

GEORGE SPIRO

KING OF DIAMONDS

Translated from the Hungarian by Andrew Bock

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CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Black Fairy
Karo
Second Lieutenant - Jacob
Queen - Old Lady
Bishop - Pal
Sage - Louse
Guard
Jailer
Henchman
Grunt
Flirt
Souse

ACT ONE

Center stage stands a huge archway, behind it a black curtain. Upstage, a shovel is standing upright in some dirt. KARO is laying down in front of the archway, sleeping. Enter BLACK FAIRY.

King Karo stands and salutes

The great king steps out and cries out:

My soldiers, where are you?

King Karo our noble king,
We search but can not find you
Salute!
We search but can not find our
Noble king
And to their deaths they march

To their deaths they march

King Karo, the mighty king
Stands and salutes,
Stands and salutes,
And searches in vain, all in vain,

Searches for his soldiers.

Enter SECOND LIEUTENANT [SL]. Exit BLACK FAIRY.

SL: Your Majesty, oh my King, wake up!

KARO: *(Wakes up.)* What? What is it?

SL: Your Majesty has fallen asleep.

KARO: I fell asleep?

SL: Yes, Your Majesty.

KARO: Who are you talking to?

SL: To none other but yourself, Your Majesty.

KARO: Why are you calling me „Your Majesty“?

SL: Because that's what you are. Majesty. You are our king.

KARO: You've got me confused with somebody else. Who are you?

SL: Your Majesty's second lieutenant, tutor, body guard, mentor, and man servant, all in one.

KARO: How nice. But there's been some kind of a mistake here. I might have fallen asleep, but not here. This isn't even an apartment building! There are no stairs here, no crumbling plaster everywhere, no dark, depressing rooms, people scratching and crawling over each other.

SL: This is the palace, Your Majesty. You must have had a frightful nightmare.

KARO: I'm dreaming now.

SL: No, Your Majesty. This is reality, and it is far more depressing than your dream.

KARO: I must have lost my memory. Where am I? What year is this? Who am I?

SL: Your Majesty's confusion is perfectly understandable. Too many horrifying events have occurred recently. Allow me to recall them for you: we live in a time burdened by strife, and at any moment all of us might die. The government is in chaos, the opposition is plotting with the enemy to stage a coup, and any second now the ceiling might fall on our heads. As we speak Your Majesty's father is being laid to rest. Here comes the coffin now.

The curtain behind the archway parts, an open coffin is brought out, with QUEEN, BISHOP, and SAGE walking behind.

KARO: *(Jumps to the coffin.)* This is my father?

SL: In person, Your Majesty. The once great king.

KARO: He looks terrible.

SL: Death's doings, Your Majesty. On other occasions he often looked better.

QUEEN erupts sobbing.

KARO: Who is she?

SL: Your Majesty's mother.

QUEEN: We are orphans, my son, orphans!

The coffin is set down next to the shovel.

KARO: Now what?

SL: They're going to lower the coffin into the earth.

KARO: What should I do?

SL: Mourn, Your Majesty.

BISHOP prays. The others sing a psalm. The coffin is lowered into a trap-door. QUEEN weeps.

KARO: Who's that?

SL: Shhh! The Bishop. Leader of the opposition.

KARO: Then why is he mourning?

SL: Ulterior political motives.

KARO: God, that's terrible.

SL: Your Majesty mustn't show it.

KARO: Why not?

SL: Ulterior political motives.
They shovel dirt onto the coffin. A throne is brought out from the black curtain behind the archway. BISHOP prays.

SL: Please, Your Majesty, ascend to your rightful place on the throne. We will crown you before the coup erupts.

KARO: But I don't want to be king! I have things to do! I can't remember what those things are right now, but I know I wasn't born to be some king!

BISHOP: Your Majesty doesn't wish to be king?

KARO: No!

SL: Oh, yes you do! You are in mourning. It's caused you to speak in this manner. Think of us, Your Majesty, and all of our hope that rests in you. What awaits us if you will not protect us?

KARO: Protect yourselves.

SL: Your Highness, my king!...

BISHOP: He's only the heir to the throne!

SL: Your Majesty! We, gathered here, we love you, and we are begging you to return this love! Be our king!

KARO: Oh, all right. I'll do for love.
BISHOP murmurs incomprehensible words, the crown is thrust into his hands, he continues to murmur.

SL: Put it on his head!

BISHOP: After I administer the rites!
He continues to murmur. The people grumble.

SL: Hurry up!

BISHOP: In a second. (*Murmurs.*)
QUEEN faints. The people grumble. SL grabs the crown out of BISHOP's hands, and places it on KARO's head.

ALL: Love live King Karo! Long live King Karo!

KARO: Who?

ALL: King Karo!

SL: May you live long, Your Majesty, my king.

KARO: So I have a name, too. Strange. Seems like I had a different name until now, but I can't remember it. But then again who cares, really? This'll do.

Armed men burst on stage from behind the archway. SL tears KARO away from the throne, and hides him behind the curtain. A fight breaks out, and all exit except for QUEEN, still fainted. SL and KARO creep back on stage.

KARO: What was that?

SL: The usual palace revolution. It always happens before, during and after a coronation.

KARO: Did we win?

SL: We'll know soon enough.

Sounds are heard again. SL and KARO hide behind the curtain. Enter GUARD, JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT, collectively called „GUARDS“.

GUARDS: King Karo! King Karo! Where are you, King Karo?

KARO: They're looking for me.

SL: Shhh! Only to assassinate you, Your Majesty.

KARO: But why?

SL: It's custom here.

GUARDS: Your Majesty, we've won, show yourself!

KARO: I'm going out there.

SL: Not yet, Your Majesty! It's just a ploy!

GUARDS: King Karo, where are you?

KARO: *(Jumps out.)* Here I am!

GUARD, JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT throw themselves at his feet.

KARO: You can come out now!

SL does not come out.

GUARD: Who are you talking to, Your Majesty?

KARO: Some second lieutenant who hid me.

GUARDS drag SL (shaking) out from behind the curtain.

GUARD: Is this the one?

KARO: That's him.

GUARD: Traitor! He's the leader of the rebellion!

KARO: He saved my life!

SL: My king, beseech them to spare my head!

KARO: Why should I beseech? You're my friend.

GUARD: It only seems that way: for an ulterior motive, politically.

KARO: Really, him too? I wouldn't have believed it. Take him away.

SL: If it pleases Your Majesty, banish me to a place far from here, but spare my head!

KARO: Then you really are a traitor?

SL: Of course not, Your Majesty, but once called a traitor by the people standing before you, even I'll believe it soon.

GUARD: You're still denying it, rebel? Your Majesty shouldn't believe a word he says.

KARO: But he saved my life!

SL: If only I hadn't! Now you will truly hate me!

GUARD: Right before the coronation began he switched Your Majesty with someone else. While Your Majesty was asleep he smuggled that other guy into Your Majesty's bed. But we took care of that guy!

KARO: Where is that guy now?

GUARD: Acch! Once we take care of someone, they've been taken care of.

KARO: *(To SL:)* Is this the truth?

SL: Godforsaken lies.

KARO: I don't understand any of this. Am I the king, or am I not the king? Where are all the kings today? This is the twentieth century, after all, isn't it?! Or maybe not? What century is this?

GUARD: What century?

KARO: Century. The century.

GUARD: I don't know... do you?

JAILER: Seventeenth.

HENCHMAN: Twenty-fourth.

GRUNT: Ninth.

GUARD: Ain't it all the same, Your Majesty?

KARO: All the same? Where do we live? What is the name of this country?

GUARD: Never-Never Land.

JAILER: Hungary.

HENCHMAN: China.

GRUNT: Kuala Lampur.

GUARD: Who cares. We're a superpower, and Your Majesty is our ruler.

ALL: Long live the King!

KARO: Please leave now. And leave him in peace, he's my friend.

GUARD: That won't do it.

KARO: He's Keeper of the Privy Seal.

GUARD: He's Your Majesty's enemy!

KARO: All the more reason. I am beginning my rule by forging an alliance with my enemies.

GUARD: Oh wise king, great king!

ALL: Long live the king!

Exit GUARDS.

SL: Thank you, Your Majesty!

He kisses KARO's feet.

KARO: Well! That isn't very becoming of the Keeper of the Privy Seal. Do we have a seal?

SL: We will, my king, we will, simply say the word!

QUEEN regains consciousness, sniffing.

KARO: Well, it's my mother.

QUEEN: My little boy, my dear little boy, let me kiss you.

KARO: Does she have to?

SL: It is appropriate in this situation.

QUEEN kisses his forehead.

QUEEN: Your poor father, if he were alive... how happy he would be to see you wearing the crown!

SL: He wouldn't be happy at all.

QUEEN: That doesn't matter, I'm going to rule in your name anyhow. Now go to your room, and start studying! You'll stay my itsi pitsi little boy forever!

KARO: What?

QUEEN: I said, get to your room!

She sits down on the throne, claps, enter GUARDS. They grab KARO, and enclose him in a circle of prison bars. BISHOP and SAGE watch the event with smiles on their faces. Enter SCHOLAR with a pile of books. He steps into the circle of bars.

