a life of its own, especially when it loses its moorings, casting wayward shadows -- like that playful one on her thigh.

GINGER

The fabric seems as alive as the...flesh. Oh, lord, my...my knees have gone wobbly.

QUINCE

Sit down; I'll fix some drinks.

(QUINCE opens a cabinet and pours two brandies.)

GINGER

I can see why you cling to your delusion, but even if Clovis did have the power to...to pass on her talent, she'd never have passed it to you.

QUINCE

I can't explain that. All I know is we've suffered a tragic loss, but believe me, Ginger, the gift of Clovis redeems the loss.

GINGER

No, no, it doesn't, nothing redeems the loss -- nothing.

QUINCE

Yes, you're right of course. *(pause)* Still, I'm certain she wouldn't want us quarreling. Why don't you help me? Help me pay tribute to her goddesses. You say you want the world to see them. Well, I can make that happen. Where are they now?

GINGER

In storage in Knightsbridge.

QUINCE

Please, let me exhibit them at Shallots. You can't do it alone. You've no connections, no capital, and not nearly enough pieces to sustain a market. She only sculpted forty, and I've already made twelve.

GINGER

You mean exhibit yours with hers?

QUINCE

We'll sell them under the name of Francis King.

GINGER

We will not! Hers were conceived by “Clovis Minton” and should honor her name.

QUINCE

A name she despised and never etched on the sole of a single foot.

GINGER

Rubbish! She was too self-effacing to bother. In any case, the fact that she’s dead will give her an edge.

QUINCE

What edge? Dead’s dead, buried and of no use to the living. Besides, Clovis never spoke about her theories and methods; she was never a great talker.

GINGER

Well, no, so why not say she’s an artist about whom nothing was known? That makes her more mysterious. She preferred to remain unobserved, unexamined,...

QUINCE

And uninteresting! Trust me, it’s better to have one’s artist alive. A pity he can’t be me, but who would believe it?

GINGER

And I won’t allow it!

QUINCE

What we need is to conjure a recluse. He’ll be shut up in Eastern Europe or exiled in the tropics like Gauguin, but he’ll be ours, all ours, and through him we’ll change the course of history. Look at the goddesses: Each and every one is a tribute to the female form, to antiquity, to the world before it was Christianized much less virtualized! Clovis saw flesh and fabric and molded it into stone, and that stone speaks to us. It speaks of our need for history, for rituals, and traditions, but it must speak from a living, breathing source or it will lose its power. That source is the artist and he must be alive!

GINGER

Why do you keep saying “he”? If we do go through with this -- and I’m not saying we will -- the artist should be a woman.

QUINCE

Why?

GINGER

Because Clovis was a woman and her work’s about women.

QUINCE

Yes, but women rarely turn a profit. I'm afraid they're undervalued and generally assumed to be...well, less competent. Of course they're not, but you're a female barrister -- I mean, how many hold judgeships or sit in parliament?

GINGER

Not nearly enough.

QUINCE

Most women are forced to relinquish the eternal for the ephemeral, and who can blame them when there's bums to be wiped, bibs to be tied.

GINGER

Times have changed.

QUINCE

Not for children reared by mothers managing all the tedious chores of life. They grow up internalizing that image and it rarely includes being an artist. That's why women aren't...well, they're not as esteemed as men.

GINGER

Well, it's monstrously unfair. It's a new millennium, and women are destined to shine!

QUINCE

Not so brightly as we'd wish.

GINGER

It's the least we can do.

QUINCE

It's shortsighted and unwise.

GINGER

It's essential! In fact, I insist! On behalf of womankind everywhere, especially the ones deprived of their civil rights,...

QUINCE

Oh, for chrissake...

GINGER

...never mind the right to paint, to sculpt, and show their faces to the world!

QUINCE

Get out of the dock, Gin! Really!

GINGER

Let's not argue; let's do it -- for Clovis!

QUINCE

(pause) Oh, all right, all right -- but she has to be *living!*

GINGER

Fine, but if we go through the bother of creating a living artist, why hide her? Let's find someone to *be* her.

QUINCE

You mean engage an actress, someone who'll attend openings, do the interviews and so forth?

GINGER

Exactly.

QUINCE

I never thought about actually employing someone. Have you anyone particular in mind?

GINGER

Not yet, but I'll start thinking.

QUINCE

Fine, and I'll do the same. Let's meet again soon. You'll see: together we'll forge a great artistic alliance. *(pause)* So are we reconciled? Are we friends again?

GINGER

We were never friends.

QUINCE

Partners then...?

GINGER

All right.

(QUINCE offers his hand. GINGER ignores it, then marches off. QUINCE removes the crimson curtain, drapes the fabric over a table, and speaks.)

QUINCE

I was hoping Ginger would relinquish her idea of bringing another woman into our scheme. Naturally, she'd want a share of the profits and what if she couldn't be trusted?

(QUINCE brings forth a tea service and platter laden with cakes and places them on the table.)

QUINCE

A week later, I told Ginger to call at tea time, and just as I was tipping the pot...

(GINGER enters the parlor and seats herself.)

GINGER

Rosemary!

QUINCE

What...?

GINGER

Rosemary Minton!

QUINCE

Cousin Rosemary...?

GINGER

She's perfect: she and Clovis were great chums as children. Now she's practically a recluse with no ambition, no prospects, living like a pauper. She works part time at a bookshop called Nutmeg's in Chelsea. I offered her a secretarial post, but she's perfectly content to sit in her flat and do nothing but read.

QUINCE

As I recall she's butch -- unkempt and lumpish.

GINGER

A bit...

QUINCE

With bushy hair, blotchy skin, and a beefy bulb of a nose.

GINGER

Well...

She's a troll. QUINCE

She loves art. GINGER

She's the family freak show! QUINCE

Sssshush! She'll hear you! GINGER

Hear me...? QUINCE

She's in the library. GINGER

What?! You actually brought her here?! QUINCE

Lower your voice! GINGER

My god! How could you?! QUINCE

Shhhush! GINGER

(whispering) I can't believe this! Even Uncle Basil called her the dimmest light on the Minton marquee -- her own father! QUINCE

Basil's a sot. GINGER

And why a recluse?! QUINCE

You said you wanted a recluse! Anyway, she's smart, sweet natured, a gourmet cook -- her specialty is pastries. GINGER

QUINCE

Pastries which have rendered her obese!

GINGER

The fact that she looks nothing like the statues could work to our advantage.

QUINCE

I don't agree! Besides, isn't she of an age as they say?

GINGER

She's *our* age.

QUINCE

But the world worships the new! The beautiful!

GINGER

Yes, and it always puts the artist in place of the art, but with Rosemary...well...

QUINCE

You're saying she's such a fright they'll bypass her altogether and really see the art!?

GINGER

They'll appreciate that someone imperfect can make something perfect. Of course, we can't let her know that some of the sculptures are yours or she won't sign on.

QUINCE

Why not?

GINGER

Because she isn't likely to believe your story anymore than I!

QUINCE

I think we're being hasty. I mean, is she *really* the sort of image we want? And what if Rosemary has scruples? She might not like taking credit for her cousin's work.

GINGER

Who better to take credit? Rosie's always loved Clo's goddesses, and what with her being a Minton, it's less of a lie. Now we really can't keep her waiting any longer!

QUINCE

Christ, I've got to think! Look, tell her I'm making a call and will be in shortly. Seat her there -- that way I can get a good look at her.

(QUINCE exits as GINGER escorts ROSEMARY into the parlor. She's plump with unruly hair, bushy brows, rumpled clothes, and a cigar in her mouth. SHE speaks meekly, in breathless spurts.)

GINGER

For godssake, don't light that thing!

ROSEMARY

Oh, dear, I...I am sorry. (*spying the tea cakes*) Ohhh, how lovely...

(ROSEMARY sits, gobbling the cakes as QUINCE peeks his head into the parlor and speaks.)

QUINCE

Even at a distance, I could see that Rosemary had only come to Fennfield to devour the tea cakes and say she would not under any circumstance pretend to be anyone but herself: a bitter, dejected old hag. As I saw it, the women were cousins, but life had blessed Clovis and Ginger and damned Rosemary. Clovis may be dead, but she was alive in her art and the minds of those who loved her, but had Rosemary even been kissed?

GINGER

Uncle Basil never smoked; none of the Mintons smoked. If you accept our proposition, I know a good hairdresser, and (*sniff*) what's that cologne you're wearing? It smells like...cabbage.

ROSEMARY

I'm afraid it's...well, it's me. Lately, I tend to smell like boiled cabbage. I can't imagine why, but when I light a cigar, it's hardly noticeable.

GINGER

Have you seen a doctor?

ROSEMARY

No. (*pause*) It's lovely to see you, Ginger, and I'm grateful for your offer, but I...I'm afraid I'll have to decline. I just don't think I'd convince anyone that I could make anything so...exquisite.

GINGER

Nonsense.

ROSEMARY

You know, Mother had one of the first sculptures Clovis ever made. It was Artemis, the Huntress. She had a fist full of arrows made with feathers from her wings.

GINGER

Clo gave Aunty Olive a sculpture? I never knew that.

