

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 5, Number 2 (Fall 2014)

Editor: Adam Versényi
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The Mercurian is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary “principles” of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as “spirit”. The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

The Mercurian publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation, rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre, as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versényi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail:

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Editor's Note

This issue of *The Mercurian* is bookended by theatrical translations from two languages and two countries we have not published before: Che Xiao's translation of *Villain in a Turbulent Time* from China, and Roger Allen's translation of *Soiree for the Fifth of July* from Syria. *Villain in a Turbulent Time* had its genesis in the 2nd Global Alliance of Theater Schools International Festival in Beijing in 2011. Schools from around the world were invited to perform productions of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Students and faculty at the Shanghai Theater Academy adapted *Richard III* into Peking opera, finding parallels between England's War of the Roses and the power struggles that existed in China's historical era of Five Hu and Sixteen Kingdoms. Shakespearean soliloquies are divided into two characters, one who speaks, the other who dances and does acrobatics. *Villain in a Turbulent Time* is an example of one approach to cross-cultural translation that adapts the work in the source text to the artistic conventions of the target culture in order to better convey the theatricality of the source text. *The Mercurian* hopes to publish more translations of contemporary Chinese theatre in the future.

The issue continues with David Copelin and John Van Burek's translation of German Carl Sternheim's comedy, *Citizen Schippel*. Here Copelin and Van Burek worked with a literal translation from the German by Lascelle Wingate, a French translation (a language in which both Copelin and Van Burek are fluent) of Sternheim's text, and a British English translation of the play to create a North American English translation. The use of literal translations by those not fluent in the source language is a contested issue in the field. Readers can judge for themselves whether or not *Citizen Schippel* is, as I believe, a theatrically successful translation.

Citizen Schippel is followed by Jacqueline Bixler's translation of *Photograph on the Beach* by the great Mexican playwright Emilio Carballido who died in 2008. In her introduction Bixler describes how the final photographic image of both her and Carballido's favorite play amidst the nearly one hundred he wrote over the course of his career, resonated powerfully with her students at Virginia Tech reading it in the context of the week of April 16, 2007, when thirty-two students and faculty members were killed. Following that mass shooting photographs of the victim proliferated showing their smiling faces frozen in time. This response to *Photograph on the Beach* illustrates the power of theatrical translation. A play from a different culture and time can speak to the Virginia Tech community and, perhaps, to the too many other communities that have suffered mass shootings since 2007.

Photograph on the Beach is followed by Matthew Ward's translation of contemporary Spanish playwright Oscar Sanz Cabrera's *Empty Bottles*. Winner of the 2012 Premio Kuxta Ciudad de San Sebastián, *Empty Bottles* is a tragi-comic investigation of what Sanz Cabrera describes as the "purgatory" of lower class like where we find "the most dreadful dramas and the cruelest, and by definition, the funniest comedies." Spain, one of the countries in the Euro Zone hardest hit by the 2008 financial crisis, still suffers from 25% unemployment. Sanz Cabrera's characters emerge from that context.

Yael Prizant's translation of Abel González Melo's *Talc* depicts the underworld of contemporary Havana, Cuba. Since the "Special Period" of the early 1990s when Russian support for the island abruptly ended, Cuba has had to reinvent itself economically. González Melo's play, part of a trilogy

entitled *Winterscapes*, shows us the underbelly of that economy in a manner reminiscent of Ancient Greek tragedy yet infused with contemporary Cuban sensibility.

The last translation in this issue is Roger Allen's translation of one of the most significant figures in modern Arabic drama, Sa`dallah Wannus' play *Soiree for the Fifth of July*. *Soiree* deals with the aftermath in Syria of the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. Wannus, a playwright and theoretician heavily influenced by Ionesco, Anouilh, Brecht and Piscator during his studies in Paris, advocated what he called "politicization theater" as a response to the events of 1967. In *Soiree* he uses a play-within-a-play structure, with actors representing both spectators and the Syrian security forces interspersed throughout the audience frequently responding to the events on stage. In this way Wannus theatricalizes what Allen describes as the initial reaction to the 1967 war in the Arab world, "combined despair and fury, then the aftermath also provoked a widespread and profound consideration, or indeed reconsideration, of the very bases of post-independence Arab society and of Arab values in general." Given the situation in Syria today and, indeed, throughout the Arab-speaking world in 2014 following the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" in 2011, *The Mercurian* is privileged to publish Allen's translation of Wannus' *Soiree for the Fifth of July*.

Finally, we conclude the issue with Iride Lamartine-Lens' book review of *New Plays From Spain: Eight Works by Seven Playwrights* that presents translations of post-Francoist playwrights from contemporary Spain. Along with Oscar Sanz Cabrera's *Empty Bottles* in this issue, this collection of translations forcefully demonstrates that there is excellent work being produced today in Spain, despite a worldwide lack of attention to it. Such work deserves recognition beyond Spain's borders while we still celebrate the brilliance of sixteenth-century playwrights such as Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina, and Lope de Vega; or the nineteenth century José Zorrilla, or the early twentieth century Federico García Lorca.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at: <http://drama.unc.edu/related-links/the-mercurian/>. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 5, No. 3 (Spring 2015) will be February 1, 2015.

--Adam Versényi

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VILLAIN IN A TURBULENT TIME

By SONG Jie, SUN Tuo

Translated by CHE Xiao

Villain in a Turbulent Time was first created in 2011 for the 2nd Global Alliance of Theater Schools International Theater Festival held in Beijing, which designated one Shakespearean play, *Richard III* for that year, to be performed by several outstanding theater schools in the world. The Chinese Opera Directing Class of Shanghai Theater Academy adapted *Richard III* into Peking opera and performed it as their graduation piece in 2012. Professor SONG Jie and his student SUN Tuo wrote the script. It was premiered at Shanghai Theater Academy, and later attended several international theater festivals, with this translation projected as the subtitle. The play was well received by the audience.

In order to turn this Shakespearean historical play into a Chinese story, the adaptors put the characters in the historical era of China's Five Hu and Sixteen Kingdoms (304-439 A.D.). This era was characterized by power struggle, sibling murder, and incest, quite similar to the period of Wars of the Roses of *Richard III*. Based upon the real history of the three generations of the Shi family during the later Zhao period (319-351 A.D.) competing with each other for the imperial throne, the adaptors turned *Richard III* into a real historical figure Shi Zun, one of the emperors of the period. In order to perform the long monologues describing the character's mind in the Shakespearean play, the adaptors divided Shi Zun into two characters A and B, who wear the same face patterns and costumes. A mainly sings and speaks, and B mainly dances and does acrobatics. In order to make the play more colorful and entertaining, the adaptation also staged those actions of female roles that were merely described in the Shakespearean play, such as *Richard III*'s murdering of Lady Anne and rape of his niece. It cut repetitive scenes and those characters unrelated with the main plot, such as Elizabeth, Duchess of York, citizens, scrivener, etc. The lyrics and spoken parts were written as similar to the Shakespearean language style as possible, with the rhymes and meters of Chinese opera. The acrobatic fights in the prologue and epilogue parallel with each other in order to compensate for the lack of fighting in spoken drama.

Since this play was written in the rhymes and meters of Chinese operatic language, modeling upon the archaic Shakespearean language, it's hard for translations to remain in the same poetic style. Also, plain language is better for the audience to understand and digest during performance. So in my translation, I delivered the meaning of each sentence as faithfully as possible, using direct and simple modern English.

SONG Jie is a professor and director at Shanghai Theater Academy, where he founded Chinese Opera Directing as a discipline in 2002. His works were performed in the US in 1981 and 2000 and Japan in 2001, where he gave lectures as well. In the 1970s he wrote scripts of Chinese opera, and since 1990 he directed Peking opera plays, which won several prestigious national awards. He published two books on the directing of Chinese opera and an essay that won the

national drama essay award in 2006. In 2004, 2006, and 2009, he was honored as an outstanding teacher by the Shanghai municipal government. Since 2005, he has led his Chinese opera directing classes to adapt foreign plays and traditional Chinese operas into full-length modern Chinese operas, which were also performed as students' graduation pieces.

SUN Tuo graduated from the affiliated Chinese Opera School of Shanghai Theater Academy in 2008, majoring in Spoken Drama, Film and TV. In 2012, she got her BA degree in Chinese Opera Directing from the College of Chinese Opera of Shanghai Theater Academy. Now she teaches at the Shanghai TV Station Little Screen Stars Art School. When studying at Shanghai Theater Academy, she won student fellowships and an award for her script of Chinese opera, and performed in and directed several spoken dramas and Chinese opera plays.

CHE Xiao, translator, was a postdoctoral fellow of performance studies at Shanghai Theater Academy between 2011-2014. After getting her MA degree in American and English Literature from Beijing University in 2003, she won a prestigious fellowship to study theater arts at University of California, Santa Barbara, where she received her PhD degree in 2010. Her research and teaching include theater, dance, film, literature, and cultural studies, and she has published and presented papers in leading international and Chinese journals and conferences. She has taught at University of California, Santa Barbara, San Diego State University, and Shanghai Theater Academy. She has written, directed, and acted in plays and films, and has done lots of translation and interpretation for theater and film studies and productions.

Villain in a Turbulent Time

Script Adaptors: SONG Jie, SUN Tuo

Translator: CHE Xiao

上海戏剧学院戏曲学院演出

**Presented by The College of Chinese Opera,
Shanghai Theater Academy**

实验音乐京歌舞剧《乱世枭雄》

Experimental Peking Opera Musical *Villain in a Turbulent Time*

根据莎士比亚《理查三世》改编

Adapted from Shakespeare's *Richard III*

艺术顾问 孙惠柱

Artistic Consultant: Sun Huizhu

指导老师 宋捷 郑稳 李丽来（10级 MFA 研究生） 滕孝晓（11级 MFA 研究生）

Instructors: Song Jie, Zheng Wen, Li Lilai (MFA graduate student of 2010), Teng Xiaoxiao (MFA graduate student of 2011)

出品人 郭宇

Producer: Guo Yu

监制 王立军 钱平安 田蔓莎

Supervisors: Wang Lijun, Qian Ping'an, Tian Mansha

统筹 黄曦炜 赵群 于翔

Coordinators: Huang Tunwei, Zhao Qun, Yu Xiang

展演筹划 上海戏剧学院演艺中心

Performance Organizer: Shanghai Theater Academy Performing Arts Center

演出运作 马俊峰 滕孝晓

Performance Operation: Ma Junfeng, Teng Xiaoxiao

剧本改编 宋捷 孙虔

Script Adaptors: Song Jie, Sun Tuo

导演（按姓氏笔画排列）于天虹 马莹 闪烁 孙虔

齐乐 余东泽 房卉 贺敬庄 柳菁 康睿 鞠沛霖

Directors (in order of surname strokes): Yu Tianhong, Ma Ying, Shan Shuo, Sun Tuo, Qi Yue, Yu Dongze, Fang Hui, He Jingzhuang, Liu Jing, Kang Rui, Ju Peilin

作曲 王为 王美敬

Composers: Wang Wei, Wang Meijing

音乐制作 王为

Music Production: Wang Wei

打击乐设计 何群

Percussion Design: He Qun

灯光设计 叶晶

Lighting Design: Ye Jing

服装设计 俞俭

Costume Design: Yu Jian

造型设计 信晓丹

Image Design: Xin Xiaodan

翻译 车骁

Translator: CHE Xiao

演员表

The Cast

(出场先后为序)

(in order of entrance)

石遵 高挺 饰演

Shi Zun: by Gao Ting

石遵乙 李名扬 饰演

Shi Zun B: by Li Mingyang

石世 张博恩 饰演

Shi Shi: by Zhang Bo'en

石斌 王飞智 饰演

Shi Bin: by Wang Feizhi

张柴 鞠沛霖 饰演

Zhang Chai: by Ju Peilin

安姬 陆艺君 饰演

An Ji: by Lu Yijun

凶手甲 范旭航 饰演

Murderer A: by Fan Xuhang

凶手乙 肖遥 饰演

Murderer B: by Xiao Yao

皇后 柳菁 饰演

Empress: by Liu Jing

柏金汉 冉鹏程 饰演

Bo Jinhan: by Ran Pengcheng

海世勋 董炳义 饰演

Hai Shixun: by Dong Bingyi

凯慈 鲁佳亮 饰演

Kai Ci: by Lu Jialiang

李福斯 戴思绪 饰演

Li Fusi: by Dai Sixu

葛雷 宋金钊 饰演

Ge Lei: by Song Jinzhao

普兰 何奕 饰演

Pu Lan: by He Yi

众兵 学生饰演

Soldiers: by students

板鼓 何群

Ban'gu (small drum for marking time): played by He Qun

京胡 王美敬

Jinghu (a Chinese instrument with bowed string): played by Wang Meijing

舞台监督: 贺敬庄 鞠沛霖

Stage Managers: He Jingzhuang, Ju Peilin

序

Prelude

伴唱起:

Chorus:

皇冠一顶金煌煌,

A shining golden crown,

千古斑驳刻沧桑;

Mottled by the vicissitudes of millions of years;

铁骨铮铮响!

The iron bone clanks!

皇权擎天上。

The imperial power lifts up heaven.
哪管得腥风血雨，
Who cares about bloody war,
说什么兄弟阋墙。
Who talks about brothers' alienation.
英雄成败亦绝唱，
Hero's victories and defeats are all masterpieces,
滚滚浪涛掩兴亡。
Rolling waves cover rise and fall.

众兵将：晋兵大败！

Generals and Soldiers: The Jin army is seriously defeated!

众 将：恭贺我主重夺王位！

Generals: Congratulations, our lord has regained the crown!

正 帝：哈哈哈哈哈……我们羯族石氏又得天下，

Emperor Zheng: Hahahaha our Jiezushi family have regained the world.

狼烟尽扫众卿之功，二弟——

We all depended on you to eliminate enemies. Second Brother—

石 斌：臣。

Shi Bin: Yes.

正 帝：封你为保国公兼大丞相。

Emperor Zheng: I grant you Lord Protector and Grand Prime Minister.

石 斌：谢陛下。

Shi Bin: Thank Your Majesty.

正 帝：三弟——

Emperor Zheng: Third Brother—

石 遵：臣。

Shi Zun: Yes

正 帝：封你为护国公兼大将军。

Emperor Zheng: I grant you Lord Protector and Grand General.

石 遵：谢陛下。

Shi Zun: Thank Your Majesty.

正 帝：御外甥张柴——

Emperor Zheng: My nephew Zhang Chai—

石 遵：臣启陛下，张柴战死。

Shi Zun: I report to Your Majesty, Zhang Chai was killed in the war.

正 帝：什么？

Emperor Zheng: What?

石 遵：张柴战死！

Shi Zun: Zhang Chai was killed in the war!

正 帝：为孤江山，又失心腹大将啊……

Emperor Zheng: I lost another confidant general to protect my kingdom……

石 斌：陛下不必伤痛，早登龙位要紧。

Shi Bin: Your Majesty, please be not sad. It is important for you to ascend the throne early.

请驾还朝，举国上下恭贺吾皇登基大典！

Please return to the palace so that the whole kingdom can celebrate Your Majesty's enthronement ceremony!

石 遵：二哥，你身当保国公大丞相，一人之下，万人之上，

Shi Zun: Second Brother, as Lord Protector Prime Minister, you're under one person but above millions of others.

日后对小弟要多加指教。

In the future, please give more instructions to your younger brother.

石 斌：你我弟兄同心。

Shi Bin: As brothers, you and I are in the same mind.

正 帝：三弟，按国礼厚葬张柴将军。

Emperor Zheng: Third Brother, bury General Zhang Chai in glorious state ceremony.

石 遵：领旨。唉……

Shi Zun: Receive the decree. Ai ………

（唱）我的好外甥啊！

(Sing) My good nephew!

第 一 场

Scene One

石 遵：（唱）叹赵国失去一位将军——神勇无敌；

Shi Zun: (Sing) I regret that Zhao Kingdom has lost a general—brave and invincible;

我为你哭泣……

I cry for you ………

石遵乙：（唱）你、你、你……真是好演技。

Shi Zun B: (Sing) You, you, you ……… really have great acting skill.

石 遵：（唱）哪一个人人生不在演戏？

Shi Zun: (Sing) Who is not acting in life?

不过是在比、在拼、在PK……

Only competing, struggling, and PK ………

石遵乙：（唱）PK 演技的高与低！

Shi Zun B: (Sing) PK who has better acting skill!

你趁战乱一剑杀死了张柴——除去了皇上的膀臂，

You took advantage of the chaos of the war to stab Zhang Chai to death—got rid of a reliable assistant of the emperor.

石 遵：（唱）他本是我将来大业一宿敌。

Shi Zun: (Sing) He is the enemy of my great career in the future.

石遵乙：（唱）哈哈……你对我还不敢抛心底？

Shi Zun B: (Sing) Ha, ha, ha you are afraid of telling the truth even to me?
你更想以此霸占他的妻。

You even want to take his wife by this.

石 遵：（唱）哈哈……你何不仔细看看自己？

Shi Zun: (Sing) Ha, ha why don't you take a close look at yourself?

石遵乙：（唱）左肩高来右肩低，

Shi Zun B: (Sing) Your left shoulder is higher than your right shoulder,
一瘸一拐，残缺不全，

You limp, and are distorted,

娘胎里造就一副陋相形畸，

Born with an ugly appearance and a deformed shape.

石 遵：你是在嘲笑我？

Shi Zun: Are you laughing at me?

石遵乙：我说的难道不是实际？

Shi Zun B: Didn't I tell the truth?

别说是人，就是狗见到了咱们，

Not only human being, even when a dog saw us,

汪汪！汪！狂吠乱叫也把调门提。

Wang Wang! Wang! It barked and yelped louder.

石 遵：（唱）天哪，父母啊！为何给了我这残形废体？

Shi Zun: (Sing) Heaven, my parents! Why did you give me such a disabled shape and useless body?

偏偏降生皇族以貌比高低！

Born into an imperial family, who are competing with their looks!

论机谋——

In terms of scheme—

石遵乙：没人能和咱们比；

Shi Zun B: No one can compete with us;

石 遵：（唱）：论战功——

Shi Zun: (Sing) In terms of exploits of war—

石遵乙：咱们数第一；

Shi Zun B: We're number one;

石 遵：（唱）我争强——

Shi Zun: (Sing) I tried to gain the upper hand—

石遵乙：争强遭人妒忌；

Shi Zun B: Gaining the upper hand caused envy;

石 遵：（唱）我鞠躬尽瘁——

Shi Zun: (Sing) I devoted myself—

石遵乙：还是为了他人做嫁衣！

Shi Zun B: Still for the sake of others!

石 遵：（唱）为皇室贡献我的青春我的爱——

Shi Zun: (Sing) I contributed my youth and my love to the imperial family—

石遵乙：（唱）嗨，别提啦，

Shi Zun B: (Sing) Hi, don't mention it,

要怪就咱的娘啊——

We should blame our mother—

她不为咱整形美容，

She did not give us a plastic surgery,

便把咱抛进——人间来喘息，

Before throwing us into—this human world to breathe,

调情弄爱——谁能看中这幅身躯，

Flirting for love—who can like this body,

从来没享受过对着含情的明镜宠幸讨取；

I never enjoyed asking for favor from a bright mirror filled with feelings;

比不上爱神的风采，

Cannot compare with the grace of Eros,

怎能凭空在婀娜的仙姑面前阔步移；

How can I stride in front of a gentle, elegant, fairy lady?

既不能春心奔放、卖弄风情、韶光洋溢，

Since I cannot be bold with passion, or coquette, or shine splendidly,

就只好打定主意以歹徒自许，

I can only make up my mind to become a scoundrel.

石 遵：（唱）老天爷——既然造就我丑陋身体，

Shi Zun: (Sing) Heaven—since you made me such an ugly body,

索性造就个邪恶的心灵表里统一。

Simply make me an evil heart to match my appearance,

我要把皇冠玩在我手里，

I want to play with the imperial crown,

石遵乙：我这就去干！

Shi Zun B: I will go to do it immediately!

石 遵：（唱）不，这出好戏先从女人……，

Shi Zun: (Sing) No, this good play starts with women first.....,

石遵乙：（唱）女人？

Shi Zun B: (Sing) Women?

石 遵：（唱）从女人身上唱起！

Shi Zun: (Sing) Starts with women!

石遵乙：（白）这件事我去搞定！

Shi Zun B: (Speak) I will go to get it!

石 遵：（白）这种事用不着你。

Shi Zun: (Speak) It does not need you.

石遵乙：（白）那、那我干什么？

Shi Zun B: (Speak) Then, then what should I do?

石 遵：（白）还有件事比这更重要，

Shi Zun: (Speak) There is another thing more important than this,

石遵乙：（白）你是说？

Shi Zun B: (Speak) You mean?

石 遵：（白）有人他在挡我的道，挡道的人就得让他死……

Shi Zun: (Speak) Someone is blocking my way. Whoever blocks my way, I must make him die

.....

石遵乙：（白）我还是想干前面的事，面对女人多有情调啊！那杀人的事……

Shi Zun B: (Speak) I still want to do the first thing. How romantic it is to deal with women! But
for murder.....

石 遵：（白）谁让你杀人啦？你去托梦，散谣言，吹阴风……看！

Shi Zun: (Speak) Who told you to murder? You pretend to be in dream, to spread rumors, and to
blow wind from the hell Look!

石遵乙：“奸佞兴风……”

Shi Zun B: “Treacherous people dominate the world”

石 遵：不让你念，而是去托梦？

Shi Zun: I'm not asking you to speak, but to pretend to be in dream!

石遵乙：托梦——哦，盗梦空间……我懂！

Shi Zun B: Being in dream—oh, steal someone's dream space I understand!

石 遵：必须让皇上大哥和丞相二哥之间结下生死仇恨，

Shi Zun: I must make Big Brother Emperor and Second Brother Prime Minister become
fatal enemies towards each other,

让人人传说刚刚打下的江山就有个名中有斌字的人要弑君篡位……

and make everyone spread the rumor that in the new kingdom, someone whose name
includes character “bin” is going to kill the emperor and usurp the crown

只要大哥相信，管叫他今天就把我那丞相二哥囚进大牢。

As long as Big Brother believes it, I will surely make him imprison Second Brother Prime Minister.

(唱) 皇上懦弱本性多疑;

(Sing) The emperor is cowardly and suspicious;

他又拖着病体,

He is ill,

我要让让皇冠在我头上举,

I must put the crown on my head,

只要我动动心机——

As long as I play the scheme—

搬弄是非、用尽谎言、毁谤、梦呓, 挑唆欺诈一个一个施毒计,

Spread scandal, exhaust extravagant language, slander, flapdoodle, instigate, cheat, and execute poisonous tricks,

牢牢抓住时机!

Firmly grasp the opportunity!

安 姬: 夫君!

Lady An: Husband!

石遵乙: 明白, 第一幕好戏就要开场了! 我这就去……

Shi Zun B: I understand. Act One of a wonderful play is going to begin! I'm going

第二场

Scene Two

安 姬: (白) 夫君, 夫君! 我的夫君!

Lady An: (Speak) Husband, husband! My husband!

(唱) 啊……我的夫君啊!

(Sing) Ah my husband!

皇族血统成枯骨,

The imperial family becomes skeletons,

圣体如冰血流干;

The sacred body is like ice and blood drains dry;

祸首背后穿心剑,

The culprit stabbed a sword from his back through his heart,

心毒胜过那蛇、虺、蛛、蛊、蟾!

More poisonous than snakes, spiders, poison, and toads!

千万遍将夫君来呼唤,

I call for my husband millions of times,

可叹你英灵含恨无人雪冤。

I regret that your heroic soul swallows anger and no one wipes out rancor for you.

石 遵：夫人，切莫如此伤心，这人已经死了，哭坏了身体，不值当啊。

Shi Zun: Madam, please be not so sad. This person is dead. It is not worthy to ruin your health.

安 姬：是哪个恶鬼来阻挡人间忠爱的大事？

Lady An: Which devil comes to obstruct the loyal love in the human world?

石 遵：夫人仁恕要紧，莫这样恶言恶语。

Shi Zun: Oh, Madam, it is important to be kind and benevolent. Please do not use bad words.
讲仁恕就要以善报恶，以德报怨。

To be benevolent we should return kindness for evil and return virtue for grievances.

安 姬：你还说什么仁恕？

Lady An: You are talking about benevolence to me?

你既不懂天理，也不顾人情！

You do not understand justice, nor consider human feelings!

你从背后杀死了我的夫君。

You killed my husband from his back!

石 遵：我知道夫人此刻的悲痛，

Shi Zun: Oh, Madam. I understand your grievances at the present.

可不要给我假设虚构的罪名，

Please do not impose imaginary accusations upon me.

夫人冤枉我了。

You wronged me.

安 姬：有几十双明亮的眼睛看到你的罪恶行径！

Lady An: There are dozens of bright eyes who saw your criminal action!

石 遵：夫人横眉怒目娇媚可爱，

Shi Zun: Oh, your angry eyes make you so lovely.

丽质天生叫我夸不完，

I can never praise enough your natural beauty.

将来会有充分时日让我充分向你表白。

I will have enough days to express my feelings to you.

安 姬：滚开！（唱）

Lady An: Go away! (Sing)

你是个人间地狱的凶孽障，

You are a ferociously evil creature in the human hell,

残害我夫君一命身亡。

injured my husband to death.