KARO: I object!

QUEEN cackles hideously.

SL: I'm powerless to help you, Your Majesty, but I'll do my best to slip a file into one of the textbooks. *(Exits.)*

The QUEEN, still sitting on the throne is exited behind the upstage curtain. KARO and SCHOLAR remain alone on the stage.

SCHOLAR: ...And thus, Your Majesty's father, or, rather, King Karo the Great, seventh in the royal lineage, signed a pact of nonaggression with the Keltums, and then, without a declaration of war, first vanquished the Tushlaks with whom a peace settlement had earlier been

reached, then with their help occupied the capitol of the Keltums, Hamdarat.

KARO: Hamdarat?

SCHOLAR: That is correct. Thus the route was established to the Far-South's bountiful quarries of Pishman.

KARO: Pishman?

SCHOLAR: That is correct. Whereupon our trade deficit, inherited from our predecessors over the centuries, was successfully eliminated. And thus, we were able to obtain the street light monopoly.

KARO: Thank God! (*Rattles the bars.*)

SCHOLAR: I am extremely pleased to see that Your Majesty, at the first taste of such tutelage, shows such interest in the material before him. Shall I repeat the history lesson?

KARO: (*Continuing to rattle the bars.*) Don't you dare!

SCHOLAR: I shall then turn to astrophysics. As I mentioned last time, within the core of the pulsating black asteroids a tremendous energy is created in the quantum, not unlike the mechanism found in slacked-lime bombs... Your Majesty fails to pay attention once again. What bids so strongly for Your Majesty's attention?

KARO: I'm testing my resolve.

SCHOLAR: I'm begging you, Your Majesty, any moment now the Queen will come in with those old men, and if Your Majesty fails the exam I'll lose my job! What am I saying? I'll lose my head!

KARO: (*Stops rattling the bars.*) Okay, Okay, I'm paying attention.

SCHOLAR: ...The detonation of one slack-lime bomb would generate the heat of all the carbide, halogen, and gene bombs detonated during all of the world wars combined. If, for example, such a bomb were detonated over the palace, absolutely everything in the equator's diameter would evaporate... Here they come.

QUEEN, BISHOP, SAGE enter from behind the archway and step behind the bars.

SCHOLAR: A most great honor. (*Bows down to the floor.*) My pupil is prepared for the examination. (*Collapses.*)

QUEEN: What's wrong with him?

KARO: Just a case of stage fright. (*Shakes SCHOLAR.*) Go ahead - ask away.

SAGE: And what should we ask, my son?

KARO: It doesn't matter. Just pick a book, give me a page and a paragraph, and then pay attention.

SAGE: I see. (*To SCHOLAR.*) May we proceed?

SCHOLAR makes a sign of acquiescence, rubs his neck.

KARO: If I can't answer you're going to hang him?

BISHOP: We will have no other choice. *(Picks up a book.)* Goethe. Faust. *(Opens it.)* Fifty-sixth page, tenth line, „Mephisto...”

KARO: Mephisto: This golden-green earth shall never be yours! Faust: Doubt, off with thee! Oh! My heart has been rent, in my eyes the centuries speed in untold unearthly struggle! Upwards, upwards, and again upwards, forever upwards!

Brief silence.

SAGE: You must love that work very dearly, my son.

KARO: It bores me to tears. It's so... judicious and lofty.

SAGE: *(Picks up a book.)* Dante.

KARO: That's better.

SAGE: Paradiso, twenty-third canto, eighty-seventh and eighty-eighth tercet...

KARO: Where well-rehearsed sinful measures tear asunder both self and other therein lies the path to the Lord and soon we greet our deaths this return, our goal, our work, and amongst them not one corpse shall despair

QUEEN: *(Grabs a book.)* Hegel. Ethics. Volume eight. Page 477, third paragraph from the bottom.

KARO: The episodic life-hierarchy devours itself. The insurmountable totality cause-creating Nothing, therefore, once brought into being simultaneously severs its own illusionary realm by virtue of the qualitative leap, begetting a greater, more perfect totality: the Intent-Nothing.

Long pause.

SCHOLAR: My student!

KARO: There. You going to let me out now?

BISHOP: I advise he remain in the cell. He's a dangerous element. He knows too much. I think it's better if he forgets it all.

QUEEN: I consent.

SCHOLAR: My student!

BISHOP: We had better hang this man. What would happen if he taught everybody everything?

QUEEN: I consent.

QUEEN motions, HENCHMAN and GRUNT drag SCHOLAR away.

KARO: Hey, where are you taking him? You're going to kill him anyway?

SCHOLAR: May the Lord be with you, my child! I die a happy man!
SCHOLAR disappears behind the archway.

KARO: This is unbelievable! What do you think you're doing?
QUEEN, BISHOP, SAGE walk out from between the bars.

BISHOP: I advise he be placed in solitary confinement, twenty meters under the ground.

QUEEN: Good. And yet, he is my son. Aren't you going to say anything?

SAGE: I'm thinking.

QUEEN: You're always just thinking.

SAGE: That's why I'm so sage.
QUEEN, SAGE, HENCHMAN, GRUNT take KARO stage right, and leave him standing alone. A narrow, vertical strip of light illuminates KARO.

KARO: Hey! Did I do something wrong? They should tell me outright. - One step to the left, one step to the right. There's not too much room here. God, it's so quiet! This is all just a nightmare. A bad dream to forget! I'm not here some slave to old people's orders, but where my potential awaits me with others beyond all borders. - I'm going to bite my finger. I'll wake up. I'll wake up. And I'll take everything again from the top. - I'm so thirsty! - Am I still alive? And if so why? - God, does my throat burn! Bastards will explain why when it's their turn... Great masters: how can we survive doing time? That's all the knowledge I'll need. No paradigm, theory, truth, law, means anything - nothing, nothing! - One step this way, one step that way. There's a lot of room here, it's roomy I'd say. Did they lock me up? No. They are the ones locked out! And the fools don't even realize it: I'm not the orphan here, just the opposite. - A crack. Let me look. A crack. I'll start with this nook. I must pay attention. I must work. I must create. I must make greater cracks in this walled up wretched state. - Hey! Footprints! Deep footprints! So others have stood here too. It looks like there were a quite a few! And now my fate has brought me to this spot. And others will follow me. Fantastic! I'm not alone, I'm not! Man, how should I say this... man, sooner or later, will evolve into something better and more noble. *(Faints.)*

GUARD: *(Shouts down from where the light emanates.)* King Karo! - He doesn't answer. He might be dead already. I'll climb down. *(A rope is dropped to KARO, GUARD climbs down. He resuscitates KARO quickly.)* He's alive! Throw another rope down! *(Another rope is lowered down.)* I'll put it 'round his neck, then you can pull. - Karo! Come on back to us!

KARO: I'm awake!

GUARD: That's right are! And up there the revolution's won! (*Voices are heard from above: Long live King Karo! Long live the King!*)

KARO: Damnit!

The stage fades to black, then immediately brightens. The ropes have disappeared. QUEEN, BISHOP, SAGE, SL, are bowed down to the ground in front of the curtain, next to the throne, greeting KARO, who is carried in the arms of GUARD.

KARO: You said the revolution was a success.

GUARD: That's right. We've won. Long live the king! (*Exits.*)

SL: Your Majesty. Please be seated on the throne.

KARO sits down, eyeing each of them grimly.

KARO: So the revolution was a success.

QUEEN: We went into battle in your name, dearest son.

BISHOP: And your bitter, heroic suffering gave us strength.

SAGE: And our aim was achieved: you have been set free.

SL: Once again we've defeated our enemies.

KARO: Really. And now I reign.

SL: You reign now.

KARO: I do as I please.

SL: That's right.

KARO: Then make the following announcement: the real Karo, who I've been switched with, will come forward and claim his rightful place on the throne.

Outcry.

BISHOP: Unheard of.

SAGE: This is a result of his internment. Solitary makes every one of them go mad, and then abdicate.

QUEEN: We must abolish solitary confinement.

SAGE: Precisely the opposite.

KARO: Am I reigning or am I not?

SL: You reign.

KARO: Okay. Then make the following announcement: I will continue to sit on the throne only for as long as the real Karo is still out there. Now go.

All exit except KARO. Enter FLIRT.

FLIRT: King Karo?

KARO: Yes?

FLIRT: I think you're cute. Don't give up the throne.

KARO: But I'm going to. Still, we could become better acquainted.

FLIRT: Oh, so that's what you think? If you step down they'll throw you into some factory, or some office, you'll work yourself to death, and bore yourself to death, you'll get ugly, get old, won't be able to carry out your manly duties, and I don't think I'd really want you like that.

KARO: I know what this is. Blackmail. Manipulation. You just like me because of - an ulterior political motive.

FLIRT: Don't even think that. Don't you think anyone here is for real?

KARO: No one.

FLIRT: Not even you?

KARO: As long as I'm the king, not even me.

FLIRT: I feel sorry for you, King Karo. It was my mistake to come here. Good-bye. *(Exits.)*

Enter QUEEN, BISHOP, SAGE, SL.