ROSEMARY

She was kept in the laundry where we used her wings to dry socks, but I...I fell in love with her.

GINGER

Really? You had a romance with a statue?

ROSEMARY

I'd stroke her arms and imagine her lifting me onto her back, then the two of us would fly to Delphi to visit Apollo.

GINGER

So where is she now?

ROSEMARY

When Mother died, the house was sold and Artemis with it. Naturally, I was devastated, but Father said she was tawdry. He also said that really talented people had a special glow that surrounded them, a sort of spiritual glimmer. He said Clovis didn't have it, and neither did I.

GINGER

Well, he was wrong; I can see your glimmer from here -- beaming with possibilities.

ROSEMARY

I'm afraid my glimmer is...well, I perspire a great deal. It's my glands.

GINGER

Then you should see a dermatologist. Have you any other infirmities?

ROSEMARY

My eyes twitch when I'm nervous, and I'm nervous when I lie -- which is why I wouldn't be much good at pretending to be something I'm not. The truth is I'm all thumbs when it comes to making anything more artful than meringue.

GINGER

Are you sure? Have you ever taken lessons?

ROSEMARY

Drawing lessons, pottery, piano, and ballet. I'm afraid I'm just not gifted.

GINGER

Is there anything you like about yourself?

ROSEMARY

Well, I...I know how dolphins mate, the history of architecture, astronomy, philosophy, and I'm reading Virgil's Poems, Passage to India, and a book on beekeeping. You see, what I really am is a devout reader. That's my true vocation.

GINGER

Well, it's a vocation that won't turn a shilling, so why not get paid for a part-time impersonation? Quince will take care of the finances, and prepare your first exhibition.

ROSEMARY

But I...I can't.

GINGER

Now see here, Rosemary, we're offering you an alternative life. You can quit your job at Nutmeg's, and meet cultured, educated people, and escape that sordid flat of yours.

ROSEMARY

But why me? Why not someone more sociable and...appealing?

GINGER

Because Clo cherished your friendship. You know how shy and secretive she was. She'd very likely have preferred that someone represent her -- so who better than you?

ROSEMARY

But Ginger, there's something you should know. *(pause)* Two weeks before Clovis... passed on, she sent a note asking me to visit. I'd no idea she was so perilously ill, and I...I lost track of the days and then...well, it was too late.

GINGER

None of us expected her to actually "pass on" as you say. I hadn't seen her myself for over a month.

ROSEMARY

But whatever she had to say, I...I missed it.

GINGER

She might have said that she wants you to do precisely what I'm asking.

ROSEMARY

But what about the sculptures? Won't people recognize them -- people who knew Clovis?

GINGER

She had few friends and not a single solitary exhibit -- not even in Quince's gallery which he deeply regrets. He's making it up to her now, which is part of the point, you see.

ROSEMARY

I don't know. *(pause, she sighs)* Suppose people don't find the goddesses as...as enchanting as we do?

GINGER

They will, Rosie, they must!

(QUINCE enters.)

QUINCE

He's right. We know their power -- Ginger and I. Observed closely, they're mesmerizing.

ROSEMARY

Hello, Quince.

QUINCE

Welcome to Fennfield. I couldn't help overhearing, and wondered: have you ever really looked at the statues, I mean studied them closely?

ROSEMARY

Yes,...yes, I have.

QUINCE

And...?

ROSEMARY

Well, I...I think they're...romantic and artfully rendered.

QUINCE

Did you know Clovis never took lessons? She was exiled from every artistic movement of her time. Forget abstractionism, postmodernism, digitalism, or neo-pop-op-surrealism -- not to mention those plastic dolls copulating all over London. It's as if every innovation

QUINCE (cont'd)

of the past century never existed. To me the goddesses represent resistance -- resistance to the brave new world of networked reality.

GINGER

It's true, she rarely used a computer, nevermind texting or tweeting.

QUINCE

But she knew her craft. For example, look at Pandora's gown: every pleat has its own private anatomy. Its starting point is called the eye, and see how it swells and swirls from hip to groin.

ROSEMARY

Clovis said Pandora was her favorite because her name means "all gifts." Look under her feet -- that's her dowry, a box filled with all the evils she let loose on the world.

QUINCE

But she kept hope inside, hoarding it for herself.

ROSEMARY

Yes, unlike Clovis who had no sense of possession or...malice. That's why it's so disconcerting that... well, I...I never noticed it before, but look how her fingers are tapered into claws.

QUINCE

So what are you implying?

ROSEMARY

Only that she seems...distorted. I...I don't mean it as a criticism.

QUINCE

No offense taken. In fact, she *is* distorted, but she's a divine being so she ought to be, don't you think?

ROSEMARY

Actually, she's mortal, the first woman ever created. Hephaestus made her for Zeus -- so he could avenge himself on the human race.

GINGER

Well, aren't you impressive?

ROSEMARY

Is it all right if I...touch her?

GINGER

Of course.

ROSEMARY

(stroking Pandora's tunic) Ohhhhhhh...

QUINCE

Tell me, Rosemary, what are you thinking?

ROSEMARY

I'm not thinking; I...I'm...feeling. It took me weeks to find it in Artemis, but it's in Pandora as well.

QUINCE

What? What's in Pandora?

ROSEMARY

Surely you know.

QUINCE

Yes, but I want to hear it from you.

ROSEMARY

(withdrawing her hand) When I was a child, I...I was fond of stroking the satin borders of my blankets. It made my...my toes curl up, and I felt a...a strange tingling. It's called hedonic touching, touching for pleasure.

QUINCE

Yes, Ginger felt it too, but it wasn't till Colvis passed away, and I was moving Calliope that my hand grasped the fabric on her thigh, and then well, I was...moved.

GINGER

Yes! That's it -- the secret to Clo's art: it's meant to be touched! *(to Quince)* Rosemary knew it instinctively!

ROSEMARY

I wonder if it was conscious, if Clovis had a method of suffusing the fabrics with...with subliminal forms or perhaps the forms simply emerged by themselves? All I know is when I first saw Artemis, I couldn't help myself. I...I started adopting her pose.

GINGER

Which was...?

(ROSEMARY stands, bends her knees, and assumes an archer's pose in one direction, then another, and another.)

QUINCE
(*appalled*) I see.

GINGER
(*applauding*) Bravo!

ROSEMARY
Artemis showed me what I aspired to become: a strong, fearless woman with a perfect nose and wings. Seeing all these statues makes me feel...

GINGER
What...?

ROSEMARY
Hungry -- for a...a better life.

GINGER
So you'll do it?

QUINCE
For heaven's sake, don't force the woman!

GINGER
We'll start you off at three hundred pounds a week. Here's the first installment in cash. You can buy yourself a new frock.

ROSEMARY
A new frock? I...I could pay the back rent.

QUINCE
You mustn't let Ginger persuade you. This charade won't be as simple as it seems. People will ask questions; you'll have to be prepared.

ROSEMARY
I realize that, and I...I'm not sure I have the fortitude to...to pull it off.

GINGER
Of course you do! Oh, please, cuz, do it for Clovis!

QUINCE
Do it only if you're capable of doing it well.

ROSEMARY

That's what I fear most, that I...I might say something foolish, and cause someone to...to lose respect for her...her work.

QUINCE

So the less said, the better. The goddesses say it all: they stand by themselves and for themselves, and whatever people want from the artist that they didn't get from the art isn't worth a fig.

GINGER

Just come to Shallot's on Cork Street when we call.

QUINCE

Not for several months. I'm going to repaint the gallery, create a catalog, send out invitations.

GINGER

You see, Rosie, that gives us plenty of time.

ROSEMARY

Well, I...I suppose...

GINGER

Not to worry! Quince will take care of everything!

(Music as ROSEMARY and GINGER depart with the tea service, and another statue appears in the parlor. QUINCE removes the crimson cloth from the table, and drapes it on the sofa as a throw. During his speech, GINGER returns to join him.)

QUINCE

A few weeks later, I called Ginger back to Fennfield. I'd been having trouble reconciling the life of an artist with that of a businessman.

GINGER

God, you look ghastly!

QUINCE

I need you to manage Shallots.

GINGER

Me? Run a gallery?

QUINCE

I can't sculpt all night and run the business all day. If this goes on, I'll be dead in a fortnight.

GINGER

Can't you hire someone?

QUINCE

Best to keep it in the family. It's the only way of ensuring that our secret stays safe.

GINGER

Ah, I see you've sculpted a new Athena.

QUINCE

There's even more in the studio. They just keep beckoning to me or...from me.

GINGER

Well, surely that must be gratifying.

QUINCE

It was, but sometimes I forget to eat because I'm compelled to finish the bridge of a nose or the arch of a foot, and now I need time to prepare the gallery. You've got to help me!

GINGER

Sorry, Quince, I wouldn't have a clue what to do.

QUINCE

I'll teach you! Besides, I've already done the hard work, spent years building a loyal clientele. No one can pry open the eyes of the art world like me, ha! But how can I pry them open when my own are closing from sheer exhaustion? That's why you have to take over! In fact, why don't you come and live here?

GINGER

Live here?! With you?

QUINCE

Why not? It's all perfectly innocent. Fennfield has five bedrooms, five baths, two parlors, and the studio.

