

MARIA OMERTA

(Lights up. It is 1979. We are outside of a small house in rural, mountainous Sicily. The walls are in rough shape, the ground is rocky with a few scrubby plants. In front of THE HOUSE, a small table with two chairs. On STAGE LEFT, there is a small garden area with an object covered by a sheet. Enter PADRE TRAPANI, a man in his late twenties dressed in a full tweed suit. He is sweating profusely and walking with great effort, as if he has just exerted himself physically.)

PADRE TRAPANI

(muttering) Of all the suits I choose to wear today. Had to be tweed.

(He pulls out a piece of paper. He wipes his face with his sleeve, studies the paper, then steps back to survey the property.)

Okay... off of Via Della Luna, a half-mile west and... just by the cliffside. If this isn't the place, I don't know where else it would be.

(PADRE TRAPANI approaches the door and raises his hand to knock. Before his fist makes contact with the wood, the door flings open, colliding with his face and making a loud CRACK. He staggers back. Through the now-open door, enter FAUSTO. He has a bit of a Gollum/Smeagol thing going on, so play accordingly.)

FAUSTO

Signore, signore! I am so sorry. I didn't see you there. Did I hit you? Are you hurt?

PADRE TRAPANI

(clutching his now-bloody nose) What do you think?

FAUSTO

Let me get you something to clean up with. *(he pats his pockets and fishes out a small white handkerchief. PADRE TRAPANI takes it.)*

PADRE TRAPANI

Thank you.

FAUSTO

What a terrible way to make a first impression. After you came all this way.

PADRE TRAPANI

No, no worries.

FAUSTO

Really, I should be begging for your forgiveness right now.

PADRE TRAPANI

Please—

FAUSTO

A man of the Church, and I beat him senseless with my door! *(he falls to his knees)*

PADRE TRAPANI

Um. No need to grovel. *(beat)* Stand up, man.

FAUSTO

You are too kind, Padre. True godly mercy shines from you, I could sense it from the first time I saw you! *(he stands and reaches to stroke PADRE TRAPANI's cheek, where he is promptly batted away.)*

PADRE TRAPANI

This is very unnecessary.

FAUSTO

I know, I understand. I am just quite overcome with your generosity in the face of such pain. I am Fausto. Come in, come in. I have good wine that will dull this ache in your nose quite quickly.

PADRE TRAPANI

Sir, I think we need to slow down. *(beat)* I am here as an agent of the Church to investigate your claims of the Holy Mother appearing to you in this house. I ask for your full cooperation in these matters, but besides that, nothing else is needed. Not your hospitality, nor your liquor. *(beat)* I don't mean to be brisk, but I am here on business.

FAUSTO

(tone switch— he is now cold and detached). Hm. You are... not what I expected. Very American.

PADRE TRAPANI

I get that a lot.

FAUSTO

Very rude. They did not send a true member of the Church?

PADRE TRAPANI

Excuse me?

FAUSTO

Well, I mean no offense. It's just that it hurts to see the Church suffer this way, sending a businessman instead of a priest.

PADRE TRAPANI

A businessman? And what do you mean by that?

FAUSTO

Oh, you know. Very cold, detached, doesn't care.

PADRE TRAPANI

Would a businessman still be standing here after getting his nose smashed in?

FAUSTO

A mistake. You know what He says about mistakes, about forgiveness of sin.

PADRE TRAPANI

I do. And so I extend my mercy to you, but don't expect much else.

FAUSTO

I see. *(beat)* Very well, businessman.

PADRE TRAPANI

Look. I think we got off on the wrong foot. Let's start over. I am Padre Trapani. And you are...

FAUSTO

Fausto.

PADRE TRAPANI

We can continue this in Italian, if you like. *So parlare abbastanza bene da cavarmela.*

FAUSTO

No no, English is fine. I am working on my skills.

PADRE TRAPANI

Very well, as you like it. Tell me, Fausto. How has Mother Mary come to you?

FAUSTO

It was really the strangest thing. You see, my wife and I, we are devout Catholics. We go to Mass, we pray the rosary, we thank Him. And we have, all of our lives. But we never thought we would have this kind of... contact... with His world. *(beat)* Two weeks ago, I will never forget it. I am in the kitchen, eating my midday meal. My wife has gone outside to put the vegetable waste back into the garden, and I think nothing of it— until I hear her scream. *(beat)* It was so horrible, it was like the scream of a wounded animal. It echoed, you know how these mountains are.

PADRE TRAPANI

I do. Too well.

