

**THE PAINTED LADY ON GENE KELLY STREET**

**a play**

**by Frank Gagliano**

**SCENE I**

**THE CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTS  
COME ON.**

**THE REST OF THE HUGE TREE IS BARE,  
HAS NOT YET BEEN DRESSED .**

**THE THREE SISTERS ARE ON  
THE CURVING STAIRCASE.**

**BARBARA IS SEATED  
ON ONE OF THE STEPS;  
AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRCASE.**

**BARBARA**

**How long *now*, Laura?**

**LAURA IS SEATED ON THE BOTTOM  
STEP, LOOKING AT THE CHRISTMAS  
TREE. GLANCES AT HER WATCH.**

**LAURA**

**Barbara. Please. Just fifteen minutes have gone by. Since the last time you asked.**

**STEPHANIE IS SEATED  
ON THE CENTER STAIRWELL LANDING,  
HALFWAY UP THE  
STAIRS.**

**STEPHANIE**

**Seems like hours.**

**BARBARA**

I can't believe we haven't talked for 15 minutes.

**STEPHANIE**

The three Fermi sisters; not talking for 15 minutes. Not a word!

**LAURA**

You seem shocked, Steph. Did we *use* to talk a lot?

**STEPHANIE**

(After a beat)

Yes, of course.

(After a beat)

Yes. . .yes. . . I'm certain of it. Barbara?

**BARBARA**

Of course.

**LAURA**

I can't remember. Anymore.

(The front door opens.  
Angela and Vincent enter.  
Vincent's head is bandaged.

Vincent clutches a violin case.  
The front door remains open.  
All the girls stand  
and stay in place on the stairs)

**ANGELA**

He's all right, girls. See? I told you that on the phone. Now you can believe me. He *is*: Quite all right. A little dizzy, perhaps. That's all. Vincent. Go on up. Rest. Sleep, if you can.

(Vincent walks up the stairs.

He stops on center landing,  
opens his violin case, takes out his violin;  
plays part of a mournful Neapolitan song.

When he finishes, he places the violin back  
in the case. Looks down at the Christmas tree)

VINCENT

We have got to finish the tree. This year, I swear, we finish off the tree with angel hair. Like in the old days. Like my father always did.

(He exits at the top of the stairs.  
After a few beats.)

ANGELA

By playing — and so exquisitely — with such technique — and with such authority — by taking the time to play that way — and by talking about dealing with angel hair — the effort of which can be a royal pain in the ass — stretching it over an entire Christmas tree. . . a spider's web. . . over an entire Christmas tree

(A beat)

—By doing both these things, the playing *and* mentioning of the angel hair, Vincent wants to show his daughters that he's all right. *And he is*. Really. No concussion. But he required stitches.

STEPHANIE

(Sits)

God.

BARBARA

(Sits)

Damn!

(Pause)

LAURA

Mother. On the phone you did tell us that; that he was going to be all right. *But --* from *what?* How did he get the concussion?

ANGELA

He attacked his Chairman.

BARBARA

(Stands)

What?! Gentle Daddy—!

STEPHANIE

(Stands)

Attacked his Chairman? Attacked Mr. Apollo?!

**ANGELA**

Yes.

**(ALL THREE GIRLS sit)**

With his violin, apparently; tried to use it as a club; an act — by the way that could threaten Daddy's tenure. One of the few acts that could. Apparently. Anyway, violin at the attack, Daddy tripped, hit his head on Jack Apollo's desk, and passed out. Apparently, there was lots of blood.

**(A man wheeling one piece of overnight luggage-on-wheels, enters. Closes the door behind him)**

**ANTON**

**(With slight accent)**

Hello. I was getting my luggage out of the boot of the car. And I thank you for keeping the door open. It is a good thing that it is a mild December. No? So far.

**ANGELA**

**(Turning)**

Ah. This is Anton Otchayanie. He was at the hospital, in the Emergency Room. He had cut himself — terribly — and needed stitches.

**(Anton holds up the bandaged middle finger of his left hand)**

**ANGELA**

**(Continued)**

Anton is a new graduate student. In daddy's College; a mature, older-than-most, *and*, a much-world-traveled, life-experienced, graduate student. Anton needs a place to stay. I told him we had this large Victorian house on Gene Kelly Street; a brightly colored Victorian house — “a painted lady,” with plenty of room. — Well, I did tell him the truth, too, of course; that Vincent was in the ER for trying to kill his Chairman, Jack Apollo, and that all our girls — because we had no sons, Vincent and I — that all our girls, *everyone* of them — Barbara,

