

Michael Kenyon / ORANGE RIND (FOR FIVE VOICES)

- EBENEZER I dreamed of Duncan, that he's imprisoned like the five of us, but in a distant compartment. I dreamed his dry fingertips touching hollows in the surface of the cell wall, the indentations where his fingernails once fit perfectly. Now his nails are splintered to the cuticle.
- DION A plotted dream, Ebenezer, a waking fantasy. *My dream* was of a fruit stand at dawn in the Xtalmla plain. Garance stands behind the boxes, calls to her long shadow: Lovely pears! Succulent peaches!
- CEMETERY Says you. I never dream, or if I do, I never remember. I have a lousy memory. I HAVE A LOUSY MEMORY! And I'm sick of imagining Duncan alive. Who cares? Right Basil?
- BASIL Stupid. We all dream of Duncan: Duncan lives on. I dreamed I was shaking him by the hand: everything burning, everyone dying.
- CEMETERY Good morning, Garance. Good night, Basil. This is not the time to shout.
- BASIL Stupid. We have to shout to be heard. These walls are thick. I dreamed Duncan had an escape plan.
- ABACUS Basil, your voice fades like space into walls. The name, Duncan, fades into the stone. If you can hear me, Basil, then it's as if Duncan is moving from my cell, through the wall between us, into your own cell. When I say: Duncan lies across the floor of the cell—

BASIL Cemetery, listen: Duncan's in his resting place, his cave, his stone stone stone. Is this what you're thinking?

Pause.

CEMETERY No. All I hear, Basil, is your voice on one side, Dion's voice on the other side. Beyond your voice, I sometimes hear Abacus's voice and beyond Dion's, sometimes Ebenezer's. But that's all. There is no one else. Four voices all speaking of a person who is dead. But you won't talk to me unless I play along. I hate the stories. Why not talk quietly of a meal you once ate, a glass of water, a conversation with a woman, a beautiful woman, or of a place? Why not mention other names?

... I remember drinking wine once at the Estancia Pildoras, with you Basil, and the others. The sun was setting; a slight breeze entered through the open door, into the room, swayed gently out again through the curtains closed on an open window. Can you hear me, Dion? You were there, remember? At the estancia. Duncan was dead drunk —

DION On the plain, Garance reaches out. She can't see Duncan, but she can guess his plans.

EBENEZER His arms and legs are thin and long. His torso conducts ribs and nipples and wisps of chest hair down toward the solo phallus. His white beard seems to drag his features away from the black eyes. Gradually, in a procession, first one leg, then an arm, then the other leg, then a shoulder, leave the ground. Duncan begins to rise in a horizontal ripple, until he's several feet above the cell floor, midway between root and coping. Like a ghost-leaf, he drifts on the breeze through the wall, passes into Dion's cell.

DION I see Duncan's feet, his knees, his belly, his chest, his neck, his head. His body surfs the air the width of the cell. And now he's passing into the opposite wall. His feet disappear, his knees, his belly, his neck, his head. ...

CEMETERY I'm trying real hard.

BASIL Just *say* you see him, Cemetery.

CEMETERY I see Duncan's knees, his scrawny chest, and everything.

BASIL Duncan looks so peaceful as he floats through the cell. He's plotting his escape with great care, taking notice of all the details. His eyes twinkle as he pushes effortlessly through the wall into the next cell.

ABACUS Here is no air current. Duncan reclines, suspended just above the floor. He's listening; I can almost hear Garance's voice asking what he's dreaming about. Duncan looks from the corners of his eyes at me, it's a pleading look: I shall transmit my dream, it says, and you, Abacus, you shall give it voice.

Garance, Duncan says, I'm dreaming about fruit. I'm dreaming of an orange you once gave me and which I can't remember eating. It had five cells. I remember all the melons, peaches, mangoes, rhubarb, apples and pears I ever ate, but I can't remember the orange... Now, I'm running along the path from town, past the schoolhouse. From here Xtalmla looks like a smouldering pomegranate against the dark sky. A woman walks down the school steps toward me carrying a toolkit, a crowbar and a bag of oranges. She says: It's much warmer where the incendiaries land.

BASIL I ask her for an orange and she gives me two. We make our plans together; her name's Garance, she tells me; she knows a ranch on the plain where we can rest.

CEMETERY I think we did this one before.

DION A clear sky sometimes shines between the black columns of smoke. Sometimes, too, the flames from town are invisible. We head for our favourite cafe where Garance orders crepes with hot loganberry sauce, a loganberry mousse, chocolate cake and those special shortbread biscuits fashioned in the shape of cats. I order bread and water.

EBENEZER We hike for miles, across the plain to the Pildoras Estancia. On the ground floor of the house a party is in progress; we stroll gracefully through the contorting bodies. Some-

one pauses in mid-reel to say to Garance, El Dorado, and she faints into my arms. Upstairs, a man comes at me with a drink in his hand. Once I've put Garance down, he's easy to get rid of: my first killing. Throughout the night in the attic, Garance and I make love. At one point, she turns to me — I'm behind her — and says: I'm asleep, Duncan, dreaming of the Lizan City Subway System. I didn't know there was a subway in Lizan, I gasp.

At daybreak, the sun streams through the window onto Garance's white limbs. We hear the distant clatter of someone breaking bottles on the ground floor. From the attic we creep past the man on the stairs; my boots stick to the linoleum.

DION No. I left the woman sleeping in the attic, the party members sprawled snoring over the stairs. I walked into the plain, peeling an orange.