FAUSTO

Si, signore. So I run through the house, out to the garden. And I see her shaking on the ground, speaking in tongues. She was... not herself. I looked around to see if there was anything causing her to act this way— maybe a fire, maybe she was burned, or an animal, I thought. And then I saw the Madonna, clear as day. Right in front of me.

PADRE TRAPANI

How did she appear to you?

FAUSTO

Perhaps it is better just to show you. I'll take you to her now.

(he visibly perks up again, motions for PADRE TRAPANI to follow him, then crosses to THE GARDEN. PADRE TRAPANI follows, stepping over various gardening tools and scrap wood piles in his path. They arrive at the tarp-covered object.)

Signore, I must caution you. You are unprepared for what lies under this shroud.

PADRE TRAPANI

Try me.

FAUSTO

Behold, La Madonna Della... Fausto!

(he pulls the tarp off with a dramatic flourish, revealing a large piece of plywood bearing a shittily spray-painted likeness of the Virgin Mary. A moment goes by.)

PADRE TRAPANI

Are you serious?

FAUSTO

(eagerly) Si, signore.

PADRE TRAPANI

This is the Mary I came all the way here to investigate?

FAUSTO

She is more magnificent than you ever thought, no?

PADRE TRAPANI

She's so... something. *(beat)* And this... was like this when you found your wife on the ground?

FAUSTO

Yes! I had never seen anything like it. She just... appeared.

PADRE TRAPANI

And this isn't a sort of representation you've come up with to describe what you saw? This is what you say is the Marian Apparition? In the flesh?

FAUSTO

You see her, no?

PADRE TRAPANI

I... sure do. But you did not paint this yourself, correct?

FAUSTO

Of course not! She... how do you say... materialized on this board! On this scrap wood I would have built into a birdhouse. Who would have thought! It's holy now. I must not touch it.

PADRE TRAPANI

And your wife didn't paint it either?

FAUSTO

That is the Holy Mother. You would do well not to call her an "it." (*beat*) No, my wife did not paint her. How could she, when she was seizing and speaking in tongues?

PADRE TRAPANI

Right, silly me. Where is your wife, anyways? I would like to talk to her. See what the Holy Mother showed her.

FAUSTO

Oh signore, I would not advise that. She is still quite shaken about the whole ordeal, and she's in a delicate state.

PADRE TRAPANI

In order to determine if this is a true Marian apparition, I need to speak to your wife. According to your story, she is the main witness.

FAUSTO

(*indignantly*) I was a main witness too! I saw it!

PADRE TRAPANI

Yes, but she was the one speaking in tongues and convulsing, was she not?

FAUSTO

Well, yes, but—

PADRE TRAPANI

Wouldn't you assume that this is who Mother Mary gave her visions to?

FAUSTO

I don't think—

PADRE TRAPANI

I must speak to her. Where is she?

FAUSTO

(briskly) She is out.

PADRE TRAPANI

She's out now? Walking around these mountains, healthy and fine?

FAUSTO

She is.

PADRE TRAPANI

You just said she's shaken, in a delicate state.

FAUSTO

She is!

PADRE TRAPANI

Which is it? I sincerely doubt she is both, Fausto.

FAUSTO

Neither. I mean both. *(beat)* I mean, she is bed-bound. She has been in a seizing state ever since the Virgin came to her.

PADRE TRAPANI

Then I must see her to confirm.

FAUSTO

No! You cannot come into my home and disturb her. She is at rest.

PADRE TRAPANI

She is *at rest*? Constant seizures for two weeks doesn't sound restful to me.

FAUSTO

You pick and choose my words to disrespect me.

PADRE TRAPANI

I do not intend to disrespect you, Fausto, but if you do not cooperate with me, I cannot move forward in this investigation.

FAUSTO

But it is your job to investigate!

PADRE TRAPANI

If I am unable to confirm the witness, this leads nowhere. There are other apparitions to be investigated out there, more reputable than this one.

FAUSTO

Fine, fine. You drive a hard bargain, businessman. I'll find her. Just wait outside here now. *(he runs into the HOUSE.)*

PADRE TRAPANI

(muttering and wiping his brow) This is what I get for my transgressions. Checking out dead-end, go-nowhere apparitions in a crazy old man's backyard... in this *heat*. "Go back to your homeland," they said, "reconnect with your roots" they said! That will fix me! Bring me closer to God! But no, I just putter around this godforsaken region and disprove Mary appearing in the sole of a boot, or in a bowl of soup, or... even spray painted on a fence! *(beat.)* Unbelievable. And I mean that, I truly cannot believe it! *(skywards)* Heavenly Father, what gives? Can you work with me a little here? *(with a clatter; FAUSTO runs out of the house.)*

FAUSTO

Signore, I am so sorry to have kept you waiting, but I could not find her.

