

*RAFAEL
AND TOBIAS*

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Cover image: Fra Angelico, *Angel of the Annunciation*, detail from a fresco in the Cloister of San Marco, Firenze

by the same author

For the theatre

TWO BROTHERS

TWO MARTYR PLAYS: AGNES, LAWRENCE

Fiction

SCARABOCCHIO

POETRY AND FEAR

GIVE MY HEART EASE

MUSIC FOR GLASS ORCHESTRA

Poetry

ELYSIAN SONNETS AND OTHER POEMS

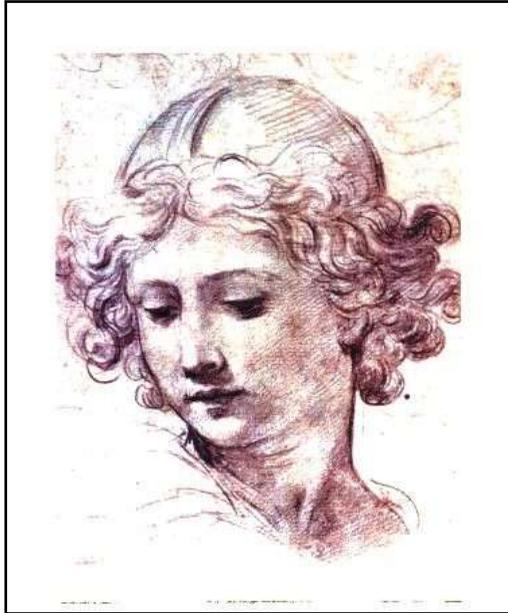
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Andromache Books

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*'L'ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle;
Les anges y volaient sans doute obscurément,
Car on voyait passer dans la nuit, par moment,
Quelque chose de bleu qui paraissait une aile.'*

- Victor Hugo

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RAPHAEL, An Angel

TOBIT, a pious man living in exile at Nineveh, father to Tobias

ANNA, wife to Tobit, mother to Tobias

TOBIAS, their son

ASMOSDEUS, a demon

SARAH, a young girl living at Ecbatana

RAGUEL, Sarah's father

EDNA, Sarah's mother

CHORUS OF HANDMAIDENS

CHORUS OF BIRD-PUPPETS, large, evil-looking, and black

ARI, A DOG, belonging to Tobias

A MAID

TWO MAN SERVANTS

REMARKS:

RAPHAEL at times appears wearing an angel mask, at other times unmasked, when he is passing as the man, 'Azarias'.

ASMOSDEUS wears a demon mask, at once comical and frightening.

ARI ('LION') is a smallish white dog, hopefully well-behaved. Can also be played by an actor of suitably convincing demeanour.

PROLOGUE

[Raphael appears alone, standing centre stage, his arms outstretched. He wears the Angel mask. Behind him, the starry heavens.]

RAPHAEL: Always alone with Him!
Day and night, throughout all Eternity
We are always alone with Him
We cannot escape His Voice
His hand upon the shoulder
His loving look
No matter where I wander
Across starry skies
Or down into the burning vaults of hell
Or over the dark face of suffering earth
Where those fallen creatures - men
Cry out for mercy and curse his very Name
Still that Voice like water runs on
Whispering forever in my ears.
If I fly on the white wings of morning
Or descend to the depths of the sea
Even there He is still with me.
Always alone with Him!
Though I dream of other voices, other names
Something small and fine to call my own
Someone littler than I to call my name
I wake from my dreams and find myself still
In the palm of his great, starry hand.
That hand that turns the heavens holds me fast.
I cannot escape that Voice
It is everywhere
In water, in wind, in song
In springing grass, in fire
The Voice that whispers forever in my ears...
Always alone with Him.

1.

[Tobit's house at Nineveh. Tobit, Anna, and Tobias stand around a table that is set with the evening meal. It is the hour of sundown, and the feast of Shevuot, the Pentecost, in late spring.]

TOBIT: A feast in honour of the Lord our God
 Who gives us light.
 A table laden, heavy with good things to eat.

