

**Scene: The Grand Hall of Blackwood Castle**

(The hall is vast and richly appointed. Sunlight streams through towering windows, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air. SANDRA, a woman of striking beauty and sharp wit, paces restlessly. LARA, elegant and observant, sits upon a velvet stool, a slight air of weariness about her.)

SANDRA:

Good Morrow, Lara! A hunger doth assail  
My belly, like a tempest's cruelest gale.  
These longings, they do grip me with such force,  
I scarce can bear to contemplate discourse.

LARA:

*(With a languid sigh)*

Indeed, my Lady, 'tis a common plight,  
When stomachs rumble, yearning for delight.  
A noble feast, a solace to the soul,  
Doth mend the spirit, and make it whole.

SANDRA:

I've pondered, dearest, on a wondrous treat –  
A disc of crust, with savoury delight complete.  
A Pizza, bathed in sauce of ruby hue,  
A simple pleasure, instantly anew.

LARA:

*(A touch of disdain)*

A Pizza? 'Tis a vulgar, greasy fare,  
A fleeting comfort, briefly to repair  
The emptiness. A dish for common men,  
Not for a lady of discerning ken.

SANDRA:

Nay, gentle Lara, let not judgment fly!  
'Tis speed and ease that capture my desire, I lie  
No falsehood, truly. And see, a touch of red,  
A scattering of alibi tomatoes spread –  
A crimson shield to mask its simple grace,  
A modest pleasure in this lonely place.

LARA:

*(A pause, considering)*

Alibi tomatoes... a clever guise,  
To cloak a craving 'neath deceptive eyes.  
Yet still, I deem it lacking, light and frail,  
A momentary balm against this gale.



SANDRA:

Hold, Lara, pause! A sweeter thought doth spring,  
A frozen jewel, a delightful thing!  
Imagine, if you will, a creamy mound,  
Of ice cream, rich and sweetly profound!

LARA:

*(A flicker of interest)*

Ice cream? A trifle... yet, I confess,  
A sudden yearning stirs within my dress.  
The thought of coolness, melting slow and bright,  
Doth banish shadows, and restore the light.

SANDRA:

Then let us seize this bounty, swiftly done!  
First, Pizza's warmth, then victory is won,  
With ice cream's chill to temper and complete,  
A balanced pleasure, truly bittersweet!

LARA:

*(A small, conceding smile)*

'Twill serve, my Lady. Let us then procure  
This dual feast, and satisfy our lure.  
A prudent choice, though lacking, I confess,  
In virtue pure, and steeped in simple zest.

*(They both fall silent for a moment, contemplating their impending feast, a subtle dance of desire and veiled intent hanging in the air.)*



### The wall

The room is grey. Pale concrete walls. A single, bare bulb hangs from the ceiling. A bucket of white paint sits on the floor. A roller. A brush. Emilie and Amelie stand facing each other, the wall behind them a blank, slightly peeling rectangle. Dust motes dance in the light.

EMILIE: *(Quiet, almost a mumble)* Twenty euros. For the paint. It's enough.

AMILIE: Enough for what? Just to cover it? It's not... it won't be enough.

EMILIE: It's white. It's... a start. We can do it tomorrow.

AMILIE: Tomorrow? You're thinking about tomorrow. Like it's just... a wall.

*She gestures to the wall, then looks away.*

EMILIE: It **is** just a wall. It's a grey wall.

AMILIE: *(Voice rising slightly)* Don't say that. Don't. It's **his** wall. You know. The one with... the picture of the bird.

EMILIE: *(Turning slightly, avoiding eye contact)* It's a picture. It was a picture.

AMILIE: You're not even saying it. You're just... measuring it. Like you're measuring how much of him is left.

*Silence. The bucket of paint sits undisturbed.*

EMILIE: We need to get the rollers. Two. You get the rollers.

*She turns back to the wall, picking up the brush. Starts to move it slowly, deliberately.*



AMILIE: *(Following her)* And the masking tape? You didn't buy the masking tape.

EMILIE: It's... not necessary.

AMILIE: It is necessary. You know it is. He wouldn't have left it. He wouldn't have just... not.

EMILIE: *(Without looking up)* Stop.

AMILIE: Stop what? Stop talking about him? Stop pretending it's just paint?

EMILIE: Stop. Just... start. Let's just start.

*She begins to roll the paint onto the wall. A thin, uneven line.*

AMILIE: *(Softly, almost a whisper)* He liked the blue. That shade of blue. The one he got from... from that place.

*She points to the hole in the wall, a jagged scar.*

EMILIE: *(Voice tight)* It doesn't matter.

AMILIE: It does. It always does. Don't you remember the pot? The flower pot?

EMILIE: *(Doesn't respond. Continues painting.)*

AMILIE: He said he was working late. Said he was just... busy.