你让人间悲声放，

You made the human world cry,

快乐世界被你涂抹得暗淡无光！

You smeared a happy world bleak!

你看一看——

You take a look—

看忠良含恨双眼

see how the loyal and the kind swallow angry feelings in their eyes.

被人暗杀喊冤枉，怒目仰面对天上，

Murdered and crying grievances, they face the sky with fury eyes,

见到你血管又喷张！

Seeing you their veins blow again!

伤口裂，血又趟，

With wounds cracking and blood flowing again,

诅咒灵魂恶豺狼，

They curse the wolf with an evil soul,

悖逆上天兴逆浪。

who goes against heaven to blow inverse waves.

心毒貌丑乱世流氓！

With an evil heart and an ugly face, you're a rogue in times of chaos!

上天哪，雷击罪犯轰鸣响，

Heaven, use your thunder and lightning to hit criminals,

大地呀，地裂吞噬罪恶还我一片白茫茫。

Earth, split to swallow crimes and return a pure world to me.

石 遵：一片白茫茫……你纯洁的心境照得我无地自容，

Shi Zun: A pure world Your pure heart leaves me no place to stay.

我不能再欺骗你，我要向你请罪，

I cannot cheat you anymore. I want to plead guilty to you.

夫人，我，我是凶手。

Madam, I, I am the murderer.

安 姬：我的夫君啊，你真的是在这个恶魔的刀下成了野鬼孤魂！

Lady An: My husband, you really became a lonely soul and a wild ghost at the sword of this devil!

石 遵：夫人，逝者已去，让他走好。

Shi Zun: Madam, the dead is dead. Let him leave peacefully.

他上了天比留在人间更加快活自在。

He is more happy and at ease in heaven than on earth.

安 姬：你这个禽兽，你应该下十八层地狱。

Lady An: You devil, you should go to the deepest hell.

石 遵：夫人，除了十八层地狱我还有好去处。

Shi Zun: Madam. Apart from the deepest hell I have a better place to go.

安 姬: 哼 你这样的人, 还有更好的去处!

Lady An: Humph! A person like you has a better place to go!

石 遵: 那就是夫人的闺房!

Shi Zun: That's Madam's boudoir!

安 姬: 无耻之徒!

Lady An: Shameless rogue!

石 遵: 夫人, 你真的不明白, 王室挣杀, 犯下滔天罪行的祸根是什么吗?

Shi Zun: Madam. You really do not know, what is the root of heinous crimes in imperial palace?

安 姬: 祸根就是你那豺狼之心!

Lady An: The root is your wolfish heart!

石 遵: 错! 看得见的刀光剑影, 而根源在于……夫人……

Shi Zun: Wrong! The visible war comes from …… Madam ……

安 姬: 我?

Lady An: I?

石 遵: 夫人!

Shi Zun: Madam!

(唱) 原是你的天姿国色惹争端,

(Sing) It was your utmost beauty that caused all the trouble,

夫人的姿色在我梦中纠缠,

Your beauty entangled so much in my dream,

直叫我顾不得天下生灵涂炭,

That I was unable to care for the loss of lives in the world,

一心只想在你的酥胸边取得一刻温暖。

I only want to acquire a moment of warmth beside your soft breasts.

安 姬: (唱) 早知如此, 我一定亲手抓破我的红颜。

Lady An: (Sing) If I knew it earlier, I would definitely scratch my face with my own hands.

石遵乙: (念) 别, 别, 别, 夫人你一时冲动——

Shi Zun: (Speak) No, no, no, Madam you get excited at the moment—

一时冲动将留下千古遗憾,

a moment of impulse will lead to regrets for millions of years.

上天造就红颜美色, 如同太阳带给世界啊——五彩斑斓……

Heaven creates beauty, like the sun brings to the world—all colors……

安 姬: (唱) 无非亦是红颜美色只为人间添灾难

Lady An: (Sing) Beauty only adds disasters to the human world.

石 遵: (唱) 这一切都是天性使然。

Shi Zun: (Sing) All these come from human nature.

石遵乙: (念) 天下的男人谁不爱美女呀?

Shi Zun B: (Speak) Among all men in the world, who does not love beautiful women?
争夺美女千万别用是非、
In competing for women never judge according to the principle of right and wrong,
别用是非来分辨。
Never according to the principle of right and wrong.

安 姬：（唱）男子野心争天下，
Lady An: (Sing) All men are so ambitious to compete for the world,
挡箭牌，是红颜，
Women's shield is their appearance,
安姬宁愿毁容貌，
I would rather ruin my appearance,
不为后世做笑谈。
Than become the laughing stock for the world.

石遵乙：（念）三国时曹操灭了袁绍，
Shi Zun B: (Speak) During Three Kingdoms Cao Cao eliminated Yuan Shao,
腥风血雨来征战。
They fought a bloody war.
父子们都是为了美色垂涎，
Father and son all fought for a beautiful woman,
甄宓多情人人称赞，
Everyone praised Zhen Fu as affectionate,
上天封她“洛神”千古流传。
Heaven entitled her “The Goddess of Luo Water” to be remembered for millions of years.

石 遵：（唱）“洛神”美名千古流传。
Shi Zun: (Sing) The good reputation of “The Goddess of Luo Water” has been circulated for millions of years.

安 姬：（唱）我不要美色传千古，
Lady An: (Sing) I do not want my beauty to be known for millions of years,
宁愿随夫一死赴黄泉。
I would rather follow my husband to the lower world.

石遵乙：不——不——不！你不能死啊！
Shi Zun B: No—No—No! You cannot die!
（念）夫人若赴黄泉路，
(Speak) If Madam goes to the lower world,
男人的世界塌了天。
The world of men collapses.

石 遵：（唱）夫人难释心愤懑，

Shi Zun: (Sing) If Madam is unable to release your anger inside,
罢，罢，罢！杀了我即可报仇冤

Fine, Fine, Fine! Kill me then you can revenge your wrongs

石 遵：请你用这匕首刺进我这赤诚的胸膛！

Shi Zun: Please use this dagger to stab into my sincere heart!

石遵乙：解脱我这向你膜拜的心灵！

Shi Zun B: Release my devoted heart!

石 遵：了结我这条生命。

Shi Zun: To end my life.

安 姬：（白）若是你死了到好，能替我的亡夫报仇雪恨。

Lady An: (Speak) It is best if you die. I can revenge for my dead husband.

石 遵：（白）为了你这美人我死也值得！

Shi Zun: (Speak) It is worthy for me to die for a beauty like you!

（唱）我只要看你秋波一转，

(Sing) As long as I see your eyes,
就是死也能更痛快。

I feel happier even dead.

你那双迷人的眼睛像大海，

Your charming eyes look like ocean,

看得我泪珠盈盈像童孩；

Make me cry like a child.

我对权力虎视眈眈，

I eye for power,

却对你美色无法忘怀，

But cannot forget your beauty,

你若叫我死也照办，

If you want me to die, I will,

只要让我亲一亲吻一吻夫人的香腮。

As long as I can kiss Madam's sweet cheek.

安 姬：（唱）我……用手举起匕首剑

Lady An: (Sing) I raise my dagger and sword

叹女人关键时刻抉择难——

I sigh that at crucial moments it is difficult for women to make choices—

难，难，难！

difficult, difficult, difficult!

石遵乙：夫人，剑掉了。

Shi Zun B: Madam, your sword dropped.

安 姬：我不想做你的刽子手。

Lady An: I do not want to be your executioner.

石 遵：那末吩咐我自杀，我自己动手！

Shi Zun: Then order me to commit suicide. I will do it myself!

安 姬：我已经说过，不想做你的刽子手。

Lady An: I already told you that I did not want to be your executioner.

石遵乙：杀吧，杀吧！此刻向心窝插上一刀。

Shi Zun B: Kill, kill! Right now stab a knife into my heart.

安 姬：我倒很想看看你这颗心。

Lady An: I really want to see your heart.

石遵乙：我的心就挂在我的嘴唇边。

Shi Zun B: My heart hangs on my lips.

安 姬：我怕你竟是心口全非。

Lady An: I am afraid your heart and your words are completely different.

石遵乙：那世上就没有一个真心人了。

Shi Zun B: Then there is not a single honest person in the world.

安 姬：好啦，好啦，把你的匕首收起来。

Lady An: Fine, fine, take your dagger away.

石 遵：夫人不舍得了，拾起那把刀来，不然就搀我起来。

Shi Zun: Madam. You're reluctant to kill me. Pick up that knife, otherwise raise me up.

石 遵：那末就算是和解了。

Shi Zun: That means reconciliation.

石 遵：我这有一块玉，我将它赠了于你。

Shi Zun: I have a jade here, and I want to present it to you as a gift.

石 遵：夫人，你拿了这块玉就是将我心拿了去，

Shi Zun: Madam, if you take this jade away, it is as if you take my heart away.

我还要请求你答应我一件事。

I also want to ask you a favor.

安 姬：什么事？

Lady An: What?

石 遵：愿你允我来办理这场葬礼，

Shi Zun: Please allow me to handle this funeral.

我的罪孽深重，必应赎罪。

I have committed a serious crime, so I must atone for my crime.

安 姬：我能看见你这样深悔前非，我心里也十分喜悦。我得走了。

Lady An: I feel very happy to see you repent so deeply. I must go.

石 遵：夫人倒是向我道别一声哪。

Shi Zun: Madam, please bid farewell to me.

安 姬：你既教了我如何待你和善，不妨就假想我已道别过了。

Lady An: Since you taught me how to treat you well, you can imagine I already bid you farewell.

石 遵：来，将棺具抬往法门寺院，待我请来高僧超度张柴将军亡灵，国礼安葬。

Shi Zun: Come, carry the coffin to Fa'men Temple. Wait until I ask an eminent monk to save the soul of General Zhang Chai and bury him in state funeral.

兵 士：闲人闪开！

Soldiers: Make a way!

石 遵：你……你不是二哥么？

Shi Zun: You aren't you Second Brother?

石 斌：三弟！

Shi Bin: Third Brother!

石 遵：二哥！你为何身披枷锁？

Shi Zun: Second Brother! Why did you put shackles on your body?

石 斌：三弟呀！，石斌的名字害愚兄，

Shi Bin: Third Brother! My name harms me.

皇兄与皇嫂昨晚同做一梦，

The Emperor and the Empress had the same dream last night.

梦中天神显圣，丢下籤语一篇在枕边

In their dream, God appears and leaves a prophecy at their bedside.

石 遵：什么籤语？

Shi Zun: What prophecy?

石 斌：“奸佞兴风，篡位弑兄，

Shi Bin: “A treacherous person dominates the world. He will usurp the crown and kill his brothers.

有文有武即是名，

His name comprises character wen and character wu.

特留籤语示警。”

This prophecy is left as a warning.”

皇兄、皇嫂即刻惊醒枕边果然有这张籤语！

The emperor and the empress immediately woke up and really found this prophecy at their bedside!

石 遵：待我看来！“有文有武即是名”……

Shi Zun: Let me look! “His name comprises character wen and character wu”……

石 斌：“有文有武”乃是个“斌”字，就是我的名字，

Shi Bin: “Character wen and character wu” equalize character “bin”, which is my name.

愚兄千思万想理不清，难道这籤语——就定下了愚兄的罪名嘛！？

I think about it numerous times. This prophecy—does it declare me guilty!?

石 遵：皇兄与皇嫂同做一梦？

Shi Zun: The emperor and the empress had the same dream?

枕边留下籤语一篇？

A prophecy was left at their bedside?

石 斌：是啊……

Shi Bin: Yes

石 遵：难道兄长还不明白吗？

Shi Zun: Don't you already understand?

石 斌：明白什么？

Shi Bin: What do I understand?

石 遵：男子受了女人的统治，

Shi Zun: The man is manipulated by the woman.

不是皇兄有心把你关进牢狱，

It is not our Emperor Brother who wants to imprison you.

而是他的妻后——皇嫂的指使！

It is his wife—at the empress's instigation!

我们大赵王国的外戚向我们羯族石氏动手了……

In our Zhao Kingdom, the empress's relatives start to handle our Shi family of Jie nationality

第一是你，第二就是我……恐怖啊！

First, it is you; second it is me

石 斌：三弟，你要为大赵国效忠啊。

Shi Bin: Third Brother. You must devote your allegiance to serve our Zhao Kingdom.

石 遵：三哥暂受一时牢狱之苦，

Shi Zun: Second Brother endures the imprisonment temporarily.

我就去见兄皇；

I am going to meet our Emperor Brother;

不管什么事，只要你吩咐我去办，

Whatever the issue, as long as you order me,

即使让我向那恶毒的皇嫂和那帮为虎作倀的外戚低三下四也好，

I will do it even if I must lower myself to that evil empress and her reckless relatives.

那奇耻大辱——

That huge insult—

（唱）我也得忍受，

(Sing) I must endure it,

只要能为你换取自由……

As long as I can exchange freedom for you

这兄弟阅墙的滋味啊——

This feeling of brothers turning into enemies—

如血滴滴落心头；
Drops like blood on my heart;
我舍身也要把你救，
I must save you even if I must sacrifice myself,
宰相的大位为你留！
I will leave you the eminent position of the Prime Minister!

石 斌：（唱）终究是一母同胞情意厚，
Shi Bin: (Sing) At least we have strong brotherhood with the same mother.
为国为民我们弟兄志同酬；
For the country and the people we cherish the same goal;
好兄弟呀……
My good brother

兵 士：宰相大人，您该走了！
Soldiers: Prime Minister. It is time for you to go!

石 斌：为兄的去了……唉！
Shi Bin: Your brother goes now Hi!
（唱）我走，走，走！
(Sing) I go, go, go!

石 遵：（唱）走上你那万劫不复的路莫回头，
Shi Zun: (Sing) Go straight forward beyond redemption, not turning your head,
好一个同胞兄长纯净不藏污垢，
He is such a pure brother without filth,
面对着他我怎能心灵无忧，
How can I be worry-free in front of him,
狭路相逢妇人之仁才会罢手——
Encountering on a narrow road, only womanly benevolence will lead to giving up—

石遵乙：（唱）雇来了刽子手杀人的魔头。
Shi Zun B: (Sing) The Satan of murderers is employed.

石 遵：你们人生的哲学是什么？
Shi Zun: What is the philosophy of your lives?

凶手甲：守法朝朝忧闷，
Killer A: Feel depressed everyday if keeping the law,
凶手乙：强梁夜夜欢歌；
Killer B: Sing happily every night if tyrannous and violent.
凶手甲：损人利己骑马骡，
Killer A: Enjoy a grand lifestyle if selfish,
凶手乙：正直公平挨饿。

Killer B: Famish if upright and fair.

凶手甲：修桥补路瞎眼，

Killer A: Be blind if repair bridges and roads

凶手乙：杀人放火儿子多，

Killer B: Many sons if murder and arson.

凶手甲：我到西天问我佛，

Killer A: I went to the Western Paradise to ask my Buddha,

凶手乙：佛说：

Killer B: Buddha said:

二人同：佛说：我也没辙！

Killer A and B: I also have no way!

石 遵：好！我很看得上你俩；快去干起来；去，去，快去。

Shi Zun: Good! I like you two very much; go to do it quick; Go, go, hurry.

石遵乙：下手必须敏捷，尤其要心如石铁。

Shi Zun B: You must do it quick. Your heart especially must be like stone and iron.

凶手甲：我们不讲空话，

Killer A: We do not give empty talk.

凶手乙：“做他伊”用手不用嘴巴。

Killer B: We do it with hands not words.

石 遵：对，眼里要落石块，傻子才滴傻泪。

Shi Zun: Yes, your eyes must be like stones. Only fools drop foolish tears.

凶手甲：“做他伊”虽然不用嘴，

Killer A: Although we do it without words,

凶手乙：提前支付的佣金要加倍。

Killer B: Our prepaid commission must double.

石遵乙：现代人都这样。

Shi Zun B: Modern people are all like this.

石 遵：十万。

Shi Zun: One hundred thousand.

凶手甲：不够养老钱。

Killer A: Not enough for retirement pension.

石遵乙：二十万。

Shi Zun B: Two hundred thousand.

凶手乙：刚够买个卫生间。

Killer B: Just enough to buy a restroom.

石 遵：干完活再来领赏钱！

Shi Zun: Come for gratuity after finishing your work!

石遵乙：哼，世风日下！

Shi Zun B: Humph! Moral degeneration in our time!

凶手同：正是：

Killer A and B: It is like this:

凶手甲：我到西天问我佛，

Killer A: I went to the Western Paradise to ask my Buddha.

凶手乙：佛说：

Killer B: Buddha said:

二人同：佛说：我也没辙！

Killer A and B: Buddha said: I also have no way!

第三场

Scene Three

正 帝：（唱）昏沉沉卧龙榻病夺三魂……

Emperor Zheng: (Sing) I feel so dizzy that I lay on bed. My sickness robs my soul ……

众臣同：陛下醒来！

All Officials: Wake up, Your Majesty!

正 帝：（唱）强睁双眼对群臣；

Emperor Zheng: (Sing) Force my eyes open to see my officials;

众臣同：龙体珍重了！

All Officials: Please treasure Your Majesty's health!

正 帝：（唱）三件事未了心不定——

Emperor Zheng: (Sing) Cannot settle down my mind due to three unfinished issues.

海世勋：这第一件？

Hai Shixun: The first one?

正 帝：（唱）孤病重太子还没有回帝京。

Emperor Zheng: (Sing) I am sick but my Crown prince has not returned to the capital.

海世勋：待臣前往鲁城迎接太子回京。

Hai Shixun: Wait until I go to City Lu to welcome the Crown prince back to the capital.

李福思：待臣前往鲁城迎接太子回京。

Li Fusi: Wait until I go to City Lu to welcome the Crown prince back to the capital.

海世勋：臣前去！

Hai Shixun: I will go!

李福思：臣前往！

Li Fusi: I will go!

正 帝：唉，皇后宣读诏书。

Emperor Zheng: Alas. Empress reads the decree.

皇 后：遵旨。（念）“父皇龙体病重，快马加鞭回京。”

Empress: Obey the order. (Read) “Father Emperor is sick. Return soon to the capital.”

正 帝：内侍，吩咐八百里快马鲁城传旨！

Emperor Zheng: Chamberlain. Order the express delivery of the order to City Lu.

李福思：敢问万岁第二件大事？

Li Fusi: Your Majesty. Can I ask for the second issue?

正 帝：（唱）第二件怕公侯不和江山难稳——

Emperor Zheng: (Sing) The second issue is that I am afraid there is no harmony among the
princes so the kingdom will not remain stable—

李福思：皇天在上，臣李福思虽为娘娘外戚，

Li Fusi: I promise to heaven: although I Li Fusi is the Empress's relative,

定要摒弃私怨恨，忠心为国，

I will certainly discard personal resentment for my loyalty to the country.

苍天可鉴。

Heaven can testify to it.

葛 雷：皇天在上，臣葛雷虽为娘娘外戚，

Ge Lei: I promise to heaven: although I Ge Lei is the Empress's relative,

定要摒弃私怨恨，忠心为国，

I will certainly discard personal resentment for my loyalty to the country.

苍天可鉴。

Heaven can testify to it.

正 帝：夫人！

Emperor Zheng: Madam!

（唱）孤有遗言你且听：

(Sing) Please listen to my last words:

外戚有过莫护短，

If your relatives make mistakes, please do not justify for them,

公侯贵戚要和乎。

There should be peace among princes and aristocrats.

皇 后：臣妾决不再记旧怨，

Empress: I will not remember old grudges any more.

愿意与满朝公侯将相同心协力共辅皇室，

I am willing to assist the imperial family with all the princes, ministers, and generals in
the palace.

都愿陛下昌达！

We all wish Your Majesty well!

正 帝：海大人，柏将军？

Emperor Zheng: Lord Hai, and General Bo?

海世勋：御前大臣海世勋，抛弃前嫌，

Hai Shixun: Your Majesty's minister Hai Shixun will discard previous grudges.

立誓精诚无欺！

I swear I'll be sincere and honest!

柏金汉：我柏金汉如果有仇视皇后娘娘，或是不衷心拥戴娘娘的亲朋，

Bo Jinhan: If I Bo Jinhan has any friend or relative who hates the Empress or does not support the Empress loyally,

我愿受天罚！

I'm willing to be punished by heaven!

海世勋：愿娘娘千岁，千千岁！

Hai Shixun: Wish the Empress a long life, a long long life!

柏金汉：愿娘娘千岁，千千岁！

Bo Jinhan: Wish the Empress a long life, a long long life!

石 遵：护国公来也！

Shi Zun: Lord Protector comes!

石 遵：臣弟参见万岁！

Shi Zun: I come to pay my respect to Your Majesty!

正 帝：三弟呀！你看原有间隙的公侯将相之间，

Emperor Zheng: Third Brother! You see among the conflicting dukes, ministers, and generals, 干戈化成了玉帛，恨转为爱了。

war turns into friendship and hatred transforms to love.

石 遵：（唱）好好好，我真高兴，

Shi Zun: (Sing) Good good good, I am so happy.

皇兄听我表表忠心：

Emperor Brother, please listen to my expressing my loyalty:

消除隔阂最要紧，

The most important thing is to eliminate estrangement,

如有得罪我行礼赔小心；

If I offend anyone I will apologize;

愿我们都像初生的婴孩一样纯净，

Wish we're all as pure as the new-born baby,

护国公永远谦恭待人。

Lord Protector will forever treat others with humility.

（白）皇兄，恕弟直言，

(Speak) Emperor Brother, please forgive my frankness.

皇兄病重小弟一直担忧，

I have been worrying about Your Majesty's illness.

继位的大事关乎我大赵万年社稷……

The throne inheritance concerns the prolongation of our Zhao Kingdom……

正 帝：（白）我们弟兄想到一处了，

Emperor Zheng: (Speak) We have considered the same thing.
寡人要立继任王位的人选，
I would like to erect the throne candidate,
可是，怕他一时难以担当！
but I'm afraid he is unable to take the responsibility at the moment!

石 遵：（白）大哥放心，

Shi Zun: (Speak) Big brother, please settle down your mind.
您看中的人选必定是人中龙凤，
The candidate you've selected is certainly outstanding.
一定能承此大任！
He is certainly able to bear this great task!

正 帝：（白）御前大臣，你记下来，寡人要立……

Emperor Zheng: (Speak) Chancellor. You record it. I would like to erect ……

正 帝：（白）皇子昭为君王！继承寡人的江山！

Emperor Zheng: (Speak) Prince Zhao as emperor! He will inherit my kingdom!

正 帝：孤已传旨，

Emperor Zheng: I've already delivered the order.
太子不日就要从鲁城回京来了。
The Crown prince will soon return to the capital from City Lu.

皇 后：（唱）愿上天让人间裂痕补尽，

Empress: (Sing) Wish heaven will fill up the cracks in the human world.
求主君赦回二弟法外施恩。
Please pardon Second Brother and bestow extrajudicial grace upon him.

正 帝：是啊，太子登基全靠二弟、三弟辅佐，

Emperor Zheng: Yes. The prince's enthronement all depends on the assistance of Second Brother and Third Brother.

二弟乃是托孤的重臣，
Second Brother is an important minister to support the orphan.
快快传旨，赦免二弟！
Soon deliver my order to pardon Second Brother!

石 遵：啊？难道皇上和文武众臣还不知道我那二哥他……

Shi Zun: Ah? Don't Your Majesty and officials already know that my Second Brother ……
他已经在狱中归天了吗？
He is already dead in prison?

正 帝：你……你说什么？

Emperor Zheng: What ... what did you say?

石 遵：我刚才去探望二哥，

Shi Zun: Just now I went to visit my Second Brother.

狱官回禀： 皇兄传下圣旨， 赐死我那二哥啊……

The prison official reported: the Emperor has issued the order to grant death to my
Second Brother

正 帝： 哎呀！

Emperor Zheng: Ah!

（唱） 闻言不啻惊雷轰，

(Sing) The news sounds like thunder booming,

孤何时定他死罪名？

When did I give him death penalty?

霎时昏沉血上涌……

I immediately feel dizzy and my blood rushes up

众（同）： 陛下， 万岁啊……

All (Together): Your Majesty, our Emperor

石 遵： 唉！

Shi Zun: Ai!

（唱） 我好悲伤……我那屈死的二兄长，

(Sing) I'm so sad my wronged Second Brother,

哭一声好兄王！

Cry for my Emperor Brother!

石遵乙：（白）佩服佩服！今年最佳男主角都是你的了！

Shi Zun B: (Speak) Admire admire! All Best Actors of the Year are yours!

（唱） 暗杀二哥在先——干得漂亮，

(Sing) First you murdered Second Brother—you did it well,

糊弄大哥在后——冠冕堂皇，

Later you fooled Big Brother—you did it gloriously,

招招局局致命棋，

Every trick of yours is fatal,

石 遵：（唱） 棋差一着路渺茫……

Shi Zun: (Sing) Lacking one trick, our road looks uncertain

他当众调回太子来继位，

In public he called the Crown prince back to inherit the throne,

我哭啊，

I cry,

石遵乙：（唱） 啊……机关算尽……竹篮打水……

Shi Zun B: (Sing) Ah tricks are used up basket carrying water

石 遵：（唱） ——空忙一场！

Shi Zun: (Sing) — have been busy for nothing!