[prays]

Blessed are you, Lord our God
Ruler of the Universe
Who brings forth bread from the earth
And wine to make glad the hearts of men.

[Anna lights the candles.]

ANNA: Blessed are you, Lord our God
 Who shows us the light of his commandments
 And bids us light the festival lights.

TOBIT: He gives us light
 And eyes to see the wonders of his work
 And you, Tobias, light of my eyes.

[Embraces his son.]

An only child, but it is enough.
The man without a child is like a blind man
He has no light for his eyes
Wherever he looks he sees only night
Another man's son, another's child.

The man without a child is a tree without branches
A tree that gives no shelter to any bird
A tree that bears no fruit.
Blessed be the Lord who has blessed me with a son.

[Again he embraces Tobias.]

Now let us eat!

[They sit down at table.]

ANNA: Others have not so much!
Think of the poor man
Beside the city wall
Or in some dark, lowly place concealed.
How will he keep the feast?
How will he worship?
What will he eat?
Think of the poor boy
Lost to his father's sight
Alone in the world
Adrift on the town
Hungry, ragged, and cold.
How will he keep the feast?
What will he worship?
What will he love?

TOBIT: The Lord has been good to us.
Let a poor man come in
to share this feast of ours
and make our happiness complete.
Go, Tobias, search the streets
Find out a man who is poor and alone on this day
And bring him here to eat with us.

TOBIAS: As you wish, Father.
 It shouldn't be hard
 to find someone like that!

[Exit Tobias.]

ANNA: Think of the poor man
 Who goes to sleep without bread.
 Think of the child whose mother cries for bread.

TOBIT: Harder than a stone is the man who will not share.
 Some day he may go hungry
 Some day he may stand outside the door begging for
 bread.
 The birds will mock him
 The crows will tear his eyes
 While he waits in tears outside the door.

ANNA: Think of the poor man
 Who has not asked to suffer so.
 Think of the woman
 Helpless, alone with her child.

TOBIT: Harder than stones are hearts that will not share
 They lie down in darkness and think that no one sees
 Like a child that hides his face behind his hands.
 But some day they will lie under the stars
 Some day they will lie under the open sky
 The birds will mock them
 The crows will tear their eyes
 Under the open sky.

[Tobias rushes in.]

TOBIAS: Father! Father!
 There! Outside! Beside the city wall!
 A man! Oh, Father! His face!
 I'm sure he's dead!

[He rushes into his father's arms. Tobit comforts him.]

TOBIT: Softly, Tobias -
 Tell us what you saw.

TOBIAS: There, beside the wall
 A man, his face was purple
 His tongue black, way out of his mouth
 and a cord tight around his neck!
 He's one of our people
 I don't know his name
 But I've seen him before I'm sure.

TOBIT: One of our people...
 Murdered and left by the wall
 Food for flies and carrion crows.
 No! He must receive a decent burial
 According to the laws of God.

[Anna covers the dishes, brings Tobit his cloak and wraps him in it lovingly.]

ANNA: And what of our feast?

TOBIT: Our feast shall be turned into mourning
 And all our songs into lamentations.

[Exit Tobit. Anna puts her arms around Tobias, and he bides his head on her breast.]

2.

[By the walls of Ninveh. Twilight. A dead man lies beside the wall, stage left, upon which several birds are perching. They rustle their large, black wings ominously. Enter Tobit. He kneels and observes the dead man.]

TOBIT: Poor fellow!
 You won't sleep tonight under the open sky.
 I shall take your place here
 Defiled by the touch of that harmless thing -
 A dead man's hand!
 Come along, then...

[Tobit hoists the dead man onto his back and carries him offstage to bury him. Darkness falls, but a bright moon now lights the scene. Interlude during which the birds' chatter rises to a threatening crescendo. They subside when Tobit re-enters. He lies down beside the wall, wrapped in his cloak, and goes to sleep. Gradual dawning of the day with noisy chorus of birds. The birds descend on Tobit and attack his face.]