GINGER

Sorry, I don't think so.

QUINCE

You can keep your flat in London, and if you're here, you'll see what it's like -- all these months of feeling possessed, of making something for the sake of itself, not just for pride and profits, but for...joy, the pure joy of making it. Have you ever felt that?

GINGER

Not since childhood.

QUINCE

Sometimes I fancy myself a modern Prometheus. Of course, in more lucid moments, I realize I...I don't deserve her talent.

GINGER

Well, who does? I mean, it seems rather arbitrary -- who has talent and who doesn't.

QUINCE

True, and those who do, don't always have the wisdom or means to use it well.

GINGER

But you have both -- lucky you.

QUINCE

Yes, lucky me; I'm saved from the grueling effects of selling poorly.

GINGER

Unlike poor Clovis who never had a chance.

QUINCE

No wonder you loathe me. *(pause)* Would you really have tried to bankrupt me?

GINGER

At the very least I'd have caused considerable inconvenience.

QUINCE

You said you once admired me.

GINGER

Decades ago.

QUINCE

The only "admirable" thing about me is my love of art. Other than that I was a monstrous child, a careless lover, an unfaithful husband...

GINGER

Unfaithful...?

QUINCE

Oh, yes, sorry. Truth be told, I can't think of a single virtuous thing I've ever done -- ever. You were right about me from the first -- I'm morally corrupt.

GINGER

At least you feel remorse. And what about all the artists you've supported and helped?

QUINCE

What about them?! Just because I love art doesn't mean I love artists. As a rule, they're beastly pains in the arse, like giddy children at their first openings. After that the venomous slime of ambition oozes into their veins, making them greedy and competitive. Believe me, no measure of money or repute can feed the insatiable vanity of "the artist." Of course, a true original is a rare find, but talent's never enough. It's the marketing machine that makes even the mediocrities look like prodigies. As for the real prodigies: if they're weak and overexposed, they become arrogant and start resting on their laurels or feel watched and lose courage. Then, when they fall from grace -- and they usually do -- heaven help us! Oh, if I weren't so dependent on artists, I'd avoid them altogether, and now -- god help me -- I'm one of them!

GINGER

Oh, please...

QUINCE

Look, I'm only voicing all the cruel, callous thoughts most men are too civil to express. Oh, yes, that's my main talent: the fine art of enmity. The trouble is, it's starting to show. Rosemary noticed it right off. You see how all those fingers tapering into claws, and Nix, my goddess of night, is developing a distinctive sneer.

GINGER

They're still quite fine.

QUINCE

Truth be told, I'm a born peddler which in the business of art makes me a gatekeeper, a guardian of culture. That's why this is so...so difficult. *(pause)* I suppose it would be different for you. I mean, if you had them, you wouldn't be torn by having to run the gallery. At least if I gave them to you, I could experience them vicariously.

GINGER

Experience what...?

QUINCE

The hands! Besides, I'm certain if you'd been by her bedside instead of me, they'd be yours.

GINGER

What nonsense!

QUINCE

Don't you see? Since you can't run the gallery, then *you* should be the sculptor!

GINGER

Really, Quince, this is too absurd.

QUINCE

I'll give you the hands -- the way she gave me hers.

GINGER

For godssake...

QUINCE

I've no choice! Are you ready? (*reaching out his hand*) Will you take my hands?

GINGER

No!

(QUINCE lunges toward GINGER, wrestling her to the floor, and pinning down her hands.)

GINGER

Ouuuuuch! Stop that! How dare you!!??

QUINCE

Will you take my hands?

GINGER

Let go of me!!

QUINCE

Please, say "yes," just say it!

GINGER

Yes, yes, you bloody bastard!!

QUINCE

Say, "Yes, I'll take your hands!" Say it!

GINGER

Yes, I'll take your hands!

(Haunting music is heard as Clovis's gift is transferred to GINGER. QUINCE releases GINGER'S hands, and THEY stagger to their feet.)

GINGER

Good Lord! You really are mad!

QUINCE

Did it work?

GINGER

Back off!

(Pause as QUINCE stares at his hands, and GINGER swills her drink.)

QUINCE

Oh, god...? What...? (*whispering*) What have I done...?

GINGER

You've assaulted me, you blithering maniac!

QUINCE

They're yours now...

GINGER

I'm pressing charges!

QUINCE

My fingers are already stiffening. (*pause, stifling a sob*) Now I've lost them both -- Clovis and her...hands.

GINGER

You've wrenched my bloody back!

QUINCE

Ginger, my dear, can't you feel what you've been given? You're the artist now.

GINGER

Don't say that! It's preposterous!

QUINCE

You'll feel driven, compelled... In fact, you're feeling it already. Look at your fingers: they're so fidgety, they can hardly grip the glass. They're subtle instruments, exquisitely tapered, but they'll need flexing.

GINGER

The only thing they need is a manicure!

QUINCE

It won't be easy having talent after decades of thinking you knew your limitations. It's like having a bomb blast away the very core of your life and all that defines it. No more Ginger Minton -- farewell the bitchy barrister, au revoir to torts and tarts!

GINGER

Something does feel...strange. These statues seem to be...

QUINCE

Beckoning...?

(Music fades in as GINGER stares at her hands.)

GINGER

My god, can it...? Can it really be true...?

QUINCE

Just promise me you'll cherish them, use them wisely, and sculpt more beauty -- for the world to behold.

(As QUINCE speaks, a female form appears. GINGER gathers the crimson fabric from the sofa and winds it around her, creating a goddess statue.)

QUINCE

Ginger remained at Fennfield. Her associates were told she was taking an extended leave, but she was setting into motion a molecular chain of events: the transformation of liquid into a malleable state that allowed for the molding of rapturous creatures transcending anything ever seen in a court of law! Weeks later, Ginger finished...

QUINCE

...Hera.

GINGER

Hera,...

GINGER

...Queen of Olympus!

QUINCE

I'm so proud of you Ginger, so proud I nearly forgot I didn't sculpt her myself, ha, ha!

(Music swells and lights shimmer on the sculptures which QUINCE and GINGER arrange to become the gallery, with the crimson draped "Hera" posed in the center. Then QUINCE speaks, and ROSEMARY enters wearing sunglasses.)

QUINCE

The opening arrived, and the gallery looked magnificent -- with the walls and ceilings painted a celestial indigo. Then Rosemary appeared and I knew we'd made a grave mistake. (*he sniffs*) She even exudes an odor -- like sauerkraut. And why is she wearing those ludicrous...

QUINCE

...sunglasses?!

GINGER

Sunglasses...

GINGER

...at night. Nice touch that -- very artsy.

ROSEMARY

At least they can't see my eyes twitch.

(GINGER and ROSEMARY circle the gallery, whispering to each other, while QUINCE mutters to himself and GINGER.)

QUINCE

What a hound! Oh, Christ, she just spilled wine on Thymon Leeks!

GINGER

Very clever -- spilling wine on the critic's cravat. You'll fuel their pettiness. It's a veritable feast!

ROSEMARY

My palms are so clammy. I do wish you'd stop introducing me to everyone.

GINGER

You're supposed to be the artist!

ROSEMARY

Oh, what a lovely wheel of Camembert. Maybe just a nibble...

(GINGER approaches QUINCE.)

GINGER

I've been telling people a sculptress can only sculpt what she is, and inside Rosemary is...

QUINCE

A gargoyle!

GINGER

...a goddess!

QUINCE

That's what Lady Tarragon called her, then proceeded to buy three Muses.

ROSEMARY

I've never seen such a lovely buffet.

QUINCE

There go the last of the crab claws!

ROSEMARY

I never get treats like this at home.

QUINCE

Watch out! She's headed straight for the prawns!

ROSEMARY

Oh, how delicious!

GINGER

By god, she's pulling it off. Isn't she...

QUINCE

Vulgar.

GINGER

...grand!

ROSEMARY

Oh dear, I've dribbled sauce on my dress.

(GINGER approaches Rosemary.)

GINGER

Quince said we just sold two Penelopes and a Hestia.

ROSEMARY

Goddess of the hearth and daughter of Cronus who once ruled the universe.

GINGER

You certainly know your classics, Rosie.

ROSEMARY

Though I've completely forgotten my aversion to *(she hiccoughs)* cheese.

(ROSEMARY strolls aside as QUINCE approaches GINGER.)

QUINCE

Several guests remarked that Rosemary evokes the ever enticing conundrum: the relation of talent to character.

GINGER

They're saying she's single-handedly reinvented the Greeks!

ROSEMARY

(hiccoughs)

QUINCE

How can an artist produce a sculpture as majestic as Clio here, and yet descend into...

ROSEMARY

(hiccoughs)

QUINCE

...barbarism.

GINGER

What a coup! Isn't she phenomenal? Isn't she superb?!

ROSEMARY

(belches loudly)

Isn't she though?

QUINCE

(Lights dim as the gallery closes. QUINCE approaches the audience, snatching the cloth from a statue, and dropping it to form a carpet in the parlor at Fennfield.)

