

# **In Imago Dei**

Libretto

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## **CAST:**

**Monk**

**Nun**

**Mafia Guy**

**Choir**

# ACT ONE

## Scene I

An old kitchen with a wood-burning stove, big table and benches. Monk and Nun in brown habits and white ropes are sitting around the table eating breakfast.

NUN:                   What are you having today?

MONK:                 Oatmeal.

NUN:                   Do you like it?

MONK:                 I like it now. I hated it when I was a child. My parents wanted me to eat it to build strength.

NUN:                   Yes...(sigh). I disliked oats with milk very much.

MONK:                 I loved red cabbage salad. Sometimes, on Sundays, mother prepared this salad with chicken and mashed potatoes. The salad was so delicious, I could never have enough...

## Scene II

The door opens. Mafia Guy enters. He sits at the table. Nun looks at him.

NUN:                   What have I done to make you hate me?

MAFIA GUY:         I don't hate you.

NUN:                   What you do to other people you do to me. So, you say you don't even hate them? You don't have those kinds of feelings? You just do your business, Mobster?

MAFIA GUY: Don't call me that. I don't come here to talk about my professional life.

NUN: I have to tell you something because it seems to me that arguing doesn't do any good: If God would deign to come down to you and fill you with the holy spirit, believe me, regardless of what you are, you would do his will. And if God, later, would leave you, you could do only one thing: that is, prostrate yourself, and pray, and beg God to come back and fill you again with the holy spirit.

MAFIA GUY: I wouldn't do it. I would not pray to any God, for any holy spirit, because I burned my soul.

NUN: If God honored you by giving you a few seconds of experiencing what the Holy Spirit is, you would gladly do everything demanded of you.

MAFIA GUY: No, you don't understand. You don't know me.

NUN: You underestimate the divine. We'll see about it. You are hard-headed.

MAFIA GUY: You think Jesus could do what he did, if he was not helped by God? You think anybody could make that kind of sacrifice without being helped? People don't have that kind of strength.

NUN: There are many people who died with "Christ" as their last word, and they weren't even holy. And some sacrificed their lives for others.

MAFIA GUY: I don't believe you. Nobody just gives his life for somebody else.

NUN: There are nameless heroes who would hide fellow men, and their whole families were executed because of it. And they knew the price, and they took the risks. Ordinary people did that out of compassion, believing that it was necessary, to save human dignity, no matter what the cost. And what do you do, you swine?

## Scene III

Monk at the table, simple food; bread, cheese, water. Silence. After a minute, Nun slips to her knees, she prays ardently. Monk walks to the stove to prepare tea.

MONK:                   Some time ago... (*He sneezes*)

NUN:                    Bless you. (*She finishes her praying with that*)

MONK:                   ...perhaps twenty years ago, I thought I'd rather suffer because of the immensity of the beauty that was around me, beauty that horrified me, destroyed me utterly, for it reminded me poignantly of the ever-present difference between the world of my soul and that of my human form. The pain I suffer looking at great paintings or reading poetry, even looking at nature, was nothing compared to the horror of being next to a gorgeous woman. I could not overcome this devastating feeling for over twenty-five years. Eventually I realized that the genius of God is manifested most brilliantly through his creation of the human being. I came to understand this through the example of women's beauty, but of course it extends to all humankind.

From afar, we hear faint music with a mellow Latino rhythm. He starts clapping his hands rhythmically, slowly stands up and commences dancing. It is gentle and natural. Nun moves her head rhythmically. After a minute, while the music is still heard, Monk sits back down and they make a toast with glasses of water.

MONK:                   Then, I was taught about the horror of this world through the horror of this world. About hatred through hatred, about prejudice through prejudice, jealousy through jealousy, anger, oh how much anger, through anger. Temptation, ask me what I was not tempted by, and I'll tell you I know all the temptations of this world. So, I was spared nothing.

NUN:                    You know, I heard that Jesus resisted all his temptations with a kind of ease, but he almost broke before beautiful women Satan materialized to undermine his resistance.

MONK: (starts laughing) I understand, Sister, I understand.

NUN: So that was the hardest struggle for you, women?

MONK: Oh yes, it was very hard. I don't even mean the sexual side of it, but seeing people holding hands. For years, I heard this sentence echoing painfully in my brain "Human love, how beautiful it is. Human love how beautiful it is." For years, I could not forgive myself for loving women more than God. I felt inferior, completely unworthy of love of any kind. Out of hatred to myself, I found a way to punish myself. You know, like our brothers in the Medieval Ages. Scourging, scourging. If that wasn't enough, I thought, I should cut the thing off. I thought I would fix myself and have peace of mind. When the blood was running down my neck, because I hit my head sometimes too, down the crevice of my spine to my lower back, I felt my hatred subsiding. Through tears, I was brought back to a kind of balance so that at least I could stop and be numb for a few minutes.  
I felt those few minutes were always saving my life.

NUN: Oh brother, you were such a poor, wretched fool.

MONK: You're saying you never thought of women's breasts like two of the best Haiku? So full of art that they elude your meager talents, you can't glorify them nor transcend them in any way, so you just want to grab them and spoil them, to bring them down to your own three dimensions.

NUN: Well, the owner of those two likes three-dimensional reality, trust me.

MONK: But a woman needs more.

NUN: What's that?

MONK: (after awhile of being somewhere far away in his thoughts) Galloping, I think. Straight into the sunset. With her hair covering the plains of this earth, strings of matter.