**(Barbara stands)**

Laura,

**(Laura stands)**

Stephanie,

**(Stephanie stands)**

— the stairway girls — ta taa! — have returned home; in this — after Twin Towers time — and during severe recession time;” have returned, our daughters have, to. . . what — suck us dry? perhaps? -- their sixty-plus-year-old parents dry? materially and emotionally? Because their lives, the Stairway girls' lives, have

**ANGELINA**

(Continued. Turns to Anton; addresses him)

fallen apart elsewhere? -- as the lives of the parents, Vincent and Angela Fermi, have fallen apart, as well? On Gene Kelly Street? In the City of Pittsburgh. . .? But the attic room is vacant, Anton— and God knows we're strapped for cash — well, God *may* know it, but I shouldn't think, cares — but I know it, and I care; Vincent is in denial, of course and as usual — an attic room with its own toilet; and in which, if you like, you are welcome to stay. And are willing to pay.

(Turns to the Stairway Girls)

I made that offer to Anton.

(Turns to Anton)

And what did you say, Anton?

(Anton slowly smiles.  
He has a dazzling smile,  
with dazzling teeth)

**ANTON**

Gene Kelly Street. Imagine. How can one turn that down? Also, we could convalesce together, Professor Fermi and I; from our wounds. Yes, I said. Of course, yes.

**ANGELA**

(To the Stairway Girls)

Anton, it seems, is a former ballet dancer. From the former Soviet Union. But, he assures me, he's a ballet dancer who is not gay. He was, however, in love, he says, with Gene Kelly.

(To Anton)

And what did you do, Anton? After you so happily agreed?

(Anton does a time step  
--but, like a ballet dancer  
would tap dance --

and, while dancing, sings”  
“Singing In The Rain.”

He smiles a great deal;  
keeps smiling while he sings, dances;

The Stairway girls look down on the  
dancing/singing Anton.

Barbara smiles;  
Laura is appalled;

**Stephanie is indifferent.**

**The lights slowly fade;**

**except for the little white lights  
on the tree.**

**Then they, too, go out; and,  
in the darkness, we still hear Anton  
singing and dancing:  
but now, we also hear a violin playing,  
“Singing In The Rain.”**

## **SCENE 2**

**THE CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTS  
COME ON.  
NOW, IN ADDITION TO THE WHITE  
LIGHTS,  
COLORED LIGHTS HAVE BEEN  
ADDED.**

**THERE ARE NO OTHER  
ORNAMENTS  
ON THE TREE.**

**VINCENT IS ON THE CENTER  
LANDING  
(HEAD STILL BANDAGED); PLAYING,  
“SINGING IN THE RAIN,”  
ON HIS VIOLIN.  
HE WEARS A DARK BLUE  
WINTER-WEIGHT ROBE.**

**STEPHANIE AND BARBARA ARE  
WORKING ON THE TREE.**

**STEPHANIE WEARS A BLACK  
TURTLE-NECK SWEATER WITH  
BLACK SLACKS AND BLACK  
SHOES.**

**BARBARA WEARS A GREEN  
TURTLE-NECK SWEATER AND**

**GREEN SLACKS AND NO SHOES.**

**ANTON, DANCING AND TRYING TO HELP, WEARS A COLORFUL RED, WHITE AND BLUE SKI TURTLE-NECK SWEATER AND DARK BLUE JEANS AND WHITE SOCKS AND VERY WHITE TENNIS SHOES.**

**LAURA ENTERS FROM ABOVE AND RUSHES DOWN THE STAIRS PAST HER VIOLIN-PLAYING FATHER. SHE HAS ON A METALLIC-BLUE, DESIGNER NAVY PEA COAT, AND METALLIC-BLUE WRAP-AROUND SCARF, AND METALLIC-BLUE HEAD PHONES ON HER EARS ATTACHED TO A METALLIC-BLUE PORTABLE CD PLAYER. HER HEAD IS COVERED BY A METALLIC-BLUE BERET.**

**VINCENT  
(Stops playing. Shouts)**

**Laura!**

**(Laura stops. Pulls ear phones away from her ears)**

**Aren't you going to help your sisters and Anton with the tree?**

**LAURA**

**No!**

**(She replaces earphones and runs out the front door and slams it behind her)**

**ANTON**

**In St Petersburg, when I studied drama -- all ballet people had to study drama -- when I studied with the great Drama coach Charlotte Pishchik -- who was rumored, by the way, to be Stanislavski's Uncle's son's mistress -- we would have to find for each scene what she called, "the dramatic question." I should think that the dramatic question for this scene is. . .How shall I phrase it? . . .--Ah! "Will the chic, beautiful, and highly-strung Laura Fermi, get**

**ANTON**

(Continued)

over her distaste of the intruder Anton Otchayanie? And stay in the same room with him?