QUINCE

Miraculously, our goddesses prevailed, luring defenseless buyers who weren't even conscious of their arms reaching out, and once they touched -- ohhhh, the reveries of spending! Of course, the musicians were from the London Philharmonic, and the champagne was Veuve Cliquot. In fact, it was very like the theatre, everyone partaking in ancient rituals: gazing and grazing while our petrified Greeks held center stage and our audience whispered asides, all of them enveloped in the same mythic fantasy, all of them hungry for transcendence, and all of them grateful -- to me!

(ROSEMARY and GINGER seat themselves as QUINCE brings forth a tray with a bottle of brandy and snifters.)

ROSEMARY

Oh, Ginger, I'm so...so awfully sorry. Do you suppose it's too late?

GINGER

Late for what...?

ROSEMARY

To confess that Clovis was the artist. Can't we just tell the truth?

QUINCE

Any idiot can tell the truth. It takes imagination to lie, and I deal in imagination!

ROSEMARY

But I'm afraid I...I didn't make a very good impression.

GINGER

And they loved you for it.

ROSEMARY

They did...?

QUINCE

We sold a full dozen statues.

Bravo!

GINGER

(QUINCE offers the snifters.)

QUINCE

This brandy is a hundred and twelve years old, a gift from a client.

ROSEMARY

Oh, how lovely.

QUINCE

Now I propose a toast: to the art world -- for surrendering itself to the past!

ROSEMARY

And to Clovis.

GINGER and QUINCE

To Clovis!

(Pause as THEY raise their glasses. Then ROSEMARY drains her brandy in one lusty gulp.)

GINGER

You know, Rosie, Fennfield is a very large house. Quince is on the first floor; I have the rooms near the studio.

ROSEMARY

You *live* here?

GINGER

It's all perfectly proper. (*to Quince*) What do you say? Why not let Rosie take the east wing of the second floor? She'll have a bedroom, a bath, her own sitting room...

QUINCE

You're being very presumptuous.

GINGER

She's in that wretched flatlet.

QUINCE

No! Absolutely not!

ROSEMARY

He's right, Ginger, and people...well, they might talk.

GINGER

Rubbish! We're all family; it makes perfect sense.

ROSEMARY

Really, I'm quite content where I am.

GINGER

No, you're not! Besides, we won't be here long. Quince thinks we should move to New York. Americans love the English and have heaps of money!

QUINCE

And for Ginger it's money, money, money.

GINGER

Only enough to pay my debts and seek the comforts I aspire to.

QUINCE

I daresay you aspire to a great deal.

GINGER

And why not? We must resist looking backwards, and relish the wonders of the world -- and there's three continents and dozens of islands to explore. *(to Rosemary)* How I wish you could stay; I feel you belong here.

ROSEMARY

Well, I...I don't think so, and certainly not if Quince doesn't want me.

QUINCE

I'm afraid I don't, though you mustn't think I don't value your role in our endeavor. The reviews will be glowing, so be prepared to step on the media treadmill.

ROSEMARY

But I...I'm really rather shy. The one time I spoke in public, I broke out in hives.

QUINCE

We'll teach you everything you need to know: the what, why, and how of sculpting.

ROSEMARY

But surely the fuss won't last long. Clovis sculpted a finite number of statues, and once you sell them, well, it's...all over.

QUINCE

Not so. Molds of the sculptures are being cast so we can produce as many as the market can endure.

GINGER

So Rosie, you'll have employment for life!

ROSEMARY

But if people come too close, they'll see I'm just a...a frumpy old bumbler.

GINGER

They'll see a woman who fashioned the perfect pubis of Venus with her very own hands! (*grasping Rosemary's hands*) How I bless them! I kiss them!

ROSEMARY

(*blushing*) Oh, you're very silly tonight, Ginny. (*pause*) Well, I...I really must be going. Thank you both for...for everything.

GINGER

Sweet dreams, cuz.

(ROSEMARY waddles off.)

QUINCE

Poor old thing. It's a wonder she hasn't had a coronary.

GINGER

She's in fine fettle.

QUINCE

She single-handedly dispatched the entire buffet! And what in god's name were you thinking? -- inviting her here! She'd wonder why you were always in the studio. She'd catch on.

GINGER

Nonsense. I'd simply say I'm learning to sculpt for myself.

QUINCE

But the gall! To suggest it without asking me first!

GINGER

Sorry.

QUINCE

Did you see her bolt down the trifle? -- with that purple trowel of a tongue. There's no excuse for such a ravenous appetite in a woman her age.

GINGER

Whatever her frailties, surely you'll admit her knowledge is formidable. No one suspected she wasn't the artist, and isn't it touching how undemanding she is, how humble?

QUINCE

Sorry, I can't seem to get past the sheer bulk of her presence, and she smells like mustard greens are boiling in her bowels. Forgive me, I can't help myself -- cousin or no, she disgusts me.

GINGER

Yes, well, *(standing to leave)* I'm afraid I'm all in. Good night.

QUINCE

Wait, Ginger, don't leave just yet. I've been meaning to speak with you about the...the hands. *(pause, he sighs)* It's just that sometimes I...I miss them. I feel like a leper again. A leper's sense of touch diminishes utterly, and my fingers are completely defunct -- the bad ones. Fingers forget, but the mind -- oh, how the mind remembers! Perhaps it's just a case of wanting what one hasn't got, but what about you? Are you any different? Have the hands changed you?

GINGER

If only you knew.

QUINCE

What do you mean? Tell me, please.

GINGER

(pause) Well, we Mintons are inclined to look on the darker side, but I feel a bit less glum, not nearly so pressed and polished. Another thing: I don't miss the law. When I look back at how I frittered away my life with petty minutiae: old precedents, new precedents, contentious, quarrelsome people -- including my ex-husbands. Now I'm sculpting flesh on the bones of Europa who grows more radiant every day. Sometimes I look at the clock, and the whole afternoon's passed in a trice. It's such a lark really -- the most wonderful gift on earth. *(admiring her hands)* I know you felt pressured into giving them up, but you're so generous to let me stay and use the studio. In fact, I'm so grateful, I'd like to...to embrace you.

QUINCE
Ha! Don't be daft.

GINGER
I'm serious.

QUINCE
That's the brandy speaking.

GINGER
I've grown very...fond of you, Quince, fonder than I ever thought possible.

(Pause as QUINCE takes a deep swallow of brandy.)

GINGER
Lately it's been difficult to even look at you without wanting to...to touch you.

QUINCE
Oh, Christ...

GINGER
Well, what do you expect? After all, these *are* Clovis's hands. I keep imagining where they've been, caressing your shoulders, your...

QUINCE
Stop! Stop this instant!

GINGER
I can't help myself, Quince, I even dream about you. I didn't want this to happen; it's a damn nuisance. I suppose that's why I wanted Rosemary here -- as a sort of chaperone.

QUINCE
Chaperone?!

GINGER
With her around, I'm less likely to jump your bones.

QUINCE
Good god!

GINGER
(*pause*) At first I thought it was those damn Greeks -- all their sensual leering. They turn you on just glancing at them, but no, it's you, I'm sure of it.

QUINCE

Well, I much prefer your loathing! No wonder your statues are becoming more macho. Don't think I haven't noticed their robust arms and thighs expanding.

GINGER

What of it? People still buy them; it hasn't affected our scheme.

QUINCE

Damn! I should never have given them up. Now I realize I acted rashly -- due to a severe lack of sleep. I forgot that even if Shallots went under, I'd still have talent, priceless precious talent that would have...saved me.

GINGER

I wondered if you'd ever want them back, though you did say they exhausted you.

QUINCE

Yes, yes, but what a sweet, gratifying exhaustion.

GINGER

So do you...despise me?

QUINCE

No, oddly enough -- you're still the better person. You see, I'm unequivocally wicked while you're just a deceitful, supercilious bitch!

GINGER

Ha, ha! But how can someone be unequivocally wicked, yet still evoke such...feelings?

QUINCE

That's your problem, I assure you.

GINGER

You really can be cruel. I pity poor Clovis. She must have been very...depressed.

QUINCE

Not really. She had the hands, you see. *(pause)* Do you suppose you'll ever want to...retire?

GINGER

Sorry. *(pause)* You know, you're always welcome to watch me work. I quite enjoy it when you do.

QUINCE

I'm afraid those days are over.

GINGER

So are you going to toss me out?

QUINCE

No, I prefer having the hands about.

GINGER

Good night then.

QUINCE

Good night.

(GINGER departs as QUINCE pours another glass of brandy, and toasts the statue of Pandora.)

QUINCE

Well, cheers, my dear Pandora. Like you, I'm plastered, ha, ha!

(QUINCE takes a deep swallow, then kisses Pandora. Instantly, a soprano is heard humming, and shimmering lights seem to animate Pandora as QUINCE whispers.)

QUINCE

It started with a woman's song which was soon echoed by others, and then I saw her...

(The humming swells in volume as QUINCE reaches out his hand.)

QUINCE

Clovis...?

(Winds howl as QUINCE attempts to grasp the image of Clovis in the wavering lights. HE spins, following her movement till he trips on the carpet, collapsing to the floor with a gasp!)

QUINCE

(moaning) Ohhhhhhhh...

(The humming fades as lights dim to black.)