石遵乙： 这哪像成大业的英雄？

Shi Zun B: How can you be like a hero who can accomplish great cause?

兄皇已死，权势最大的是谁？

The Emperor Brother is already dead. Who has the greatest power?

看看识时务的来啦！

See here comes a person who fits the world!

柏金汉：（唱）痛哭声中藏动荡，

Bo Jinhan: (Sing) Cry hides turmoil,

凯 慈：（唱）关键时再不要过度悲伤；

Kai Ci: (Sing) At crucial moments don't be too sad;

石 遵：（唱）也不知他二人是敌是友？

Shi Zun: (Sing) Wondering whether they are enemies or friends?

二人同：（唱）识时务背靠大树好乘凉。

Two Together: (Sing) To fit the world we rely upon a big tree to enjoy a good shade.

石遵乙：（唱）成大业还需左右臂膀，

Shi Zun B: (Sing) To accomplish great cause needs supporters.

一个好汉两个帮。

A good man needs the help of others.

石 遵：（白）感谢二位大人对我的关心，

Shi Zun: (Speak) I thank your attention to me.

皇兄临终前已使一朝众臣修好言和了，

My Emperor Brother has reconciled all court officials before he died.

不过我最想知道的是御前大臣海世勋此刻的心境。

But I most want to know Chancellor Hai Shixun's feeling at the moment.

柏金汉：当然，御前大臣，举足轻重。

Bo Jinhan: Of course. Chancellor, is very important.

凯 慈：末将即刻前往海大人那里探听虚实。

Kai Ci: I'll immediately go to Lord Hai to find the truth.

柏金汉：什么虚实？

Bo Jinhan: What truth?

凯 慈：末将心中明白的很。

Kai Ci: I understand it very well.

柏金汉：大人，如今重中之重把皇后那班目中无人的亲朋们和太子拆开！

Bo Jinhan: Your honor. Now the most important thing is to alienate the Empress's arrogant relatives and friends from the Crown prince!

石 遵：太子？可惜这太子不是我大哥的亲生！

Shi Zun: The Crown prince? What a pity that this Crown prince is not the descendent of my big brother!

柏金汉：啊？此话从何说起？

Bo Jinhan: Ah? How did you reach this conclusion?

石 遵：柏大人你应当记得，我那皇嫂进宫不到八月就生下了这位“太子”。

Shi Zun: Lord Bo you should remember, our Empress gave birth to this “Crown prince” within 8 months.

柏金汉：如此说来太子是皇后带来的野种！

Bo Jinhan: So the Crown prince was the Empress’s bastard!

石 遵：我大哥伤了赵家皇室的脸面，惭愧……

Shi Zun: My big brother damaged the self-respect of the imperial Zhao family, ashamed ……

柏金汉：当断不断，反受其乱，

Bo Jinhan: Who fails to make a necessary decision will be bothered by it.

最好的计策，待微臣快马赶到鲁城，将那个野种“太子”斩草除根。

The best strategy is to rush to City Lu, to kill that bastard “Crown prince”.

再将真情诏告天下。

Then announce the truth to the world.

石 遵：我的谘询大臣，我的神坛先知！

Shi Zun: My consultative official! My altar prophet!

我的好兄弟，等我成就大业，

My good brother, after I accomplish the great cause,

你就是御前大臣兼定国将军，领燕北封地。

You will become Chancellor and General Protector, with northern Yan as your territory.

柏金汉：谢殿下封赏！

Bo Jinhan: Thank Your Highness for your reward!

凯 慈：护国公！禀告护国公，

Kai Ci: Lord Protector! Report to Lord Protector,

御前大臣海世勋明日召集众臣，共议太子加冕。

Chancellor Hai Shixun will assemble officials tomorrow to discuss crowning the prince.

石 遵：啊？他竟不同我商议？这么着急为他加冕？

Shi Zun: Ah? He even didn’t discuss with me? So anxious to crown him?

又是串通皇后的阴谋，

This is another conspiracy with the Empress.

柏大人不宜迟，快快赶到鲁城截太子斩草除根。

Lord Bo should not delay, hurry to City Lu to stop and exterminate the Crown prince.

柏金汉：我即刻快马启程。

Bo Jinhan: I will set out immediately on an express horse.

石 遵：凯慈将军，集合倾国兵马围住京城，

Shi Zun: General Kaici, assemble all army of the kingdom to surround the capital,

明日殿前议事听我号令行事，附耳上来！

In court tomorrow you follow my order to take action, come over here to listen!

第四场

Scene 4

海世勋：国无君主民不定，

Hai Shixun: In a country without a monarch people cannot settle down.

李福思、葛雷：谨遵遗嘱立新君。

Li Fusi & Ge Lei: Erect the new monarch according to the will.

海世勋：召集各位大人，就是为了议定加冕太子的吉日。

Hai Shixun: The purpose for convening you Lords is to decide an auspicious day to enthrone the Crown prince.

凯 慈：加冕盛典都准备好了吗？

Kai Ci: Is everything ready for the crowning ceremony?

李福思、葛雷：都齐备了；只等决定日期。

Li Fusi & Ge Lei: Everything is ready; we're just waiting for the date.

海世勋：国不可一日无君，明日就是吉日。

Hai Shixun: A country cannot be without monarch even for a day. Tomorrow is the auspicious day.

凯 慈：不知护国公有什么高见？

Kai Ci: Wondering what opinion the Lord Protector has?

海世勋：昨日命你请护国公议会，为何不见到来？

Hai Shixun: Yesterday I ordered you to invite Lord Protector to the meeting. Why didn't I see him come?

葛 雷：看，柏金汉大人来了！

Ge Lei: Look, Lord Bo Jinhan comes!

海世勋：姗姗来迟，你往哪里去了？

Hai Shixun: You're late. Where have you been?

柏金汉：迎接太子去了。

Bo Jinhan: I went to welcome the Crown prince.

海世勋：太子现在在哪里？

Hai Shixun: Where is the Crown prince now?

柏金汉：已然送他上西天了！

Bo Jinhan: I've sent him to death!

众 臣：啊？你竟敢反叛？

All Officials: Ah? You dare to rebel?

石 遵：柏金汉做得好！

Shi Zun: Bo Jinhan did a good thing!

这个太子不是我石家的血统，

This Crown prince is not the lineage of our Shi family,

我大赵的江山怎能让外姓继承？

how can we pass our Zhao Kingdom to another family?

凯 慈：护国公！启禀护国公，

Kai Ci: Lord Protector! Report to the Lord Protector,

末将在海大人后花园挖出一个木人，

I dug out a wooden puppet from the backyard garden of Mr. Hai,

有七隻绣花针钉住木人的七窍，

There are seven needles stuck into its seven apertures.

护国公请看！

Lord Protector please take a look!

石 遵：待我看来。

Shi Zun: Let me look.

石 遵：海大人，你把我的姓名、生辰写作木人身上，

Shi Zun: Lord Hai. You wrote my name and date of birth on the wooden puppet.

七窍钉针到底要干什么？

What did you want by nailing needles into its seven apertures?

海世勋：此事绝非老臣所为。

Hai Shixun: I absolutely did not do that.

柏金汉：这是妖人所用魔魔法，

Bo Jinhan: This is a sorcerer's trick of magic nightmare.

分明要害护国公性命！

Obviously it intends to harm the life of the Lord Protector.

海世勋：太子加冕在即，你暗杀太子，图谋不轨！

Hai Shixun: The prince is going to be crowned. You murdered the prince and scheme rebellion!

柏金汉：你们加冕的是一个野种！

Bo Jinhan: What you intended to crown is a bastard!

侮辱了大赵国的皇族血统！

An insult to the imperial lineage of the Grand Zhao Kingdom!

石 遵：海大人，皇兄娶有孕的皇嫂进宫封后，

Shi Zun: Lord Hai, my Emperor Brother married the pregnant Empress into the palace and granted her the Queen.

不到八月就生下一子的事，你应当不会忘记吧？

She gave birth to a son within 8 months. You shouldn't forget this, should you?

海世勋：皇后娘娘虽说先孕后进宫，

Hai Shixun: Although the Empress came into the palace with pregnancy.

所怀之子也是先帝的血统。

The son she conceived is the descendant of the late emperor.

李福思：皇后是正统的皇后！

Li Fusi: The Empress is the legitimate empress!

葛 雷: 太子是正统的太子!

Ge Lei: The Crown prince is the legitimate prince!

海世勋: 你们暗杀太子, 意欲何为?

Hai Shixun: You murdered the Crown prince. What do you intend to do?

石 遵: 怎么三位重臣, 要结党谋反吗?

Shi Zun: You three important officials, are you cliquing to rebel?

我石遵还没让你们害死,

I Shi Zun have not been murdered by you yet.

大赵血统的皇族还没死绝呢! 集结兵马!

The imperial family of Zhao lineage has not died out! Assemble the army!

海世勋: (唱) 忠良无辜被刀裁,

Hai Shixun: (Sing) The loyal, the good, and the innocent are knifed.

血雨腥风滚滚来;

Bloody war comes;

悲惨邪恶的时代,

In a tragic and evil time,

英雄何惧断头台!

Heroes are not afraid of guillotine!

柏金汉: 臣, 柏金汉, 恭请真龙天子登基。

Bo Jinhan: I, Bo Jinhan, respectfully ask the real dragon to ascend the throne.

凯 慈: 臣, 凯慈, 恭请真龙天子登基。

Kai Ci: I, Kai Ci, respectfully ask the real dragon to ascend the throne.

众 同: 臣等参拜! 万岁! 万岁, 万万岁!

All together: We all pay our respect! Your Majesty! Your Majesty, Your Majesty!

皇 后: 篡位的豺狼!

Empress: A wolf usurps the throne!

(唱) 大骂石遵豺狼性,

(Sing) Curse Shi Zun's wolfish nature,

杀死皇儿如刀剜我心!

Murdering my imperial son is like cutting out my heart with a knife!

先皇归天尸骨未冷,

The late emperor is dead but his body is not cold yet,

你、你……你杀太子、诛皇戚、

You, you you killed the Crown prince, murdered the royal,

残害忠臣

and harmed the loyal and the good.

桩桩罪恶天不容!

Your series of crimes are not tolerated by heaven!

石 遵：（白）天理不容第一件，

Shi Zun: (Speak) The first thing not tolerated by heaven:

你身怀野种嫁皇兄。

you married my Emperor Brother pregnant with a bastard child.

皇 后：（唱）未嫁时你兄已然强暴我，

Empress: (Sing) Your brother had violated me before the marriage.

石 遵：（白）这胎儿不是我大哥的种？

Shi Zun: (Speak) This fetus was not my brother's seed!

皇 后：（唱）你污言作践我糟蹋我名声！

Empress: (Sing) You insulted me with dirty words and spoiled my reputation!

做皇后又跌落深渊唯叹女人遭恶运！

As an empress falling into abyss again, I can only sigh for women's fate!

石 遵：（白）我已以正宗血统君临天下，

Shi Zun: (Speak) I already rule the country with my authentic lineage.

你可听一听臣民的忠心。

You can listen to subjects' loyalty.

众 同：万岁！万岁，万万岁！

All Together: Your Majesty! Your Majesty, Your Majesty!

皇 后：（唱）天爷呀…你为何只顾沉眠，让他肆意施暴行！

Empress: (Sing) Heaven ... why do you only sleep, and allow him to carry out atrocity!

这世道谁肯听我诉苦难？

In this world who is willing to listen to me telling my suffering?

石 遵：（白）“成者王侯败者贼”

Shi Zun: (Speak) "Victors become princes but losers are thieves."

这定论从古传至今。

This conclusion is passed down to today from ancient times.

还是想一想怎样保住你皇族，尊贵……

Think about how to protect your royal family, honored

也保住你花容月貌的女儿。

also protect your beautiful daughter.

皇 后：（唱）听不懂这是什么弦外音？

Empress: (Sing) Cannot understand what implication it is?

我女儿普兰公主是你亲侄女，

My daughter Princess Pulan is your niece,

待字闺中玉洁冰清；

Unmarried, clean like jade and pure like ice,

只求你饶了她年青的生命！

I only beg you to have mercy on her young life!

哪怕是让我早早藏身埋骨入新坟。

Even if you ask me to die early.

石 遵：哪能啊！说实实在在的话，我爱皇嫂的美貌……还要保护你的名节，

Shi Zun: How could I! To be honest, I love your beautyI also want to protect your chastity.

所以我要娶你的女儿，我的侄女普兰公主为妻，

So I will marry your daughter, my niece Princess Pulan, as my wife.

封她为大赵皇后！

I will grant her the Queen of the grand Zhao!

皇 后：你……你这个畜生！

Empress: You you beast!

第五场

Scene 5

公 主：（念）父亡，兄死，刀光剑影，

Princess: (Speak) Father perished, and brother died. A war is going on.

悲痛，悲痛……

Sad, sad

有谁怜顾少女青春。

Who pities a young girl's youth.

石 遵：（念）瘸腿，驼背，女人见了如见鬼，

Shi Zun: (Speak) Limped, humpbacked, a ghost in women's eyes,

帝王，权位，

Emperor, power,

爱神眷顾给力加倍。

Eros's bless gives double strength.

公 主：万岁。

Princess: Your Majesty.

石 遵：不要这样称呼我。

Shi Zun: Don't address me like this.

公 主：叔王。

Princess: Uncle King.

石 遵：更不要叫叔王。

Shi Zun: Don't call me Uncle King even more.

公 主：你本来是我的叔王啊！

Princess: You're my Uncle King!

石 遵：怎么？你母亲下朝回来不曾向你说起吗？

Shi Zun: What? Didn't your mother tell you after she returned from the royal court?

公主：母亲下朝回来，抱住我痛苦……

Princess: After my mother came back from the court, she embraced me and cried.

石遵：哭什么？

Shi Zun: What did she cry for?

公主：哭父王，哭兄长……

Princess: Cried for my Father King, and for my brother

石遵：难道她不曾关心你的婚姻么？

Shi Zun: Didn't she care about your marriage?

公主：我的婚姻？唉，父兄刚刚亡故，还谈什么我的婚姻？

Princess: My marriage? Hey, my father and brother just died. How can I talk about my marriage?

石遵：有道是：逝者已矣，青春难再呀！

Shi Zun: There is such a saying: the dead already passed out, youth is hard to stay.

公主：青春难再……，叔王，你是说侄女我么？

Princess: Youth is hard to stay Uncle King, are you referring to your niece me?

石遵：是啊，普兰。假如我没记错，你今年一十七岁了。

Shi Zun: Yes, Pulan. If I remember correctly, you're 17 this year.

公主：唉，可怜生在帝王家，

Princess: Alas. What a pity to be born into a royal family.

宫冷只有甘寂寞。

I can only resign myself to the loneliness of the deserted palace.

石遵：帝王最惜花开时，怎容普兰空自香。

Shi Zun: Emperor most cherish bloom. How can I let Pulan send out fragrance only for herself.

公主：叔王，这是何意？

Princess: Uncle King, what do you mean?

石遵：普兰，一十七岁普兰怒放，香气袭人，

Shi Zun: Pulan. Pulan at 17 blooms and sends out enchanting fragrance.

酷似你母当年，胜似你母当年，

You are exactly like your mother at that age, better than your mother at that age.

上天造就如此美色，难道你不该身居王后之位吗？

Heaven created such beauty. Shouldn't you be the Queen?

公主：叔王此言，侄女不甚明白……

Princess: Uncle King's words, your niece cannot completely understand

石遵：好了，好了，寡人初到后宫，还不曾见过你的闺房，

Shi Zun: Fine, fine, I just came to the inner palace and haven't seen your boudoir yet.

还不请驾临幸？

Don't you invite me to patronize it?

公主：母亲说过，普兰的闺房，不准男子进入。

Princess: My mother told me that men were not allowed to enter Pulan's boudoir.

石 遵：哈哈……，寡人乃万乘之君，难道君命比不过母命？

Shi Zun: Ha Ha I am the supreme ruler. Can't my order overrule your mother's order?

公 主：如此叔王……万岁请……

Princess: Then Uncle King Your Majesty please

皇 后：（唱）闻报禽兽内宫闯——

Empress: (Sing) I heard the report that the beast had rushed into the inner palace—

皇 后：（唱）心惊胆怕步慌慌；

Empress: (Sing) Scared and panic

天颜冷酷灾难降，

Heaven is cruel and sends out disaster,

求皇后救普兰你是好婶娘！

Ask the Queen to save Pulan you're a good aunt!

安 姬：（唱）事不宜迟内宫往！

Lady An: (Sing) Cannot delay but hurry to the inner palace!

石 遵：（唱）初绽花朵分外香。

Shi Zun: (Sing) A flourishing flower is especially fragrant.

皇 后：你、你、你到我内宫做什么来了？

Empress: Why did you, you, you come to my inner palace?

石 遵：嫂嫂不从王命，寡人不得不亲自登门求爱。

Shi Zun: Sister-in-law did not follow your King's order, so I had to come to woo by myself.

皇 后：你！……到我女儿内室做什么去了？

Empress: You! Why did you go to my daughter's boudoir?

石 遵：普兰闺房清香可人！

Shi Zun: Pulan's boudoir is graceful!

皇 后：女儿

Empress: Daughter

安 姬：禽兽！

Lady An: Beast!

（唱）人间败类廉耻丧尽，

(Sing) Human scum is shameless,

淫欲肆虐乱人伦；

Lust rages and causes chaos in human relations;

想当初甜言蜜语设陷阱，

Recollect how you trapped with your sweet talk at first,

坠你魔窟夜夜梦魇惊；

Falling into your snare I was awakened by nightmare every night;

驼背的蟾蜍瘸蛇蝎，

A humpbacked toad and a lame viper,

登上王位更狰狞！

More hideous after ascending the throne!

石 遵：（唱）上天给我畸形貌，

Shi Zun: (Sing) Heaven gave me an abnormal appearance,

我看世人心难平；

My mind is hard to calm down when I look at others;

就要报复这世界，

Want to revenge this world,

做尽恶人恶事不皱眉头铁铮铮！

Do all the evil things without scowl like iron clanks!

安 姬：（唱）你在地狱领使命，

Lady An: (Sing) You got your task in hell,

专为魔鬼卖灵魂；

You sold soul especially for the devil;

大地即崩裂，

Earth is going to split up,

炼狱烈焰喷；

Hell spouts out flames;

人神同呼号，

Humans and gods wail together,

共愤绞尔魂！

All are angry and hang your soul!

再不戴这皇后的金箍罪恶的顶！

No longer bear this evil golden hoop for the Queen!

石 遵：封普兰公主为大赵皇后！

Shi Zun: Grant Princess Pulan as the Queen of the Great Kingdom of Zhao!

皇 后：誓死抗旨！

Empress: Pledge your life to resist the order!

普 兰：母亲，我已经是他的人啦……

Pulan: Mother, I already belong to him

第 六 场

Scene 6

柏将军求见皇上！

General Bo asks to see the Emperor!

柏金汉：（唱）当初为他谋帝位，

Bo Jinhan: (Sing) At that time when we schemed the crown for him,

他许我御前大臣、定国将军封地在领北。

He promised me the positions of Chancellor and General Protector with my territory in the north.

年过半载无兑现，

Half a year has passed without fulfilling his promises,

该封不封用人太黑。

Not conferring his favor when should, he took advantage of people too severely.

柏金汉：皇上万岁！我听到了这个消息，我的君主。

Bo Jinhan: Long live the Emperor! I heard about this news, my lord.

石 遵：夜半进宫什么事？

Shi Zun: Why did you enter the palace at midnight?

柏金汉：石闵起兵了，来势很猛啊。

Bo Jinhan: Shi Min revolted, and his army comes fiercely.

石 遵：你做了什么部署？你的职责呢？

Shi Zun: What arrangement have you made? Where is your responsibility?

柏金汉：陛下，臣想皇上有一件重要的事忘记了。

Bo Jinhan: Your Majesty, I think Your Majesty has forgotten an important issue.

石 遵：是你胁迫我的皇上。

Shi Zun: You are coercing Your Majesty.

柏金汉：是，我请您，

Bo Jinhan: Yes, I am asking you.

万岁有诺言在先，一旦登上王位，

Your Majesty made a promise before, once you ascended the throne,

便封赐我御前大臣、定国将军，还有燕北的封地。

You would grant me Chancellor and General Protector, together with my territory in Northern Yan.

关键就在此；您所允许的海瑞福德伯爵爵位和那些动产都应该归我了。

The key is here: the title of Lord Hairuiford and those properties you've promised should all belong to me.

石 遵：燕北的封地……那不正是石闵起兵的地方？

Shi Zun: The territory in Northern Yan Isn't that the place where Shi Min revolted?

你该当何罪。

You've committed a crime.

柏金汉：皇上还没有把燕北之地封给我。臣无罪。

Bo Jinhan: Your Majesty has not granted me the territory of Northern Yan. I'm innocent.

陛下对我的正当请求怎么说？

What would Your Majesty say to my proper request?

石 遵：这个石闵，孤记得孤为大赵打天下时，

Shi Zun: This Shi Min. I remember when I conquered the world for Kingdom Zhao,
石闵还不过是个顽皮的孩童。也许——

Shi Min was only a naughty child. Maybe—

柏金汉：您的令誉和信义要维护。

Bo Jinhan: Your reputation and credit should be protected.

石 遵：我当初为什么没有杀死他的呢？

Shi Zun: Why didn't I kill him at that time?

柏金汉：万岁，您答应封赐我的爵位——

Bo Jinhan: Your Majesty, the titles you promised to me—

石 遵：我需要你到燕北去看看虚实。

Shi Zun: I need you to take a look at the situation of Northern Yan.

柏金汉：皇上。

Bo Jinhan: Your Majesty.

石 遵：唉，什么时间了？

Shi Zun: Ai. What time is it?

柏金汉：臣斗胆请万岁回忆一下您当初对臣的诺言。

Bo Jinhan: I dare to ask Your Majesty to recollect your promise to me at that time.

石 遵：唔，可是什么时间了？

Shi Zun: Well. What time is it?

柏金汉：三更了。

Bo Jinhan: Three-shift.

石 遵：好，让它敲吧。

Shi Zun: Fine, let it beat.

柏金汉：为什么让它敲？

Bo Jinhan: Why do you let it beat?

石 遵：因为一面你在乞求，一面我要默想，

Shi Zun: Because at one hand you're begging, at another hand I need to meditate.

而你却像那更夫手中的梆鼓更锣当当敲个不停。

But you beat nonstop like the watchman's rattle, drum, and gong.

我今天无心封赏。

Today I'm not in the mood of granting a reward.

柏金汉：那就请决定万岁再次承诺。

Bo Jinhan: Then I ask Your Majesty to make another promise.

石 遵：你真麻烦，我此刻心情不对头。

Shi Zun: You really bother too much. Now my mood is not right.

柏金汉：啊？！

Bo Jinhan: Ah?!

(唱) 利用我时许封赏,
(Sing) When using me you promised me reward,
一旦登基踹一旁;
Once ascending the throne you kicked me aside;
拥戴这样的君王哪有下场?
Where will I end by supporting such a monarch?
倒不如战场复仇枪对枪。
Worse than revenging on the battlefield spear to spear.

士 兵: 大将军石闵兴兵讨伐石遵!

Soldier: General Shi Min raises an army to crusade against Shi Zun!

士 兵: 大将军石闵为正义而战!

Soldier: General Shi Min fights for justice!

凯 慈: 大赵皇帝御驾亲征, 讨伐叛将石闵!

Kai Ci: The Emperor of Grand Zhao himself sets out to crusade against Rebel Shi Min!

第七场

Scene 7

石 遵: (白) 把灯点上, 把灯点上。

Shi Zun: (Speak) Lit the light, lit the light.

(唱) 夜半噩梦惊醒,

(Sing) At midnight I was awakened by a nightmare,

一双双枯瘦的手指掐我脖颈。

Pairs of skinny fingers pinched my neck.

王位征途荆棘满地,

The journey to the throne is laid with thorns,

我是无所畏惧的大英雄。

I'm a fearless big hero.

安 姬: (白) 夫君, 夫君。

Lady An: (Speak) Husband, husband.

石 遵: (白) 你…你…你

Shi Zun: (Speak) You ... you ... you

安 姬: (唱) 杀我夫君在先,

Lady An: (Sing) At first you killed my husband,

骗我嫁你为妻;

Then you cheated me to become your wife;

从未在你枕边有过片刻的安睡,

Never had a moment of peaceful sleep beside you,

篡王位杀了我鲜血尚滴……

Usurping the throne you killed me my blood still dropping

此刻叫你翻来覆去，

Now make you turn over and over again,

战场上叫你钝刀落地魂无所依！

On battlefield knock down your dull knife with your soul having no place to go!

石 遵：不，杀你是柏金汉的主意。

Shi Zun: No. It is Bo Jinhan's idea to kill you.

柏金汉：我的主意？

Bo Jinhan: My idea?

柏金汉：（白）你这个黑心肠的暴君！

Bo Jinhan: (Speak) You black-hearted tyrant!

（唱）我拥戴你加冕；

(Sing) I supported you to be crowned;

你对我施淫威。

You executed despotic power to me.

噩梦中让胆裂心碎，

In nightmare make your gall split and your heart break,

战场上让你绝望昏厥！

On battlefield make you despair and faint!

安 姬：黄泉路上多寂寞，夫君你快来陪我！

Lady An: The journey to the lower world is lonely. Husband you come quick to accompany me!