**BARBARA**

Don't mind Laura. With what she went through, it's no wonder she finds everything and everyone distasteful.

**STEPHANIE**

Bull poop! I'm tired of hearing that. We've all gone through it. And we're angry because we've had to crawl back home to—

**BARBARA**

For me, the dramatic question — the overriding dramatic question — continues to be: “Why did Vincent Fermi attack his Chairman?”

**STEPHANIE**

Barbara, please. “Vincent will tell us when he's good and ready.” To quote mother.

**ANGELA**

(Entering)

Are you good and ready, Vincent?

(She wears an elegant dark brown tailored suite; with elegant strand of pearls and pearl earrings. She carries two poinsettia plants Vincent follows)

Or must we wait to hear it in court, when the Chairman brings you up for charges?

**BARBARA**

It's *that* bad? Mr. Apollo is bringing charges?

**ANGELA**

That's the rumor.

(She places poinsettia plants near the tree)

**STEPHANIE**

Daddy?

(Everyone stops working on the tree and looks at Vincent.)



Pause)

VINCENT

He called me, “A discarded scum bag.” . . . “Professor Fermi, you are nothing but a discarded scumbag.”

(Pause)

ANTON

What is a “scumbag?”

VINCENT

“Scumbag,” of course, is used a lot today; and, for most people, probably has lost its resonance. Like “asshole.” In fact, if he had just called me an “asshole,” I don’t think I would have considered attacking him. Just about all those words have lost their resonance. . . .Hm. Just about everything, in fact, has lost its resonance. Hasn’t it? . . .—Still, it got to me: “You are nothing but a discarded scum bag.” . . .Everyone, I suppose, still understands that a scumbag is a condom.

ANTON

Ah.

VINCENT

And “condom” doesn’t resonate in any nasty way; doesn’t upset most people. Except those religious right fanatics, of course. *And* pedophile priests, perhaps. So, why did it upset me? You might well ask, A condom is a condom is a condom; by itself, a pristine item. *But*— ah, but do they know what “scum” is? I wonder. In my day it was clearly the word for “semen,” “ejaculate,” “cum.” The “bag,” nèe condom, was the receptacle for “jerk off” stuff. But the operative word — the triggering word in that phrase he called me — what my asshole-of-a Chairman called me — was the word, “discarded.” A “discarded” scumbag is one filled with “jerk-off” stuff. It is “discarded” because it is used up. Finished *with*. Climaxèd. . . .“Hey Vinnie,” my friend Sal would say, “look’a this. A used scumbag!” And he’d pick it up from the sewer grate, where it hadn’t gone down with the other discarded crap, and wave it in my face. Ugh! I’d say, and run on home! . . .It’s true, I was fastidious. Then, as now. But why was I also . . .terrified? And enraged? Even then?

(Pause)

BARBARA

Daddy. Really. “Sticks and stones,” for God’s sake. Couldn’t you just keep the violence verbal? And behind your Chairman’s back? In the typical academic way?

**STEPHANIE**

Just before Robert ran out on me he called me —cover your ears, Anton— he called me a “skanky cunt.” Now, if there was ever a time to attack someone -- with a balls cutter, if I had one -- that was it. But, no; little Stephanie did her usual thing. She turned her back on him. Pouted. While Robert stormed out; somehow in the right. No, no; that’s good, Dad, I’m proud of you. Surprised; but proud. You should have broken the bastard’s skull.

(Pause)

**ANTON**

What is “skanky?”

**VINCENT**

Perhaps my terror then -- in my childhood scumbag days--was a foreshadowing; what role terror was to play in my life later. Now. Today. And that the terror of that picking up of an actual discarded scumbag was a beginning, in my life, of a through—line to Apollo’s discarded scumbag metaphor.

**ANGELA**

Of course. And Apollo was your friend Sal’s future nephew. Who has been waiting -- ever since he found out who you were — to use it against you.

**VINCENT**

There are stranger scenarios.

**ANTON**

Does Skanky mean disgusting?

**ANGELA**

What now, Vincent? What do you want? What do you hope to gain from this?

**VINCENT**

I want a return match. With my asshole Chairman. I want him to take it back. I want an apology -- a public apology. And I want that apology smeared all over the University’s Home Page. And if I don’t get it — I’ll go after him again. And this time I’m smear the bastard’s brains all over his desk.

(A cell phone rings)

(Angela takes the cell phone  
from her belt)

**ANGELINA**

(Into cell phone)

Yes?

**(Listens)**

**Ah. Yes. I'll ask him.**

**(To Vincent)**

**It's Jack Apollo. He wants to come over. Within the hour.**