

## Kiss of the Spider Woman

by Eleanor Malin

Two faces in a cell — one the face of a homosexual in makeup, telling a story; the other a political prisoner huddled in the shadows, scarred, bloody.

The storyteller recounts, in detail, the story from a Nazi propaganda film, which serves as transportation and counterpoint to the storyline of the two men's relationship. William Hurt as Molina plays the woman's face to Raul Julia's male prisoner. The two begin as polar opposites — feminine-masculine, romantic-idealist, hedonist-spartan, fantacist-realist.

As the male side in the match, Julia plays a prisoner who has been systematically tortured. They have interrupted his interrogation and he wonders why. He guesses there is something they want to find out. His situation really is desperate. He knows once they get what they want, his number is up. He's got nothing to look forward to, and nothing to lose.

Molina passes the time by "telling a movie" — which for most of the film is the Nazi propaganda movie, complete with amazing plot twists and embellishment by Molina.

A constant theme in the main movie is contradiction. As the political activist, Valentin Arregui, Julia at first objects to being entertained by a Nazi story, when the Nazis are against everything he believes in. Moreover, he is suffering heavily as a result of fascist behaviors, and is surely scheduled for more suffering shortly. But, therein lies the

paradox. He *is* entertained. His situation is so desperate, why not.

As the woman in the B-movie clips, Leni Lamaison, a French cabaret singer, then later as the Spider Woman, Sonia Braga gets to lay it on with a trowel. These segments were perfectly done — splendiferous camp — with the look and feel and silliness of a romantic '30s film.

Molina turns to telling a movie whenever he or Valentin is in particular need, which seems to be most of the time.

Valentin is being poisoned. Molina knows about it. Molina is in league with the warden to try and track down Valentin's cadre (in exchange for parole). The warden also wants him to identify another political prisoner across the way from their cell.

Molina covers his trips to the warden's office by saying it's his mother visiting. He tells the warden he must have groceries, and here's more irony; Molina feeds Valentin the groceries, to get him past the poison.

At some point, Molina finishes the Nazi movie and Leni is transformed into the Spider Woman, living on a deserted island completely covered with a web growing out of her. One considers that this might be a symbol of the intrigue and the trap set for Valentin, since he washes up on the beach in the scenario as a shipwrecked sailor, but since that's too easy, we won't mention it.

The two men, as a result of the shared prison experiences, and debates over the telling of the movies, begin to expand their horizons. Valentin, questioned about his young girlfriend in the movement, admits he really loves Marta, an older, beautiful, wealthy woman, who drops him when she finds out about his politics. Sonja Braga plays Marta, and we see this section through Valentin's



eyes, it being his memory. He is becoming more able to share his feelings.

At one point, Molina shows up with a super sack of groceries (he has had time to think it over), and included in the haul is a box of candy, a red, heart-shaped velour box (candy for my Valentine?). Good use is made of symbolism and color. The old film clips are black and white or tinted. The groceries look so colorful against the squalor of the cell. The prison food looks like dog food. The box of candy is so red against the prison blues, and so is the blood.

By the end of this film, Valentin has identified the other prisoner, who has died by then, anyway. Molina has been let out on a special parole, because the warden hopes he will lead them to the rest of the group. Valentin has progressed quite a distance from his original stance, but then, so has Molina, who ignores his old life to take up the destiny of a political person.

Valentin is in the infirmary, in so much pain he's just been given a shot of morphine by the attendant, so he can get some rest. The attendant asks Valentin not to mention it, as it could cost his job. On the other hand, it could have been ordered to cause addiction and get to the heart of the matter.

Valentin starts dreaming a movie-type dream. Marta is in it. She tells him not to worry, it's a short dream but a beautiful one.

When Molina told his movie, often it was to pull Valentin through his pain. Is Marta now pulling him through pain to keep him alive, or is he now dying? Is it the morphine?

This movie was made as though it had been woven. The three main characters were

excellent, Braga versatile and enigmatic, Julia surly and suspicious. And Hurt. Better here than usual.

At first I got the feeling he wasn't pulling it off, as a gay male might be a part he wouldn't want to be too good at. But he really began to look vulnerable after awhile, and in his final scenes, he's really convincing. He's really working hard in this part.

*Kiss of the Spider Woman* opens at The Movie House on October 4.

## Jammin' at the Gender Gap II

Five top northwest women's musical acts will be showcased at the second annual "Jammin' at the Gender Gap" festival of women's music. Starry Night will open its doors at 6:00 pm, Saturday, October 19th, for this benefit for Portland NOW. The public (over 21) is invited to attend this unique music festival which will run from 7:00 pm to 1:00 am.

B.J. Castleman will entertain with her inimitable vocals and varied piano style. The Celtic trio, Banshee returns for the second year of the festival with Gayle Jewel, Robin McRevey and Sylvia Hackathorn, presenting women's folk and political traditions from French Canada, Ireland, Scotland, and the States. Another trio, We Three, from the Seattle area, has captured Portland audiences in the past with their a capella harmonies. Kim Scanlon, Sarah Favret and B. Sue Johnson



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