(The next morning GINGER enters the parlor, wearing her robe. SHE spies QUINCE lying on the crimson carpet, attempting to rouse himself.)

GINGER

Good lord! Did you fall?! Are you all right?

QUINCE

(groaning) Ohhhhh, Christ, my eyes are on fire.

GINGER

Can you stand?

QUINCE

Not yet...

GINGER

I'll fetch some of water.

QUINCE

No, no, just listen...*(gesturing for Ginger to move closer)* Rosemary *must* come to Fennfield -- straight away! Phone her and bring her back! I've had a...a vision.

GINGER

More likely a delirium!

QUINCE

After you left, I kissed Pandora's lips. Then Clovis appeared and kissed me back straight away! Then she spoke: she said she wanted Rosemary!

GINGER

I'll get some coffee.

QUINCE

No, no, call Rosemary! Insist she come back!

(GINGER departs as QUINCE staggers towards the audience.)

QUINCE

So Ginger fetched Rosemary, and they sat in the parlor while I eavesdropped by the door.

(QUINCE skulks to the side as ROSEMARY and GINGER enter and seat themselves.)

ROSEMARY

Where is he now?

GINGER

Sobering up I should think.

ROSEMARY

Then he'll remember he detests me.

GINGER

He seemed sincere, so take advantage. You'll be much more comfortable, and you won't be paying rent. We'll meet for dinner; otherwise, your time's your own.

ROSEMARY

(pause) I must tell you, Ginger, I'm not keen on Quince and never have been. I always pitied Clovis, and I don't see how you endure the man, much less live with him.

GINGER

You've no idea. The truth is I've become quite...drawn to him. It's one of those intense attractions you think you've outgrown.

ROSEMARY

You don't mean you're...?

GINGER

I haven't felt this way since I met Garlin at Cambridge.

ROSEMARY

(pause) Does Quince know?

GINGER

Yes, and I should never have told him. It's that wretched brandy -- it loosened my tongue and now I've lost a friend. Maybe it really is the sculptures wreaking havoc. Why else am I suddenly attracted to a someone who claims to be the wickedest man alive.

ROSEMARY

He is.

GINGER

Then why do I feel so...exhilarated by his company?

ROSEMARY

Well, I don't! All I feel is fat, and it's horrid being fat in a city like London. People stare with pity or revulsion, but what right do they have to force their image of perfection on me, then hate me if it doesn't fit?

GINGER

They don't.

ROSEMARY

Of course the ideal woman looks more and more like the ideal boy: she's hipless, breastless, and tall. Why can't the ideal woman be bountiful and... voluptuous?

GINGER

To some people I'm sure she is.

ROSEMARY

Not to Quince -- or to you.

GINGER

Nonsense! If I were gay you'd be my kind of girl, Rosie. Now don't fret about Quince. He's usually at the gallery while I'm in the studio, trying my own hand at sculpting. It seems it's a family trait I'm just starting to explore.

ROSEMARY

You should sculpt the male deities -- like Poseidon.

GINGER

What an idea. Poseidon did you say?

ROSEMARY

The god of oceans, earthquakes, and horses. You could give him Quince's face and a horse's ass, ha, ha, ha!

GINGER

Ha, ha! Oh, Rosie, I'm so pleased you'll be staying at Fennfield -- for both our sakes. It might ease the tension between Quince and me. There's something about the place. Some days it seems like the air in the rooms has been purified. When I'm in your flat, I feel the opposite -- an oppressive malaise.

ROSEMARY

That's the advantage of living in hell -- you stop caring about getting the things you want. You even forget what they were.

GINGER

Then you've nothing to lose.

ROSEMARY

(pause) I'm here on a trial basis. I'll stay a week and if I'm the least bit uncomfortable, I'm going home.

GINGER

Fine.

ROSEMARY

I also do my own cooking. My *métier* is French and Indian cuisine.

GINGER

Agreed.

ROSEMARY

I'll need a quiet place to read.

GINGER

Quince has an excellent library.

ROSEMARY

What about my cigars?

GINGER

Off limits in the parlor, kitchen and dining room. Now go home and start packing!

(GINGER departs as QUINCE enters to speak.)

QUINCE

Rosemary's move to Fennfield was a spiritual necessity. Rumor had it, she'd nearly drowned in a river of lethal cocktails, but her fetish for literature saved her -- all those books she hadn't yet read were like a flotilla of rafts, and she'd reach for one, then another and another. Now it was time to hoist her sails, to shift the tides on her mortal sea. *(approaching Rosemary)* So she installed herself in a room overlooking...

QUINCE

...the garden.

ROSEMARY

The garden...

ROSEMARY

...is so beautiful, and what a grand bed. *(pause)* Where's Ginger's room?

QUINCE

Down the hall from yours.

ROSEMARY

She told me about Clovis appearing in your dream. Apparently, she's the one who wants me here.

QUINCE

Yes, but I haven't seen her since. Ginger thinks she only comes bottled in brandy, but she was as real to me as you are now.

ROSEMARY

I wonder why? I mean, why would Clovis want me?

QUINCE

I can't say, but she was very insistent. I must say your agreeing to come has certainly cheered Ginger. She's quite devoted.

ROSEMARY

It seems she's even more devoted to you.

QUINCE

She told you that, did she? What a pity we can't be smitten with the proper people.

ROSEMARY

When we were young, I was "smitten" with Ginger. It was futile, of course. She only noticed me when we played badminton.

QUINCE

Well, everyone's noticing you now.

ROSEMARY

Yes, it's disconcerting to see my name in the papers.

QUINCE

Artists love to see their names in print, to be talked about and admired. Every artist I know is ambitious, and ambition is a form of lust -- far more potent than sex or money.

ROSEMARY

Was Clovis ambitious?

QUINCE

For much more than fame. Despite the world's indifference, she trusted her imagination and to hell with fools like me. Till the day she died, I considered her work frivolous -- all form without context.

ROSEMARY

We're often blind to the talents of people we claim to...to know best.

QUINCE

I should have known. From the time I was a toddler making mud pies, I thought I'd never make art. But I learned to recognize it. I studied, I noticed, but I failed to recognize Clovis, and that disturbs me more than anything, even more than her death.

ROSEMARY

She thought your indifference implied a...deficiency. She felt she was perceived as a reactionary, but she was really modern -- a contemporary classicist.

QUINCE

Well, at least give me credit for marrying her. I gave her a home, a place to create.

ROSEMARY

Don't you ever wonder whom else you've misjudged?

QUINCE

Of course. By rights, I should be an artist myself, subjected to scorn and ridicule. Instead I'm a shopkeeper, but a good one, and I'll do everything I can to see that the goddesses triumph.

ROSEMARY

So will I. In fact, I've been preparing what I'll say at the interviews -- as if I were Clovis.

QUINCE

But you're not, so best be yourself.

ROSEMARY

Really? Just be...myself?

QUINCE

And for godssake let go of that humility -- because you're about to have a head on collision with fame and acclaim!

(Music resounds and lights flash as GINGER enters with a camera. ROSEMARY grasps the crimson carpet, wrapping it around her shoulders like a shawl.)

GINGER

Smile, Rosie!

(GINGER snaps pictures. After a few timorous poses, ROSEMARY smiles more confidently, then boldly as QUINCE addresses the audience.)

QUINCE

The Times, The Mirror, The Guardian, and the BBC descended on Fennfield en masse. An hour before the siege, she erupted in hives and hot sweats so malodorous, I had to administer disinfectant and a large glass of whiskey.

(By the end of his speech, ROSEMARY is speaking in the past into a video camera while QUINCE and GINGER are seated in the parlor in the present, facing the audience, watching her on television. QUINCE thumb taps the remote control while GINGER seems distracted, her mood descending into gloom.)

QUINCE

I diligently taped Rosemary's interviews, and we stayed tethered to the telly. (*tapping the remote control*) Wait till you hear this. She's adopted a whole new tone to her voice: very cultured, even erudite, and she's managed to make poetry out of...

QUINCE

...plaster.

ROSEMARY

Plaster...

ROSEMARY

...is made from gypsum, a rock mineral found throughout the world, so you see, it's stone ground to powder then turned back to stone. My purpose is to sense which goddess wants to be revealed through the stone. Then my fingers follow her form and render her visible.

QUINCE

She's gone from pupil to pedant in a matter of days! And bless her for praising...

QUINCE

...the Greeks!

ROSEMARY

The Greeks:...

ROSEMARY

We owe them everything: science and philosophy, our constitutional government, and it was the Greeks who gave us theatre -- the great tragicals and comicals.

QUINCE

Ha! Here's where they ask why the goddesses and not the gods.

ROSEMARY

There's too many statues of men in the world, too many biceps, triceps and swords. We need more softness, more curves;...

QUINCE

More fat! More fun!

ROSEMARY

My mission is to carry the art of sculpture beyond the phallic order to the celestial planes of the female deities.

QUINCE

Everyone thinks she's loony -- a potty old pagan!

ROSEMARY

Women have lost their heroic idols, their sacred place in the world, but with these hands, these mortal hands, I'm bringing them back!

QUINCE

By god, she's convincing!

ROSEMARY

To hell with all theocracies of fear and oppression!

QUINCE

To hell with all warmongering gods!