张 柴：（白）你还记得我吗？

Zhang Chai: (Speak) Do you still remember me?

（唱）背后穿心剑夺我命。

(Sing) The heart-piercing sword from my back took my life.

尸骨未寒娶我妻。

My body still warm you married my wife.

黄泉路上多寂寞。

The journey to the lower world is lonely.

你也来领略阴间寒与凄！

You also come to experience the cold and desolation in the underworld!

三幽灵：（白）黄泉路上多寂寞，

Three Spirits: (Speak) The journey to the lower world is lonely.

拉你石遵来陪我！

Drag you Shi Zun to accompany us!

石 遵：（白）不…不…不……

Shi Zun: (Speak) No...no...no.....

(唱) 野鬼拉我去做伴,
(Sing) Wild ghosts drag me to accompany them,
黄泉路上喊孤单。
Cry lonely on the way to the lower world.
(接唱) 蓦然睁双眼,
(Continue singing) Suddenly opening my eyes,
蓝色的微光闪, 死沉沉的午夜寒,
Blue glimmer sparkles, and lifeless midnight is cold,
只见这汗珠挂在皮肉上抖抖颤颤,
See sweat hanging on my flesh and shaking,
好吓人的梦魇!
What a scary nightmare!
难道说我也怕?
Am I afraid as well?
良心把我苦苦纠缠;
Conscience deeply troubles me;
良心惊扰得我心乱,
Conscience disturbs me until my heart frets,
伸出了千万条舌头吐怒言;
Millions of tongues stretch out to spit out angry words;
控诉我伪誓罪, 罪无可恕;
Accused me of the crime of perjury, a crime unforgivable;
谋杀罪, 血迹斑斑;
The crime of murder, bloody;
乱伦罪, 罪欺天地,
The crime of incest, bullying the world,
种种罪行, 大大小小, 拥上公堂,
All kinds of crimes, big and small, all crowded to the courtroom,
齐声嚷“有罪! 有罪!” 罪恶滔天!
Shouting together “Guilty! Guilty!” Crimes are heinous!
我恨自己……我爱自己……
I hate myself I love myself
丑形残躯半世相为伴,
An ugly form and a deformed shape have accompanied me half my life,
恨又那堪爱又那堪!
How am I worthy of hatred and worthy of love!
又何必让良心是懦夫惊扰得心惊胆战,
Why should I make my conscience a coward disturbed and frightened,

我靠自己换来这至高无上的皇冠，
I got this supreme crown by myself,
我高高站立在大赵国权在手——
I stand highly upon the Great Zhao Kingdom, with power in hand—
开弓没有回头箭，
A flying arrow has no way to return,
只有勇往冲向前，
I can only rush forward with courage,
莫说回头是蠢汉，
Don't mention that a repented man is a fool,
一身残缺有谁怜？
Who pities me for my deformity?
孤注一掷决胜负，
Desperate I determine victory or defeat.
千古成败亦空谈；
Through the ages success or failure is all empty talk;
战场上只要给我一匹马，
As long as give me a horse on the battlefield,
我还要报复大地报复天！
I still will revenge earth and revenge heaven!

侍 卫：报！

Guard: Report!

石 遵：说！

Shi Zun: Speak!

侍 卫：石闵将军率军入宫，兵临城下！

Guard: General Shi Min led the army into the palace. The city is under siege!

石 遵：带马，平叛！

Shi Zun: Bring me the horse! Suppress rebellion!

石 遵：一匹马！一匹马！我的王位换一匹马！

Shi Zun: A horse! A horse! My throne exchanges a horse!

伴 唱：一匹马！一匹马！我的王位换一匹马！

Chorus: A horse! A horse! My throne exchanges a horse!

伴 唱：皇冠一顶金煌煌，

Chorus: A shining golden crown,

刀丛剑影梦一场；

Knives and Swords are like a dream;

铁骨空自响，

Iron bone clanks for nothing,

正道是沧桑；
The right way is full of vicissitudes;
不要那腥风血雨，
Do not want those bloody wars,
不要那邪恶猖狂；
Do not want those evils and furies;
美丑善恶有天鉴，
Beauty, ugliness, good, and evil are judged by heaven,
滚滚浪涛掩兴亡。
Rolling waves cover rise and fall.

剧终
The End

CITIZEN SCHIPPEL

By Carl Sternheim

Adapted by David Copelin and John Van Burek

From a literal translation by Lascelle Wingate

TRANSLATING STERNHEIM'S *BÜRGER SCHIPPEL*

John Van Burek's wife Anne saw a revival of the play, Sternheim's greatest comedic success, in France, where it was a huge hit. She brought back a French translation of the script. John read it and was charmed by it. Knowing of my translation of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, which he had seen at the Shaw Festival in 1990, John asked me if I'd be interested in working with him on translating Sternheim's comedy into North American English. I of course agreed, even though my German is minimal. So is John's.

I found a British translation of the play, but as so often, what makes sense in British English is not exactly right for a North American audience. We realized that we needed a literal translation of the text. Through his Pleiades Theatre, John commissioned Lascelle Wingate, whose mother tongue is German, to do that for us. Armed with Lascelle's literal, the French translation, the British version, a very large German-English dictionary, and our combined theatre sense, John and I went through the play several times, finally coming up with a text that seemed to work.

We tested it with a two-day workshop in Toronto with professional actors, and made some refinements thereafter. The result is what you are reading now.

Challenges were many, starting with John's and my minimal German. The title, *Citizen Schippel*, is not an exact rendering of *Bürger Schippel*, but we felt that it was better than, say, *Paul Schippel, Esq.*, which is the British choice. So often these things are judgment calls!

Two examples will stand for the rest of the many challenges we faced. In the original, Andreas Wolke (whose surname is also the German word for "cloud") often says, "*Ja also wie?*" Given our sense that Wolke, in love with the sound of his own voice, always searches for just the right word (even when it isn't), John came up with the phrase "How to put it?" as Wolke's frequent question to himself. It's not only a reasonable translation, it's extremely playable. As for the word play on Wolke, we tried to find an English equivalent, but finally chose not to. Fortunately, Wolke's "cloudishness" can be acted with success.

-- David Copelin

Carl Sternheim (1878 – 1942) was a German playwright and short story writer. One of the major exponents of German Expressionism, he satirized the moral sensibilities of the emerging German middle class.

Sternheim was born in Leipzig, the son of a Jewish banker and a working-class Lutheran woman. His parents married two years after he was born. Between 1897 and 1902, Sternheim studied philosophy, psychology, and jurisprudence at the Universities of Munich, Göttingen, and Leipzig, but he never graduated.

In 1900, he began working as a freelance writer in Weimar, where he met and married his first wife, Eugenie Hauth. Their union ended in 1906. In 1907, Sternheim married the writer Thea Löwenstein, with whom he had two children.

The wealth brought by Thea from her rich manufacturing family enabled Wedekind to write full time. Living in Munich, Sternheim worked in the company of fellow artists such as Mechtilde Lichnowsky, Max Reinhardt, and Frank Wedekind, and assembled his own art collection. In 1908, he collaborated with Franz Blei to launch the Expressionist literary journal *Hyperion*, which published the first eight prose works by Franz Kafka. In 1912, the Sternheims relocated to Belgium. In 1918, they fled the fighting of World War I and temporarily moved to St. Moritz and Uttwil in Switzerland.

Sternheim and Thea divorced in 1927. His next marriage, to actress and singer Pamela Wedekind, took place in 1930 and lasted until 1934, after which he lived with Henriette Carbonara. Sternheim died in Brussels during World War II and was buried in the Ixelles Cemetery.

The Nazis banned Sternheim's work not only because of his Jewish descent but also because of his savage comic assaults on the self-satisfaction and moral corruption of the German bourgeoisie.

His works remain popular in Germany, but English language productions of them are rare. Some years ago, Steve Martin adapted Sternheim's *Die Hose* into English as *The Underpants*, thereby bringing something of Sternheim's particular vision to a new and appreciative North American audience.

David Copelin is a member of the Playwrights Guild of Canada and the Dramatists Guild of America, as well as a founding member and former President of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. David's original plays include *A Clean Breast*, *The Angel Capone*, *Bella Donna*, *Hitler Goes to Heaven*, *Quicksand*, *Quite Contrary*, *The Rabbi of Ragged Ass Road*, *That Other Thing*, *Trojans for Tots*, and *Wife Insurance* (with Cat Delaney). His translation of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* has been produced at the Shaw Festival, Yale Repertory Theatre, and many universities. With John Van Burek, David adapted Carl Sternheim's comedy *Citizen Schippel* for Toronto's Pleiades Theatre, and he recently translated Stéphane Brulotte's *In Hemingway's Shadow*. David has worked as a dramaturg and story consultant for Arena Stage,

CBS/Fox Video, the Mark Taper Forum, Marin Theatre Company, Midwest Playlabs, New Dramatists, the Phoenix Theatre, ScriptLab, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Warner Bros. Pictures. He has taught theatre at Brock University, the University of California, and Southern Oregon University. David is a graduate of Columbia University and Yale Drama School. A dual citizen of Canada and the U.S., he lives in Vancouver, BC. David is represented by Michael Petrasek at The Talent House in Toronto.

Born in Toronto, **John Van Burek** has had a distinguished career in the theatre, nationally and internationally, in both English and French, as a director, teacher and translator. He has mounted over one hundred productions, ranging from the European classics to opera to new Canadian plays, and his work has taken him to many countries in the world. In 1971 he founded Toronto's first French-language theatre, Le Théâtre Français de Toronto, which he ran for some twenty years. At the same time, through his numerous translations, most notably the works of Michel Tremblay, he began to introduce theatre from Québec to English-Canadian audiences.

Mr. Van Burek has also taught extensively, including at such schools as Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, University of Victoria, Ryerson Theatre School, National Theatre School of Canada/École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada and York University. He has directed in the U.K and in France, and in 1996 he led an international theatre exchange project in Bangladesh. For BRAVO! Television he wrote and produced a series of six television documentaries about the development of new plays in Canada. In 1997 he founded Pleiades Theatre, which is mandated to produce plays that originate in languages and cultures other than English, and to do them in new Canadian translations. Since its inception, Pleiades Theatre has produced plays from France, Italy, Russia, Québec, and India.

Mr. Van Burek has been the recipient of many awards and honors, notably The Toronto Drama Bench's award for Distinguished Contribution to Canadian Theatre, a Canada Council "A" Grant, and the Prix Alliance for his contribution to French-language arts and culture. He has been decorated by l'Ordre de la Pléiade de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie. For several years he was a member of the Canadian Artists and Producers Professional Relations Tribunal in Ottawa and he recently received the prestigious Silver Ticket Award from the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts.

CITIZEN SCHIPPEL

A comedy in two acts

by

Carl Sternheim

Adapted by David Copelin and John Van Burek
from a literal translation by Lascelle Wingate

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CHARACTERS

(5m, 2f)

Tilmann Hicketier, *a goldsmith*

Jenny Hicketier, *his wife*

Thekla Hicketier, *his sister*

Heinrich Krey, *a bureaucrat*

Andreas Wolke, *owner of a print shop*

*The Prince

Paul Schippel

*A Doctor

* = may be played by the same actor

PLACE: A town in a small German principality

TIME: About 1910

ACT ONE
Scene 1

(The bourgeois home of the Hicketiers. JENNY is in the living room. A crown made out of gold laurel leaves sits on a cushion in a glass case. THEKLA enters. She is very blonde.)

THEKLA

Jenny? Are you alone? Last night, around midnight, I heard a noise outside. I looked out my window. I saw a shadow, then the silhouette of a man!

JENNY

Thekla!

THEKLA

Crouching by the wall. I couldn't take my eyes off him. The fellow saw me, but didn't say a word. We were frozen in time. Finally, to break the spell, I stepped back. The man vanished. Gone. Who could it have been?

JENNY

A secret admirer.

THEKLA

Why in the dead of night? And to come and go like that, like a burglar ...

JENNY

You're seeing things. You're still in shock after Adolf's death.

THEKLA

Adolf Naumann. Don't talk to me about him. He was my fiancé, yes, but a horrible man. So stuffy, so upright! He made me sick.

JENNY

You used to like him well enough.

THEKLA

One night last month took care of that. We were alone. He was my universe; I was happy, and full of desire. If he'd said one word, made one gesture, I'd have given myself to him. But the idiot just sat there, his big calf's eyes bugging out of his head.

JENNY

Child!

THEKLA

And that was that. I was free again.

JENNY

Well, now he rests in peace.

THEKLA

Thank God. What a morning!

JENNY

Soon the men will be back from the funeral. I wonder if they managed to sing “How sweetly he lies ...” without their dead tenor?

THEKLA

Adolf Naumann’s turning to dust. That makes me so happy.

JENNY

Don’t you ruin Tilmann’s memory of his friend!

THEKLA

No more than I’d ruin the saintly image he has of *me*. To hear my brother tell it. Naumann and I were the perfect couple. So, for him, I’ll play the grieving widow.

JENNY

Tilmann needs his symbols. It’s the way he is.

(THEKLA has picked the crown from the glass case. Laughing, she puts it on her head.)

THEKLA

Here you see united the two supreme perfections: Tilmann’s baby sister and the crown they’ve won twice at the *Sängerfest*.

JENNY

Third time unlucky, what with your fiancé dying just days before the contest.

THEKLA

You see? That shows you how insensitive he was. They’re thinking of asking Paul Schippel to --

JENNY

Schippel! Dangerous complications with that one. Sorry, I can’t tell you what they are.

THEKLA

Oh, Jenny, please. I’ve known for a long time. Schippel’s illegitimate. He’s a bastard.

JENNY

Don’t let on you even know that word! Your brother --

THEKLA

He thinks I still believe in the stork.

JENNY

The men are squirming. They can't bring themselves to ask Schippel to sing with them. The mere thought makes their skin crawl. And time's running out. The Prince has already come to town. Tilmann can force himself to put up with the disgrace, if necessary, but Wolke and Krey --

THEKLA
(*laughing*)

They're going mad. The shame, the shame!

JENNY

You make fun of them because men like that aren't romantic enough for you.

THEKLA

Romantic! Compared to my brother, Krey and Wolke are small potatoes.

JENNY

You don't take the trouble to see their good points.

THEKLA

If I even look at Krey, he panics. The confirmed old bachelor is terrified of the available young *Mädchen*.

JENNY

Wolke likes you. He's always liked you.

THEKLA

Then Krey, a thousand times Krey! I could train him. *Mein Gott!* That specter last night looked like Wolke! Could that be possible? *Herr* Andreas Wolke on the prowl for nocturnal romance?

(*She bursts out laughing.*)

If he could do that, maybe I could learn to like him. I've never been so ready for my knight in shining armor!

JENNY

Oh, Thekla.

THEKLA

My heart is free. For me, it's the first day of summer.

(*HICKETIER, KREY and WOLKE enter. They are in frock coats and top hats.*)

HICKETIER
(*to THEKLA*)

Arme geliebte Schwester!

WOLKE

Our gifted tenor Adolf Naumann departed this world in glory, so to speak, torn from us in the prime of life. The funeral – splendid! The singing -- gloomy, without a tenor. A personal observation. Krey, what's your opinion?

KREY

(sotto voce)

Will you shut up!

WOLKE

(to THEKLA)

We, in true appreciation of your feelings, have ... how to put it?

HICKETIER

Liebes Kind.

THEKLA

Leave me alone.

(She exits.)

HICKETIER

It's struck her like lightning from the clear blue sky.

WOLKE

Shaken to the roots of her being. Our task must be ... how to put it? He was ... taken all in all ... a man.

KREY

Let's not waste more time in chitchat. Hicketier, bring the letter.

HICKETIER

I'll get it.

JENNY

Have you written to Schippel?

HICKETIER

(to JENNY)

Stay with Thekla. It's a difficult time for her.

JENNY

She's a sensible girl. She'll get over it.

(HICKETIER and JENNY exit.)

WOLKE

Women: so utterly mysterious. The groom is not cold in his grave, and the bride is “sensible.” Who knows? Perhaps her eye is already on someone else.

KREY

If you don’t shut your filthy mouth ... !

WOLKE

As if I didn’t know.

KREY

What’s that supposed to mean?

WOLKE

Is there something you’ve forgotten to tell me?

KREY

I’m warning you.

WOLKE

I know what’s what.

(HICKETIER returns.)

HICKETIER

The typewriter spared me the indignity of actually having to *write* to the beggar. I didn’t close with “Sincerely yours,” or “Respectfully,” and I signed it with a rubber stamp.

KREY

In the circumstances, that could be a mistake. Read it.

HICKETIER

“*Die Herren Hicketier, Krey und Wolke*” – I put our names in alphabetical order – “might be willing, should you be suitable, to allow you, on probation, to sing in our quartet. You are requested to present yourself at the address of the undersigned on Monday the 13th.” – That’s today – “at 3 o’clock PM. Hicketier.”

WOLKE

Bravo! Well done.

KREY

It sounds like a summons from the tax man. That’s how you talk to a dog.

WOLKE

Is Schippel – how to put it? -- much more than a dog?

KREY

Unless he's totally spineless, he'll foam at the mouth.

HICKETIER

When I wrote this, I was enraged at having to make the first move. It was the most humiliating sacrifice of my life.

KREY

I should have been consulted. As a civil servant, I know all there is to know about writing such letters. There are ways to be polite even when exploding with rage. After this, he might want nothing to do with us. Then we're done for.

WOLKE

Nevertheless, Hicketier has done his duty.

KREY

Is that enough? It's success that counts.

WOLKE

What should he have written? "We are honored ... we implore you..." to a man in the poorhouse?

HICKETIER

And who could tell the whole town he can make us sit up and beg?

KREY

Nonsense. If he refuses, we can't sing. The crown is lost.

WOLKE

Indeed, yes, and – how to put it?

HICKETIER

Our situation is catastrophic.

WOLKE

I'm at a loss for words.

KREY

In the opinion of well-respected judges, Schippel's voice is superior to Naumann's. With him, we'd be able to compete with any quartet from any village in the Principality.

WOLKE

You think so?

KREY

But I can't imagine any person accepting our offer after such a rude invitation.

HICKETIER

“Person?” That horn-tooting wretch? One word from us and he’d be out in the street.

WOLKE

O Gott, O Gott, mein lieber Gott im Himmel!

HICKETIER

Wolke ...

WOLKE

O Gott, O Gott. Krey, what are you saying?

KREY

“Present yourself.” Ha!

HICKETIER

I suppose you could have done better? I am a Hicketier. Goldsmiths since the Thirty Years’ War.

WOLKE

The Wolkes are just as distinguished.

KREY

So should I, a mere high-ranking civil servant, have prostituted myself? Why didn’t you come to me? I have a whole arsenal of meaningless phrases at my command.

HICKETIER

What should we do?

WOLKE

One thing is certain: We cannot withdraw from the festival.

HICKETIER

To abandon as men what inspired us as boys?

WOLKE

Madness!

HICKETIER

It’s the legacy of my forefathers. It’s what we promised to hold sacred at the deathbed of our dear departed friend ...

KREY

And, since members of any quartet must be born in and be residents of this town, and since no other tenor is to be found here, we are --

HICKETIER

We're at Schippel's mercy.

WOLKE

And knowing that, Hicketier, you wrote that letter? I'm sweating blood. And water.

HICKETIER

I was in a state of absolute upheaval, yet I forced myself to do more than any human being could be expected to do, in the circumstances.

KREY

Well, it wasn't enough.

WOLKE

Lieber Gott, help us out of this unholy mess. Amen.

(KREY has been looking out the window. Suddenly:)

KREY

Here comes Schippel!

HICKETIER & WOLKE

(together)

Ha?

HICKETIER

Summoned for three, and it's not yet one. What's the meaning of this?

KREY

It could be a bad omen.

WOLKE

How so? My knees are shaking. Krey, you've got me all muddled up.

KREY

Pull yourself together, you dishrag!

HICKETIER

Who will talk to him?

KREY

It's your house. And your invitation.

WOLKE

Be careful. Kid gloves.

KREY

Open-minded, but absolute.

WOLKE

Easy does it.

(Enter PAUL SCHIPPEL, thin, with red hair, about 30.)

SCHIPPEL

Schippel ... Paul.

HICKETIER

Very good.

SCHIPPEL

You're Hicketier?

HICKETIER

Herr. Herr Hicketier. I must insist –

WOLKE

Pssst!

SCHIPPEL

I beg your pardon?

WOLKE

(bowing)

Wolke, owner of the printing shop, and *conseiller municipal*.

KREY

Krey.

HICKETIER

And you -- ?

SCHIPPEL

Me? I play the clarinet. You know – black wood, nickel keys – Get it?

(WOLKE mimes playing.)

WOLKE

I think so.

SCHIPPEL

(laughing)

Wonderful imitation. -- *Meine Herren*, I am poor. From the bottom of the barrel, as you would say in your circle. This coat is my entire wardrobe. And I'm a lousy player.

WOLKE

Lousy. Right.

SCHIPPEL

Otherwise, I'd play in a good orchestra, not a beer-hall band. When I play, it's desperate, like a man on the gallows.

(He laughs uncontrollably.)

HICKETIER

I haven't over-estimated you.

SCHIPPEL

Oh, yes, you have. Most respected gentlemen, my playing is dreadful. When I tootle, even the beer goes flat.

WOLKE

(laughing immoderately)

Sehr gut.

SCHIPPEL

You want to know what I make? About 20 marks a week. In other words, two days of meat, five days of hay, and that's from the horse's mouth.

WOLKE

Enough.

SCHIPPEL

Sleep in an attic, my comb has no teeth, not a bristle in my toothbrush. That's my story.

HICKETIER

Spare us the revolting details. Your history is known to us.

SCHIPPEL

You astound me, *Herr* Hicketier.

HICKETIER

You are illegitimate.

(SCHIPPEL laughs. WOLKE laughs.)

SCHIPPEL

How easily that rolls off your tongue. In surroundings like these, I could never say such a word. What a man of the world you are! You've broken the ice. No need to beat around the bush: my origins are ... unknown.

KREY

A small accident.

HICKETIER

Let's leave it there.

WOLKE

Ja. In the dark.

SCHIPPEL

Excuse me, *meine Herren*, it is relevant. Let us be honest: I am a bastard. I'll bet I'm the first one you've ever met.

KREY

The social phenomenon is quite common -- and growing.

WOLKE

Being a trustee of an orphanage, I am well acquainted with it.

SCHIPPEL

One could easily say it's stood the test of time, and what's more --

HICKETIER

Enough of this. Would you like to sing with us?

SCHIPPEL

Kindly let me finish. I want you to know just how insignificant I am.

KREY

That's his story.

SCHIPPEL

Don't you see, my head is always bowed?

HICKETIER

Why would I even notice?

SCHIPPEL

It's like this. I feel insecure, and that's the way I am. And then, these surroundings ... the opulence makes my head swim. Beg your pardon; I'll get hold of myself. When I was a child, I

tried to play with other children in the street. Naturally, they kicked me. One girl even spat in my face. So I'm more familiar with earth than heaven, and that's why I keep my head bowed.

WOLKE

Such things don't happen any more. The orphans in my care enjoy everything that ... how to put it?

SCHIPPEL

See, I've spent my life crouched in a dank garret. Your letter arrives. Suddenly, everything's changed. No longer ignored, despised, parched, starved for everything in sight.

HICKETIER

So you think this letter's a release from your proletarian bondage?

SCHIPPEL

On the money! Please understand the unsettled state you see me in. From one moment to the next, I was totally transformed, reborn, one might say.

HICKETIER

That's lovely. Somewhat too personal.

(SCHIPPEL walks around the room and stops in front of a painting.)

SCHIPPEL

A heavenly picture. Painted in oil. I can tell.

HICKETIER

You'll sing for us today, and we'll decide.

(SCHIPPEL lets out a shining A that he holds for a very long time.)

KREY

Oho!

HICKETIER

That sound tells me --

WOLKE

Bravo!

SCHIPPEL

Jawohl, meine lieben Herren, jawohl, it's going to be heavenly. And by the way, my mother was a saint.

(He takes hold of HICKETIER's lapel.)

HICKETIER

Don't touch my coat!

SCHIPPEL

No offense.

(He holds out his hand to HICKETIER, who pretends not to see it.)

Your hand, *Herr* Hicketier. Your hand.

HICKETIER

This is strictly a business arrangement.

SCHIPPEL

Just give me your hand.

HICKETIER

Strictly business!

SCHIPPEL

Why won't you shake my hand?

WOLKE

Hicketier!

SCHIPPEL

A simple request, *nicht wahr?* What I'm asking is only natural. Perfectly normal. I expect to shake hands here, there, and everywhere. I expect to be addressed by name in the street, in the *biergarten*, and in your homes. Understand?

KREY

Admission to the quartet does not imply a social relationship.

SCHIPPEL

"Does not imply?" Meaning what? My voice is good enough for you, but not my hand?

(He shakes both KREY's hands violently.)

HICKETIER

Are you insane?

WOLKE

O Gott! O Gott!

KREY

This is too much!

HICKETIER

Enough! You've gone berserk. Pull yourself together. Face facts. You are a nobody. You are completely at our mercy for your keep and for whatever crumbs we throw at you. We can take that away from you whenever we like. However, if your voice passes muster, we are prepared to raise your state. A new jacket, and a shiny coin in your wallet. That's it. Meanwhile, keep your hands to yourself.