PADRE TRAPANI

You couldn't find your wife who is supposedly bed-bound and afflicted by visions of the Virgin? Really?

FAUSTO

Really!

PADRE TRAPANI

Right. Okay. Did she run away or something?

FAUSTO

Maybe she was raptured.

PADRE TRAPANI

Of course. Only her. Nobody else. Not the priest or the other self professed true Catholic in our midst.

FAUSTO

(indignantly) Do you imply my wife is not holy enough to be raptured? Or that she is not real?

PADRE TRAPANI

Perhaps both!

FAUSTO

This is outrageous. All of this, coming from a fake priest!

PADRE TRAPANI

Me, fake? Speak for yourself. I cannot believe that they would send me here to investigate this *sham*.

FAUSTO

Sham! I can't believe you would call the Virgin this awful name.

PADRE TRAPANI

Believe it, Fausto. I'm leaving.

FAUSTO

Have fun trying to climb down the mountain.

PADRE TRAPANI

Climb down the mountain...? *(he checks his watch)* Oh. It's 8:30, so...

FAUSTO

(smugly) The cable-car stopped running for the night.

PADRE TRAPANI

Shit. I'm stuck.

FAUSTO

Mind your language, there's a lady present.

PADRE TRAPANI

Oh. You mean the spray painted Virgin?

FAUSTO

Yes. And yes, you are stuck.

PADRE TRAPANI

Wow. Okay.

FAUSTO

Well, now that you must spend the night here, I am happy to open my house to you... provided that you look again at the Madonna. Reconsider, and enjoy my hospitality.

PADRE TRAPANI

I don't see that I have another choice.

FAUSTO

(joyfully) You do not! I will get the wine. *(he runs inside the house).*

PADRE TRAPANI

Good Lord above. Of all the places in the world to get stranded. *(he takes a seat at a small table outside the HOUSE. FAUSTO enters, carrying a bottle of red wine and two glasses)*

FAUSTO

For this occasion, I bring to you my finest red... which is also my only red. *(he begins to pour the wine)*

PADRE TRAPANI

Perhaps I shouldn't.

FAUSTO

That is nonsense. You are with a friend, you are in Sicilia, it is a lovely cool evening—

PADRE TRAPANI

(dabbing sweat from his brow) Cool?

FAUSTO

Drink. There is no excuse not to.

PADRE TRAPANI

I'm here as a Church official. Drinking on the job isn't exactly—

FAUSTO

During service, you take Communion, don't you? *(pointedly)* Bread and wine?

PADRE TRAPANI

It's not just that, it's—

FAUSTO

Ah. I see.

PADRE TRAPANI

(exasperated) What do you see, Fausto?

FAUSTO

I'd recognize it anywhere. Trouble with the drink, eh?

PADRE TRAPANI

I don't know what you're talking about.

FAUSTO

The red face? The tremble in your hand? Could be a lot of things, but from the way you looked at that bottle when I brought it out. I made a guess.

PADRE TRAPANI

That is entirely untrue *and* out of line—

FAUSTO

Some accusations, sir.

PADRE TRAPANI

From me? Or from *you*?

FAUSTO

So angry. Hard to be a priest with so much rage inside of you. *(beat)* That's why you left the church in New Orleans, hm? *(beat)* 1975?

PADRE TRAPANI

(a long moment of silence— something is very wrong.) How... do you know about that?

FAUSTO

Another guess.

PADRE TRAPANI

That cannot be... this is *not* a guess.

FAUSTO

You don't believe me, that's your problem.

PADRE TRAPANI

How could you know about that?

FAUSTO

Tsk, tsk. Even New Orleans couldn't contain your sin. And so you were banished back to the land that bears your name.

PADRE TRAPANI

(stands up suddenly) Fausto, how the *fuck* did you find out about New Orleans? This isn't a joke.

FAUSTO

Throwing around all the "fuck" and the "shit," no wonder they didn't want you anymore, Businessman. *(beat)* Was it about your anger, or the drink? *(beat)* Or the woman?

PADRE TRAPANI

(quietly) You don't know what you're talking about. You shouldn't even know any of this in the first place.

FAUSTO

But I do, don't I?

(FAUSTO has entirely dropped the crazy-old-man ruse, and his physical demeanor has shifted, from erratic and jumpy to still and in control. It is clear that the power dynamic is in his favor now.)

PADRE TRAPANI

You do. *(beat)* How?

FAUSTO

I have my ways. Connections.