TOBIT: Ah! Ah! Help! Help!
 The birds! The birds! Someone help me!

[Enter Anna with a basket containing his breakfast. She hears his cries and comes rushing to his aid. She beats off the birds.]

TOBIT: Anna, is that you?

ANNA: Yes. Are you hurt?

TOBIT: Anna... Is there no moon tonight?

ANNA: There was a moon
 But already the day is dawning.

TOBIT: Anna, do you see me?

ANNA: Yes, I see you very well, my dear
Are you badly hurt?
Why do you cover your face?

TOBIT: Anna... Oh God!
It is better for me to die than to live
Let now my spirit be taken up
Let me be like the dust of the streets
Let me be like the bending grass
Like the stones under men's feet
Let the sorrow within me die
For I no longer wish to live
A man without light for his eyes
Oh Anna, I am blind!

[Anna kneels upon the ground and takes him in her arms. As the full light of dawn gradually comes up, we see that Tobit is now blind. Now blackout this part of the stage. Light comes up stage right, on Raguel's house in Ecbatana.]

3.

[Ecbatana. Raguel's house is on two levels, with a well downstage in the courtyard. The time is very early that same morning. Sarah lies asleep in her upstairs chamber, beside the corpse of her new husband. Asmodeus comes stealing downstairs and out of the house.]

ASMDEUS: *[Rubbing his hands with satisfaction]*

So! That takes care of another one!
Seven bridegrooms, count them!

Line them up in a row if you please -
Seven lusty bridegrooms
For only a single little bride
A pretty little lily-white bride.
Every night I'm there at her side
Her sheets smell of paradise
Her cheeks are ripe as roses
And oh, the curve of her little round white... chin!
I've knocked off seven bridegrooms
And I'd happily take on seventy more!
Her innocence protects her
I know I can't possess her
But if I can't have her then nobody shall!
If I can't have her nobody shall!
Yes, I've killed off seven already -
Would anybody care to make it eight?

[He hears the handmaidens approaching and runs off. They have come to awaken the bridal couple. Sarah wakes to find them pulling hopelessly at the corpse.]

CHORUS OF HANDMAIDENS:

Murder! Murder!
She's done it again
Murder! Murder!
The bloody-handed witch!

[Sarah tries to embrace the corpse but they push her away.]

Get back! Away!
Murder! Murder!
She's done it again!

SARAH: No! It wasn't me!

I never harmed a hair of his head.

1st MAID: Liar! You've killed seven men!

2nd MAID: Liar! You've killed seven men!

3rd MAID: She strangles them in their sleep
The poor young men.

CHORUS: Witch! Witch!
She ought to be burned!

SARAH: No! I never harmed anyone in all my life...

CHORUS: Witch! Witch! She ought to be burned!

[They lay hands on her and she struggles with them.]

SARAH: No! Let me go! Let me go!

1st MAID: Why do you beat us so?
We didn't kill them!
Now they're dead
Why don't you run after them
straight to hell?
May we never see a child of yours!

CHORUS: May we never see a child
Not a son, not a daughter
No! Never a child of yours.

[Exit handmaidens.]

4.

[Sarah sits down at the window, looks out meditatively.]

SARAH: My God, have you forgotten me completely?
Will you not now take me utterly out of the earth?
I am the only child of my father
The only light of his eyes
If I die, how shall he live?
His old age in sorrow shall be brought to the grave.

Oh, it is better for me to die than to live!
Let now my spirit be taken up
I turn my eyes to heaven
I turn my face, I turn my eyes...
I am innocent of any sin with man.
Seven husbands of mine are already dead
No kinsman remains to take me for his wife
Why then should I live?
To listen every day to a false reproach.
Let me be like the dust of the earth
Let me be like the waves of grass
Like stones under the sea
Let the sorrow within me die
Let me die! Or help me...
Let me die! Or save me
That I may hear reproach no more.

[Light comes up on Tobit, still in Anna's arms, stage left.]

TOBIT: Let now my spirit be taken up
Let the sorrow within me die
Let me die! Or help me
Let me die! Or save me