ROSEMARY

The goddesses are regenerative, maternal and eternal, and if you stare long enough, if you dare to touch their tunics, they'll even...

QUINCE

...make you hot! Horny!

ROSEMARY

...persuade you.

QUINCE

Ha! They'll drive you bloody bonkers! Aren't you proud of your cousin? You were absolutely right! No one could play the part better, and her enthusiasm is undeniably genuine.

(ROSEMARY throws the crimson shawl out to Quince (as if through the television screen). QUINCE catches it, drapes the shawl on a chair, then turns to GINGER.)

QUINCE

Oh, for chrissake, Ginger, look at me! What's wrong? God, I hope you're not sulking.

GINGER

No, I'm just tired.

QUINCE

Is it Rosemary? Are you envious of all the attention she's getting?

GINGER

No, of course not. Why? Are you?

QUINCE

Oh, no, we're getting on well enough, but her appetite -- my god! She must weigh in at twenty stone. Was she always so voracious? I mean, as a child.

GINGER

She relished a good meal, if that's what you mean. Sweets were her favorite.

QUINCE

She downed six scones for breakfast -- slathered with butter.

GINGER

You're counting?

QUINCE

Three kippers, a four egg omelet, and pray god she doesn't break the bed. It's a genuine antique.

GINGER

You shouldn't have invited her here if you're only going to ridicule her.

QUINCE

It was Clovis who wanted her, and why not? She's a veritable polymath, and have you noticed? She's starting to smell like pears and plumeria. But imagine hauling those bazookas around all these years!

GINGER

Please, Quince, she can't help who she is. Besides, I thought you liked large breasted women. Clo told me so.

QUINCE

Large yes, but those could crush a man's skull! And the veins in her legs -- like pillars of gorgonzola.

GINGER

But you love gorgonzola! Look, we're all prisoners of our bodies. Why can't you accept her as she is?

QUINCE

I'm trying, really I am. As a matter of fact, when she waddled up stairs last night, I actually felt a pang of something, and it wasn't heartburn.

GINGER

I'm going to bed.

QUINCE

You don't suppose it was...pity?

GINGER

I'm feeling too wretched to suppose anything.

QUINCE

What do you mean? Are you ill?

GINGER

(wincing with pain) Oh, god...

QUINCE

What is it?

GINGER

Damn!

QUINCE
What?!

GINGER
I've got a cramp!

QUINCE
A cramp...?

GINGER
A deep wrenching pain, mostly in the left hand but it's spreading to the right. It began last Friday after I tried to -- nevermind...

QUINCE
What...? What did you try?

GINGER
Instead of finishing Persephone, I started on...Poseidon.

QUINCE
Poseidon?!

GINGER
He was coming along splendidly, but just as I was molding his...manhood, I felt a twinge, a cramping in my thumb.

QUINCE
Of course, you fool! Clovis and her goddesses don't want you sculpting the gods! You defied them and they're punishing you.

GINGER
You...? You don't really believe that?

QUINCE
I believe that the purpose of the hands is to create goddesses.

GINGER
But you don't believe in them -- I mean, they're not real entities.

QUINCE
How do you know? What do any of us know?

GINGER

We know they're ancient myths, characters in the epics of Homer, the plays of Sophocles.

QUINCE

But if you accept the mystery of the hands, don't you have to accept the possibility of other mysteries as well? Sometimes, when I was sculpting, I felt a beatific wave of bliss surround my entire body. I felt wise and radiant and blessed to be alive! I felt I might even have a...a soul.

GINGER

I'm surprised you didn't try to sell it.

QUINCE

Ha! Very funny! You still have your wits about you. Now give me your hand.

GINGER

What...?

QUINCE

I'll massage it. Which one is it?

GINGER

The left, but you're sure you won't try to...?

QUINCE

No, heavens, no.

(GINGER offers her hand to QUINCE who massages it as he speaks.)

QUINCE

So have you tried going back to Persephone? I already have a buyer.

GINGER

No matter what I do, I'm in agony. I can hardly button my blouse.

QUINCE

Let's call your doctor. See him tomorrow, and if you're no better in a week, then give the hands back to me.

GINGER

Oh, you'd love that wouldn't you?

QUINCE

Well,...yes.

GINGER

(pulling back her hand) You haven't...? You haven't poisoned me?

QUINCE

Good heavens, no! Never! I'm unscrupulous, but I wouldn't jeopardize your health.
(recovering Ginger's hand) After all, your hands are dependent on your entire well being, and besides, we have dozens of orders to fill.

GINGER

But what if they can't be given back or what if I've ruined them altogether? *(standing up, turning away)* Oh, damn! Damn Clovis!

QUINCE

Clovis...?

GINGER

For dying, then giving you her hands! And damn you for squandering them on me!

QUINCE

Oh, Ginger, my dear girl, I haven't squandered them. You've created the most exquisite Europas and Fortunas ever made, and everyone loves the Muses, especially Urania. My God, you've done wonders, and the whole world's richer for it.

GINGER

I just can't go back to being a barrister; I love being an artist. Why would anyone want to be anything else?

QUINCE

Because they're scrambling just to survive, and the rest sell out to wealth and celebrity or sit comatose in front of their screens. They're so bombarded with images, they've killed their capacity to create new ones. Well, I for one crave a deeper level of existence that only the muse provides, and since the muse speaks through you, dear Ginger, you really must get well.

GINGER

Thank you, Quince, that's the nicest thing you've ever said. You even called me "dear".

QUINCE

Whatever possessed you to sculpt Poseidon in the first place?

GINGER

I wanted to give him your face.

(GINGER departs as QUINCE turns towards the audience.)

QUINCE

Naturally, I was hoping to reclaim the hands, and then it would be Ginger's turn to mind the shop. As for Rosemary: she'd been living at Fennfield a month, in Clovis's old room, so they shared the same linens. Their heads rested on the same downy pillows, filled with the same downy dreams.

(QUINCE grasps the crimson cloth from the chair and throws it over a table as GINGER and ROSEMARY enter. Rosemary's hair is beautifully coifed; her complexion luminous; her clothing luxuriant. SHE adorns the table with a decanter of brandy and snifters.)

QUINCE

That night, after Rosemary served the coq au vin, truffle risotto, and ambrosia pudding, she asked Ginger to...

QUINCE

...teach.

ROSEMARY

Teach...

ROSEMARY

...me, show me what you know. If I learn to sculpt for myself, I can experience what it's really like. I thought I'd start with Eurydice, a Thracian nymph who died of snake bite.

GINGER

I'd be happy to oblige, but I seem to be getting a touch of arthritis so I won't be working tomorrow. In fact, I'm going to the doctor.

ROSEMARY

Oh, dear.

GINGER

As soon as I'm better, I'll demonstrate the fundamentals. Of course, you can always ask Quince. He knows all about sculpting.

QUINCE

You realize you can't study any field that strikes your fancy and become proficient overnight.

ROSEMARY

Ginger has.

QUINCE

Nonsense! It's taken months and she obviously has innate talent. Being a sculptor is a lifelong dedication, almost a religious calling. One becomes an aesthete.

ROSEMARY

But aren't we already aesthetes? -- the three of us striving in the eternal Kingdom of Art.

QUINCE

Sculpting is strenuous, arduous labor, and while composition can be taught, originality cannot. First, you'd need to master the proper tools, starting with your own -- oh, dear...

ROSEMARY

My own what?

QUINCE

Hands. And frankly,...well, look at them.

GINGER

What's wrong with her hands?

ROSEMARY

Everything. They're pudgy muffin mitts.

GINGER

Ah, but they've turned the pages of the world's great classics.

ROSEMARY

They've also stacked shelves, punched keys, kneaded dough. (*staring at Ginger*) And like all hands, they've longed to hold other hands, but now they long to shape plaster into goddesses.

QUINCE

But my dear Rosemary, why waste your time? Isn't it enough to bask in their glory? Week after week the gallery's mobbed, people waiting in queues for hours just to stand in their presence. Isn't it enough to bear witness, to marvel at the effect the goddesses are having?

ROSEMARY

No,...no, it isn't.

QUINCE

But don't you feel part of some bold purpose? Some splendid destiny?

ROSEMARY

Yes, but I want to be a larger part. I need to know what Clovis knew, to feel what Clovis felt. Oh, Quince, haven't you ever dreamed of being an artist? I mean, for years you've been running Shallots Gallery, and you display the work so tastefully, but haven't you ever aspired to...to create it?

GINGER

If only you knew...

(Pause as QUINCE sighs, turning away.)

ROSEMARY

Oh, dear, I...I am sorry, Quince. Please forgive me, I...I didn't mean to...offend. It's just that sometimes when I stare at Pandora, at her box with hope inside, I want to open that box because my hope is that before I die, I'll create just one beautiful object -- a sculpture or a painting or a poem.

GINGER

(wincing with pain) Pass the brandy.

(QUINCE pours more brandy.)

ROSEMARY

Look at Pandora: every atom in her sings! If only we could hear. *(pause)* When we were girls, Clovis and I joined a coven.

GINGER

I stopped believing in god years ago, so how can I possibly start believing in goddesses?

QUINCE

How can you not?