PADRE TRAPANI

To who? To New Orleans? *(beat)* I don't understand. What does any of this have to do with me? *(beat)* What am I doing here?

FAUSTO

You tell me, businessman. Sit down, have some wine. *(he pours two glasses)* And relax, I was not sent to hurt you.

PADRE TRAPANI

It certainly feels like you were. *(he sits.)* Wait, *sent?* Who sent you?

FAUSTO

All in due time. Now, why don't you tell me how you got here? In your own words?

PADRE TRAPANI

(reluctantly) I don't know where to begin.

FAUSTO

Do your best. Perhaps this will jog your memory. *(he pulls out a small handgun and languidly points it at PADRE TRAPANI's chest.)*

PADRE TRAPANI

Oh. Woah. Okay.

FAUSTO

Relax, just a conversation starter.

PADRE TRAPANI

That much I can see. *(beat)* I... am from Sicily. From Trapani. *(beat)* Here.

FAUSTO

Yes.

PADRE TRAPANI

I left when I was twenty. I wanted to go to America, be a priest in the states. I first went to New York, as most of us do. A few years there, and I wanted a change. I decided to go to New Orleans, a place I'd heard was full of depravity and sin and needed someone like me. Only...

FAUSTO

You got caught up in some of that depravity, eh?

PADRE TRAPANI

(he hangs his head in shame) After I had been at the church for a few months, I met *her*. *(beat)* Maria. *(beat)* I didn't know anything about her at first. I just knew that she sat at the front row of the congregation and watched my sermons, rapt with attention. Something in her gaze made me

want to keep speaking, as if I was preaching to her and her alone. *(beat)* I was a goner the moment we locked eyes.

FAUSTO

She was a looker, eh?

PADRE TRAPANI

More than that. She was a *seer*. She knew things about me that she shouldn't have known, that I had never told her. She told me... things about the home country, who I was here. I think she was blessed by God with prophecy and visions. I felt even more connected to her then, because of that.

FAUSTO

But it didn't last.

PADRE TRAPANI

She was... the wife of the deacon there. So we couldn't be together, not really. But we had our trysts—

FAUSTO

In the vestibule.

PADRE TRAPANI

(wincing) Yes, in the vestibule. I am not proud of it. *(beat)* The more time I spent with her, the more I drank. I knew I couldn't have her, at least outside of the church walls. So, you were right about that one, Fausto. *(he takes a long sip of his wine, an action of defeat.)*

FAUSTO

I know. *(beat)* So, how did it end?

PADRE TRAPANI

Why are you asking me if you know the answer?

FAUSTO

I want to hear it from your mouth.

PADRE TRAPANI

Why?

FAUSTO

So I don't have to use this. (*he gestures to his gun*) I'd prefer not to, but if you lie to me, I may have to use her to... check the facts, so to speak.

PADRE TRAPANI

No, I've already told you enough. I don't understand why I am being questioned so viciously. I have already paid for this sin— I got put in this job far away from my life in the States, inspecting apparitions with no... no basis in reality. I am away from Maria, and that is more than I can bear, that is punishment enough. (*beat*) Let me have something to myself. How we parted. It's cruel to take that from me.

FAUSTO

Do you honestly think I would ask if I didn't know the truth already? The story isn't yours alone anymore. It never was.

PADRE TRAPANI

What do you mean, it hasn't ever been? How do you know all of this?

FAUSTO

You answer my question, I'll answer yours.

PADRE TRAPANI

Her husband found out. (*beat*) I'll always remember the look on her face when I was dragged away from her down the aisle. It was awful for the both of us. He beat me bloody in the alleyway behind the church— him and his brothers. Then, he gave me the privilege to decide whether I would remain in New Orleans and get killed or... leave forever. Never return. (*beat*) What was I to do? What choice had I? I was a coward. I didn't fight for Maria or my life there. He made sure I was moved here, back to Trapani, where I ran from so many years ago. He *knew* I didn't want it, he knew why I left, but—

FAUSTO

(*quietly*) How did he know?

PADRE TRAPANI

Know? Know about what?

FAUSTO

Why you had left? Why didn't you want to come back here?

PADRE TRAPANI

(*freezes— he didn't mean to let this slip*) I— I don't know.

FAUSTO

I think you do. *(beat)* What did you tell him? *(beat)* Who was he?

PADRE TRAPANI

He was... merely the deacon. Maria's husband. Nothing else.

FAUSTO

That's not true, and you know it. *(he shoots PADRE TRAPANI in the hand, who cries in pain)*
Remember what I said to you earlier, about lying to me? How you should not do it?