SL: We've carried out your word and a large crowd has now gathered in front of the palace.

KARO: Really?

BISHOP: Hundreds have come seeking the throne.

SAGE: As we predicted.

QUEEN: What do you mean hundreds? Thousands! And they're not coming here, they're barreling here like Huns! The entire empire is on its way!

KARO: Quit bitching, oh fertile mother. Let them in.

BISHOP: One at a time. Only.

GUARDS usher in the first throne-seeker, the SCHOLAR's character.

KARO: *(Jumps off the throne.)* My tutor! They didn't kill you after all?

SCHOLAR: Who is this?

SL: The king.

SCHOLAR: I am the king.

KARO: Don't you recognize me? Your student!

SCHOLAR: I've never laid eyes on you before in my life.

KARO: You hung him!

BISHOP: We most certainly did not.

KARO sits down again.

SL: What do you want from the king?

SCHOLAR: What do I want? Rather, what does this imposter want from me, the king? For when a mere baby I was switched in the nursery.

QUEEN: You?

KARO: This is your mother, kind sir.

SCHOLAR: Yes, I remember you, dearest mother.

QUEEN: I'm younger than you are!

SCHOLAR: You were always so timeless. I'm happy to see you looking so well.

SL: And where do you get the idea that you were switched with another baby while in the nursery?

SCHOLAR: I remember.

KARO: Throw him out.

GUARDS throw SCHOLAR out. Enter FLIRT.

KARO: What do you want now?

FLIRT: I'm the king.

KARO: You're a girl.

FLIRT: When I was switched in the nursery, they also switched my sex. Haven't you heard of a female king before?

KARO: Throw her out.

FLIRT: I thought you'd realize why I want to be king. So that I might have you beside me on the throne. But you're an imbecile. *(Exits.)*

Enter SOUSE.

KARO: How can I help you?

SOUSE: Well, I heard they were having tryouts for the king, n' we thought, the missus and me, we thought we'd come on out here. I've never tried something like this before.

KARO: What's your name?

SOUSE: Souse.

KARO: What's your occupation?

SOUSE: I'm poor.

KARO: He's not the one, either. Time to wake up, good man, you are not the king.

SOUSE: Got it. I'd always thought so. Nothing ever works out for me. *(Exits.)*

KARO: Are there many waiting outside?

GUARD: A couple hundred thousand.

KARO: I'll look them over.

The curtain is pulled back, and a blinding light sprays over the audience. KARO looks out over the audience.

KARO: Good God! I never knew there were so many lame, cankerous, blind, ulcerous, blistering, leprous, choleric, people out there!

GUARD: The seriously ill stayed at home.

KARO: What are they all doing here?

GUARD: All of them think that they are the king.

BISHOP: And there you are...Your Rashness planted the seeds of this fruit before us. And now who will assuage them?

KARO: I will.

He jumps behind the archway as though stepping onto a balcony, and begins orating in the upstage direction.

KARO: People! *(Laughter.)* People, please go home! *(Roar.)* Not one of you is the real king. *(Uproar.)* I will attend to your needs! Everyone will be happy, healthy, and rich!

Voices: „Death to the imposter! Down with the usurper of the throne!” Stone are thrown in, KARO jumps back from behind the archway, the curtain closes.

SL: Is that what you were looking for?

KARO: Yes, it was. I’ve decided that until the real king appears, I’ll have to take matters into my own hands. I’ll go out among the people, ascertain their needs, and fulfill my promises to them.

SAGE: The coffers are empty.

SL: As always.

KARO: Then I’ll fill them. Where do I begin?

SL: Allow me to suggest the square in front of the palace. I’ll make all the arrangements. *(Exits.)*

KARO: And in disguise I’ll pass myself off as a stranger. As a matter of fact...I am a stranger. *(Exits.)*

QUEEN: And we’ll have a little palace revolution while he’s gone.

SAGE: It’s about time.

BISHOP: The young king we’ll leave under the watchful eye of assassins.

Exit all. Stage in front of archway fills with people. From behind the archway SCHOLAR, FLIRT, SOUSE, step forward, in new, formal outfits. Behind them enters SL, wearing chain-mail armor, and a motorcycle helmet.

SL: Now, whatever he asks you, you’re going to answer...

FLIRT: That we’re very happy with everything just the way it is.

SL: That’s right.

SOUSE: This coat is too tight, damnit.

SL: It's a tuxedo. And suck in your gut.
Enter KARO dressed simply, behind him HENCHMAN and GRUNT; both assume positions on either side of the archway.

SOUSE: What do I get if I do this right?

SL: You can keep the tuxedo. Forever.

SOUSE: I need it like a hole in the head. *(To KARO.)* Hey, buddy, I'll let you keep this thing if you tell the king you're very happy with everything just the way it is.

KARO: Really. And how did you come up with that idea?

SL: What are you talking about?

SOUSE: Aw - it's the king's majesty. I'm happy with everything just the way it is.

SCHOLAR: I'm perfectly satisfied with everything as it is.

FLIRT: I'm very satisfied with everything just the way it is.

KARO: Was this cardboard enthusiasm an order from someone?

SOUSE: This damn tuxedo is too tight. I'm taking it off.
SOUSE takes off the tuxedo. He wears a tee-shirt and jogging shorts underneath.

KARO: And are you also wearing your job-interview outfit?

FLIRT: I'm not wearing a thing underneath this.

KARO: I wish to be left alone with this woman now.

SL: And what about surveying the needs of the people?

KARO: That can wait a little longer if it's waited until now. Wait a minute. Of course. This is part of their manipulation. Ulterior political motives. Don't go very far, I still wish to see you.

FLIRT: In the evening dress?

KARO: Without it. *(Looks down at his navel, sighs.)* Everything keeps getting harder by the second. This isn't so easy. My soul is so heavy. *(Puts his hands in his pockets.)* Why is one person born a man and another a woman? Such mystery! I don't understand a thing. *(Takes his hands out of his pockets.)* All right, we can go now.
Enter Crowd 1, carrying signs that read: „Long Live King Karo!”

CROWD 1: King Karo, King Karo
To our deaths we go,
Happy to meet our end for you,
Our king, hail halloo!

Enter Crowd 2 with signs reading „Down with Karo the „Damned”

CROWD 2: Down with Karo the Damned
His rule is nothing but sham
Death to him hey!
Death to him ho!

Chaos ensues, enter GUARD and GRUNT, they break up the demonstration. The crowd disperses. KARO is dirty and disheveled, his nose is bleeding. Enter SAGE as a beggar.

SAGE: Long live King Karo! *(Laughs.)* Death to King Karo! *(Laughs.)*
These are wrong! *(Laughs.)* Those are wrong! *(Laughs.)* I'm
wrong! *(Laughs. Exits.)*

Enter QUEEN as OLD LADY, a market-woman.

OLD LADY: Peanuts! Get your peanuts here! *(Whispering.)* American peanuts,
get 'em here! *(Shouting.)* Get your nutmeg here! Get your casket
fermented capers here!

KARO: I'd like some peanuts.

OLD LADY: You got any money?

KARO: Money?

OLD LADY: Karopeks.

KARO: No.

OLD LADY: Get lost. Get your smashed, pickled naseberries here! Half a Karo
gets you naseberries, the brats love 'em! *(Exits.)*

KARO: Looks like I'm not worth much. Does my top half or bottom half
buy you naseberries?

SCHOLAR: *(Gasping.)* The protest is continuing by the bridge, and some
people have been killed!

KARO: That's awful! Who's responsible?

SCHOLAR: That bastard King Karo! May the Lord protect him.

KARO: He couldn't have done it!

SCHOLAR: But he did. He's answerable for everything.

SOUSE: He's a great king he is, hope he rots.

FLIRT: What are you cursing for? He's a nice kid. Anyway, he's com-
pletely in the dark, his mother and advisors are running the show.

SOUSE: 'Cause he's letting them.

FLIRT: Because he's young still. He's only sixteen.

SOUSE: Still he shouldn't let them. A sixteen-year-old is old enough to take
the bull by the balls. Eighteen-year-olds these days are going senile.

FLIRT: I wonder if you would have been one of them.

SOUSE: I was. But when I was sixteen at least I fought in the revolution.

FLIRT: If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't brag about that.

SOUSE: Twice! Once one way, and then back again. But these kids these days, they just sit on their asses, noses in books, and not a single original thought of their own. Fairies, the whole bunch of them. Bleech!

FLIRT: You let him get away with that, mister?

KARO: What do you mean „mister”? I'm the king.

FLIRT: The king? That's a good one. Say that again!

KARO: What are you laughing at? I am Karo.

FLIRT and SOUSE laugh.

FLIRT: Wipe your nose first.

SCHOLAR: If he's the king then I must be Einstein.

SOUSE: Yeah, and I'm Robin Hood.

SL: *(Enters, running.)* Have you seen the king?

SCHOLAR: No.

SL: In all the confusion I've lost him somewhere. He's in disguise.

KARO: I'm here!