GINGER

The Mintons tend to be Anglicans or heretics like me. I always thought we simply aged, expired, then dropped into the void. I certainly didn't believe in miracles -- until Clovis died and did the dirty deed.

QUINCE

Careful, Ginger...

GINGER

Clo gave us irrefutable proof that miracles exist!

QUINCE

Ginger...

GINGER

Oh, let's tell her! Maybe if I give them to Rosie, they won't hurt so damn much.

QUINCE

Don't be daft!

GINGER

You've already had them, and isn't she ideal? *(To Rosemary)* Listen, if you ever longed to hold my hands, come hold them now.

QUINCE

Shut up!

GINGER

(overlapping Quince) Then you'll see what Clovis gave to Quince, and Quince gave to me.

QUINCE

Shut up! This instant!

GINGER

Will you take my hands?!

QUINCE

I told you to stop!!

ROSEMARY

(moving to clasp Ginger's hands) I don't understand...

GINGER

Now say "Yes!" Say, "Yes, I'll take your hands!"

QUINCE

Noooooooooo!!!

(QUINCE thrusts his own hands between GINGER and ROSEMARY, breaking them apart!)

QUINCE

You damn fool! You can't give them to that cow!!!

GINGER

Why not?! At least "that cow" deserves them! You heard her: she loves the goddesses; she *wants* to be a sculptor! Clovis would want her to have them!

QUINCE

Bollocks! Clovis wouldn't risk her gift on...well, *look* at her! She's bound to have a strained back, a weak heart, and a tumble down the steps and she's an invalid for life! It takes stamina to sculpt and she's simply not fit!

ROSEMARY

How dare you! I'm as fit as you!

QUINCE

Oh, bugger off!

GINGER

Damn you, Quince!

(QUINCE tosses brandy into GINGER's face!)

QUINCE

Damn yourself! If you're going to throw your life away, at least wait till you're sober!

GINGER

You bastard!

ROSEMARY

Oh, Ginny, are you all right?!

QUINCE

Please leave us!

ROSEMARY

(Handing Ginger a napkin) Here.

QUINCE

I said leave! Now!

ROSEMARY

I won't let you hurt her!

QUINCE

I won't! I promise! Now gooooo!

ROSEMARY

I...I don't understand...

QUINCE

For chrissake, woman! *(to Ginger)* Tell her to leave us alone!

GINGER

Go Rosie, leave us...

(After ROSEMARY leaves, QUINCE whispers.)

QUINCE

Have you lost your bloody mind?!

GINGER

You hurt her feelings. I thought you'd changed your attitude. *(pause)* God, why don't I hate you? You haven't an ounce of humanity, never mind humility.

QUINCE

Humility is not a virtue, especially for an artist -- which is another reason Rosemary's a poor choice. Despite her bravura performance, she's been humbled, and a woman who's been humbled tends to settle for less.

GINGER

The way Clovis settled for you?

QUINCE

Ha! Touché!

GINGER

(pause) Picasso said, "Art is the child of suffering." Why would Clovis give her child to a man like you?

QUINCE

Vengeance! She was teaching me a lesson, teaching me to appreciate her by becoming her.

GINGER

You never became her. You're a man, a man sculpting goddesses who were crushed and replaced by gods. The goddesses belong to women.

QUINCE

Codswallop! They belong to all of us! To the whole of civilization! I loathe the mentality that claims the art of Africa belongs only to Africans, the music of Cuba to the Cubans. All art travels across all boundaries and it's the cultural heritage of everyone living! Everyone!

GINGER

Fine, I agree. *(pause)* You know, you're quite dashing on your soap box.

QUINCE

Oh, for chrissake...

GINGER

I still say it's high time the goddesses were sculpted by one of their own! Besides, yours were becoming monstrosities.

QUINCE

They were not!

GINGER

You said so yourself.

QUINCE

At least they weren't on steroids!

GINGER

They're still beautiful.

QUINCE

Which is why you mustn't give up on yourself! Remember, the hands embody a great gift. You can't be passing them about willy-nilly like a beach ball.

GINGER

I want Rosie to have them.

QUINCE

Ah, but what Rosie wants is you!

GINGER

She'll have to settle for the hands.

QUINCE

You'll feel differently tomorrow, trust me. In fact, I've decided to close Shallots, cancel my appointments, and nurse you back to health!

(GINGER is touched and embraces QUINCE.)

GINGER

Good night, sweet Quince.

QUINCE

Now off to bed!

(GINGER departs as QUINCE speaks.)

QUINCE

Curious that I didn't insist she return the hands right then and there. But after years of running a gallery, I know that genius without fortitude can wither on the vine, and I'd been feeling liverish of late. I suppose I drink too much -- which is why I forgot that Rosemary's room sits just above the parlor. By morning I was in desperate need of a potent cup of...

QUINCE

...coffee.

ROSEMARY

Coffee?

(ROSEMARY enters dressed in a robe, more radiant than ever. SHE carries a pot of coffee and a plate of scones.)

QUINCE

Good morning, my dear Rosemary. You're looking quite ravishing. Obviously, you're feeling better than I. (*selecting a scone*) Oh, I do love your scones. The very best in England if I say so myself. (*pause*) By the by, I'm sorry I was such a brute last night.

ROSEMARY

I'm well aware of your scorn for me.

QUINCE

My outburst was inexcusable, and I do hope you'll forgive me.

ROSEMARY

You think I'm a gluttonous voluptuary, and you see it as a weakness, but I take great pleasure in dining, and to deny myself the tastes and textures the Earth has to offer is to deny life itself.

QUINCE

Are you hungry now? Would you like a scone?

ROSEMARY

I'm always hungry. Every woman I know is hungry -- for scones, chocolates, and pastries filled to bursting with custards and creams, but no, no, mustn't touch. If the goddesses had endured, they'd want us to touch. They'd delight in watching us revel in their bounty. They wouldn't approve of women torturing themselves with deprivation or cycling away their lives, wasting their talents.

QUINCE

But aren't the goddesses the very image of perfection you disdain?

ROSEMARY

Yes, and they're hungry too.

QUINCE

Are they?

ROSEMARY

Famished! For freedom, power, and respect, and if I were sculpting them, they'd be larger, rounder, and appreciated for being themselves.

QUINCE

Good! And I'm learning to appreciate you. It's strange, but I feel I'm seeing you with new eyes. It's not just your intellect that shines, but your hair glimmers like Florentine gold. In fact, you remind me of a goddess yourself.

ROSEMARY

Which one? There's so many.

QUINCE

Whichever one you wish.

ROSEMARY

(pause) Demeter, goddess of marriage and fertility. All through childhood, I envied girls who were attracted to me and destined to have children.

QUINCE

Then you shouldn't be Demeter.

ROSEMARY

Later, at university, I learned the treachery and rage of Medea.

QUINCE

Medea's not a goddess; she's a sorceress.

ROSEMARY

Then I'm Electra whose mother betrayed her.

QUINCE

She's not a goddess either!

ROSEMARY

No, she's a fictional fantasy -- just like me.

QUINCE

So tell me, have you ever known the pleasures of Aphrodite?

ROSEMARY

Only in my dreams.

QUINCE

(pause) You know, you really have the most glowing complexion, and your eyes are such a brilliant blue. I keep wondering how I've missed seeing you all these months?

ROSEMARY

Perhaps dealing in sculptures has made you forget that you're as warm blooded as the rest of us.

QUINCE

Am I? Then please, Rosemary, forgive me, and let's try to be friends. If there's anything I can do to atone for my callousness, please let me know.

ROSEMARY

Do you really mean that?

QUINCE

I'll do anything you ask, anything.

ROSEMARY

Then please, Quince, let Ginger give me the hands.

(Pause as QUINCE slowly backs away.)

ROSEMARY

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you. At first I didn't understand, but I do now.

QUINCE

Understand what?

ROSEMARY

The hands were meant for me. *(pause)* In these vintage houses, heat rises but so do sounds. Your voices carried to my room.

QUINCE

Ah. Then you heard...?

ROSEMARY

Every word.

QUINCE

And you *believed* us?!

ROSEMARY

All I want in the world are those hands.

QUINCE

(pause) I'm sorry, but Ginger isn't ready to part with them just yet.

ROSEMARY

She was last night.

QUINCE

She was soused, and if she does give them up, she'll return them to me.

ROSEMARY

But I'm certain they were intended for me. *(retrieving a note from her pocket)* Look, Clovis wrote this letter, urging me to visit.

(Pause as QUINCE reads the letter.)

ROSEMARY

If only I'd come. Even you admit that I encouraged her more than anyone.

QUINCE

But why would she give them to someone too poor to employ them? How were you going to sculpt in that hovel? Were you going to mold puddings and carve cakes? Besides, why would Clovis give the hands to you and not, for instance, to Ginger or to me? In fact, she did give them to me -- because she knew I could afford to produce and market them indefinitely.

ROSEMARY

It's true that you and Ginger have every material advantage, but Clovis knew I'd be resourceful. In any case, it doesn't matter what you or anyone thinks. Clovis knows what she wants and she'll get it one way or the other.

QUINCE

Ha! How would you know what Clovis wants?