CEMETERY I'm cold. No, I'm not cold. I'm bruised. I've terrible haemorrhoids, a sore throat. I can hardly speak. And Duncan was killed, or died, a long time ago. I dream Duncan is dead. You hear that, Basil?

BASIL I've walked for days and I've made it to the foot-hills, almost to the border. I carry the crowbar and one orange. When I sleep, I realize I'm only dreaming I'm asleep. When I sleep I dream five men in a line of adjacent cells. Within each cell, each man is dreaming of me —

CEMETERY Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. My name is Duncan — I'm ... I'm escaping —

BASIL When I wake up, I forget I'm asleep and that this is all a dream. My name is Duncan, I tell myself. I'm escaping.

ABACUS And the fact is we're each of us alone, neither warm nor cold. The fact is Duncan, when we bring him here, fills us with hope. His plans for escape, his plans for government, his ideals, are magnificent. He's pleased with the way we narrate his dream. Garance, too, is happy.

Duncan speaks; no sound is emitted; I read his lips. These are the final plans: Garance waits on the outside, in a

wattle shack in the orchard. She's baking rhubarb crumble and buttermilk muffins against our break-out: she knows we'll be hungry. She has a jeep and will help us reach the border. There is, she confides in a serious tone, patting her belly, the possibility of children.

BASIL When we've crossed the border, we'll celebrate. We'll find a place where we can all live together. We'll build five shacks side by side and at night, before going to sleep, we'll be able to talk back and forth in quiet voices.

CEMETERY Sometimes . . . I like to scrape my teeth on the wall . . . when I'm fed up . . . all this crap about escaping . . . my front teeth feel good against the stone —

DION Until we achieve our — ahem! — objective, we'll — ahem! — we'll need no food or sleep. We'll dream standing up! — and it won't be of orange groves or borders. I'll whisper your name — Ebenezer — listen — Ebenezer —

EBENEZER Dion?

DION Cemetery —

CEMETERY Dion? Basil?

BASIL Abacus —

ABACUS Basil —

Pause.

ABACUS Basil!

Pause.

BASIL Of course it could be we're just waiting for the firing squad. Maybe we'll have to dig holes in the ground before they shoot us. I can almost hear the rifles being cleaned, bolts slipped into place —

CEMETERY Are they coming for us, Basil? Can you hear them?

DION If I close my eyes I can almost hear —

CEMETERY I feel real strange — feverish — don't you feel strange?

BASIL Click-chk! Click-chk!

CEMETERY I feel like . . . maybe we should have another dream, something easy—you know—

DION —about the rats, the rats scuf-scuffling along the tunnels. . . .

EBENEZER I glide through these walls—it's very simple—tramp through the subway tunnels, along platforms and up a steep corridor to street-level—just like that. Anyone coming with me? The rats won't trouble us, nor the trains: I've memorized the transit schedule.

We surface at night in the centre of Lizan City. Traffic is slow and heavy; the movie crowds spill from the cinemas onto the sidewalks. The pedestrians' faces glow brighter than day, the intersection's lit by a huge neon sign: *THE LIGHTER*. Beside the subway exit, Garance waits at the curb in a slick black TransAm. As we push between the astonished bystanders and clamber in, Garance tells us she traded the jeep, but if we squeeze, we can all fit.

By the time we reach the edge of town, the night inside the car smells of orange blossom.

DION I see a large tabby cat cleaning its paw by the *City Limits* sign.

CEMETERY I think that if the cat dreams, it will not dream of me. At the roadside I see two eyes rushing like headlights. When I look back, the cat is gone.

BASIL Someone's escaping!

CEMETERY *Begins clapping.*

ABACUS There's always someone escaping, but whenever they escape, they forget to stay quiet so we can know they've really gone, really made a clean get-away. Cemetery almost made it once, but he got delirious, began raving about politics.

DION *Begins clapping.*

ABACUS On the edge of town we meet Duncan. About time, he says with a smile, and climbs in. Six men and one

woman in a TransAm. The jeep was too conspicuous, Garance laughs. We're riding skin to skin, crammed in together, all dreaming of the woman at the wheel who drives us through the night.

EBENEZER *Begins clapping.*

BASIL Past the cafe where she relates eating a meal of crepes with loganberry sauce, loganberry mousse, chocolate cake and coffee. Those were the days, she sighs. And we all sigh. Cemetery says:

Clapping ceases.

CEMETERY You forgot to mention the special biscuits shaped like kittens. My father used to drown kittens when I was a boy.

DION When I was little, we lived near a house where an old gentleman kept hundreds of cats and hundreds of rats: just enough rats to feed the cats.

EBENEZER At dusk the following day, we reach the border; Garance and Duncan have arranged a circus, a gigantic celebration in the middle of a field in a beautiful green valley. Hundreds of gypsies swallow swords by the light of the half-moon. And we drink and dance and eat all night; we share Garance between us; each has her once. We sleep through the next day; we're safe among friends.

DION If we each have her once, that's six times Garance makes love, or is it five?

Pause.

CEMETERY I'm not sure, I think I have gangrene... in my finger
... I've enough of gangrene, and of cats...

Pause.

BASIL It's stopped working again, Abacus. It never lasts long
any more. It used to work. It used to cheer me for quite
a while afterwards. Once, I remember, the story, the
dream, rolled on and on until I thought I was alone,
and outside, right outside, dreaming of... I can't
remember.

Pause.

ABACUS Tomato's a fruit, I believe. Isn't tomato a fruit?