SL: Go fuck yourself, okay? Where could he have disappeared to? He couldn't have gone and started ruling without us?!

KARO: I'm telling you I'm right here!

SL: If you don't shut your mouth, you'll be feeling for teeth with broken fingers! If you see him anywhere, let us know right away!
(Runs out.)

Enter GUARD and GRUNT, in plain clothes.

FLIRT: Watch out, these guys are assassins! Let's act like we're just talking!

GUARD: Have any of you seen the king?

FLIRT: Like I was saying: the price of naseberries is going up. They'll be asking three Karos soon.

GRUNT: These people here are spreading inflammatory rumors.

GUARD: What did you just say?

FLIRT: I was just saying that the price of naseberries is going down. Soon they'll be asking a quarter Karo for 'em, or maybe half a Roe.

GUARD: You say that just now before, too?

FLIRT: That's right.

GUARD: Is that what she said?

SOUSE: That's right.

GUARD: *(To HENCHMAN.)* Take him to the lockup. We'll hang him for bearing false witness.

GRUNT grabs SOUSE.

GUARD: So what'd the girlie say just now?

SCHOLAR: Eh?

GUARD: I said, what'd you'd just hear her say?

SCHOLAR: Eh! Like reindeer!

FLIRT: He's deaf.

GUARD: Oh really. *(To KARO.)* And you?

FLIRT: Mute, poor guy.

GUARD: Oh, don't tell me.

KARO: *(Stammers.)*

FLIRT: From birth.

GUARD: You know him?

FLIRT: He's my little brother.

GRUNT: Captain! If we hang him, then we won't be able to knock off the king!

GUARD: That's true. How many times have I put in that request for a raise in our salaries, and for more guys out here on the street! And what good did it do? Let him go. And watch it from now on, you hear?! You didn't hear a thing. Am I clear?

SCHOLAR: Eh?

GUARD: You too!

KARO: *(Stammers.)*

OLD LADY: *(Enters.)* Get your naseberries here, four Karos the price! *(Exit.)*

GUARD: Damn! The price has gone up again! There must be something really screwed up with inflation. You all didn't hear a thing, you didn't see a thing, am I clear?

SCHOLAR: Eh?

Exit GUARD and GRUNT.

FLIRT: You're such a sorry excuse for a man, you would've shot your mouth off in front of them. And they would've believed that you were the king, and you would've hung instead of him. What's the problem with you? Are you nuts?

KARO: *(Stammers.)*

FLIRT: Hey! They're gone now!

KARO: I'm the king! *(He goes over to the archway.)* Let me in.

HENCHMAN: Won't even think about doing that.

KARO: I am the king.

GRUNT: Anyone could say that.

HENCHMAN: Even me.

KARO: But look at me!

GRUNT: Move on!

KARO: Assassins have been sent to kill the king. Let me in so I can warn him.

HENCHMAN: Well now, and what if you're this assassin?

GRUNT: Yeah, you look exactly like one of those professional assassins.

HENCHMAN: You're under arrest.

GRUNT and HENCHMAN drag KARO behind the upstage curtain. Enter SL.

SL: I can't find him anywhere. That rotten little emperor is giving me such a royal pain in the ass. As if I really needed this highfaluting job! I should have stayed a slingshot retractor. Have any of you seen the king?

SCHOLAR: Eh?

SL brushes him off with a wave of his hand and walks behind the black curtain.

FLIRT: What do all these people want with the king all the time?

SCHOLAR: Eh?

Alarmed, FLIRT and SCHOLAR exit in opposite directions.

OLD LADY: *(Enters.)* Five Karos for the naseberries filled with hazelnuts! *(Looks around.)* Five Karos for naseberries no hazelnuts. Six Karos, get your naseberries here! *(Exits.)*

Stage darkens. Enter SL and KARO from behind the archway.

SL: So you refuse to answer our questions. That's not very nice of you, is it? Would you kindly tell us who was party to the conspiracy?

KARO: What conspiracy?

SL: The one against the king's life.

KARO: I haven't done a thing.

SL: All right, son, that's what everyone says in the beginning. So you no longer maintain that you are the king, is that right?

KARO: That's right.

SL: Good. Now we'll take you down another peg or two.

Claps, the back curtain parts and a steamroller drives onto the stage. HENCHMAN and GRUNT are riding on it. The steamroller stops.

KARO: What's this?

SL: It's the newest torture device. One of a kind. We've just imported it. We place the guy underneath, roll over him, and then look for two eggs over easy. Those are his eyes.

KARO: How handy.

SL: Quite handy.

KARO: Hey, you don't want to run over me, do you?

SL: Do you think we enjoy wasting gas? Look down at your feet. What do you see?

KARO: A beautiful carpet, an abstract.

SL: Made of flesh, blood, bones! They didn't confess. And we even start with the toes, to give them time to think.

KARO: How fortunate.

SL: What do mean by that?

KARO: That at least you've got the carpet.

SL: Don't be insolent! Who else was involved in the conspiracy?

KARO: Do you want names?

SL: Let's have them.

KARO: You'll bring them here, too?

SL: That's correct.

KARO: And what are you going to ask them?

SL: The same questions. And where the king is.

KARO: Why should they know where he is?

SL: The enemy always knows everything better than we do. That's their business. We're soft in the head. Well?

KARO: I can't tell you a thing.

SL motions, the steamroller moves forward, stops in front of KARO.

SL: Lie down now, feet this way.

KARO: No.

GRUNT jumps down off the steamroller and sits down on KARO's chest.

SL: And now? (*KARO groans.*) Let him talk.

GRUNT takes a little weight off him.

KARO: I confess! I'll confess everything!

SL: Don't let him get up yet.

SL sits down cross legged, takes out a typewriter, places it on his lap, puts in a piece of paper, takes out a tape recorder and turns it on.

HENCHMAN: *(Broodingly.)* Could've gotten two with all this trouble. Or three. Or more. Why does it always take so long to come up with the right way to do things?

SL: Right, you can start.

KARO: I don't know their names.

SL: Don't play with my nerves.

Signals, HENCHMAN lifts him up.

KARO: But I can give descriptions of them. They didn't tell me their names.

SL: Conspiratorial tactic?

KARO: Ulterior political motives.

SL: All right, we've got the right one, he's a conspirator, no question about that. What do they look like?

KARO: One has a full black beard, and is fat.

GRUNT, on the top of the steamroller, strokes his full black beard.

SL: Continue.

KARO: The other was a big bald guy.

HENCHMAN rubs the top of his bald head.

SL: Any other distinguishing features?

KARO: No.

SL: Where did you meet them?

KARO: In front of the palace.

SL: Really. So close. What did they say?

KARO: That they'd had enough of the fucking monarchy.

SL: ...fucking monarchy. Continue.

KARO: They promised me four Karos if I'd knock off the king.

SL: That's not very much!

KARO: I fibbed. Eight. Because I wanted to buy two medlars.

SL: ...two medlars. Pickled with hazelnuts or nutmeg?

KARO: With American peanuts.

SL: ...with hazelnuts. They're so expensive?

KARO: The price has gone up.

SL: And?

KARO: I took their offer.

SL: Where's the money?

KARO: What money?

SL: The eight Karos.

KARO: I would've gotten it only after completing the assignment.

SL: Of course. Where did this occur exactly?

KARO: I told you. In front of the palace.

SL: More precisely. So we can make a mold from their footprints. They did have feet, didn't they?

KARO: Four.

SL: What do you mean four?

KARO : Two each.

SL: ...two each per man. Well then? Where did it happen?

KARO: At the palace gate.

SL: Were your accomplices there too?

KARO: Yes. At either side of the gate.

SL: What were they carrying?

KARO: Bully-clubs.

SL: Bully-clubs? You're lying! Only palace guards carry bully-clubs!

Silence.

SL looks up from his typewriter.

SL: Full black beard... Big bald guy... *(Types again.)* The paper work must be filled out correctly, everything in its proper column. Well then, bully-club, and one more bully-club. Date, place signed, signature. *(Signs the paper.)* I need two witnesses. You two, sign this!

HENCHMAN climbs down from the steamroller. HENCHMAN and GRUNT lean over the paper and sign it, obviously suffering greatly. SL bends over, and puts shackles on their feet.

SL: I think that about does it.

HENCHMAN and GRUNT straighten up and try to run away, but fall. SL screeches triumphantly, howls, then pushes them toward the black curtain.

SL: I've got you now my little doves, heee-heee, I'm not going back to being a slingshot retractor, heeee-heee, I'll sleep soundly tonight, heee-heeeee!

KARO: Aren't I free now?

SL:

Absolutely no chance, you'll stay here. Heee-heee!

SL disappears with GRUNT and HENCHMAN behind the black curtain. KARO starts after them, the curtain closes in front of his nose.

KARO:

They locked me in.

He climbs up onto the steamroller, tinkers with it, starts it up, goes around in a circle, then directs it towards the back curtain. It comes down. KARO triumphantly drives off the stage. Curtain.