KREY

Basta!

SCHIPPEL

Ach, so?

(He bangs his fist on the table.)

HICKETIER & KREY

Mein Herr!

WOLKE

Understood?

SCHIPPEL

Also, meine Herren: Mahlzeit!

(SCHIPPEL exits.)

KREY

What did he mean by that?

WOLKE

He's turned us down. The game is over.

HICKETIER

We're back where we started.

WOLKE

In a nutshell, case closed. He clearly laid out his conditions. I would even say he was delicate, almost feminine. Then Hicketier loses his temper and spoils everything. Now? We're done for.

HICKETIER

Right from the beginning, that creature was determined to break down a barrier that for me is made of steel.

KREY

If he knew how to respect our boundaries, we could have made certain concessions.

WOLKE

But everything he said was wrapped in “If you please,” and “Would you be so kind.”

HICKETIER

Perhaps, but underneath all that I could smell what he was really after: personal contact. Intimacy. (*Enraged:*) Is this fellow going to clap me on the back in front of the whole world? Have you no shame? If we give the animal one finger, he’ll wrap himself around it like a weed, and strangle us. Good God, poor people stink! Open the window.

WOLKE

But what about the A that he sang? Don’t you understand that with that note alone we would have won the crown? So to speak.

KREY

Nothing could be more certain. Naumann couldn’t hold a candle to him.

HICKETIER

It breaks my heart, but I can’t bring myself to mix like that, any more than I would mingle with the nobility. I like my world clearly defined, above and below. Anything else makes my flesh crawl. We have just buried Naumann. Our grief is great, but greater still is the loss of our most sacred dream.

WOLKE

Is Schippel the only solution?

KREY

In a word, yes. The festival is in less than two weeks. There is no other tenor to be found.

HICKETIER

This person, if we allowed him in, would not hesitate to cozy up to our women. How could one even explain to a maiden like Thekla the existence of such a mongrel? *Guter Gott!*

WOLKE

Even so, it’s heartbreaking.

HICKETIER

Please! Not another oration. Not two in one day. Such is life. Such is fate.

(Exit HICKETIER.)

WOLKE

Thekla! So that’s it! If it were only Hicketier, he could bear to have Schippel around. But Thekla, that – how to put it? – that defenseless maiden, the pure and naïve *Fräulein* Hicketier ...

KREY

What are you getting at?

WOLKE

As a result of Naumann's death, she is no longer protected from such an individual. Can you deny it? And that's what's tipped the scale!

KREY

So?

WOLKE

All right, look. It's just the two of us. You can be straight with me.

KREY

You don't say.

WOLKE

Come now, don't be bashful.

KREY

God Almighty.

WOLKE

You love Thekla. And if Hicketier knew that you were taking her under your wing --

KREY

This is monstrous! Because I can't compete with your vile tongue, I have to put up with this stinking comedy. *You* love the woman, not I.

WOLKE

No, you do.

KREY

To me, she's torture! The sight of her makes me nauseous. The mere smell ... revolting!

WOLKE

I see right through you.

KREY

Sodom und Gomorrah! Listen, I am content with my life, but you --

WOLKE

You love her! Take her! Seize the moment!

KREY

You love her! I've known it for years.

WOLKE

You love her! You can bleat it through heavenly trumpets, you're still lying. I know you love her. I'm begging you, get us out of this disastrous situation. Surrender to your own happiness.

(KREY hurries out. WOLKE runs after him.)

KREY

I'd rather hang myself!

WOLKE

You pig-headed fool. Don't be so proud. I'm not giving up.

(A confused noise outside. Immediately, KREY opens the door and appears in the doorway with a deep bow. Enter THE PRINCE, in uniform. He is in his twenties. KREY and WOLKE follow him into the room.)

THE PRINCE

Where am I? Whose house is this?

KREY

(bowing again)

Your Highness, this is the home of the Hicketiers.

THE PRINCE

Go and get me some strips of linen and a bowl of water. Send a message to the castle. Get the doctor down here.

(KREY runs out. The PRINCE sits in an armchair and opens the torn sleeve of his tunic. He suddenly stares at WOLKE, who is pressed shyly against the wall. WOLKE bows deeply.)

WOLKE

Wolke.

THE PRINCE

What? -- That *verdammte* horse! One blast from a steam engine and he takes off like a shot. No holding him back. I steer him into the street, then run him along the wall of this house. Some servant grabs the reins, and that stops him. The brute!

WOLKE

Amazing!

THE PRINCE

Schwein! From now on, you're on a tight rein.

(HICKETIER and KREY enter, bowing.)

HICKETIER

What a mishap. Your Grace, Your Highness.

THE PRINCE

Water, linen ... a woman would be best ...

HICKETIER

My wife is bringing some right away.

(WOLKE bows again.)

WOLKE

Wolke!

THE PRINCE

I heard you. What's your point? – Now, *Herr* Hicketier ...

HICKETIER

How may I be of service?

THE PRINCE

Filthy nag. My arm is bleeding. What a cursed day. An old witch ran across my path. Cold, drizzle, grey clouds. Now I know the meaning of melancholy.

(THE PRINCE collapses. KREY rushes over to him.)

KREY

Your Highness! -- Fainted.

(HICKETIER and WOLKE race aimlessly around the room, then toward the door. Enter JENNY and THEKLA. JENNY is carrying a bowl of water; THEKLA carries linen bandages. THEKLA kneels in front of THE PRINCE, takes his arm, which is hanging limply, and begins to clean and bandage it. Meanwhile, JENNY does everything possible to bring him around. THE PRINCE wakes up.)

THE PRINCE

The bridle ... *Was ist?* Heavenly vision!

(THEKLA finishes her work.)

Kindness itself. Pure grace. *Ich danke. Charmante.*

(The WOMEN exit.)

HICKETIER

Your Highness, she has learned how to care for the sick.

THE PRINCE

I tell you, *la charité en personne*. I never knew what that meant. Until this moment, merely a word. This bandage ... a masterpiece. *Charmante*. Horse lost its head. The brute.

(He gets up and grabs his cap.)

Pardon – did I not have a whip?

(to Wolke:)

Why did you keep saying “Wolke?”

KREY

That’s his name, your Highness. He owns a printing business.

THE PRINCE

Aha! *That* Wolke! The blue sign in the market square: “All Types of Printing Speedily Executed.”

WOLKE

And at the most reasonable rates.

THE PRINCE

Delighted. Who were those ladies? Where did they go?

HICKETIER

My wife Jenny, and my younger sister Thekla. Tomorrow’s her birthday.

THE PRINCE

Thekla ... *Mein lieber Herr* Hicketier, you are not unknown to us. There was a time ...

HICKETIER

Your Highness, as a child, during the late Prince’s reign --

THE PRINCE

Yes, yes. -- So this is *Herr* Wolke. No subversive writings? Nothing socialist? Anarchist?

WOLKE

Your Highness! Out of the question.

KREY

Krey. Civil servant.

THE PRINCE

Bravo! The middle class, *meine Herren*, and the civil service ... hmm. But my guardian angel? Why am I denied the opportunity to express my gratitude?

HICKETIER

Sofort!

(He exits. THE PRINCE sees the golden crown.)

THE PRINCE

What's this? A golden crown?

KREY

Won twice by our quartet.

THE PRINCE

Of course! My father's famous crown for the singing competition. *Meine Herren*, you are our very own *Meistersinger*, as it were. That reminds me – oh, what a sin of omission! – it's in two weeks, I know, and we still haven't chosen the compulsory song.

(To himself:)

Here I am, drowning in boredom, with such delicious distractions so close by.

(Aloud:)

Yes, men's voices singing in harmony, so essential, so close to the soul of the people – a bulwark against the onslaught of an age without ideals. The German *Lied, meine Herren!* We know the importance of this imminent event, and the shining glory that will rain down upon your Prince.

(To himself:)

Himmel, where's all this coming from?

(Aloud:)

You've won this crown twice. You must not lose it now. This time above all, victory must be yours.

(WOLKE and KREY bow. HICKETIER returns with JENNY and THEKLA.)

My dear Hicketier, these gentlemen know my views on the prize song.

(He bows to JENNY and kisses her hand.)

Gracious lady!

(*He bows to THEKLA.*)

Ma chère, may heaven protect you ...

(*Very quietly, to her:*)

Thekla.

(*THE PRINCE salutes and leaves. The OTHERS bow deeply. THEKLA sinks into the same chair that THE PRINCE sat in. She is invisible to the OTHERS onstage for the rest of the scene.*)

WOLKE

My legs are like jelly.

HICKETIER

He was standing -- right there.

KREY

Your roof, over the Prince's head!

JENNY

Let us hope his wound heals quickly.

KREY

And the way he spoke -- so simple, so down to earth.

WOLKE

And so cordial! "*Our Wolke*," *his Wolke*. But of course.

HICKETIER

From a different world, a higher sphere.

WOLKE

"You must win the competition, *meine Herren*." There it is.

HICKETIER

He said that?

KREY

In no uncertain terms. And the look he gave us --

WOLKE

Piercing, yet affable. "The German *Lied* staving off anarchy. *Charmant*. None but you must win the crown."

JENNY
(to HICKETIER)

Dinner's ready.

(*She exits.*)

KREY

Given such an order, what are we to do?

HICKETIER

It will have to be one of you.

WOLKE
(to HICKETIER)

All right, let's be frank. Among us all, only you have the power. Only you can lure Schippel back without making us lose face.

KREY

Besides, our feelings don't matter any more. Now it's a question of honor – or dishonor! – in the eyes of the Prince.

HICKETIER

But –

WOLKE

The Prince! *Ach*, Hicketier, look me in the eye and tell me, Prince or no Prince, that you would sit back and not do everything in your power to make our dream come true?

KREY

Unless you get Schippel back, you won't be able to live with yourself.

WOLKE

That's the truth.

(*Pause.*)

HICKETIER

Very well. Once again, we're in turmoil. Once again, in the name of honor and duty, I take the bull by the horns.

WOLKE
(*quietly to HICKETIER*)

And as for Thekla, I have a suggestion.

HICKETIER

(*laughing*)

As usual!

WOLKE

Give me your hands, *meine Herren*, we must see this through: Swear.

(*Together down center, HICKETIER, KREY and WOLKE give each other their hands simultaneously.*)

ALL THREE

We swear!

KREY

I feel better now.

WOLKE

An eventful morning. “The bravest warrior wins the day, then eats and drinks the night away.” Hicketier, the glory will be yours.

HICKETIER

Not so fast. I still have to deal with that horrible creature. But now, *meine Herren*, come to dinner.

(*HICKETIER exits.*)

KREY

We must have a word in private.

WOLKE

What? What do you mean?

KREY

You fake. You camel trader!

WOLKE

I have nothing to hide.

(*They exit. THEKLA runs to the window and throws it open. She leans out and waves a handkerchief. Lights down.*)

ACT ONE
Scene 2

(The next day, the same room. Lights up on THEKLA, alone. There is a knock on the window. THEKLA opens it slightly. An arm appears. Its hand bears a letter. THEKLA takes the letter and closes the window. She opens the letter and reads it. As she does so, WOLKE enters.)

THEKLA

Was ist das? – Ach, it's him! Tonight, around ten o'clock, he wants to ... mein Gott!

WOLKE

May I ask, not to be nosy, if your brother has returned?

THEKLA

To eliminate any suspicion of intrigue: Here.

(She offers WOLKE the letter, which he does not take.)

WOLKE

For heaven's sake, Thekla. There's no need. The divine plan is unfolding as it should. Birthday greetings flying through the window. Permit me to add my own. I know all about it. My knowledge of human nature unveiled the little secret long before the evidence was clear. I even enlightened the lover about his own inclinations.

THEKLA

What? Who?

WOLKE

Allow me to give you a clear explanation. You must know that since you were a little girl, I too have had a special regard for you. Nothing could change that, this side the grave. But now, I notice that Krey –

THEKLA

Krey?

WOLKE

When you are present, he feigns indifference, a certain *je ne sais quoi*, a certain ... how to put it?

THEKLA

You mean that Krey – and ... and you too?

WOLKE

Ach, here is where it turns tragic. My great sense of honor compels me to admit that Krey is superior to me in every way. *Ergo*, I withdraw. You may suspect that Krey has forced me to say this, but I swear I am driven only by what is in my heart to tell you of his complete manliness,

his worthiness, his significance, his laudable character, his loyalty, his uprightness, his iron will – and, at the same time, his sobriety, and his noble restraint, not only in regard to you-know-what, but --

THEKLA

I've always found him pleasant enough. But you mentioned sobriety. You make him sound dull.

WOLKE

Krey? Dull? *O du guter Gott*, the man has the most extravagant ideas! Everything he does arises from the silent grandeur of his innermost thoughts. Not dull, but shy, to such a degree that we must force him to confess his passion. And so, I would ask you, please, Thekla ...

THEKLA

To encourage him?

(to herself:)

Could this serve my purposes?

(Aloud:)

What you're asking a *Mädchen* to do --

WOLKE

I'm driven by friendship! What does my renunciation cost me? A few words. Yet my heart is heavy.

(He grabs her hand and kisses it.)

THEKLA

May your wisdom be my guide.

(She leaves, laughing quietly to herself.)

WOLKE

Bullseye! If Krey continues to deny the truth, then someone will have to pry it out of him.

(Enter JENNY.)

WOLKE

So, he's not yet returned from seeing Schippel?

JENNY

He was moaning and groaning all night long. He was battling demons.

WOLKE

Better to battle demons in dreams than to stifle feelings, the way Krey does.

JENNY

Oh, is he suffering, too?

WOLKE

About Schippel, yes, but there's more. A letter from Krey to Thekla just flew through that window.

JENNY

Secret messages? Are you mad?

WOLKE

You know me, Jenny; I am a moderate man. I held that letter in these hands. He loves her.

JENNY

Unmöglich!

WOLKE

In black and white. What's more, written with such reverence, such purity –

JENNY

Tilmann won't like that. He was already reluctant to give her to Naumann, who was much closer to him than Krey.

WOLKE

But his shining virtues! The restrained power of his overwhelming passion! I beg you, in the name of our friendship –

JENNY

Let's wait till this business with Schippel is sorted out. Meanwhile, what about Thekla?

WOLKE

She did not say it in so many words, but with my profound knowledge of human nature, I would be blind not to notice that within her fair form, the little bird of love is about to take wing.

JENNY

If that is the case, I promise every assistance. She did mention a man crouching by the wall last night, looking up at her.

WOLKE

It was Krey! *Probatum est.*

(HICKETIER enters.)

HICKETIER

Victory! I turned into Windischgasse, and suddenly, there was Schippel! After a few words, the business was settled. He will return.

JENNY

Gott sei dank!

HICKETIER

He'd reconsidered. The Prince's decree about our Festival was in the morning paper. He'd memorized every word!

WOLKE

The audition must be today! Every minute counts.

HICKETIER

He's on his way.

(to JENNY:)

Leave the door open. He mustn't be seen loitering in front of the house.

(JENNY exits.)

WOLKE

What I said about Thekla stands.

HICKETIER

I appreciate your sentiments, and I can guess your intentions, but don't do anything until this calamity is resolved. By the way, Krey is also making subtle hints about you.

WOLKE

Not possible!

HICKETIER

Quite possible, but I can only deal with one thing at a time. Have you seen the birthday girl?

WOLKE

Through the cloud of sorrow at what is lost, shines the first ray of hope reborn.

HICKETIER

How poetic.

(Overcome, WOLKE shakes his hand and leaves.)

He loves Thekla.

(HICKETIER takes a gold armband, made in the shape of a laurel crown, from his desk. He holds it to the light, comparing it with the crown from the singing contest.)

An exact replica of the original. Even if I lose that crown, this one I've made for Thekla will never be lost. What will she think of my work of art?

(Enter THEKLA.)

HICKETIER

I was just about to call you. *Komm' her.*

THEKLA

Was ist's?

HICKETIER

Made by my own hands. Guess for whom?

THEKLA

It's for me. Who else? *Danke.*

(She sits on his lap.)

HICKETIER

Now, little Thekla, with the passage of time, the ties that have bound us together since you were a child will weaken. Do you understand the significance of this gift?

(She puts her arms around his neck.)

THEKLA

I cling to you, as always.

HICKETIER

Though the sibling love which inhabits the soul of the Hicketiers may fade, this golden wreath will be a constant reminder of that bond. Whenever you're alone, you will remember.

THEKLA

That is sad, and so unnecessary. Even without this, I could never forget my family or my childhood.

HICKETIER

The women of our family have rarely prospered. What is inner strength in our men becomes sheer whimsy in our women. Even as you cleave to your husband, the closer you and I remain, the more spiritually intimate we will be, and the more your needs will be satisfied.

THEKLA

No matter what tears me away from you, there will always be something that brings me back.

HICKETIER

Will that always be the case?

THEKLA

It's my birthday. Don't be so serious.

HICKETIER

Here, allow me.

(He takes her arm.)

Wear this under your clothes. It will be our secret.

(He puts the armband on her.)

Your family home will be your refuge. Here, your most private thoughts are your own. You have my word on that. Here is my hand.

(They shake hands.)

Now, you little minx, listen to me. One minute, you're almost a widow, and the next, you have a new admirer, in hot pursuit.

THEKLA

I know ...

HICKETIER

Given your beauty, it's natural that everyone wants you, not to mention our old honorable name and the sack of gold that come with you! Does your admirer have potential?

THEKLA

Potential? *Ach, Gott!*

(She runs out.)

HICKETIER

Look at that. What an adorable child.

(HICKETIER exits. Lights down.)

ACT ONE
Scene 3

(Later, the same day. Lights up. JENNY shows in SCHIPPEL and exits. SCHIPPEL stands in the middle of the room and looks around.)

SCHIPPEL

I can't believe it. After thirty years of starvation, luxury! No longer a dead leaf tossed in the wind. From one day to the next, I will have gained a name that people will reckon with. As fat Hicketier fell asleep last night, I'm sure he was thinking, "If I could only get that Schippel..."

(He tiptoes around the room.)

Plush furniture! Your highnesses, take note of me. It is my privilege to loll around on you.

(He sits in an armchair.)

Or to look leisurely through a photograph album.

(He starts leafing through one.)

Someone comes, I stand, and I casually say, "How do you do? I have a right to be here. I was invited, almost dragged." Fine people, the lot of them, all related, honorable, worthy. Gold brooches and chains. Fat signet rings. "*Guten Tag, Herr*, delighted to make your acquaintance! I am Paul Schippel, the darling of the house. I can do whatever I like."

(He belches.)

"*Aber, Herr Schippel!*" "A little burp, my dear Bishop. It's permitted after a good meal, among friends."

(HICKETIER enters.)

HICKETIER

À propos of what transpired yesterday...

SCHIPPEL

Forget it. What's past is past. Today is a new day.

HICKETIER

Very well. We were worried, despite your remarkable voice, that given your origins, you might not fathom the historical greatness of the German *Lied*.

SCHIPPEL

That's harsh.

HICKETIER

I don't mince words.

SCHIPPEL

I don't need to be pampered. We just need to reach an understanding. Maybe we'll get lucky, and the Prince will choose a song about *Wanderlust*, or some old forest, or a good roll in the hay – which, given my origins, as you put it, I would be particularly well-suited to interpret.

HICKETIER

Where did you learn breathing, phrasing?

SCHIPPEL

From my clarinet. My pipes open and close just like the stops on my clarinet.

HICKETIER

Do you practice in front of a mirror?

SCHIPPEL

I know my gullet like the back of my hand. My little uvula works like a glockenspiel.

HICKETIER

So, shall we sing together?

SCHIPPEL

I hereby commit myself to the cause.

HICKETIER

Bravo. Just a word about behavior in society --

SCHIPPEL

I get it. Easy does it. I'll keep the brakes on. And the paws off.

HICKETIER

You see in me a man firmly rooted in tradition. With me, things take time to develop.

SCHIPPEL

Got it. Not like me, shot up in a flash out of nothing. Like they say, when the stalk's thin, the head wobbles. I'll have to break that habit. You're right. Mustn't give in to those impulses.

HICKETIER

Slow but steady.

SCHIPPEL

No jumping in. No grabbing.

(SCHIPPEL holds out his arms to HICKETIER.)

HICKETIER

What's wrong with you?

SCHIPPEL

No slapping you on the belly. Don't touch!

(SCHIPPEL slaps HICKETIER on the belly.)

"Morning, Hicketier, old pal!"

HICKETIER

I beg your pardon! What are you *doing*?

SCHIPPEL

(controlling himself)

Not so crude. Understood. Keep your distance.

HICKETIER

(furious)

Indeed! You behave! Or else –

SCHIPPEL

Kurz. I accept. I'll sing like Gabriel's horn. We're unbeatable. When do we start?

HICKETIER

Tonight. Eight o'clock, here.

SCHIPPEL

Agreed.

HICKETIER

And always with the understanding that, if you conduct yourself in future according to my express wishes, I shall keep my promise and put a penny in your purse. *(Beat.)* I'll get twenty marks from the till right now.

(Exit HICKETIER.)

SCHIPPEL

What a dinosaur. What an ass. Yesterday, I was like a rabbit cowering in the cabbage patch. Now I feel such colossal strength rising within me, I have knives growing on my toes and sabres on my teeth. My good man, I'm afraid I'm going to soil your tidy parlor, and my company will rub you raw.

(THEKLA enters and crosses through the room, ignoring SCHIPPEL's bow. SCHIPPEL follows her, imitating her haughty walk, then stops center stage.)

Frosty *Fräulein* flutters forth, and marks the gulf between us. What do you smell like, my little dove?

(He walks where she walked, sniffing.)

Lovely.

(HICKETIER returns.)

HICKETIER

Who was here?

(He gives SCHIPPEL a gold coin. Laughing, SCHIPPEL takes it.)

SCHIPPEL

If you only knew ...

HICKETIER

Don't tell me -- !

SCHIPPEL

A pretty little pipit. Back a moment sooner, you'd have had to make a formal introduction.

HICKETIER

Out of the question. When it comes to my family, the strictest privacy.

SCHIPPEL

Obviously. But ...

HICKETIER

What?

SCHIPPEL

We sing here tonight at eight o'clock.

HICKETIER

But? Out with it!

SCHIPPEL

My lips are sealed. Wild notions. In your drawing room, I'm filled with dynamite.

(He laughs.)

Filled with dynamite: *Das ist gut, was?* But I know what's what: Get out fast, before I explode. *Auf Abend.*

(Exit SCHIPPEL.)

HICKETIER

(trembling)

“But?” “If you only knew -- ” What? Thekla came through here. I’ve got goosebumps all over. -
- Jenny!

(Enter JENNY.)

There’ll be too many men in this house until the festival’s done. That child is leaving today.
She’s going to her aunt in Naumburg.

JENNY

Krey slipped her a letter through the window today.

HICKETIER

Krey?! Quick, pack her bag. Send her in here.

(Exit JENNY.)

Krey too? Even the apes are after her. Wolke *and* Krey? A letter through the window? Just a
while ago, we were so close, but she never said a word.

(Enter THEKLA.)

Krey’s letter. Give it to me. -- Give me the letter.

THEKLA

Tilmann, the letter wasn’t from Krey.

HICKETIER

So it’s from Wolke. Hand it over. Behind my back. Why?

THEKLA

It’s not from Wolke either.

HICKETIER

Not from Wolke? Not from Krey?

(He sinks into a chair, then jumps up.)

Grosser Gott! Nein, nein, nein! Sag nein!

THEKLA

To what?

HICKETIER

Child, I am going mad. Out with it. It's my fault. All I've been thinking about is the crown. I forgot about you. Who is it from? Thekla!

(They are looking into each other's eyes. She tries to leave. He pulls her closer.)

Tell me who! *(whispering)* Schippel?

THEKLA

Are you insane?

HICKETIER

Then for God's sake, who is it?

THEKLA

That's my business!

(She runs out, slamming the door.)

HICKETIER

A fox is in the henhouse. She has to go away. -- But whoever he is, I'll get him.

(Lights down.)

ACT ONE
Scene 4

(That night, about ten. A garden behind Hicketier's house. A fence is visible on the right. THEKLA is leaning out of a second story window. The PRINCE, in a black cloak, enters. He hugs the wall beneath THEKLA's window.)

THE PRINCE

Thekla!

THEKLA

There he is!

THE PRINCE

I had to creep along the edge of the forest, in the dark, step by step. I needed the patience of a saint. The worst part was having to slink by five or six houses that still had their lights on. Don't my subjects ever sleep? I must pass a law.

THEKLA

Noble sir, we do have a parliament.

THE PRINCE

So now young girls know about politics?

THEKLA

These days, girls get a thorough education. I know science and I can even read a train schedule. But princes who sneak up to a girl's window in the night exist only in fairy tales. Or so they say.

THE PRINCE

If I'm caught, I shall be the Sultan Haroun al-Raschid, making sure his people are well looked after. They'd believe that, wouldn't they?

THEKLA

People see you as melancholy. Goes with the night and the black cloak.

THE PRINCE

Does Thekla see me as melancholy?

THEKLA

It's hard to see the Prince as melancholy when he wears a monocle, even at night. Perhaps he will say that he cannot see without it. In any case, a truly melancholy man sees only the abyss in his own heart.

THE PRINCE

The ladies say the monocle becomes me.