*She watches Emilie paint, her face unreadable. The grey paint spreads slowly across the wall.*



[SCENE END]

### Rover

Sunlight streams through sheer curtains, dappling the plush velvet furniture. A table sits center, holding a delicate vase of lilies and two impeccably chilled martinis. ELEANOR (40s, impeccably dressed, a hint of forced brightness) and VIVIAN (40s, equally stylish, a touch of mischievousness) are perched on a chaise lounge, deep in conversation. Rover, a stout, dignified bulldog, snores contentedly at Eleanor's feet.

VIVIAN: *(Taking a delicate sip of her martini)* Honestly, Eleanor, you've never met a dog quite like Rover. Such unwavering devotion. It's...remarkable. Like a furry, four-legged shadow.

ELEANOR: *(Smiling warmly)* Oh, he is. Absolutely. He's been with us through thick and thin, you know? A true companion. He follows me everywhere. Even to the grocery store.

*She gently strokes Rover's head. He grunts in response.*

VIVIAN: *(Leaning forward conspiratorially)* You know, the best dogs are the ones that seem to **understand** you. Like they're judging your every move.

ELEANOR: *(Chuckles)* Well, he certainly has an opinion. Mostly about biscuits, I suspect. *(Gestures to the martinis)* Speaking of opinions, these are simply divine. Mr. Harding bought the finest gin.

*A beat of comfortable silence. Then Eleanor's eyes flick to a dark, crimson smear on her husband's jacket hanging on a nearby chair. It's unmistakably lipstick.*

*Her smile tightens, but she forces it into place.*

ELEANOR: *(A little too brightly)* Oh, my! Isn't that a lovely shade? Mr. Harding was... admiring the lilies earlier. He said they reminded him of... of a particularly vibrant rose.



*She pats Rover's head again, a little harder this time, as if grounding herself.*

VIVIAN: *(Observing Eleanor with a raised eyebrow)* Roses, you say? A rather bold statement for a man who usually prefers beige.

ELEANOR: *(Clears her throat, a slight tremor in her voice)* He's... he's been reading a great deal lately. About... about color theory. A rather fascinating subject, really. *(She glances pointedly at the jacket, then back at Rover)* Poor Rover seems perfectly content. Doesn't he, darling? Just a little nap.

*Rover lets out a particularly loud snort.*

VIVIAN: *(Slowly, deliberately)* Loyalty is a remarkable thing, Eleanor. A truly remarkable thing. Especially when it's...unwavering.

*Eleanor offers a small, brittle smile and takes a large gulp of her martini. The sunlight seems a little less bright now.*



## Apples

The last sliver of sun bled orange onto the crumbling stone walls of the courtyard. A damp chill clung to the air, smelling of damp wool and something faintly metallic from the rain earlier. Andrea, her hands rough and red from the soap, meticulously folded a threadbare sheet. Siri, her face etched with a permanent weariness, was sorting a pile of grey socks. The laundry lay scattered around them, a jumble of faded colours and worn fabrics.

"Markus," Andrea said, her voice low, almost swallowed by the quiet of the evening. She didn't look up. "He... he came to see us, didn't he?"

Siri sighed, a small, dry sound. "Came. Yes. He wanted to talk. Said he was doing... well."

"Well," Andrea repeated, the word tasting bitter. "Well is a big word, Siri. A very big word." She paused, carefully tucking the corner of the sheet. "He's got a... a business now. An apple firm. 'Frutta del Sole,' he called it. Fruits of the Sun."

Siri grunted, pushing a sock into a bundle. "Sounds grand. Like a promise of something warm."

"A promise," Andrea agreed, her fingers still. "That's what he said. Promised us he was doing alright. Said he'd send us something. A little... something."

A long silence stretched between them, punctuated only by the rustle of laundry.

"He looked... different," Siri finally said, her voice flat. "Clean. Not like he used to be. Like the dust had washed off him."

"Like a mask," Andrea corrected, her gaze fixed on the darkening courtyard. "A shiny mask. He used to smell of sweat and coal smoke. Now... now he smells of apples." She wrinkled her nose slightly. "Apples and... something else. Something expensive."

"He said it was prospering," Siri stated, almost mechanically.

"Prospering," Andrea scoffed. "Who gets rich growing apples, Siri? The bees? The worms? The rain? It's a gamble, you know. A bloody, sun-baked gamble." She picked up a damp handkerchief and began to wring it out with a slow, deliberate movement. "He was always a dreamer, Markus. Always looking for something... brighter. Like he was trying to escape the rain."

Siri didn't respond. She continued to sort the socks, a small, sharp sound as she folded them.

"He said he wanted to repay us," Andrea said, her voice barely a whisper. "For... for when we helped his mother. Before. When she was sick."

"He's a good boy, Markus," Siri said quietly, but without conviction.

"Good boys," Andrea said, sharply. "They're all good boys. Until the harvest comes, and the sun burns too hot." She looked out at the deepening shadows, her face a mask of quiet, weary skepticism. "Just... just remember, Siri. Don't expect the sun to always shine."