ACT TWO

The stage looks much as it did in the beginning of Act One, only the archway is brighter, newer. Only the shovel is missing (having been removed after the funeral at the beginning of Act One). Enter SL as JACOB, QUEEN as OLD LADY, BISHOP as PAL, SAGE as LOUSE, SCHOLAR, FLIRT, SOUSE. Behind them they pull a huge rubber band, the end of which disappears off the stage. GUARD, wearing a chain-mail breast plate and crash helmet, is pushing them along with a bully-club.

ALL: Pull! Pull!

GUARD: Faster, you lazy bums!

ALL: Pull! Pull! Pull! *(KARO drives onstage with the steamroller and stops. He stares at the people pulling, puts the ignition key in his pocket, and climbs down. The others stop pulling, and the rubber band coils back off stage. They stare at the steamroller.)*

GUARD: Back to work! Let's go! *(Goes after them after them, with no effect, stops and stares at the steamroller and touches it.)*

JACOB: Steam propulsion?

KARO: No, steamroller.

JACOB: A real guzzler, eh?

KARO: Nope, one or two beers and I'm done for the day. I just had one and they put it on a tab. Strange, since I got this pair of wheels I get credit everywhere. Haven't we met somewhere before?

JACOB: I don't think so. My name's Jacob.

They shake hands. KARO mutters something.

PAL: Pal. *(Shakes hands with KARO, who mutters something again.)* I was captain of a submarine during the Third War.

KARO: That must have been something. Where were you fighting?

PAL: In the Sahara.

FLIRT: Is this hunk of junk yours?

KARO: That's right.

FLIRT: I've seen better. You got a VCR up there?

KARO: Nope.

FLIRT: You couldn't pay me to drive it. Mind if I climb up?

KARO: Go right ahead.

FLIRT climbs up and catches the key that KARO throws up to her, guns the engine with obvious enjoyment.

GUARD: Stick?

PAL: Come on. Turbine.

GUARD: Ah-hah. Well, let's go everyone, quit wasting the day - the chief inspector finds his way out here and I'm dead.

KARO: Let me guess: you're pulling a boat with this rope.

SOUSE: Rope? It's made out of rubber!

KARO: Collective expander?

SOUSE: Expander! That's a good one!

They laugh.

KARO: Then what is it?

SCHOLAR: A launching mechanism. It's more reliable than ejaculatory fuel, and much more economical. We simply pull on this end. The other end is hooked up to the rocket, and on the other side they're also pulling, and when the desired load of kilopounds is reached they let go, we fall on our backs, and the rocket zooms to the third cosmic velocity.

KARO: Wow! So it's a slingshot!

SCHOLAR: The perfected form of the catapult.

KARO: But why use people?

SCHOLAR: It's the cheapest.

KARO: But there are all kinds of machines... The products of human ingenuity... useful discoveries...

SCHOLAR: We've come a long way since then!

GUARD: That's enough, let's cut that out now, they're signaling from twenty kilometers off, want to know why the rubber band went slack.

They fall in again to pull the rubber band, rhythmically, inch by inch across the stage. They barely move at all. KARO watches.

KARO: I've got an idea. Let's tie the end to the steamroller. They stop pulling, and the rubber band once again slides off the stage.

GUARD: Can't do that.

KARO: Why not? It's stronger than the seven of you.

SCHOLAR: Well, Louse?

LOUSE: The regulations forbid it. *(Takes out a book, opens it, flips through the pages, reads.)* „Steamrollers, helicopters, four-legged work animals, and those of similar strength for use in the replacement of human work efforts are illegal for educational purposes, and must be avoided, in other words, any substitutes are strictly, and lawfully, forbidden.”

SCHOLAR: That just about says it.

They again begin to pull the rope.

KARO: You might as well rest for a while!

LOUSE: We'd lose our jobs! Pull! Pull! There are so-called realities, you know. They must be taken into consideration. You can't blindly introduce new things like that. It would be simpler and easier to do it this way or that way... Pull! Pull! So it'd be easier if a machine pulled it, huh? And we'd become disposable, huh? Pull! Pull! All Pull! Pull!

KARO: You're all going to collapse. Let me help.

GUARD: You don't got a choice. I'm going to make you no matter what.

KARO: Oh. Then I don't feel like helping.

GUARD: Fall in, you stupid kid!

GUARD beats him till he joins the others, KARO starts pulling with them.

KARO: Where is this rocket set to go?

SCHOLAR: The galaxy.

OLD WOMAN: That's right. The apoplexy.

SOUSE: No! It's going to blow-up the enemy's capital.

KARO: Don't tell me there's one of those slack-lime bombs in there?!

SCHOLAR: We've come a long way since then! Slack lime evaporates everything. The veneer bomb in there just annihilates human beings.

LOUSE: I was told there's nothing in that rocket. There's just a message to life on other planets.

KARO: There's no point in continuing this. None. It's counterproductive, really. I'm quitting.

GUARD: So you're not going to pull, you stupid kid?

He beats KARO, who starts to pull again.

FLIRT: Just pretend you're pulling. I haven't pulled it once. Just wrap your hands around it. That's what everyone's doing.

KARO: But we're moving somehow!

FLIRT: That's because they're letting us over at the other end. It's an agreement we have.

KARO: Don't these slave-drivers even notice?

FLIRT: Of course they do. But they don't say anything, 'cause there'd be a revolt, and then they wouldn't get their double rations of honeyed raisins.

KARO: And what do we live on?

FLIRT: Everybody forges for beetles, roots and potatoes after work.

KARO: What ever happened to the division of labor?

SCHOLAR: We've come a long way since then! There are no longer any professions set down in stone. In our society of mature, multi-faceted individuals everybody forages for himself. Pull! Pull!

Enter JAILER with a large kettle, sets it down, exits.

GUARD: *(Taps the bully-club against his crash helmet.)* Lunch break.
Everyone lies down and stretches out.

KARO: Isn't anyone eating?

FLIRT: Tonight.

OLD LADY: If you're good then we'll give you some too.

KARO: But why isn't anyone eating now?

They laugh. KARO looks in the kettle.

KARO: There's nothing in here!

FLIRT: Of course not.

KARO: Then why pretend like there is? This is terrible! I'm hungry!

SCHOLAR: There was a time when the kettle did contain something. But it's been empty since Karo has been king. Still, old habits die hard and they still bring the kettle out here. That's what they're paying the kettle-carriers for.

LOUSE: Once there was a massive uprising among the people. Not for more food, but because they had forgotten to bring out the kettle. Ever since then they've been very careful to bring the kettle.

KARO: Since Karo is king? Is he still alive?

LOUSE: Not for long.

Laughter.

PAL: Our friend here is obsessed with the idea that he's the king!

Laughter.

LOUSE: You'll all be surprised some day.

PAL: He preparing for the great role from a book! He's learning all kinds of languages, reading Machiavelli, boning up on the marriage of Napoleon and Saint Ilona, and oh, what else?

SCHOLAR: The Natural History of Revolutions.

KARO: I don't know that one. Who wrote that?

SCHOLAR: Me. When I was young. I was a scholar once, and wrote books. They locked me up. They let me go.

KARO: And then?

SCHOLAR: I wrote more books. I knew quite a bit then. They locked me up again. Then they let me go.

KARO: And?

SCHOLAR: Then I really knew a hell of a lot and didn't write any more.

KARO: What about now?

SCHOLAR: Now I know too much. So I forgot it all. Including what I wrote. That's the way it should be.

KARO: No it isn't. I'm going to write all of this down.

SCHOLAR: You ever been in prison before?

KARO: Yes, I have.

Laughter.

SCHOLAR: How many times?

KARO: Three times.

FLIRT: You're full of shit.

KARO: I want to tell you all something now: I am Karo the King.

LOUSE: Wait a minute. That's me. I mean, it will be me when everyone else realizes it. Karo might have been killed and they're not saying yet.

GUARD: What's going on over there? Spreading slander and ugly rumors?

OLD LADY: You just calm yourselves down now, or no french toast tonight.

GUARD: I didn't say a word.

LOUSE: *(To SCHOLAR.)* Ask away.

SCHOLAR: *(Picks up a book.)* Hegel. Ethics. Volume Eight. Page twenty, third paragraph from the bottom.

LOUSE: Now let's see... just a second... *(Whimpers, whines, falls to the ground in spasms.)*

KARO: What's the matter with him?

SCHOLAR: He's trying too hard. It's going to kill him.

KARO: *(Whispering.)* „The episodic life-hierarchy devours itself...”

SCHOLAR: Are you reciting from Hegel?

KARO: I know all of these books by heart.

Silence, the others draw away from him.

OLD LADY: Now you're really going hungry tonight.

SOUSE: Comes out here and knows it all.

LOUSE: Little son of a bitch. Just who do you think you are, huh?

PAL: We drowned his kind out on the Sahara.

SCHOLAR: Leave him alone, he was probably born this way. He'll forget it soon enough.

SOUSE: Don't you worry about them, I'll protect you. When were you born?

KARO: It's been sixteen years.

SOUSE: Ho-ho! Do you remember your mother?

KARO: Nope, not really.

SOUSE: Not many children were born in those days. I can remember only one, and that was the one I had a hand with. Any of you seen any babies sixteen years ago?