ROSEMARY

(pause) After you and Ginger fell asleep, I went to the kitchen for some cocoa, and when I passed Pandora -- I don't know why really, but I...I kissed her -- just as you did. In that instant, Clovis appeared and kissed me back. Then later, in bed, I thought of your own vision, and how Ginger pleaded with me to live here, as if there was something compelling her to...to summon me. Don't you see? It was Clovis who needed me here. Her hands have been seeking me all along!

QUINCE

Ha! That's preposterous!

ROSEMARY

Oh, please, Quince, tell me what her last hours were like. Are you certain she didn't mention me?

QUINCE

No! She was drugged and wasted to the bone. She was only conscious a few moments, and all she could do was flail about. In fact, she knocked over her water glass and a pot full of... Oh, dear...

ROSEMARY

What...? What was it?!

QUINCE

Rosemary. She loved herbs, and the gardener had brought her a miniature bush in a pot with a bow.

ROSEMARY

That's it! Don't you see? She was telling you to find Rosemary! It can't be a coincidence.

QUINCE

Of course it can! Besides, she could still speak. If she wanted you, she would have spoken your... Oh, dear.

ROSEMARY

What...?

QUINCE

Well, come to think of it, she did say "Rosemary," but I assumed she was referring to the plant.

ROSEMARY

She meant me!

(GINGER enters, trembling and disheveled.)

QUINCE

Ginger...?!

GINGER

My whole arm's gone numb. I...I can scarcely breathe.

QUINCE

I'm driving you straight to hospital!

ROSEMARY

Oh, Ginny, my poor darling.

QUINCE

Don't move! I'll get our coats!

(QUINCE exits as ROSEMARY approaches GINGER.)

ROSEMARY

Before you leave, I want the hands.

GINGER

Sorry.

ROSEMARY

Please, you must give them to me now! Hurry before Quince returns. If you won't, I'll have to take them.

GINGER

You can't take them; they have to be given, and I...I'm not ready.

ROSEMARY

But I am!

(ROSEMARY forcefully grasps GINGER'S hands.)

ROSEMARY

Yes, I'll *take* the hands!! I'll take them now!

(The haunting melody is heard as GINGER howls in agony.)

GINGER

Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!

(GINGER draws back, freeing her hands as QUINCE dashes in with their coats.)

QUINCE

My god! What's happened?!

(GINGER lifts her fists as ROSEMARY stands dazed and delighted, beholding her splayed fingers.)

ROSEMARY

I...I can already feel them. Look, they're...they're trembling.

QUINCE

You...you *gave* them to her?!

(GINGER shakes her head, suppressing sobs.)

QUINCE

She...she stole them!? *(to Rosemary)* Snatched them like a bloody thief?!

ROSEMARY

What choice did I have?!

QUINCE

Look at me, you damn harpy! You're not to leave Fennfield! If you try to escape, I'll find you! I'll track you down to the ends of the earth! Come on, Ginger, let's go!

(QUINCE and GINGER depart. Music is heard as ROSEMARY'S hands quiver with life, and a female figure appears. ROSEMARY scoops the crimson fabric from the table, swirling it around the figure. Soon the lighting alters, and GINGER returns with her arm in a sling, followed by QUINCE who whispers.)

QUINCE

Four hours later we returned, slipping through the back door to spy on Rosemary who was so absorbed she didn't sense our presence.

GINGER

(whispering) My god, she's sculpting Persephone in her own image. She's putting more flesh on her bones, and look at her cheeks bulging with seeds she'll spew upon the earth. *(she sighs)* Isn't she marvelous?

QUINCE

No, she is not! I've been peddling slim trim goddesses. Who's going to want them jumbo sized?

GINGER

Everyone! Look how she's molding the drape of the tunic.

QUINCE

Shhh! Lower your voice!

GINGER

You're jealous.

QUINCE

I am not!

GINGER

It's odd, Quince, now that I'm my old self, I like you more than ever.

QUINCE

There's good news.

GINGER

But I'm strangely attracted to Rosie as well. When she grabbed hold of my hands I felt pain, yes, but I was also...well, aroused. In fact, I don't think I've ever felt this drawn to a woman.

QUINCE

Well, you can't have her!

GINGER

Why not? You don't want her; *I'm* the one she loves.

QUINCE

If she loves you so much, why'd she steal your bloody hands?!

(ROSEMARY turns with a gasp.)

ROSEMARY

Oh, you startled me! (*to Ginger*) Are you all right?

GINGER

Much better, thanks.

QUINCE

You've certainly put some pounds on Persephone.

GINGER

She's sublime!

ROSEMARY

Oh, Ginger, I...I hope you'll forgive me. It's the most marvelous gift in the world.
(*gazing at her hands*) From the first moment, it was as if I'd broken through some sort
of membrane, and now I...I feel...

GINGER

What...? What do you feel?

ROSEMARY

The strength of Artemis, the wisdom of Athena, and the joy -- oh, the joy! -- of Eos,
Goddess of Dawn and Mother of the Wind!

QUINCE

Well, don't blow away just yet, because before I consign my soul to the shop, I will *take*
the hands!!!

(QUINCE seizes Rosemary's hands, pulling her arms,
spinning her in circles!)

ROSEMARY

(screaming) Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!

QUINCE

(overlapping) Yes! I will take the hands! I will! I will! They're mine! Mine! Miiiiine!!!

ROSEMARY

Let go! Let go! You're hurting me!

GINGER

For godssake! Stop it!

GINGER

Release her this instant!!

(QUINCE releases ROSEMARY as GINGER moves to comfort her. Pause as QUINCE attempts to flutter his fingers.)

QUINCE

No, oh, nooooooooo.... *(to Ginger)* She stole them, so why can't I?!

ROSEMARY

Sorry, Quince, but the person they were intended for finally has them, and I'll *never* let them go!

QUINCE

A pity they can't be shared...

ROSEMARY

You've had them long enough. For three thousand years men have had the freedom to create! Now it's *our* turn!!

QUINCE

Well, you can't create here! Leave this house!

GINGER

You don't mean that.

QUINCE

You too! And take that bloody Pandora with you!

ROSEMARY

But I...I was hoping to stay and work at Fennfield.

QUINCE

Impossible!

GINGER

Come now, Quince, don't you want the hands in close proximity?

ROSEMARY

And won't you miss my cooking?

QUINCE

No!

GINGER

Won't you miss my flirting?

QUINCE

I will not!

GINGER

We'll miss you, won't we, Rosie?

ROSEMARY

Not really.

QUINCE

(turning to leave) You have one week to find new lodgings!

ROSEMARY

Wait, Quince, before you leave, I...I was wondering...

QUINCE

What?!

ROSEMARY

(slowly, gazing at her hands) When we have Clovis's hands, do we clip our nails or hers? Do we walk and talk and butter our biscuits as Clovis?

QUINCE

Except for acquiring talent, we remain essentially ourselves.

ROSEMARY

I don't think so.

GINGER

Neither do I.

ROSEMARY

I think Clovis affects us; I think she makes us feel things we never felt before.

QUINCE

What things?

ROSEMARY

Gratitude and...affection -- even for you.

GINGER

Apparently it comes with the hands, because he certainly doesn't deserve it. Really, I think it would serve him right if we left.

ROSEMARY

But where would we go?

GINGER

I still have my flat, and we could start our own gallery. We'll call it "The Clovis Minton Gallery." I'll manage it; you'll furnish it.

QUINCE

You can't compete with Shallots!

GINGER

Why not?

ROSEMARY

Yes, why not?

QUINCE

Because you're obligated to me; I'm the one who made the goddesses famous!

GINGER

But Rosie's *making* the goddesses!

QUINCE

You're blackmailing me: if I don't let you stay, you'll go off on your own.

GINGER

What choice do we have?

QUINCE
 You can leave the country!

ROSEMARY
 England is our home.

QUINCE
 Then you can...

GINGER
 What?

QUINCE
(pause) Oh, Christ, you can...stay. Damn!

ROSEMARY
(to Ginger) I don't think we should stay if we're not wanted.

GINGER
 Good point. We're not beggars, you know.

QUINCE
 All right, you're...you're welcome to...to remain at Fennfield.

(GINGER and ROSEMARY look dubious.)

QUINCE
 I really *want* you to...to stay. *(pause)* Please, don't...don't leave me.

ROSEMARY
 Oh, Quince.

GINGER
 My dear fellow.

(Music fades in as GINGER and ROSEMARY approach QUINCE and grasp his hands.)

QUINCE
 Oh, oh, dear...

(QUINCE near tears, recovers his composure.)

QUINCE

So here we are at Fennfield. Ginger's flirtation with Rosie was fleeting. It seems she still wants me, and Rosie wants Ginger, and guess who wants Rosie? Oh, yes, I've gone quite mad with love for Rosie. Her talent is burning straight through and around her, and when she lets me hold her, my heart swells with longing. I even forget my schemes to reclaim the hands, though Ginger believes there's remnants of talent still left in us, so I've taken to dabbling in water colors while she landscapes the gardens, and we both watch in wonder as Rosie changes the world with her gift.

(The music swells as QUINCE and GINGER freeze, and lights reveal ROSEMARY winding the crimson cloth around a female form.)

End of Play