PADRE TRAPANI

A Caporegime! He was of the Family, the family in New Orleans. I told him more than I should have— ah, fuck! Fuck, that hurts.

FAUSTO

The truth tends to do that. *(beat)* But he was not of your family, eh? Not the one you abandoned? You told him secrets. You told him things he should not have known, not ever. *(beat)* Worse, you *sold* him secrets. Dirty, weak *soldato* that you were, couldn't help but get blinded by the glamour of the swamp. Although, that's not the first time this happened, eh, *Padre*?

PADRE TRAPANI

(gasping and clutching his bleeding hand) No, no it wasn't! I— sold secrets. Before I left Trapani. That's *why* I left. I had to go. I would have been caught.

FAUSTO

Finally, some honesty from you. *(disdainfully)* Here, pour some wine on that. Don't want it to get worse. *(he pours wine on the wound, causing PADRE TRAPANI to cry in agony)* You know that got your brother killed?

PADRE TRAPANI

Salvatore? He's... he's gone?

FAUSTO

Because of you, businessman. Does that make you feel good? Your loose lips sent him to his grave, soon after you left. But I guess you wanted to forget all about us for some money and a lady, soldier of God. Forget your vow, your silence, your *omerta*. How much repentance does it take to come back from that?

PADRE TRAPANI

Oh my God. Oh my God.

FAUSTO

How much can your God help you now? *(he points his gun at PADRE TRAPANI again)* That's almost everything I wanted to hear from you, sir. *(beat)* Only one more thing. You didn't sell secrets to the Deacon, did you? *(beat)* You sold them to her. To Maria.

PADRE TRAPANI

Yes. It was all to her, all for her. *(beat)* I didn't think she could *do* anything with them. To confess what she knew would be to admit that we were together. *(beat)* I just didn't want to be alone anymore. Not with this guilt. I couldn't carry it on my own.

FAUSTO

How altruistic. Ignoring the cash that just happened to fall into your pockets after one of your heart-to-hearts.

PADRE TRAPANI

You don't know the guilt I feel for it.

FAUSTO

Mmm. It weighs heavily on one's conscience, doesn't it?

PADRE TRAPANI

It does.

FAUSTO

Well, I'm sure you'll be happy to know that Maria is doing well these days. She and her husband bought a new house in the Quarter, on our dime. *(beat)* You didn't honestly think that the arm of our family couldn't reach across the Atlantic? To keep track of your foolish, dishonest deeds? You were a liability, *Padre*. You're just lucky we got to her— and you— before that husband ran his mouth on anything vital. *(beat)* Right around... the beginning of your courtship.

PADRE TRAPANI

You mean to tell me... all of it was a lie? Everything Maria and I shared? *(beat)* She had no prophecy, no visions?

FAUSTO

We weren't privy to *every* detail that you two shared. But she knew who you were from our contact, and I imagine that's where some of her *visions* came from. *(beat)* Now, why don't you

focus on our conversation here? The Family misses you. We only brought you back here to talk. Think of it as a confessional, of sorts.

PADRE TRAPANI

You *brought* me back here? This was your doing?

FAUSTO

Had to keep an eye on you somehow. Keep you chasing your visions close to home.

PADRE TRAPANI

If being here wasn't enough, you made me search for apparitions of Maria too. I had to hear her name through thousands of apparitions, only to find out that she's... belonged to you this whole time? How cruel.

FAUSTO

You broke *omerta*, fool. Your sacred silence. You killed your brother. For that, there is no return, no cruelty you can complain of. This is only equal retaliation.

PADRE TRAPANI

All these theatrics, your crazy old man act. The Mother Mary spray painted on a fencepost. All to torture me.

FAUSTO

Never say I'm not a showman.

PADRE TRAPANI

I've learned my lesson about what I can never say. Trust me.

FAUSTO

I have a hard time doing that. Given your track record.

PADRE TRAPANI

Well, what now? Where do we go from here?

FAUSTO

We go nowhere. *You* go down the mountain. Never to leave Sicily. (*beat*) Go into poverty, go live a life in the hills, go kill yourself for all we care. But know that we are always watching. And if you slip, if you share anything you shouldn't... we will know.

PADRE TRAPANI

I... get to leave? After all of this?

FAUSTO

Do you see me getting up to stop you? *(beat)* Climb, *padre*. Before I change my mind.

(PADRE TRAPANI rises shakily from his seat, clutching his still-bleeding hand. He turns to the path where he came, his back facing FAUSTO, who stands up and points his gun as PADRE TRAPANI begins to walk down the path. Lights go down, a gunshot sounds, and the thud of a body hitting the ground echoes. END OF PLAY.)