PAL: Not me. But then on the Sahara there wasn't even one...

SCHOLAR: In those days I was in solitary twenty meters under ground.

FLIRT: I wasn't even born yet.

LOUSE: I was memorizing books about artificial insemination.

JACOB: And me, well, those were dark times. I was busy putting babies to the sword. I had an order. But you I never saw.

GUARD: I was in hangman's school then. They didn't allow babes over there, there wasn't even one teacher who looked like one.

OLD LADY: Souse! I was still barracks wench back then, over by the new settlements, on the other side of the Seven Mountains! Whose kid is this?

SOUSE: Whose kid... don't even ask, 'cause I'll burst into tears! Love is a great thing, little buddy, under the plantain leaves, the haycock, when everything is filled with the smell of the kakadu. Ah, that filly; as long as I live I'll never forget her, just don't ask me her name, I didn't ask, we didn't have the time. And now here you are, little buddy - there, made you look!

KARO: What can I say, these days I'm full of insecurities. Let's forget about it.

GUARD: *(Pounds on his helmet with his bully-club.)* Let's go, lunch break is over!

Enter JAILER with a television. He removes the kettle and exits. Some of them sit down in front of the t.v. on foot stools brought out from behind the black curtain.

SCHOLAR: *(Yawning.)* It's getting late. It's time for bed.

SOUSE: It's time for bed, woman!

OLD LADY: I'm staying up for the news.

KARO: It's night already?

FLIRT: That's right.

GUARD: Shut up everyone, I can't hear!

JACOB: Someone make it louder! Pal! You know how it works!

PAL turns up the t.v.

JACOB'S VOICE ON TELEVISION:

In Geneva, UNESCO Chancellor Metternich met with members of the press and made a statement on the extraordinary, grave 30-year peace. As we've already reported, great importance is being ascribed to the powerful Papal encyclical contribution to a humanitarian settlement of the Viking and Mekong aggression. - And now, footage from today's peace demonstrations.

SOUSE: Let's go to bed, woman.

OLD LADY: I'm waiting for the forecast.

PAL'S VOICE ON TELEVISION:

An enthusiastic crowd gathered in front of the palace gates today, greeting with enthusiasm a momentous address by King Karo the Seventh. Excerpts from that speech follow.

JACOB: Here comes the Pharaoh.

PAL: Mandarin, you idiot. The president's president.

OLD LADY: Good-looking fellow.

KARO'S VOICE ON TELEVISION:

People! (*Great applause from the t.v., cheering.*) I will tend to your needs! (*Rhythmic clapping, cheering.*) Everyone will be healthy, wealthy and happy!

Tremendous ovation, seemingly without end.

KARO: That's not the way it happened at all!

PAL: As if you knew how it happened!

KARO: I was there, but I said more than that, and at the end they pelted me with stones!

The ovation on television continues.

PAL'S VOICE ON TELEVISION:

After the demonstration, the parties, the trade unions, and representatives of the opposition warmly greeted our king, who gave a reception in their honor in the Marble Room in the House of Representatives.

OLD LADY: See that! Buy me some palm groves like that.

SOUSE: Just a bunch of queer shit.

VOICE OF QUEEN ON TELEVISION:

Tomorrow's weather will be...

KARO: None of that is true!

OLD LADY: Shut up and let me hear!

VOICE OF QUEEN: ...mild, with no winds expected, hurricanes developing in some areas...

JACOB: (*Turns off the television.*) Well, let's go to sleep.

LOUSE: I'm staying up for a while.

JACOB: All that studying isn't going to do you any good. Good night.
They separate to different areas of the stage, lay down and go to sleep. LOUSE reads. FLIRT slides over to KARO, teasing him.

KARO: What do you want?

FLIRT: Remember my evening dress? I told you about it this morning.

KARO: You remember?

FLIRT: You're an idiot.

KARO: So somebody does recognize me. There is something to believe in after all.

FLIRT: It was a beautiful dress. And underneath I wasn't wearing a thing.

KARO: And you said we'd meet later.

FLIRT: I stood in front of the throne in my evening dress...

KARO: No, it wasn't there.

FLIRT: And the king fell in love with me. At first sight.

KARO: That's true.

FLIRT: Wasn't it lovely?

KARO: Very lovely.

FLIRT: I hope I have that same dream again tonight.

KARO: What do you mean dream?

FLIRT: Just like I said. It's a wonderful dream.

KARO: It's no dream! I'm here beside you. The others are asleep. Let me enjoy your virginity now!

FLIRT: And in my dream I was a virgin once more, and I knew everything would work out just the way I wanted it to. *(Cries.)*

KARO: Don't cry, everything can work out now. *(Caresses her.)*

FLIRT: Get off of me! Go to hell. You can't even dream in peace.

KARO: Where are you going?

FLIRT: Shut up.
FLIRT goes over to GUARD, he gets up, and the two of them exit together. JACOB crawls over to KARO.

JACOB: Are you sleeping?

KARO: I can't.

JACOB: Can you keep a secret?

KARO: I'm afraid that's all I can keep.

JACOB: We're getting ready to stage a coup.

KARO: Finally! It's taken you long enough.

JACOB: We need someone to sit on the throne, while we run things from behind.

KARO: Again?

JACOB: We've been thinking that you might be our man. So think it over - it's a respectable job. You'd be a puppet king.

KARO: Is this my only choice? King or pauper?

JACOB: That's right.

SCHOLAR: (*Crawls over.*) It's a choice that only the lucky few get to make. Think about the people who don't even have that. Nothing above or beneath them. All their deeply held wishes and desires floating by as they sleep, and then suffocating them.

PAL: (*Crawls over with a black hood over his head.*) Whose got to die?

KARO: Who is this?

JACOB: He's our designated, volunteer hangman. It won't come off without a little blood.

KARO: You know what - oh, forget it. I'm hungry. Don't you have something to eat? I'm in the mood for turkey, really. Why don't you give me some and I'll think about it. Uproar.

JACOB: Eat the holy turkey?!

PAL: Horrible!

OLD LADY: (*Crawls over.*) What have we come to?!

JACOB: As soon as we're in power, we're going to outlaw all recipes calling for turkey. That is in our manifesto, and is what we bring with us from our oppression.

KARO: That's completely idiotic.

JACOB: (*To PAL.*) This boy is shameless.

PAL: I think so.

JACOB: He might be a spy.

PAL: I'm sure he is.

JACOB: Let's terminate him.

SCHOLAR: No, let's make him king.

JACOB: I'm putting it to a vote: termination, or coronation? Well?! Why aren't you voting?

SCHOLAR: Which one are we voting for?

PAL: Again wasting time with that democratic joke of voting, when he wants to eat the holy turkey?!

JACOB: I don't get it. Whenever it comes to a vote, we're utterly impotent.

OLD LADY: That's right. Because without Louse, we're an even number.

LOUSE: I'm voting with the majority. *(Reads.)*

PAL: He is the majority, isn't he? I've had enough of this.
PAL drags KARO behind the archway.

SOUSE: Don't need to kill him.

SCHOLAR: I agree.

JACOB: The time is now; we don't have time for voting and the rest. Where is that girl? She has the explosives.

OLD LADY: Her and the guard are off making fireworks together.

JACOB: The guard is our man. He started as a jailer, then obtained a higher degree in hangman management. We need the experts.
Enter FLIRT and GUARD.

FLIRT: There's a lot of movement outside. Something's up. Where's Pal?

JACOB: Butchering the kid.

FLIRT: No! *(Runs behind the arches drag PAL out.)* Where's the kid?

PAL: He's sleeping. He confessed everything.

FLIRT: What did he confess?

PAL: That he's not the person we think he is.

FLIRT: Who is he then?

PAL: He confessed that he's not even the person he thinks he is.

FLIRT: I'm going to wake him up.

PAL: Let him sleep. He's having a nightmare. He keeps mumbling about there being too many footprints, creating, building, too many footprints. It's utter nonsense.

FLIRT: That's strange. He didn't say anything about me?

PAL: No.

FLIRT: And I thought he might have liked me. But no. He doesn't like me. He's gone and left me! He's been unfaithful! I'll kill him!

SCHOLAR: Just forget about it, kid.

JACOB: There's no time.

GUARD: What do you want to do now? It won't be light for a while still.

FLIRT: I'll be there in a second. So we're rising up tonight, huh?

JACOB: That's right.

PAL: That's right.

GUARD: But first we'll lay down.

FLIRT: In a second. Louse, did you hear us?

LOUSE: What?

FLIRT: Tonight.

LOUSE: Can't do it. I haven't finished reading these books.

JACOB: We'll make him the rearguard and service corps.

SOUSE: I didn't hear any of that.

OLD LADY: I don't know a thing about what's going on.

JACOB: We'll win without you two. Pal! You stay here, we'll direct them over to you and you conduct the carnage.

FLIRT: What an evening! What a night! Trickling slowly from the full moon, a perfume the scent of my sex, my soul on fire, light as any wind, this is revolution's night!

Exit JACOB, SCHOLAR, GUARD, FLIRT. Enter KARO from the black curtain.