THEKLA

In folk songs, princes always wear shining swords. But when they appear beneath a maiden's window, they're also wearing a dagger. Every self-respecting maiden demands a dagger.

THE PRINCE

I am more like the legendary Eberhard von Wittenberg, who, unarmed, could lay his head in the lap of any of his subjects. Can Thekla guess what ardent wish I'm wishing at this moment?

THEKLA

To be Prince Eberhard?

THE PRINCE

Nothing less.

THEKLA

And, like him, a mere child when you assumed your duties, you want to be loved by the people?

THE PRINCE

Bravo. Are you the people, Thekla?

THEKLA

Ja.

THE PRINCE

My subject?

THEKLA

Jawohl.

THE PRINCE

I, like a hero in Shakespeare, appear! You, maiden, have caught my eye. With a voice of thunder, I command you: *Komm' hier.*

THEKLA

Ach, Shakespeare's old hat. That was three hundred years ago.

THE PRINCE

Oh. How would a modern poet do it?

THEKLA

If you want to be convincing, you'll have to involve parliament. You are a constitutional monarch.

THE PRINCE

So, I will summon parliament.

THEKLA

What about the Social Democrats?

THE PRINCE

There's only one. He'll be outvoted. The others do what I tell them.

THEKLA

Well, first they'll have to get my brother and his cronies out of this house. They're in my way.

THE PRINCE

Why aren't they in bed?

THEKLA

Important business. They're reviving their quartet. The old tenor died and they've found a new one. In two weeks, the Prince's laurel crown will be won or lost.

THE PRINCE

This singing business will allow me to maintain official contact with your family for the next few weeks. Tomorrow morning, I shall grant your brother an audience. – Ssh!

(In a brightly lit window on the ground floor, SCHIPPEL's silhouette passes by. He sings an aria from Otto Nicolai's The Merry Wives of Windsor.)

SCHIPPEL
(singing, off)

*“HORCH, DIE LERCHE SINGT IM HAIN.
LAUSCHE, LAUSCHE, LIEBCHEN STILL,
LAUSCHE, LAUSCHE, LIEBCHEN STILL.
ÖFFNE SACHT DEM FENSTERLEIN,
HÖRE, HÖRE, WAS SIE WILL,
HÖRE, HÖRE, WAS SIE WILL.”*

(Applause, off)

THE PRINCE

Beautifully sung. Why isn't a voice like that one of the glories of my court theatre?

THEKLA

Because the singer is a bastard.

THE PRINCE

So it *is* Shakespeare! Bastards are his specialty. Bastards and princes. You must admit, this is a moment worthy of poetry. And my monocle has disappeared.

THEKLA

Those telegraph poles over there aren't very poetic.

THE PRINCE

But what are they, compared with a bastard, a prince – and surprise! – here's a dagger. Actually, it's only a hunting knife, but with a little imagination –

THEKLA

I've got that.

THE PRINCE

We need a ladder.

THEKLA

Over there in the shed. Stop! No one ever saw Haroun al-Raschid on a ladder.

THE PRINCE

It's a modern version.

THEKLA

And the maiden's honor -- ?

THE PRINCE

Is shielded by the Sultan's cloak.

THEKLA

A parlor and a ladder: Not very romantic.

THE PRINCE

A ladder and a parlor: The bourgeois setting of my dreams.

(HICKETIER appears at the ground-floor window. He opens the curtains and looks out into the darkness. Farther back in the room, SCHIPPEL, KREY and WOLKE are standing around the piano.)

THEKLA

This is madness. I don't dare. I had the most awful scene with my brother. He knows about the letter. To put his mind at rest, I told my sister-in-law it was just your thanks for my help yesterday. Nevertheless, he's ordered me to leave town first thing in the morning. He's scared.

THE PRINCE

Of whom?

THEKLA

Of you. Who else?

THE PRINCE

Are *you* scared?

(HICKETIER disappears from the window.)

THEKLA

I love Tilmann. His *Angst* is so painful to see.

THE PRINCE

Then I am intruding on your peace and quiet. Am I leading an angel astray?

THEKLA

Angel? Since yesterday, my every breath is a sin. *Aber ein Prinz!* A melancholy hero. For years, I have been singing folk songs with my brother, songs about a sad prince who comes out of nowhere, and thus, I was his before he appeared in the flesh.

THE PRINCE

Is he what you hoped for?

THEKLA

Completely.

THE PRINCE

Thekla, that is a confession.

THEKLA

It's meant to be. Otherwise, would I be talking with you from my window at night?

THE PRINCE

Do you trust me?

THEKLA

Absolutely.

THE PRINCE

Listen: Tomorrow, I will meet you up by the hunting lodge.

THEKLA

Not possible. I must leave. It's been decided.

THE PRINCE

Don't you dare. Not tomorrow morning. Not until you've seen me one more time. Between six and seven in the morning, I'll order everyone out of the lodge. I will ride up the bridle path wearing a green hunting jacket, a hat with oak leaves, and a hunting knife at my side. Is that romantic enough? If you like, I will also wear a decoration, a little gold wreath given me by my beloved cousin, the Kaiser.

THEKLA

What shall I wear?

THE PRINCE

Something in cotton. Nothing fancy. Come to me as one of your own class. As you are: Heavenly.

THEKLA

(humming, then singing:)

*“IHR HÄSLEIN WEISZ, IHR SCHWARZES ÄUGLEINKLAR,
DAZU TRÄGT SIE EIN GOLDFARBKRAUSES HAAR.
IHR WEITER LEIB IST WEISSER ALS KEIN HERMELEIN ...”*

THE PRINCE

Coming from you, these thoughts move me deeply, and all this business of your brother singing for the crown, ah, such noble bourgeois ambition goes straight to my heart. In our forests, in the little villages, there dwells the very spirit of these songs, and it brings tears to my eyes.

THEKLA

They are born within us and they're part of our lives. Our region possesses the most beautiful songs. They can all be found in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.

THE PRINCE

That's why your Prince is duty-bound to cherish them.

THEKLA

I'll teach you all you need to know.

THE PRINCE

And the prettiest songs will be sung in the morning.

(Inside, the QUARTET sings the Huntsmen's Chorus from Act Three of Der Freischütz. HICKETIER can be seen in the middle, waving a baton.)

THE QUARTET

“WAS GLEICH WOHL AUF ERDEN DEM JÄGERVERGNUGEN,
WEM SPRUDELT DER BECHER DES LEBENS SO REICH?
BEIM KLANGE DER HÖRNER IM GRÜNEN ZU LIEGEN,
DEN HIRSCH ZU VERFOLGEN DURCH DICKICHT UND TEICH,
IST FÜRSTLICHE FREUDE, IST MÄNNLICH VERLANGEN
ERSTARKET DIE GLIEDER UND WÜRZET DAS MAHL – “

(The PRINCE holds both his hands up to THEKLA. She reaches down for them.)

THE PRINCE

You're joy for a prince, a real man's desire.

THE QUARTET

“WENN WÄLDER UND FELDER UNS HALLEND UMFANGEN
TÖRT FREIER UND FREUD'GER DER VOLLE POKAL.”

THEKLA

The ladder. Quick, bring the ladder.

(The PRINCE brings the ladder.)

THE QUARTET

“YOHOHOHO, TRALALALA – “

THEKLA

Look out, I'm coming down.

(She quickly descends the ladder. The PRINCE catches and embraces her. The QUARTET keeps singing.)

THE QUARTET

“YOHOHOHO, TRALALALA” etc.

THEKLA

Get rid of the ladder.

(The PRINCE drags it away.)

-- Where shall we go? Over there. If anyone comes by, we're safe.

(He embraces her.)

THE PRINCE

You are my beloved, you're perfect. Your dress, your blouse – Pretty as a picture.

THEKLA

And the canvas it's on?

THE PRINCE

Your eyes ...

THEKLA

And hair ...

THE PRINCE

And mouth ... *(He kisses her.)* Answer that.

THEKLA

You are so proud, so noble.

THE PRINCE

Hardly proud.

(He starts to kneel before her. THEKLA stops him.)

THEKLA

Don't do that.

(They sink to the ground together.)

THE PRINCE

Oh, Mädchen --

THEKLA
(kissing him)

Liebster --

THE PRINCE

Who am I?

THEKLA

Henry the Eighth.

THE PRINCE

What? I'm not the first?

THEKLA

First and only.

(They hide behind the carriage. HICKETIER, SCHIPPEL, KREY and WOLKE come out the front door.)

WOLKE

No doubt about it: Phenomenal! Krey, what's your opinion?

KREY

Gut.

WOLKE

The vocal line, the timbre. Hicketier, you seem deeply moved.

HICKETIER

I never expected this. There can be no doubt of the outcome now; the competition is ours.

WOLKE

How his voice melds with ours! We never knew such harmony with Naumann.

(to SCHIPPEL:)

As the nightingale said to the Emperor of China, "I saw tears in your eyes."

SCHIPPEL

That's true. I did see one.

(He takes WOLKE by the lapels.)

WOLKE

I don't deny it. Your E made me misty.

HICKETIER

The male voice, in its higher register, is one of God's greatest miracles. Nothing touches my heart more.

WOLKE

More tender than a maiden's touch.

(to KREY:)

You needn't be ashamed of your emotions.

KREY

Don't overdo it.

HICKETIER

Let us retire while the memory is still warm. *Gute Nacht.*

(HICKETIER turns towards his house.)

KREY

Gute Nacht.

(KREY and WOLKE walk towards the gate. SCHIPPEL follows them, then turns back towards HICKETIER.)

SCHIPPEL

Hallo!

HICKETIER

Yes?

SCHIPPEL
(hesitating)

Um ...

WOLKE

What is it?

SCHIPPEL

Nothing, really.

WOLKE

Come on.

(He draws SCHIPPEL toward the fence.)

With a tenor like this, Krey, even *your* operetta could get a performance.

KREY
(to SCHIPPEL)

He's lying through his teeth. I've yet to write a single note.

WOLKE
(to SCHIPPEL)

He never takes advantage of an opportunity. You'll see what I mean soon enough. What did you want with Hicketier?

SCHIPPEL
(giving him a look)

A momentary thought; gone now. Ha ha!

(SCHIPPEL, KREY, and WOLKE exit. HICKETIER stands in his yard and looks up at Thekla's window.)

HICKETIER

No "Good night." She didn't even come out. It will be like that for days, for weeks. I was too quick with that letter, too vehement. A thank you from the Prince for helping him yesterday. She surely heard us singing. She must be in a state; all confused. In her little head, in her heart, love and defiance in mortal struggle. -- Child? Are you asleep, my child? -- I can't explain it. I was terrified. Suffocating. But now, if I force myself into the turmoil of her soul, I will spoil everything. *Lieber Gott!* If I could only be near her, to comfort her.

(He sings:)

"Hören, hören, was sie will." What beautiful sounds from that cockroach! Not cracked or wobbly the way the rabble sing, but rather the music of the spheres. – Ah! Little sister! May all good angels bless you! Your big brother, his heart racked with fear, wanted only to understand. Forgive me. Sweet dreams. *Gute Nacht.*

(He blows a kiss toward her window and enters the house. The PRINCE appears from behind the carriage.)

THE PRINCE

They're all gone. *Madame*, will you not step from the shadows of our humble abode and illuminate the surroundings with your presence?

THEKLA
(off)

Who cares about surroundings? May this night never end!

(The PRINCE disappears again. SCHIPPEL appears at the fence.)

SCHIPPEL

Look how this house squats on the earth. We pay in blood for every square inch we inhabit; here, an empty carriage has an acre to itself. (*Brandishing his fist:*) I hate you, all of you, you bourgeois slime. You fill your guts with sugary crap, you shit it out, then gorge again. You infect your brats with this rot, until beneath their hard, smooth skin, they've also learned to screw the world. Meanwhile, with us, one measly litter and we're exhausted. Even our grandchildren will be too anemic to kill you off.

(He enters the yard.)

I look like a scarecrow in these rags. Her, the bourgeois bitch, those rolling hips could split her seams.

(Again he copies THEKLA's walk. Then he strokes the wall of the house.)

No wind'll blow through here. This wall's a meter thick. And inside, bloated portraits of your father and your grandfather, born 1810, died in '86. I don't even know who my father is, let alone my grandfather. You got away this time, you old bugger. Did I have plans for you! I'd have played my last card to get my hooks into you. Now I'm itching to breathe in your face again. I'm down here just pining for you, you smug, hidebound jackass. Even your farts are self-righteous. But I love you, your class, your entire race. My little heart is pounding, my pulse is racing. I won't sleep a wink.

(He sees the ladder.)

A ladder! I'll risk it. To the dispossessed, *Herr Baron*, you're more appealing than a woman.

(He places the ladder against THEKLA's window, climbs up and looks in.)

Underwear on a chair? A small room? This can't be his.

(Quickly, he climbs down the ladder, shifts it to another window, climbs up again, and looks in.)

There he is! The universe unfolds. Look at him. He puts his jacket on a hanger. He smooths it out. There must be order in the universe. And what does Schippel see? He buttons six solid buttons. Look, grey stockings with garters!

(HICKETIER opens the window.)

HICKETIER

Are you out of your mind?

SCHIPPEL

Drunk with song! Still excited. Don't be scared, *Herr Middleclass*, a little craziness won't hurt you.

HICKETIER

You're ruining the good impression you made. Go home.

SCHIPPEL

You're such a donkey. You never understand my intentions. I wanted, ha ha ha, I wanted to bask in my good fortune.

HICKETIER

It's obvious you're insane. In the middle of the night, right next to my sister's window. She's asleep. Go away! Do you hear me? Go!

(He slams the window shut. SCHIPPEL climbs down the ladder and stands in the yard.)

SCHIPPEL

So bossy! If his sister is sleeping up there, pink and plump in her white finery ... You swine! You're trying to trick me.

(He races up the ladder again and bangs on HICKETIER's window.)

Get up, you lazy dog! The girl in that room – that's right. I want her. Wake her up.

The PRINCE, with THEKLA behind him, sidles into sight. They remain invisible to those on stage. HICKETIER rushes out the front door and hisses at SCHIPPEL.)

HICKETIER

What did you say, you filthy -- ?

SCHIPPEL

Your sister! Now! Or you'll need a crowbar to pry one note out of me!

(HICKETIER runs to the carriage and grabs a whip from the driver's seat. As he approaches, he sees THE PRINCE and THEKLA and stops in his tracks. He gasps. THE PRINCE and THEKLA run back out of sight. HICKETIER pulls himself together and totters toward SCHIPPEL.)

HICKETIER

Did you bark, you cur? Filthy proletarian scum.

(SCHIPPEL jumps off the ladder and tears the whip from HICKETIER's hand, then pushes him hard against the wall and shouts in his face.)

SCHIPPEL

Ja, stinking proletarian scum! I'm going to marry your sister, the stuck-up bitch! I'm waving a red flag in your face. Yeah, you can drop dead, you dinosaur. Bet that makes your head spin! We're not done yet.

(SCHIPPEL runs out the gate. HICKETIER stands paralyzed. THE PRINCE escorts THEKLA to her front door, then turns to HICKETIER.)

THE PRINCE

Your sister Thekla is quite overcome ... *Gute Nacht, Herr Hicketier.*

(He quickly turns to go. Lights down)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene 1

(The same. Early the next morning. HICKETIER is sitting at a table, asleep. JENNY appears at the front door.)

JENNY

I don't have the heart to wake him.

(WOLKE appears outside the fence.)

JENNY

(pointing to HICKETIER)

Ssssh!

WOLKE

Good grief.

JENNY

He sat there all night. When I woke up this morning, he wasn't in bed.

WOLKE

Worries. Schippel!

JENNY

He puts on a brave face, but in his heart, he's suffering.

WOLKE

With the Festival so close, he must get a grip on himself. The Wolkes too have a name to protect. Have you spoken to him about our plan?

JENNY

What plan?

WOLKE

Krey. I would like to celebrate the Festival and the engagement at the same time.

JENNY

You're on the wrong track. If Krey even suspects that you're plotting behind his back, he could get nasty.

WOLKE

Right. He's a lynx, a fox, a ferret. However, my dear, in love there are complexities that you can't even imagine. Imagine, for example, that a -- how to put it? -- a whirling dervish has a dream about a wild bacchanal in which the woman he loves is tricked into a compromising situation.

JENNY

How awful.

WOLKE

The dervish imagines that, thanks to his great courage, he can save his woman. But eventually, the dervish's own inner demons possess him. He forgets that his dream was just a dream. He starts to believe that his true love has in fact been compromised in real life! The result? Disaster. Wreckage. Mother wails, Father sits in sackcloth and ashes. The cause? An orgy of unbridled imagination. Now, I don't suggest that Krey is like that benighted dervish. Far from it. He is, however, what nature knows as a "phenomenon," namely: His superior intellect.

(HICKETIER starts to snore.)

Bravo!

JENNY

You think Krey is that clever?

WOLKE

Jenny, he's a universal genius. What a mind! Just ask him about the Greeks, or the Jews. Mention technology, physics, algebra, then observe the pupils of his eyes, the way they flicker and narrow to slits. You can watch the whole mysterious process.

JENNY

Really?

WOLKE

In his mind, Thekla is such a paragon of virtue, such a Platonic ideal, that he doesn't dare declare himself.

JENNY

On the whole, he's right. She is a Hicketier, and what's more, she's an angel.

WOLKE

Delectable, beyond compare. Agreed. Now, hear my battle plan: I besieged Krey with speeches, her picture, samples of her handwriting; filled his world with her spirit, her scent. I – how to put it? -- plagued his life with her. Finally, last night, when the colossus had been brought almost to his knees, I blurted out that in a state of wild desire, she had carved his initials, intertwined with hers, on the big elm tree over there.

JENNY

Wolke!

WOLKE

I did the carving myself between five and six this morning. Take a look.

(He shows her.)

JENNY

So artistic.

WOLKE

What'll you wager that Krey will show up before he goes to work, just to see for himself?

JENNY

Here he comes!

WOLKE

Hide!

(WOLKE pulls JENNY behind the carriage. KREY enters, looks around carefully, then runs to the tree.)

KREY

It's true. Horrors. I'm done for. *Kaput.*

(Weeping, he exits. WOLKE and JENNY re-enter.)

WOLKE

In tears? That settles that. Yes, dear friend, I wanted to make you happy.

(He follows KREY off. JENNY sits down next to HICKETIER.)

JENNY

My darling!

HICKETIER
(waking slowly)

Hm?

JENNY

It's after eight.

HICKETIER

Thekla!

JENNY

Did you sleep here all night?

HICKETIER

I didn't sleep a wink.

JENNY

Come now, forget your troubles. Once you've won the crown, you can get rid of Schippel.

HICKETIER

I had this terrible dream ... Tell me your thoughts. Tell me your deepest thoughts.

JENNY

I don't have any. I'll get your coffee.

HICKETIER

Thekla --

JENNY

Should get married.

HICKETIER

God knows!

JENNY

She's the right age. But knowing her, she'll want something special.

HICKETIER

Not a word to anyone, not even to her: Schippel.

JENNY

Tilmann!

HICKETIER

We've had our heads in the sand. And now it's gone too far. If I refuse, there'll be a catastrophe.

JENNY

Thekla Hicketier -- Schippel? Over my dead body!

HICKETIER

No, I have a plan. There's a certain officer I know, a bachelor. He has no money. I'm sure he could be persuaded to adopt Schippel, give him a pedigree. Do you get the picture? No questions! Not a word until the matter is settled.

JENNY

Here I was, blaming myself ... so all along, Thekla's been hiding something.

HICKETIER

She has.

JENNY

Perhaps the Prince could do something about Schippel ...

(HICKETIER jumps up.)

HICKETIER

No crumbs from the mighty! No begging, no whining, no embarrassing charity. I have a firm hand. I'll take care of this.

JENNY

God willing.

(She exits to the house. THEKLA opens the shutters of her window. She is not fully dressed. Her arms reach toward the sun. We see the golden bracelet on her upper arm. Below, HICKETIER moves toward her silently. She sees him, takes off the bracelet and tosses it to her brother. He catches it and tosses it right back to her.)

HICKETIER

Forget the melodrama. We're past that. I have news for you and I want an answer. Last night, Herr Schippel asked for your hand. I've considered it, given it great thought, and I have agreed. It's the only practical solution.

THEKLA

(aghast)

Brother -- !

HICKETIER

No ifs, ands, or buts. Today, this morning, and for the rest of your life.

THEKLA

My fate --

HICKETIER

Is to be a middle class woman. No more. No less.

THEKLA

I ... oh ... my heart ...

(She buries her face in her hands.)

HICKETIER

(sharply)

The dream is over. Open your eyes. You're a Hicketier: Show some pride. Pride! Or be a laughingstock.

THEKLA

I'm coming down.

(She jumps out the window and lands in HICKETIER's arms.)

Whatever you say. I know you only want what's best for me.

HICKETIER

Within the hour, you'll be across those mountains, at your aunt's house. You will stay there until I'm certain that honor and harmony have been restored. You can cry your eyes out, roll on the floor, weep and wail, but keep it to yourself. The only thing the world cares about is a show of strength.

(He puts his arm around her shoulders and walks a few steps with her.)

From this day forth, whether you're a wife, mother, or grandmother, always remind yourself that your glorious sacrifice has not been in vain. In future, when I come to visit, your lovely smile, which even now is breaking through your tears, will remind us who we are, from whence we come, and whither we are going. God bless you, child.

(THEKLA points offstage; SCHIPPEL enters.)

SCHIPPEL

Guten Morgen, everybody!

THEKLA

Guten Morgen, Herr Schippel.

(She leaves.)

HICKETIER

You come just in time.

SCHIPPEL

I come because I'm eaten up by anxiety. Since last night, I've been hovering around your house.

HICKETIER

Like a hawk circling its prey.

SCHIPPEL

I crawled over the hill as far as the stream. I couldn't take my eyes off that window.

(He points to THEKLA's room.)

The light didn't go out all night. Imagine my feelings.

HICKETIER

Which ones?

SCHIPPEL

You just said it.

HICKETIER

The hawk?

SCHIPPEL

When I was a child, I used to play in the street with the other children. Once, a little girl spat in my face: Thekla Hicketier.

HICKETIER

Ah!

SCHIPPEL

That moment ignited twenty years of hate in me. This morning, by the stream, I sang louder than the roaring waters in a voice I never knew I had. It will be at your service for the singing contest, because I know you'll be giving me that little girl. Half the pleasure of my revenge will be in *not* telling you the dreams I've dreamt about what I'm going to do to your sister when I get my claws into her.

HICKETIER

Some bridegroom. You're insane. But since the girl has agreed -- she's yours.

SCHIPPEL

I knew it the minute I saw you together.

HICKETIER

You're always so frank.

SCHIPPEL

And every time we meet, you'll be ashamed of our connection.

HICKETIER

Indeed.

SCHIPPEL

Don't fret. My philosophy is simple and sound. But knowing that I've got you in my clutches, because of how badly you want that crown – I can make you dance like a puppet.

HICKETIER

Who do you think you are, God?

SCHIPPEL

We need that once in a while.

HICKETIER

For now, the wind's in your favor.

SCHIPPEL

It sure is. And I have a vivid imagination.

HICKETIER

Which you'll inflict on Thekla.

SCHIPPEL

On your sister, brother-in-law.

HICKETIER

Do you think that scares me?

SCHIPPEL

I can see the signs.

HICKETIER

You're getting too close again. Soon you'll be poking my belly. Ha ha ha.

SCHIPPEL

My dear little friend, I don't need to do that any more.

HICKETIER

You'll punish Thekla with your third-rate fantasies. Just because she spat on you once --

SCHIPPEL

The time is coming when, within my own four walls, we'll stand face to face as husband and wife.

HICKETIER
(laughing out loud)

So?

SCHIPPEL
My vengeance awakes. Words come spewing out of my mouth!

HICKETIER
So?

SCHIPPEL
I'm starting to --

HICKETIER
Does that make you proud, to be an *ersatz* Hicketier?

SCHIPPEL
I used to choose my words carefully. Me, a nobody, who fell into this world by accident, grew up in the gutter, I want this innocent bourgeois maiden and I want her now. Let me get my hands on her.

(He grabs HICKETIER.)

HICKETIER
So?

SCHIPPEL
You old goat, I bet this is breaking your heart.

(HICKETIER laughs.)

HICKETIER
No, the joke's on you, you ragpicker. You think you've picked up a jewel, but your jewel has lost its luster.

(SCHIPPEL is taken aback.)

Lost. She was a thousand times too good for you, and now, one of your betters has plucked the flower. If you know what I mean.

SCHIPPEL
Thekla -- ?

HICKETIER
She's all yours.

(A long pause. SCHIPPEL turns away.)

It's my duty to enlighten the newest member of our family. We can discuss the size of her dowry in my office.

(He gestures toward the house.)

If you please. I think I've found a way to explain your mysterious birth. There's a certain officer who has the misfortune of being your long-lost father.

SCHIPPEL
(turning back)

I think I understand.

HICKETIER

Bravo.

SCHIPPEL

I don't need the details.

HICKETIER

Bravo *encore*. Both you and your father-to-be will be well compensated.

SCHIPPEL
I'm sure we would. Unfortunately, the deep-rooted ideal of manly honor that I'm learning how to feel won't allow me to accept this marriage proposal.

HICKETIER

Was?

