

LOVE IS A PUPPET

Kathe Koja

(Victorian Opulence at District VII Detroit – 11/19/11)

ISTVAN, with Marco his puppet

GABRIEL, a hustler

(ISTVAN enters, takes the measure of the event space. GABRIEL is watching, detaches himself from whatever sexual scam he's running, approaches ISTVAN. They lead each other into the booth, a makeshift boudoir. Quick sex ensues to a pleasant conclusion.)

GABRIEL: Ain't you the jockey! Got a taste of something wet, may be?

ISTVAN: Lovely . . .

(They share a bottle, taking each other's measure)

You live here?

GABRIEL: Sometimes. I come and go.

ISTVAN: What's your name?

GABRIEL: Gabriel. Gabriel the Angel. What's yours? *(No answer)* You a traveler, aren't you.

ISTVAN: Yes. I travel a great deal – I come and I go . . . The road's a pleasure, mainly, though the journey's growing long. I take what pleasures I may, it helps to pass the time. Such as – *(indicating party)* A fine display, there.

GABRIEL: Thankee. You're a bit of a looker, too.

So you're a traveling fellow – I've known a few fellows like that.

ISTVAN: No doubt you have. More than a few.

GABRIEL: Some of them came to stay . . . What's in the box? Presents for me? *(No answer. Lifts the lid)*

Why, it's toys, ain't it?

ISTVAN: Leave that. – Not toys, no. Or I suppose one could call them philosophical toys. I don't suppose you read much philosophy, do you? No matter.

GABRIEL: *I know what matters.*

ISTVAN: I said, leave it.

GABRIEL: You make shows, and such?

ISTVAN: I do. We do. *(Takes Marco from the trunk)* We make our way along the road, we investigate true love.

For can there ever be an actor more suitable for the vagaries of desire? to perform the most amazing feats, turn inside out and die a thousand times? Only to live again on the morrow, refreshed and ready for more abuse: just like the heart!

And you don't need flesh and bones to want love, it's not of the flesh itself. Though it has a certain smell, one can't mistake it –

GABRIEL *(puts himself between ISTVAN and Marco)*: I smell [chocolate].

ISTVAN: – and a certain taste on the tongue, not only the taste of kisses, but of solitary tears, and lovers' sweat – (*Situates GABRIEL opposite Marco.*) For isn't love itself a kind of puppet? And the desired one, the one who pulls the strings?

Do you have love in your life?

GABRIEL: Love! Do you?

ISTVAN: I did. I do.

I will again.

GABRIEL: You got a lady? (*ISTVAN laughs*) A man, then, a gent?

ISTVAN: Yes.

GABRIEL: A special gent?

ISTVAN: Most special indeed.

GABRIEL: Where is he? Here?

ISTVAN: Elsewhere, just now. He's employed at a brothel called Under the Poppy.

GABRIEL (*laughs*): A brothel! Cock-a-hoop!

ISTVAN: Oh yes, it's a singular establishment. They entertain there, the whores do, in tin spangles and stocking feet. Alongside my sister, the pinchpenny madam, who cuts her wine with water and her water with gall . . .

(To Marco) We'll play them a new sort of show, though, won't we?
Love's always a show, and always with a hero at its heart. *(To himself)* Rupert

and I, we played many nights together, we were heroes to each other, weren't we. And it's nowhere near its closing, that show, no matter how long the intermission.

GABRIEL: If he loves you so much, your special hero, why ain't he with you?

ISTVAN (*pushes GABRIEL off*): Watch what you say. That's none of your affair.

GABRIEL: Not yours neither, if – what's it? Rupert? – is off diddling in some brothel –

ISTVAN: Leave it –

GABRIEL: – while you're here a-playing alone with your toy! Was it him put you out on the road? That's love for you!

ISTVAN: Little whore (*grabs him*), retract that grubby fucking finger, don't dare to touch a moment what's not yours, what you'd never understand if you lived a thousand times a thousand years.

GABRIEL: I never meant it, sir, I –

ISTVAN: You're the toy, and I've fucking done with playing. Get out.

Go.

(GABRIEL exits. ISTVAN puts Marco into the trunk again, turns to the audience in the booth)

You'll excuse that contretemps, *Mesdames et messieurs* . . . And you'll excuse us, too: we must be on our way, myself and my associate. But perhaps we'll all meet again Under the Poppy.

If you go that way, tell my sister I sent you.

(Audience exits.)