OLD LADY: You left the light on in the bathroom again.

KARO: Me?

OLD LADY: Or maybe it was your father.

KARO: Don't nag.

OLD LADY: Neither of you know how I suffer.

SOUSE: Quit nagging.

OLD LADY: I do the laundry, cook, clean the house, and both of you just waste electricity.

SOUSE: *(Takes out a newspaper.)* Now that's interesting. A lot more people died again today.

OLD LADY: You're always hiding behind that stupid newspaper.

SOUSE: And it says you weren't one of them.

OLD LADY: It's always the sports, always soccer.

SOUSE: *(Pages through the paper.)* The all-stars lost.

OLD LADY: That's what they deserve.

SOUSE: What'd you say?

OLD LADY: I smell gas.

SOUSE: Here's a guy who plays a hundred chess boards at the same time, blindfolded. Now that I like.

OLD LADY: You're wasting your lives.

JACOB: *(Runs on stage.)* Here it comes! *(Runs off stage the other side.)*

PAL: *(Takes out a broadsword, removes it from it's sheath.)* Let's get to it.

FLIRT: *(Runs on stage.)* To arms! *(Runs off stage the other side.)*

GUARD: *(Runs on stage.) To the palace! (Runs off stage.)*

JAILER/HENCHMAN/GRUNT: *(Run on stage.) To the palace! (Run off stage.)*
PAL lashes about with the sword meeting no target.

KARO: We've got to do something!

OLD LADY: Did you lock the door? Did you turn the key two times?

SCHOLAR: *(Runs on stage.) The king must be taken! (Runs off stage.)*

JACOB: *(Runs on stage.) Hey! Guards! Watch the palace! (Runs off stage.)*

GUARD: *(Runs on stage.) The queen must be hidden! (Runs off.)*

JAILER/HENCHMAN/GRUNT: *(Run on.) The uprising has begun! (Run off.)*

OLD LADY: Let's get out of here, we have to save the crown jewels! *(Runs off.)*

SOUSE: What are you mumbling about? *(Reads.)*

KARO: We've got to do something!

LOUSE: *(Looks up from his book.)* I think I'm getting it now: there is an underlying relationship between particles of matter and the matrix.

SCHOLAR: *(Runs on.)* We're winning! *(Runs off.)*

FLIRT: *(Runs on.)* We're losing! *(Runs off.)*

OLD LADY: *(Runs on.)* Where's the bishop? Oh God! *(Runs off.)*

SOUSE: *(Reads.)* Did you close the door?

JACOB: *(Runs on.)* We must seize their leaders! Hey! You!

KARO: Yes, what should I do?

JACOB: Their leader! Get whoever in charge! *(Runs off, runs immediately back in.)* Are you a rebel?

KARO: Well...

JACOB: Protect the queen!

OLD LADY runs on stage.

JACOB: You'll pay for this with your life! *(Runs off.)*

OLD LADY: The way the rabble rose up! Execute them all!

JACOB: *(Runs on.)* The queen must be killed too! She's here somewhere!

OLD LADY: *(Sits down.)* Don't strain your eyes.

SOUSE: What'd you say?

JACOB: The queen's disappeared! We let her slip away. You idiot!

KARO: Me?

JACOB: Our right flanks are down, I've got to run! Wait here, I'll come and help!

FLIRT: *(Runs in.)* The front line needs repositioning! *(Runs off.)*

SCHOLAR: *(Runs in.)* Let's not panic!

GUARD: *(Runs in.)* There's one of the rebels!
JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT run in.

GUARD: *(Pointing to SCHOLAR.)* Grab him!
They grab him.

SCHOLAR: Hey! We're on the same side!

GUARD: Rebel!

JAILER: So are we!

HENCHMAN: I am too!

GRUNT: I'm not!

SCHOLAR: *(Pointing to GUARD.)* Grab him!
They grab him.

GUARD: You assholes! I'm an insurgent!

OLD LADY: What are they writing in that lousy paper? *(Jumps up in anger.)* The commander has been wounded! You can't let it go unanswered, lieutenant!

GUARD: There's the queen! Grab her!

OLD LADY: Onward in the name of Karo! *(Runs out.)*

GUARD: After her! Long live Karo! Long live the revolution! *(Runs out.)*

SCHOLAR: Long live the revolution! *(Runs out.)*
JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT stand around without a clue what to do.

PAL: *(Stabs JAILER.)* Ha! *(JAILER dies.)*

HENCHMAN: Did you say something?

GRUNT: Me?

PAL: *(Stabs GRUNT.)* Ha! *(GRUNT dies.)*

HENCHMAN: Didn't you say something? *(Walks around.)* Who are you? A Rebel?

KARO: Well...

JAILER: Your Majesty! What is your command?

KARO: Well...

SOUSE: *(Reads.)* Well how do you like that? Five million Swahilis starved to death again yesterday. Why don't they watch out, for Christ's sake! *(Continues reading.)*

PAL: *(Stabs JAILER.)* Ha! *(JAILER dies.)*

Slaves enter stage left with a massive boulder which they are pushing across the stage. Slave-drivers, dressed in space suits, whip them onward. The huge rock moves very slowly across the stage.

- JACOB: *(Runs in.)* We'll crush the uprising, Your Majesty!
- FLIRT: *(Runs in.)* The aristocracy is fleeing!
- JACOB: Are you a rebel? Take that! *(Lunges at FLIRT, jumps out of the way, and grabs her as she prepares to fall.)* Okay, okay, the devil didn't get you. I'll kill you, you heel! *(Runs off.)*
- SCHOLAR: *(Runs in.)* What are you three lying around for?
JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT get up.
- GUARD: *(Runs in.)* Follow me!
JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT run out after GUARD.
- SCHOLAR: We must prohibit our people from looting!
- FLIRT: We don't have to prohibit a thing! This is the day of vengeance!
SCHOLAR and FLIRT exit in opposite directions.
- JACOB: *(Runs in.)* That rebel got me! The queen's body guards seduced him over to their side! Let's go, Bishop, go cut their throats! Well there he is, the Bishop, go get him! Here's the King's chief officer *(beats his chest)*, here he is, let's have your sword right here *(beats his chest)*, Here comes the queen - I'll kill her, she's escaped, thank God! Here's the queen, I'll kill her!
Enter OLD LADY.
- JACOB: So here you are, you old ninny! Oh, my wound, my wound! Long live king Karo, suppressor of the uprising. Long live King Karo, leader of the revolution! *(He falls and faints.)*
- OLD LADY: *(Sits down, indifferently)* I hid the crown.
- SOUSE: *(Reading.)* That's a good girl. Where'd you put it?
- OLD LADY: In the wardrobe.
- LOUSE: *(Stands up.)* My head is spinning from all these letters. I feel some kind of dizziness... as if I were... as if I was already the most, the most beautiful, I'm Karo the Ninth!
- PAL: Really? Look here, you merciless tyrant, tormentor of your people! *(Stabs him, LOUSE dies.)*
- SOUSE: Did you lock it up good?
- OLD LADY: I sure did.
- LOUSE: *(Get's up.)* I'm Karo, the rebel!
- PAL: Really? Look here, you miserable wretch! Long live the king! *(Stabs him. LOUSE dies.)*

Enter JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT, and GUARD.

GUARD: It's the end.

On either end of the stage men with machine-guns appears. They start firing at each other.

FLIRT: *(Enters.)* End of the battle.

SCHOLAR: *(Enters.)* We lost.

FLIRT: We won.

GUARD: We lost.

JAILER: We won.

HENCHMAN: We lost.

GRUNT: We lost.

OLD LADY: I'll turn on the t.v.

SOUSE: I'm going to sleep. *(Puts down the newspaper, disappears behind the archway.)*

PAL: I'll take care of this. *(Follows him.)*

SCHOLAR: Of course, what else could we expect. This is how things get done in economies of want... *(Claps her hands to her mouth.)* Oh! I just can't stop philosophizing!

OLD LADY: What the hell is wrong now with that stupid thing?

QUEEN's VOICE ON THE TELEVISION:

After the bitter lesson our nation has learned, I promise you in the name of the great King Karo that blessed we stand now at the threshold of a new, happy, golden era.

Huge applause on the television.

FLIRT: Those are our people! Don't you see? Our people have taken power!

PAL: *(Enters.)* That's been taken care of.

BISHOP's VOICE ON THE TELEVISION:

Let us give our thanks to our magnificent king, leader of the revolutionary battle, through whom we were able to overthrow king Karo! Long live King Karo!

PAL: Damn, I was left out of the government again. *(Exits back behind the curtain.)*

OLD LADY: *(Turns off the t.v.)* Nothing interesting on. I'm going to sleep.

SCHOLAR: They might not even throw me in jail now. It's Terrible! What have we come to?

The slaves have just now managed to roll the rock over to the other end of the stage, and disappear along with their slave-drivers. The two machine-gun totting squads stop shooting, pack their things, and disappear. KARO remains alone on the stage.

KARO: If there were someone I could turn to, if there were just one person, who could, who could smile, someone to give meaning to this chaos, who could show me a way, I'd bow down before him...