SCHIPPEL

Nope. You can keep her and your money. My decision's final.

HICKETIER
(pushing him)

Fort, fort! Get out!

SCHIPPEL
(stepping back)

I knew in my heart that we could never be related.

(HICKETIER comes toward him. SCHIPPEL stops him with a strong gesture.)

Halt! Control yourself. Count your blessings.

(KREY and WOLKE enter.)

WOLKE
(to SCHIPPEL)

I see you're not wearing a scarf. I worry about your voice.

KREY

Cough drops.

SCHIPPEL

No worries, *meine Herren*. I know the weight of my responsibilities as a gentleman. At the Festival, I shall sing like a god! *Guten Morgen*.

(Exit SCHIPPEL. HICKETIER heads back to the house.)

WOLKE
(to HICKETIER)

Listen –

HICKETIER

Not now.

(HICKETIER exits. KREY grabs WOLKE and drags him to the elm tree.)

KREY

Swear!

WOLKE

I could raise two fingers, and that would be the end of it. But first, I want to tell you more about her, about what I've observed. You know camomile, larkspur, dandelions? Well, she picked every flower she could find, just to ask, "He loves me. He loves me not. He loves me."

KREY

Swear that she carved those letters. Swear!

WOLKE

And marjoram. I mean --

(KREY squeezes him so hard that WOLKE squirms.)

Venus flytrap.

KREY

Swear!

(He kicks WOLKE's behind.)

WOLKE

(running away)

And every time, the last petal said, "He loves me ... "

(KREY grabs WOLKE again and shakes him, shouting, quite beside himself.)

KREY

Your oath! Your oath!

WOLKE

(to himself)

What difference does it make?

(He raises his hand. Aloud:)

I swear!

(KREY falls onto a chair and covers his face with his hands.)

You fool, with your kind heart caught in the grip of habit. Look at me, your friend Wolke, look at me; I love you with all my heart, and I can't bear to see you torturing yourself any longer. Deep down inside, I know that all you want is peace and quiet.

(Overcome with emotion, WOLKE kneels before KREY.)

Krey? Go and get your Thekla.

(KREY lifts WOLKE up and embraces him.)

KREY

I don't know how all of this fits together. I don't know why; up till now my life was so comfortable. But from the heartfelt emotion in your voice, I can tell that it must be so. Say no more.

(They shake hands.)

Wait here. I shall return as a bridegroom.

(He enters the house.)

WOLKE

Now there's a man, a wonder, touched by God. How did a poor creature like me ever ... how to put it?

(Lights down.)

ACT TWO
Scene 2

(Two weeks later. Daybreak. A meadow. THE PRINCE and THEKLA enter from opposite sides, stretching their hands out to each other.)

THE PRINCE

Our final encounter. Allow me to say that you will always hold a heavenly place in my heart.

THEKLA

I am engaged to your Highness's bureaucrat, Heinrich Krey.

THE PRINCE

Yes. Your brother announced it yesterday, after his great triumph at the Songfest. Thekla has been kept well out of my reach by all kinds of tricks and machinations, insults to my manly honor. I fully expected opposition; but all I got was smiles and phony acquiescence. Meanwhile, you'd vanished, only to reappear after the deed was done. Who was behind this? Who dared?

THEKLA

It happened. It had to happen. Even if it were to cost us both our lives – but we're still here.

(THE PRINCE gestures.)

THE PRINCE

Thekla!

THEKLA

Surely your Highness does not intend to seduce me again. Not that I would mind; without you, God knows, I'm just ordinary. But as things stand now, I must be the very soul of propriety.

(THE PRINCE tries to embrace her.)

THEKLA

The soul of propriety.

THE PRINCE

Mon amour!

(THEKLA struggles and stamps her feet angrily.)

THEKLA

Propriety!

(THE PRINCE steps back. Immediately, THEKLA smiles at him.)

I've been thinking about the Fate that brought us together, and about you. You are a delightful bit of good luck for any woman. Unforgettable. Slender, warm, hungry as a child, you convinced me that I was the first one you'd ever even touched, so naturally I responded. With the arrogance of a hero, you took possession of the abundance you were given, yet you have no idea how precious it is. You'll only understand this after many years and many more women. God willing, your image of me will shine so brightly that you will always think of me as being worthy of you.

(With tears in her eyes, she takes the gold bracelet from her arm and gives it to THE PRINCE.)

Remember Thekla Hicketier!

(THE PRINCE bows deeply over her hand.)

Will you escort Heinrich Krey's bride for one last walk across the meadow?

THE PRINCE

Do you know Herr Krey well?

THEKLA

Well enough. He has demonstrated a noble character.

(They start walking.)

THE PRINCE

Promise me that you will never think of me as a noble character, but rather as a bit of good luck for women.

THEKLA

Yes, with all my heart.

(They leave. Lights down.)

ACT TWO Scene 3

(A street. Enter SCHIPPEL from one direction, KREY and WOLKE from another.)

SCHIPPEL

Greetings, gents. *Guten Morgen*. Councillor Wolke. Herr Krey. How's our happy bridegroom this fine morning?

(KREY and WOLKE nod brusquely and keep going.)

What? Not a word?

(He runs around to confront them.)

Meine Herren, don't walk away from me. I'm talking to you! Yesterday I won you clowns the prize, today I'm something stuck to the bottom of your shoe?

WOLKE

Let us pass.

KREY

Ignore the creature. Who does he think he is?

SCHIPPEL

I know who I am, and what I am. I know what you are, too. And what you're going to be.

KREY

Riddles? Pah.

WOLKE

My good man, you've done quite well for yourself, now leave it there. Don't you think that's best? Let us pass.

SCHIPPEL

Let you pass? How to put it? *Nein*. Not until you ask politely. Say please, and I will, as Herr Krey would say, take it under advisement.

KREY

Wolke, we're wasting time. Schippel, stand aside, or I'll –

SCHIPPEL

Or you'll what? Save your strength, Krey. You'll need it for your wedding night.

WOLKE

Monstrous!

KREY

I'm warning you –

SCHIPPEL

You're warning me? I'm warning you! You're going to be such a laughingstock.

KREY

What's that supposed to mean?

(Enter HICKETIER and JENNY. SCHIPPEL doesn't see them.)

SCHIPPEL

There's got to be an easier way to get your hands on Hicketier's money. Can't you just steal it? Wolke, help him out.

WOLKE

How dare you!

SCHIPPEL

I'm not daring anything. I'm not about to marry damaged goods.

HICKETIER

Schippel, be quiet!

SCHIPPEL

Oh, look who's here. *Guten Tag, mein Herr. Gnädige Frau.*

JENNY

Herr Schippel.

SCHIPPEL

See, the lady knows how to be polite. Take a lesson, gentlemen.

KREY

What do you mean, "damaged goods?"

HICKETIER

Schippel – !

SCHIPPEL

Oh, didn't Hicketier tell you what he told me?

JENNY

What's this?

HICKETIER

I have no idea what he's talking about.

SCHIPPEL

Tilmann! Did you forget? That's not right. -- It seems that *Fräulein* Thekla Hicketier has been – um – compromised.

HICKETIER

You're a dead man.

KREY, WOLKE, JENNY
(together)

What does he mean, “compromised?”

SCHIPPEL

I don’t know the details. He does.

HICKETIER
(to SCHIPPEL)

Schweig doch!

JENNY

Tilmann?

KREY

Hicketier?

WOLKE

There seems to be some mystery here.

SCHIPPEL

Oh, dear, what have I done?

HICKETIER

You have insulted my sister’s good name. I would give you a thrashing, but now that Herr Krey is her fiancé, he will demand satisfaction.

KREY

I will?

WOLKE

You must. For Thekla’s honor.

HICKETIER

The fellow is trying to sabotage the order of things with his innuendoes. Are you going to let him get away with it?

KREY

No! My Thekla is pure.

SCHIPPEL

Fine. It’s no skin off my nose.

JENNY

Shame on you, Schippel!

HICKETIER

Jenny –

JENNY

What's wrong with you? Slandering an innocent child like that!

SCHIPPEL

Innocent? If you say so.

JENNY

I *do* say so! – Heinrich Krey, do your duty!

KREY

Jenny, I --

HICKETIER

Krey, if you don't challenge Schippel, his insinuation will stand uncontradicted. I shall be forced to withdraw my consent to any marriage. Do you understand me?

SCHIPPEL

Auf wiedersehen, the dowry! Money remits a multitude of sins.

KREY

Schippel, I demand satisfaction.

WOLKE

No, no, Heinrich. There's a proper form to these things. Take off your glove and throw it at him.

HICKETIER

Now just a minute. That's fine for equals. But between a Krey and a Schippel?

WOLKE

True. Is there even a – how to put it? – a protocol for a situation like this?

HICKETIER

Hmm. Let me think. *Nein. Garnichts.* None.

JENNY

Heinrich, take your glove and slap his face.

WOLKE

Ja, ja! Left glove? Right glove?

SCHIPPEL

Goodbye.

(He starts to leave, but HICKETIER grabs him.)

HICKETIER

Not so fast. Krey? What Jenny said.

SCHIPPEL

Help!

(KREY slaps SCHIPPEL with his glove.)

Ow! That hurt!

HICKETIER

Excellent. Now here's what will happen. Krey, bravo, you've just challenged this mongrel to a duel.

KREY

Oh, God. *Gott in Himmel!*

SCHIPPEL

A duel?

HICKETIER

Schippel, you've been challenged by the party you insulted. You get the choice of weapons.

SCHIPPEL

Weapons?

HICKETIER

Jawohl. Swords, knives, pistols. Which do you choose?

KREY & SCHIPPEL

(together)

Pistols?

HICKETIER

Good choice. Now. Given the lack of rules for such a situation, we must improvise. So: Tomorrow. Dawn. On the parade ground. Twenty paces. I will provide the firearms. Just us, oh, and a doctor. Agreed? Agreed!

(Blackout.)

ACT TWO
Scene 4

(Enter SCHIPPEL, wearing a morning coat and top hat.)

SCHIPPEL

I'm a dead man. After my noble renunciation of that slut, which cost me a fortune, after my heroic efforts at the Songfest, which they only won thanks to me, all I got from those snots was a curt little nod, and now – the icing on the cake – I've been invited here this morning to get shot! Some thanks! Yesterday they needed me, today they want to kill me. This coat will be my shroud. Well, gentlemen, you may think you've dug my grave, but don't expect me to jump in. You're not filling me full of holes. It'd be downright murder to come after a harmless fellow who's never even held a gun. Of course, they make it all look legitimate. My life's a disaster. I wanted into that world so badly I'd have cut off my balls to get there. But I'm not letting somebody shoot them off. I'll be dead. I know it. I dreamed about it. I saw myself blown wide open with my guts hanging out. I had it all in my hands; I lost it. Nothing left but my pathetic life. All I want to do is play the clarinet again, sing, live on tips. No wearing kid gloves day in, day out, turning a blind eye to everything around me. For one glorious moment, I held Hicketier in the palm of my hand. But for what? Like fireworks for a corpse. Thanks for nothing. *Mein Gott!* What am I doing here on the very spot where they expect me to bite the dust? This is where Krey wants to shoot me. But I've got a surprise for him, for all of them. When I go to bed tonight I'll still be in one piece, I can say whatever the hell I like to whoever I like. I'm flying the coop. Heading for the hills. I'm going to crawl into a hole, the one I came out of.

(Exit SCHIPPEL. Enter HICKETIER, KREY and WOLKE. They are wearing frock coats.)

WOLKE

Five minutes to seven. We're the first ones here. Krey, how are you doing?

HICKETIER

Stop asking your endless questions. He seems fine.

WOLKE

Well, my hair is standing on end. Why did I ever consent to this unholy duel? We could have won Schippel over with diplomacy, gotten guarantees of his future behavior. That man, I've no doubt about it, will skewer Krey like a pig on a spit. Besides, I saw our friend here in a dream, with no head.

HICKETIER

You're the one with no head.

WOLKE

(to KREY)

Is your heart beating? How's your pulse? – Where's the doctor?

(He feels KREY's pulse.)

When we were having our *schnapps*, I saw your tongue. It's all coated. How will this end?

KREY

Everything used to be so perfect.

HICKETIER

This is a noble encounter, don't besmirch it with your cowardice.

WOLKE

I don't give a damn about appearances when my dearest friend's life is at stake.

KREY

(pitifully)

Shut up, Wolke.

WOLKE

A bridegroom, loving and beloved, in the springtime of his life, condemned to a gruesome death. We are staring murder in the face, and you, Hicketier, are the guilty party!

HICKETER

Ridiculous.

WOLKE

Didn't you remind Krey in no uncertain terms of the injury done to his fiancée's honor, an injury for which he would never have demanded satisfaction on his own account from one so far beneath him? Did you not make this duel a condition of his receiving Thekla's hand, so that he was forced to challenge Schippel? You did! And why did you do that?

(to KREY, who is on the verge of collapse)

Buck up, Krey!

(to HICKETIER)

Because, when all is said and done, you admire that upstart! Hicketier, for a long time, I have suspected something very dark in your soul – don't interrupt me! Your pretend superiority is nothing more than smoke and mirrors. Schippel was sent by Heaven to unmask you.

HICKETIER

Oh, really? The man has nothing, yet he refused one hundred thousand marks, not to mention a beautiful girl. And then he won the laurel crown for us with his heavenly voice. Now, unfamiliar with any such test, yet with manly fortitude, he faces the business end of a pistol. Before that kind of courage, the very least Krey can do is not blink.

WOLKE

People like us, whose position in the world is well understood, don't need to compete with the likes of Schippel.

KREY
(pitifully)

Wolke, shut up.

HICKETIER

I demand the right, whenever I want, to test the human qualities of the people around me. At this moment of truth, don't you fuss and dither, or you'll sabotage Krey.

WOLKE

Seven o'clock. Not a soul in sight.

KREY

Maybe he's forgotten.

HICKETIER

Nonsense!

WOLKE

Seven oh two.

KREY

I was so comfy before. Do you see what you've done to me?

WOLKE

Exactly how long do we have to wait?

KREY

I feel faint.

HICKETIER

Could they have gone to the wrong place?

WOLKE

Krey is about to have a nervous breakdown.

HICKETIER
(to KREY)

Tell Wolke, "Don't be silly."

WOLKE

Seven oh eight. Are we obliged to wait all day?

HICKETIER

They've gone to the wrong place. We'll go find them. Come along.

(Exit HICKETIER.)

WOLKE

Grant us a hurricane or an earthquake!

KREY

My nerves are shot. I used to be so comfy.

(WOLKE takes KREY by the arm and quickly drags him off. Beat. The DOCTOR enters, holding SCHIPPEL by the arm. He drags him downstage.)

DOCTOR

Don't be such a baby. Pull yourself together.

SCHIPPEL

Let me out of here. If you hadn't caught me, I'd be long gone by now. You want to help the poor? Then let me go, I beg you!

DOCTOR

Impossible. Think of the consequences!

SCHIPPEL

I'm too poor for consequences!

DOCTOR

Since the Songfest, in the eyes of the finer folk, you are a distinguished person.

SCHIPPEL

I'm a prole, believe me. Two weeks ago, I was a nobody. Invisible. I can do that again. Disappear into nothing. Not trouble a soul.

DOCTOR

Good God, man, what about your honor?

SCHIPPEL

Dearest doctor, I don't have any. I swear. Let me go!

DOCTOR

Your enemies will make you a laughingstock.

SCHIPPEL

Let them! That's it! That's what I want. That's what I pray for. I'm just a dog, a miserable wretch, a piece of shit. I admit it.

DOCTOR

A little nervous breakdown, nothing serious.

SCHIPPEL

You're wrong! My knees are like jelly. I'm gonna die, Doctor, I'm gonna die. Let go! I'll drop dead right at your feet!

(HICKETIER, KREY and WOLKE return.)

HICKETIER

Ah, here they are.

(EVERYBODY bows.)

The places have been marked out. Twenty paces apart. Positions, please, everyone.

(All go to their places. KREY and SCHIPPEL stand diagonally opposite each other; SCHIPPEL is down right and KREY is up left. The DOCTOR is near SCHIPPEL. HICKETIER is on KREY's left; WOLKE, on his right. HICKETIER takes two pistols from a box, loads them, and shows them to WOLKE.)

HICKETIER

Two bullets each, two shots each. Both loaded.

(WOLKE fusses. The DOCTOR has opened his medical bag. KREY can barely stand.)

WOLKE

(to KREY)

Take a deep breath.

KREY

(stammers something like)

D ... Death.

HICKETIER

(quietly, to SCHIPPEL)

Deep breath ...

SCHIPPEL

(stammers something like)

I'm dead.

(WOLKE pulls out his handkerchief. HICKETIER takes it.)

HICKETIER

At the count of three ... fire! *Eins ... zwei ... drei!*

(He waves the handkerchief like a flag. SCHIPPEL fires without aiming. KREY falls down. EVERYONE except SCHIPPEL runs to KREY and pulls him offstage.)

DOCTOR

(off)

A scratch on the arm. Insignificant.

WOLKE

(off)

God be praised!

(SCHIPPEL, standing with his arm outstretched like a marble statue, fires again! THE DOCTOR rushes back onstage.)

DOCTOR

Are you mad? It's over. Herr Krey is slightly wounded. You're fine.

SCHIPPEL

(mechanically)

Danke.

DOCTOR

Don't you want to see your opponent and be reconciled?

SCHIPPEL

(mechanically)

Ja.

(He lets the DOCTOR lead him offstage. HICKETIER and WOLKE intercept them.)

WOLKE

Thank you so much, you noble, noble man. Wolke will never forget your magnanimous gesture.

(SCHIPPEL and the DOCTOR exit.)

HICKETIER

The man's bearing was heroic. The same serenity and self-assurance as at the Songfest. What an honor, to be acquainted with such a marksman.

(SCHIPPEL returns. HICKETIER goes toward him.)

Filled with poisonous prejudices and deep distaste for your origins, I have until now refused you entry to our society. You have beaten me. It is my duty, so to speak, to tell you how much, in future, I shall be honored by your company.

(HICKETIER offers SCHIPPEL both hands.)

This day will not be forgotten. Your accomplishments will be remembered, and I will ensure personally that the greatest blessings of the middle class shall be heaped upon you. *Auf Wiedersehen*, my dear *Herr Schippel*.

(HICKETIER raises his hat formally to SCHIPPEL and exits. SCHIPPEL, now standing alone in bright sunlight, buries his face in his hands.)

SCHIPPEL

I am so happy! Their greatest blessings, on me – too much.

(Slowly, with rapture.)

Mein lieber Herr Paul Schippel! You are now a full-fledged member of the middle class. And still alive! Glorious!

(He makes a sweeping bow to himself.)

END OF PLAY

PHOTOGRAPH ON THE BEACH

By Emilio Carballido

Translated by Jacqueline E. Bixler

Photograph on the Beach: Life in A Snapshot

I first met Emilio Carballido in Mexico City in June 1977, when he was, coincidentally, putting the finishing touches on *Photograph on the Beach/Fotografía en la playa*.¹ During the many years that I have devoted to the study of this theatre, I have at times been asked which of his nearly one hundred plays is my favorite.² I have unfailingly answered with *Fotografía en la playa*, which was also, I later discovered, Carballido's personal favorite.

In a style reminiscent of Chekovian drama, Carballido takes a long still shot of a large family that comes together for a brief reunion on a beach somewhere in the state of Veracruz. In the span of one day, members of four generations converge in the home of the grandmother, where, like the waves of the gulf, they merge and meld, only to clash and separate anew. The constant entrance, exit, and regrouping of characters soon reveals strong, dangerous undercurrents below the surface of feigned contentment, personal fulfillment, and familial harmony. The final scene, in which all sixteen characters, including family, friends, and servants, hold still for a family portrait, is one of the most powerful scenes ever created by Carballido. Frozen for the short moments it takes to snap a picture and therein for eternity, the characters' smiles are belied by their voices, which thrust us into the future and remind us that life is ephemeral.

My decision to translate *Fotografía en la playa* is not only based on my predilection for this play, but also on two particular events: the passing of Carballido in 2008 and the mass shooting that occurred at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007. As if it were itself a snapshot, *Photograph on the Beach* captures the life of its creator. For example, the figure of Grandmother is based on Carballido's grandmother, a storyteller *extraordinaire* who raised him in a small town in the state of Veracruz. Dismissed by her family as blind, deaf, and senile, Grandmother is nonetheless the character around whom the others revolve and the only one who actually understands what is going on. Héctor is Emilio himself, a gay writer and teacher who likewise ended up living in his Veracruzian cradle after spending most of his professional life in Mexico City. The character of Nelly and her premature death in France are based on Yolanda Guillaumín, one of the many young, talented artists that Carballido mentored and supported during his lifetime.

¹ The first published version of the text appeared in *Carballido: Fotografía en la playa, Soñar la noche, Las cartas de Mozart* (Mexico City: Escenología, 1994). The premiere took place in Mexico City in the Teatro de la Paz of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, and was followed in May 1985 with a staging in the Teatro Pedro Díaz of Córdoba, Carballido's alleged birthplace, as part of the celebration of his 60th birthday. In 2004, it was staged in the enormous theatre of the Palacio de Bellas Artes of Mexico City.

² For more information on this play and on Carballido's theatre in general, see my book, *Convention and Transgression. The Theatre of Emilio Carballido* (Bucknell UP, 1997).

Despite these anecdotal links, *Photograph on the Beach* transcends both Carballido's life and the time during which the play was written. This play is not only about the complexity of relationships and the ultimate strength of family ties, but also about the fragility and fugacity of life itself. The final words of the characters, heard above the sound of the waves and beyond the frozen smiles on their faces, remind us that death lurks around the next corner:

Jorge: Chacho had already gotten married, and Vevita, too. It was my turn. That's when the accident happened. I was on a motorcycle. I didn't feel anything. I just turned my head and something was running over me. And then I wasn't there.

Seemingly by chance, a number of students in an advanced Spanish class at Virginia Tech were reading *Fotografía en la playa* the week of April 16, 2007, when the lives of 32 students and faculty members were suddenly cut short. During the days and weeks that followed, we saw photo after photo of each victim, smiling in what appeared to be an eternal present. I could not help but think of Carballido's play and its final "message."

During the process of translating the dramatic text, I realized that my predilection for this particular work is based in large measure on the intensity of this last scene, the way the physical and the emotional, the momentary and the timeless, the verbal and the visual, all come together in one frozen moment. As for the rest of the text, I found, to my chagrin, that it is often wordy and repetitious. While I was initially loathe to eliminate anything, colleagues and other friendly readers persuaded me as to the need to cut, or at least condense, parts of the dialogue. Another challenge was the colloquial, very "Mexican" register used by the characters, particularly those of the younger generations. Furthermore, in order to convey the discontent that lurks beneath the surface of this "happy family," I needed to find language that carries a tone that is sarcastic, if not ironic. The metaphorical, elliptical passages delivered by the Grandmother and Héctor were particularly difficult to translate. I can only hope to have been successful in capturing Carballido's "way with words," his remarkable wit, and his trademark blend of the poetic and the profane, the metaphorical and the mundane.

During his long career, Carballido captured time and time again the complexity of human relationships, particularly those that involve family. While some may not agree with my selection of *Photograph on the Beach* as the best of Carballido, the weaving of life and death, the momentary and the eternal, the profound and the pedestrian, is without a doubt classic Carballido.

-- Jacqueline E. Bixler

Photograph on the Beach is just one of the nearly one hundred plays that **Emilio Carballido** (1925-2008) created over the course of six decades. During his long lifetime, he was widely recognized as the most influential and successful Mexican playwright of the 20th century. His plays continue to be a staple of the theatre scene in Mexico City and are also frequently staged in Europe, the US, and throughout Latin America. An extraordinarily prolific and versatile

playwright, Carballido wrote thirty full-length plays and over sixty one-act pieces as well as movie scripts, operettas, adaptations, and children's theatre. He created plays in a wide variety of styles and tones, including comedy, dark comedy, farce, *espectáculos* based on historical events and personages, and tragicomic adaptations of classical mythology. Aside from his own writing, he devoted his life to the promotion of Mexican theatre through university classes, workshops, edited collections of *Teatro joven*, and the theatre journal *Tramoya*, which he founded in 1975 and edited until his death. Other English translations of his works include: *Conversation among the Ruins*; *I Too Speak of the Rose*; *The Day They Let the Lions Loose*; *The Mirror*; *The Time and the Place*; *The Golden Thread*; *The Intermediate Zone*; *The Clockmaker from Córdoba*; *Theseus*; *Medusa*; *Orinoco*; *A Rose, by Any Other Names*; *The Sea and Its Secrets*; *The Census*, and *A Short Day's Anger*.

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PHOTOGRAPH ON THE BEACH

EMILIO CARBALLIDO

First staged by the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in the Casa de la Paz theatre, Mexico City, in July 1984.

CHARACTERS:

Grandmother
Celia – her daughter
Constanza – daughter of Celia
Adrian – son of Celia
Hector – son of Celia
Agustin – son of Celia
Veva – wife of Agustin
Vevita – daughter of Agustin and Veva
Chacho – son of Agustin and Veva
Jorge – son of Celia's deceased son, also named Jorge
Nelly – Hector's student and Jorge's girlfriend
Benita - maid
Patricia - maid
Elisa – wife of Adrian
Adolfo – Vevita's boyfriend
Luis – Hector's friend
Photographer

Seaside. The clothing should be from 1960s.