PAL: *(From behind the archway)* If there were someone I could turn to, if there were just one person, who could, who could smile, someone to give meaning to this chaos, who could show me a way, I'd bow down before him...

KARO runs to the archway, pulls open the curtain. PAL - a black hood over his head - is kneeling, crying.

KARO: The hangman!

PAL stands up, dragging his broadsword behind him, exits, unhappily.

KARO: How many human lives have I taken, how many sins have I committed unknowingly; how many lives didn't I save, when I could have; why aren't I alive; why aren't I Karo, the liberator, Karo, who I should become, should have become; why do the years pass, why does even my body desert me...

FLIRT: *(Enters.)* Hey, grandpa! What's wrong, ya need some help over there?

OLD LADY: *(Enters.)* Listen! Last night you wouldn't let me get to sleep again.

KARO: Me?

OLD LADY: Your snoring keeps getting louder. Do you want a little prune juice?

KARO: I hate prune juice. I'm hungry for something meaty.

OLD LADY: Meaty! In your toothless gums! Nyum-nyum-nyum, and now he wants to suck away on a little meat! *(Exits.)*

KARO: What's wrong with her?

FLIRT: Nothing, she's joking. Do you like me?

KARO: The evening dress! And nothing underneath it!

FLIRT: What are you pawing me for, you old lech? You're a little late for that! How old are you?

KARO: Sixteen.

FLIRT: Sixteen? *(Laughs.)* You hear that, everyone?

Enter LOUSE, PAL, SOUSE.

FLIRT: He says he's sixteen years old.

The others roar with laughter.

KARO: Why? How old am I?

LOUSE: Sixty.

KARO: How old?

PAL: Sixty.

KARO: Stop it!

SOUSE: You're sixteen years older than me.

KARO: Me? Older than my father?

SOUSE: Got drunk again, didn't you?

OLD LADY: *(Enters.)* He wanted meat!

SOUSE: He's just hungover.

JACOB: *(Enters.)* How long am I going to wait for you?

FLIRT: I'm ready.

KARO: Jacob!

JACOB: Yes?

KARO: Look in my eyes.

JACOB: I've got things to do.

KARO: Tell me the honest truth: am I old?

JACOB: As old as the hills. Are you coming?

FLIRT: What are you whispering for? You know I'm coming.

Exit JACOB and FLIRT.

KARO: No! It's not true! It can't be!

LOUSE: It must be hard to accept growing old.

KARO: I was just sixteen years old! Just now! It's impossible that my life passed me by! Since I just started... I haven't even lived! I'm sixteen years old, and I can do anything still! Give me a mirror.

OLD LADY: A mirror?

SOUSE: Give him one, if he wants it so bad.

OLD LADY disappears behind the archway.

KARO: This is such a stupid game, it makes no sense, it's a ruthless game. You shouldn't ridicule people like this.

LOUSE: That's what I say, too.

OLD LADY: *(Enters with a mirror.)* Here's your mirror.

KARO: *(Takes the mirror but doesn't look in it.)* This can't be happening to me. To anyone else, yes, but not to me.

PAL: Oh boy, that's what the dying said in the Mississippi marshlands just before they breathed their last.

LOUSE: That's what every poet writes about. That's what all the lonely must feel as well.

PAL: It's hard to understand. If I ever get old, I won't complain. Thank God I'm a long way from it.

OLD LADY: So you're not going to look in the mirror?

PAL: There's was some heavy fighting at the meeting of the Mississippi and the Nile. Many lives were lost.

LOUSE: One philosopher writes more people died than there are living.

SOUSE: Smart thinking.

Enter GUARD, JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT, they take their places in front of the archway, spear, sword, rifle, and anti-tank gun. Enter JACOB and FLIRT, laughing as they climb up onto the steamroller.

KARO: Everyone is lying! *(He throws the mirror down on the ground.)*

OLD LADY: Hey! Do you know how much that cost me? Eight and a half Karos! *JACOB and FLIRT drive away on the steamroller.*

KARO: Get out of here! Everyone!

OLD LADY: Let's leave him alone, he'll wear out soon.

PAL, LOUSE, OLD LADY exit.

SOUSE: Sixty isn't exactly the end of...

KARO: Get out of here!

SOUSE exits, shrugging his shoulders.

KARO: Let me in! I am the emperor!

GUARD: Pan handling's not allowed here.

KARO: You'll regret this, I promise you!

GUARD: An old hooch hound, escaped from the drying out center. Give him a shove out of the way.

JAILER, HENCHMAN, and GRUNT drag KARO over to one side. From behind the back curtain enters QUEEN, SL, BISHOP, SAGE, SCHOLAR, FLIRT, in ornate costumes.

GUARD: Make way for the royal emperors!

Trumpets sound. Enter SOUSE.

KARO: Wait! Here I am! I'm one of you!

They beat KARO.

QUEEN: What do you want, my subject?

GUARD: Senile old fart.

FLIRT: Poor fellow. Here, take this Karo, good man. *(Throws him money.)*

GUARD: Say thank you, you stupid beggar.

KARO: I'm not going to! Don't you recognize me?

They beat KARO again.

FLIRT: Leave the poor man alone.
JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT salute.

BISHOP: And now let us say: Long live the king!

ALL: Long live the king!

GUARD: This one didn't cheer.

KARO: No!

SAGE: King Karo will inspect his empire!

ALL: Long live the king!
QUEEN, SL, BISHOP, SAGE, SCHOLAR, FLIRT exit. GUARDS throw themselves on KARO again.

GUARD: Leave him alone, he'll kick soon, anyhow. Let's follow the king. We're supposed to be his guards.
GUARD, JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT exit after the others.

KARO: Don't you recognize me!

SOUSE: Quiet. You should be happy they didn't hang you.

KARO: They didn't have one kind word for me.

SOUSE: What'd you expect? They're all the same.

KARO: It's good that at least you've stood by me.

SOUSE: What the hell are you blubbering about?

KARO: Thank you, friend.

SOUSE: Friend? Your cankerous butt. I never laid eyes on you. *(Exits.)*
KARO jumps behind the archway, pulls open the curtain. Upstage, in front of black veils, in green and gold light an enormous globe is spinning slowly. Enter SL, GUARD, JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT.

SL: Turn around.
KARO turns around.

SL: Aim!
GUARD, JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT, have their backs to the audience. They go down on one knee, and aim their riffles at KARO.

SL: You disturbed the tranquillity of the universe.

KARO: Too little.

SL: Nothing was good enough for you.

KARO: That is true.

SL: You never accepted anyone else's truths.

KARO: No, I did not.

SL: You revolted.

KARO: But not enough.

SL: You hated everybody.

KARO: I loved too much: I was weak.

SL: Did you see the globe?

KARO: I saw it.

SL: What did you feel?

KARO: I can't say.

SL: Try.

KARO: It's impossible.

SL: Nothing else exists in the whole universe.

KARO: That I know. But none of you do.

SL: You're not going live again.

KARO: I know.

SL: Are you sorry for what you've done?

KARO: I'm sorry that I have done nothing.

SL: You were alone.

KARO: I can't believe that. I just didn't search hard enough.

SL: You've been left on your own.

Silence.

SL: Here's the shovel, take it.

KARO takes the shovel.

SL: Look up.

KARO looks up. In back, between the archway and the spinning globe the other characters are climbing up a path.

SL: They didn't accept you as one of them.

KARO: Let me go over there to them. I'll try again.

SL: Not one of them is alive.

KARO: Can't you call them back?

SL: No. There is no God. There is nothing.

KARO: Can't I start again? It doesn't matter if it's difficult. It could be much more difficult than this was. But let me.

SL: Can't do it. *(Takes the shovel, thrusts it in the ground.)* Stand beneath the arch.

KARO goes over, turns around.

SL:

Aim! *(They aim at KARO again.)* Fire!

GUARD, JAILER, HENCHMAN, GRUNT lower their rifles, and lower themselves with SL into the trap door. The others have already disappeared. KARO is alone. He steps forward, starts to dig, then stops.

KARO:

I, the only living, I, the last glance on what is not, the first conscious and the first unprejudiced smile. I, the last living, who stands ready to join the bleeding, who has a last glance of forgetting, and has a last laugh, I know that it was beautiful, it made us all but live, a thousand worlds would not have had better dreams than the existing did, the ONE, it was beautiful, and its ending brings no loss it was not a chance, only its dream. Not the possibility, simply the dream. In horror it would be. If it ever came to be.

KARO sets down the shovel and lies down in the same place he was at the beginning of Act 1. Enter BLACK FAIRY.

King Karo stands and salutes The great king steps out and cries out:

My soldiers, where are you?

King Karo our noble king,
We search but can not find you
Salute!

We search but can not find you
Noble king
And to their deaths they march

To their deaths they march

King Karo, the mighty king
Stands and salutes,
Stands and salutes,
And searches in vain, all in vain,

Searches for his soldiers.

Enter SL.

BLACK FAIRY:

Psst! *(BLACK FAIRY and SL exit in opposite directions.)*

CURTAIN