The patio: Sky in the background. In front of that, a wall about 6 feet high, preferably of a dense, visual texture. Cement floor. In the center, a rustic wooden chair with a woven straw seat. Nothing else.

The beach: Sand, sky and a beach chair. Nothing else. Clouds that cross the sky and disappear.

No intermission.

The patio: *Bright sunlight. Grandmother, seated, shells peas. Silence. The mailman whistles nearby. She raises her head. Pause.*

Grandmother: The mailman's here. *(She looks up.)* Flocks of birds. Such a sunny day. All these crazy birds. Pigeons and seagulls. Vultures, too, way up there. They fly so smoothly, just gliding around, like they're going to stay up there forever. You start wishing that you could be one of them. All it takes is a carcass to bring them down. *(Shelling peas.)* I can smell the sea from here. Some days it's like that. Veva must be sick. No, when someone's sick, they send a telegram, or call. Or they don't even let us know. She already sent the money for this month. *(Shelling peas.)* They must be coming. That's it. More visitors. It's one of those years. So, Agustin is coming. They were here two years ago. No, three. Well, I'm still here. But this will be the last time. *(Shelling peas.)* Benita! Benita!

The maid sticks her head in.

Grandmother: If you've hung out the sheets, make sure they hold. If not, they go flying and end up God knows where, with one big gust, just like life. Life is nothing but a big gust of wind.

Benita: Miss Cata, there's nothing on the line. I've even finished ironing them. *(She exits.)*

Grandmother: Good. *(Shells peas.)* Ah, the billowing sheets. My wedding sheets, my brand-new little house. I watched so many trees grow tall, and for what? I didn't even want to sell the place. There are no trees here. *(Looks up.)* Adrian hasn't even had breakfast. And it's nearly noon. He sleeps too much. Constanza says he needs it. Well, that could be true. God bless those who can sleep. *(Shells peas.)* It's no good to stay awake, like some wandering soul, tossing and turning until the roosters crow... to roam around the house in the dark, saying the rosary until the churchbells ring and the milkman comes. Blessed are those who can sleep. *(Looks up.)* But not all day. No, not those who get up at noon, nap all afternoon, flip through the papers and just go back to bed... *(Stops suddenly but continues to shell peas. A short silence.)* I wonder if he's drinking. *(She pauses and goes back to shelling.)* No, he doesn't drink. *(Shelling peas.)* Constanza! Constanza, please come here! She must've gone down to the telephone. *(Shelling peas.)* If you ask them, I'm just an idiot, I don't notice anything. The phone rings, she answers, says something, hangs up, and runs off to the public phone on the corner. She's much too old for that. Benita! Benita!

Benita sticks her head in.

Grandmother: Is Constanza here?

Benita: Yes.

Grandmother: Please tell her to come here.

Benita exits.

Grandmother: The impulses of the young are that and nothing more. But an old maid? They'll roll around in the hay with her. Or she'll wind up lost, God knows where. Constanza, please come! She's much too old for that. (*Shells peas.*)

Silence. Constanza enters.

Grandmother: Come close, dear. (*She whispers in her ear.*) Listen, your brother Adrian, he doesn't drink.

Constanza: (*Annoyed.*) No, grandma. Of course not.

Grandmother: I know he doesn't. That's what I said: he doesn't drink. But... there are other things. That's what I wanted to tell you. There are... I don't know, drugs. That boy isn't....?

Constanza: You were shouting for me just to tell me that? God, grandma, how can you think such a thing?!

Grandmother: Well, why does he sleep so much?

Constanza: He doesn't sleep that much.

Grandmother: Yes, he does. I'm telling you, pay attention. Adrian is a good boy, but when they're in jail they learn terrible things. That's what jails are for.

Constanza: Grandma! How can you say that?

Grandmother: Don't get angry. I was just thinking. But keep an eye on him, just in case.

Constanza: He sleeps... out of apathy, depression, disillusionment.

Grandmother: Well, that may be. But those all cause insomnia. So keep an eye on him.

Constanza: You never run out of things to make up! (*She leaves, disgusted.*)

Grandmother: You're right. I never know what to invent. Life doesn't know either, does it?

She shells peas. Pause. Nelly enters.

Nelly: Good morning, ma'am.

Grandmother: (*Observing her.*) Good morning. A very good morning.

Nelly: Would you like some help?

Grandmother: No, thanks. I've nearly finished. Besides, you wouldn't know how.

Nelly: What makes you think I don't know how to shell peas?!

Grandmother: All you modern girls know how to do is open cans...

Nelly: (*Laughs.*) Miss Catita, that's not true. You must think I don't know anything about cooking.

Grandmother: Well, do you?

Nelly: Not much.

Grandmother: (*Skeptical.*) Well, if you want, join me later. I mean, if you want to learn how to cook something.

Nelly: (*Lying.*) Oh, yes, I'd like that.

Grandmother: Aren't your legs cold in that dress?

Nelly: No, it's so hot! In fact, you must be suffocating all buttoned up.

Grandmother: Dark colors deflect the heat.

Nelly: This is very light.

Grandmother: Yes, very. (*Pause.*) Don't your underpants show when you sit down?

Nelly: Yes, but they 're special. Look. (*She lifts her skirt.*)

Grandmother: Oh, how pretty. (*She gathers up her things to leave.*)

Nelly: You're leaving? Can I help you?

Grandmother: I can handle it. You stay here. (*She exits.*)

Nelly smiles, disapprovingly, moving her head a little. She then shrugs her shoulders and sits down.

Nelly:

(Reciting. As she does so, Hector enters)

Maître Corbeau, sur un arbre perché,
Tenait dans son bec un fromage;
Maître Renard, par l'odeur aléché,
Lui tint, à peu près, ce langage.
Eh, bonjour, Monsieur du Corbeau...

Hector: Eh, bonjour, mademoiselle la Renard.

Nelly: Bonsoir, monsieur Hector.

Hector: I stayed up late.

Nelly: Reading?

Hector: Thinking.

Nelly: Oh. About your work?

Hector: My... everything.

Nelly: Oh. (*Making a small gesture.*)

Hector: (*Pause.*) Just think: our body is constantly changing. Tissues are forever transforming. If you blink right now, biochemical changes take place in your eye. Open it and it's a different organism.

Nelly: Really?

Hector: Yes. And what you were seeing before has also changed. Energy is nothing more than change. What we see is a cloud, an illusion of atoms, an eternal explosion. And our eyes, after blinking, are never the same. So...

Nelly: So what?

Hector: Everything we see is like a fantasy. It's not true that the sea is calm, nor that it's calm right now. Everything we look at is like the sea.

Nelly: You stayed up all night thinking about that? (*She gets up.*)

Hector: No. That occurred to me while I was in the shower.

Nelly: Ah. (*Pause.*) Your other brother is coming.

Hector: Says who?

Nelly: Your mother.

Hector sits down.

Hector: Where are they going to put him?

Nelly: He's coming with your sister-in-law and their brats.

Hector: All of them?!

Nelly: No. Just half of them.

Hector: The little ones?

Nelly: The older ones. The question is where are they going to put *me*? Now do you see?

Hector: See what?

Nelly: I shouldn't have come. They don't even like me.

Hector: Constanza likes you.

Nelly: She already knew me. And she probably thinks we're an item.

Hector: She likes you because she doesn't think we're an item.

Jorge enters with fruit and shares it with them.

Jorge: Uncle Agustin is coming.

Hector: So I hear.

Jorge: With Aunt Veva, Chacho and Vevita.

Nelly: Those idiots are going to kick me out of your room.

Hector: They'll be in the living room, with Jorge and me.

Nelly: They're going to move me out. You'll see.

Jorge: I'll tell them to leave you where you are.

Nelly: As if they'll listen to you.

Jorge: *(To Nelly, upon seeing Celia approach.)* Come on, run!

Nelly: Where? Ah!

They take off running. Celia enters.

Celia: Where are they going?

Hector: I don't know.

Celia: We need milk. I'll send Jorge. That girl doesn't let go of him. *(Pause.)* I thought she was your... girlfriend, your... something.

Whenever he's with Celia, Hector speaks without facial expression and without changing his tone.

Hector: *(Dryly.)* My daughter, perhaps?

Celia: How could you think that? She's not young enough. *(Pause.)* She's not your daughter, right?

Hector: No.

Celia: Guess what? Your brother Agustin is coming.

Hector: How nice.

Celia: What a joy to have my four children here with me. All but Jorge, the poor thing. Life is so cruel... How could he go like that? He wasn't old enough.

Hector: And what is the right age to die?

Celia: Normally it's the older ones. Our children should never leave us. One day you'll come home and find me gone. Where's Mom, you'll say. And I'll be rotting away in my grave, getting eaten by worms! *(Tears in her eyes.)* And my children elsewhere, unaware. Mom's gone! *(Dries her eyes. Pause. She speaks quickly, without transition or pause.)* Mrs. Graco was a humble woman. She scrubbed floors, or something like that. Then one day this group of Roman women, the frivolous kind, were talking about who had the best jewelry. Mrs. Graco went and got her two kids, showed them to the women, and said: "These are my jewels." They were humiliated. Well, I have four jewels. And that's a mother's pride. *(Laughs and caresses him.)* I'll put your brother in Jorge's room. He and Chacho and Jorge can sleep there.

Hector: What about Veva?

Celia: Her? She can sleep with Constanza. There's no reason for her to be glued to her husband like a snail. Let's give him a little rest, don't you think?

Celia exits, crossing paths with Constanza, who goes directly to Hector.

Constanza: Hey, do you think Adrian is using drugs?

Hector: Yes.

Constanza: Really? That's what grandma thinks. But what sort of drugs?

Hector: Tranquillizers.

Constanza: He's going to kill himself!

Hector: Kill himself, no, but...

Constanza: Talk to him, o.k.?

Hector: What am I going to say?

Constanza: Tell him to stop taking that shit.

Hector: He's not a kid. And when someone uses drugs, it's for a reason.

Constanza: Apathy, depression, disillusionment...

Hector: Exactly.

Silence. They remain still.

Constanza: *(Leaving.)* Agustin is coming with his brood.

Hector: So I hear. *(Exits.)*

Celia and Grandmother quickly cross the stage.

Celia: I want to know why you always turn the television off on me.

Grandmother: Because it's stupid. I didn't bring you up to watch those things.

Celia: I'm not a child, mother. I can watch what I want!

Grandmother: As long as your mother is alive, you can't. Turn it on, if you must, but put on some other program. *(Exits.)*

Celia: Constanza! Constanza! Your grandmother won't let me watch my TV show. Constanza!
(She is about to exit.)

Grandmother appears in front of her.

Grandmother: Do something useful for a change. You sit there all day, watching idiotic programs. There's plenty to do in this house. Help out. Do something. *(Exits.)*

Celia: Constanza! *(Exits.)*

The light changes. Agustin, Veva, Vevita and Chacho enter with suitcases.

Agustin: The family home, kids. Check it out. This is where your father played, where he grew up.

Vevita: We see it every year, Dad.

Agustin: These old walls, marked by time... So many memories.

Grandmother enters. She looks at them, confused. Agustin opens his arms.

Grandmother: Good morning. What can I do for you?

Chacho: Gran, it's us.

Agustin: Grandma, how are you?

Grandmother: Oh, it's you. I don't have my glasses on. Is that you, Agustin?

Agustin: Of course it is, Grandma.

Grandmother: Ah, and your children. How they've grown.

Veva: But you do have your glasses on.

Grandmother: They're reading glasses. Also, your husband has a moustache now and he looks old.

Agustin: *(As if he were dealing with a child.)* I've had a moustache for years. You simply didn't recognize us. You don't know who we are anymore.

Grandmother: Fine, I didn't recognize you. I know, I know, I'm a stupid old woman. But don't just stand there like idiots. Go on in.

They all hug and kiss one another.

Veva: You never change.

Grandmother: Neither do you.

Chacho: How are you, Gran? *(He kisses her.)*

Celia enters.

Celia: My dear son!

Agustin: Mom! My beautiful mom! Hey, kids, your grandmother's here!

Everyone:

(At the same time.)

Grandma!

Gran!

Kids!

They exchange kisses. Constanza enters.

Constanza: You're here!

Everyone:

Your brother's finally here.

Aunt Consta!

Sis!

Consta, you look great!

Hey, Veva, kids!

Etc. More exclamations. More kisses and hugs. Hector enters.

All the new arrivals: Hector!!!!

Everyone exchanges kisses, exclamations, hugs, effusive expressions of affection. Nelly and Jorge enter and witness the scene.

Nelly: *(Parodying the others.)* Jorge, Jorgito, you're here!

Jorge: Nelly, my little Nel! *(They kiss and hug one another.)*

Vevita: Jorge, Jorge's here!

Everyone: Jorge, Jorge!

They all talk at the same time, repeating the same incoherent gushing of affection. The tiring car ride, the years that have passed, each other's appearance, "you look great," "you've put on some weight," etc., gesturing wildly as they speak or in response to what is said... Nelly approaches and greets them. They respond in kind. Everyone exits, all speaking at the same time.

After they have left, Patricia comes in carrying blankets and pillows. She belts out what she knows of a bolero.

Patricia: *(Singing to herself.)*

Vuelan las gaviotas en parvadas,
en la vieja playa llora el mar,
brillan los cocuyos cual cascadas,
todo en nuestro nido sigue igual...

[The seagulls fly in flocks,
the sea sobs down at the old beach,
the fireflies glow like waterfalls,
all remains the same in our nest...]

Nelly enters.

Patricia: Are you going to the beach, too?

Nelly: I hope so.

Patricia: I'm afraid of the water. Can you believe that? I was born here. But I'm at least going to get wet.

Nelly: Well, o.k.

Patricia: I'm also afraid nothing's ever going to change and I'll never get what I want.

Nelly: What is it you want?

Patricia: I wish I knew.

(She sings.)

Con toda esa belleza y tú no estás,
mi amor, regresa pronto, sin tardar,
que yo me estoy muriendo de ansiedad...

[All that beauty and you aren't here,
Come back soon, my love, without delay,
for I'm dying of anxiety.]

She exits. Nelly leans on the wall in the background. Constanza enters and sits down, tense, angry. She starts crying. Nelly approaches her slowly.

Nelly: What's wrong, Constanza?

Constanza: You were there? I'm so nervous. So, so nervous. *(She dries her eyes, half smiles and shrugs her shoulders.)* Nerves.

Nelly hugs her. Constanza bursts out crying.

Constanza: I want to leave. I can't take it anymore. They've left me here with both of them. I deal with the house. I pay for everything. No one helps. I take care of both of them. *(Blows her nose.)* No one helps. *(Pause. She blows her nose again and dries her eyes.)* Don't say anything to Hector.

Nelly: No, of course not.

Constanza: (*Heatedly.*) He's not even married. He could live with them! Oh, I'm so ashamed. Forgive me. (*She exits quickly.*)

Nelly moves backstage. Jorge enter.

Jorge: They took my room away from you. Hector and I will be in the living room, with Chacho. You have to stay with Vevita and Constanza.

Nelly: With Vevita, over my dead body. No way. The same applies to that creep, Chacho.

Jorge: Well... You probably don't want to stay with my grandmother.

Nelly: It would be better if I just left. I only see you at night and now not even that...

Jorge: They call on me for everything. No one helps Constanza.

Nelly: I know. Why did you bring me here? This is your thing. Actually you didn't bring me here. It was Hector.

Jorge: Don't get mad, Nel.

Nelly: I should be studying, not hanging around here like a lovesick idiot, getting in the way.

Jorge: It was my idea. I asked Hector to invite you. I wanted us to be together.

Nelly: So very together. Now they want me to cook. Aren't we going to the lagoon?

Jorge: Not now. My Uncle Agustin is here.

Nelly: So what?

Jorge: I never see them. I can't leave.

Nelly: You don't see me either.

Jorge: Don't be like that...

Nelly: It's true. Here it's because of your family. There it's because of your work and your classes.

Jorge: You have classes, too.

Nelly: That only makes it worse. And if I get the grant... You aren't going with me.

Jorge: I told you I'll try...

Nelly: You'll try... You were also going live with me...

Jorge: Why do I always piss off my girlfriends? They're not going to stick around. Come over here... *(They sit on the floor, hand in hand.)* I have to graduate, get settled. When you return, I'll have my degree.

Nelly: Your grandmothers told me they want you to marry a girl with buck teeth.

Jorge: Don't listen to that. I always play along. Then they forget all about it. You know what? You can stay in the kitchen. I'll put a little cot in there, o.k.?

Nelly: So your grandmother can catch us. She walks around the house when she can't sleep.

Jorge: Yeah, you're right.

Nelly: What if I stay in the living room with you guys?

Jorge: No, you know them!

They look in each direction and then kiss.

Nelly: If I go to Paris and you stay here, they're going to make you marry Buck Tooth. And just to stay on their good side you'll do it.

Jorge: I'm not going to do anything, but you, over there, all by your little self..

Nelly: What?

Jorge: All those French guys, Nel... All blonde...

Nelly: And you here with all these loose women... All of them beautiful...

Jorge: Those who leave don't remember anything.

Nelly: And those who stay?

Jorge: We remember longer.

They kiss.

Jorge: Stay with Constanza. I'll make sure they put Vevita someplace else.

Nelly: Don't kiss me. Watch out.

Celia enters, clinging on to Agustin. They don't see Nelly and Jorge.

Celia: I'm so happy to see my four jewels all together.

Constanza, Hector, and Adrian enter.

Agustin: But Jorge isn't here, Mom. Our unforgettable Jorge.

Adrian: It's so sunny. Let's go to the living room.

Hector: *(To Jorge and Nelly.)* And you two?

Jorge signals him to keep quiet. He and Nelly creep out on hands and knees.

Agustin: This is where we played. So many memories!

Celia: So very many, my dear, that they wouldn't fit in a book.

Hector: Depends on the size of the book.

Celia: In a huge one, maybe.

Constanza: Let's go in, o.k.?

They start to exit. Constanza stops Hector, who stops Adrian.

Constanza and Hector: *(Together.)*

Hey, wait...

I want to talk to you...

They look at one another and smile.

Celia: *(Offstage.)* Hey, kids! Come here!

Hector: We're on our way. *(Softly.)* Shit.

Grandmother passes through.

Grandmother: That girl, Nelly, she sleeps with Jorge, doesn't she?

Hector: Grandma, what do you mean?

Abuela: Just keep your eyes open so at least they won't do it in this house. *(Exits.)*

Constanza: You think nothing but nonsense! Nothing but lies!

Hector: Jesus, Grandma, don't be like that!

Hector, Constanza and Adrian look at one another. Celia sticks her head in.

Celia: We opened the sherry. Come and have a drink. *(Exits.)*

Constanza: I wanted to talk with the three of you. It'll have to be later. In the meantime, talk to each other. *(Exits.)*

The two look at one another. Pause.

Hector: Listen: don't fuck things up, Adrian.

Adrian: With what?

Hector: Don't take that shit anymore.

Adrian: What shit?

Hector: Those barbituates, or whatever they are.

Adrian goes over and sits down.

Adrian: If I don't take them, I don't sleep.

Hector: But they're addictive. And they're going to destroy your heart. Is that what you want? *(Pause.)*

Adrian: I don't want to be awake.

Pause. They look at each other. Hector goes over to him.

Hector: Well, you have to... You have to... *(He puts a hand on Adrian's neck.)*

Adrian: I know. *(Pause.)* We'll see.

Pause.

Hector: But don't take so many.

Adrian: I'll take less.

Hector: That's it. Take less.

They look at one another.

Celia: (*Shouting jokingly from offstage.*) If you don't get in here, we're going to finish off the sherry!

Hector: Shit.

Adrian: Let's go.

They exit.

Veva: (*Enters.*) No way. I want to be with my husband. Why do you guys have to separate us? Was that your mother's idea?

Constanza: (*Enters.*) I thought we three women could room together.

Veva: And that other one, the one chasing after my nephew Jorge?

Constanza: O.k., she can go with you guys and I'll stay with my mother.

Veva: I'm going to be with my husband, not with that woman. Let me be with him. I never sleep without him. Never. I mean, never.

Constanza: We'll see how we can accommodate everyone.

Veva: But he and I together.

Constanza: Yes, together.

Veva: It really wasn't your mother's idea?

Constanza: No, I already told you.

Veva: That's odd.

They exit. Vevita and Chacho enter.

Vevita: If they make me sleep with Grandma, I'm going to a hotel. I don't give a shit if they get mad.

Chacho: You'll put up with it just like the rest of us. We'll sleep wherever we can.

Vevita: Adolfo promised to come visit me. Some visit! This house is like a concentration camp.

Chacho: That's why you're going to a hotel. So he can pay you a nice visit in your comfy little bed.

Vevita: I'm not going there for that, and if I were it would be my business, not yours or anyone else's. I'm old enough.

Chacho: Well, what do I care if they knock you up? Go to hell.

Vevita: Same to you, you fucking jerk.

Grandmother passes through.

Grandmother: Nice mouth, dear. Lovely. (*Exits.*)

Vevita: (*Softly.*) Look what you did, asshole. Grandma heard me and it's all your fault!

She hits him furiously. He laughs loudly and defends himself as if he were boxing. They exit the stage running. Adrian, Hector and Agustin enter, each with a beer, walking slowly and aimlessly, in silence.

Agustin: They need to whitewash this wall. Look at it.

Hector: You can pay for the paint.

Silence. Adrian sits down.

Adrian: You were right, Hector. Elisa's family. The fact that they are rich. Or were rich. It's not a problem for her. She's wonderful, a perfect companion. She helps me. At one point she even started selling things she'd smuggled across the border. She did her part. I could never ask her to give up her people. I could never make her leave all that behind. They weren't going to see her poorly dressed. She wasn't going to have less with me. I wasn't going to make her do without her usual comforts. I never asked her family for anything, not even a glass of water. Nothing. That's why it was so difficult. She even knows how to sew. She made clothes. She always had the kids dressed like princes and princesses, like little dolls. You've seen my kids. It was hard with what I made. Elisa worked miracles.

Agustin: Yeah. She also worked up huge bills at the store.

Adrian: I didn't have credit. She did, because of her family. We both bought stuff. I wasn't walk around looking like a beggar. I needed to look good. It wasn't just her. It was both of us. And then those other expenses... You can't let others pay the bill. You can't play dumb when it shows up on the table.

Agustin: You always paid before anyone else could.

Adrian: Well, it's a little embarrassing when people think you're starving. They think you're going to skip out on paying. So, you pay, while they play dumb. They have no problem owing money. They owed Elisa so much for the stuff she smuggled. They would say "I'll pay you later, sweetie." And in the end she never got paid.

Hector: But Adrian, you were living like a rich man, in every respect. Those schools your children were going to... I kept telling you, nothing but expensive. Run by priests! Nothing but robbery.

Adrian: Yeah, I know. But it takes time to figure that out. I was getting commissions. Thanks to those acquaintances, I sold more. I sold more than anyone.

Agustin: You also spent more than anyone.

Adrian: Yeah, I know. You go over a little bit, and then a little bit more... Then all of a sudden they're going to repossess. Bills all over the place. I couldn't let them take it all away. I mean, a repossession, how could I face Elisa's family? That's why I did it.

Agustin: Isn't embezzlement worse than repossession?

Adrian: I got both. And now Elisa is with her parents and I'm here. And now I've got a record. So where can I work? No, I'm going to go north and have Elisa join me with the kids. That's what I've decided.

Agustin: You're going to take Elisa?

Adrian: She's my wife!

Agustin: You're going to ruin yourself all over again. She doesn't know how to do anything but spend, look nice, and spend.

Adrian: Your wife spends more and she doesn't look nice.

Agustin: We pay. We don't owe. We don't... *(He stops.)*

Hector: We know, Agustin. You have lots of money.

Agustin: Not that much, but... It's just a matter of priorities. Veva isn't like... *(He stops.)*

Adrian: It wasn't Elisa, damn it! It was me! I am to blame, not her!

Hector: Don't shout. Agustin, you could give Adrian a recommendation.

Agustin: Can I? Well, I can, more or less, ... as a brother... But you have to promise me...

Adrian: No, Agustin. I don't have to promise anyone anything. That's what jail was for. Not even Constanza, who bailed me out on her own. She knows I'll pay her back. *(Pause.)* Or that I won't. *(Pause.)* I know what I've done, so you don't have to tell me. And thanks, but I'm better off without a recommendation. *(About to leave.)*

Hector: Hold on. (*Stops him.*)

The three of them remain there, quiet and still, as if frozen. Hector has a hand on Adrian's arm.

Agustin: Look, I only meant... You misunderstood. I only...

Hector: That's enough. Be quiet.

Silence and stillness.

Adrian: It's so hard to start over.

They exit in the same slow, purposeless way in which they entered. Grandmother enters and sits down.

Grandmother: Celia, come here. I said, come here.

Celia: Yes, mother.

Grandmother: If you stay with me, where will Constanza sleep?

Celia: In the living room, with Vevita and Hector's little friend.

Grandmother: So that anyone who shows up can see them in their undies.

Celia: Well, where should I put them?

Grandmother: In Adrian's room.

Celia: I didn't want to bother Adrian. You see how he is.

Grandmother: Yes, I see, and that's why you need to bother him. Make him do things. Wake him up. That's what you need to do.

Celia: So where do I put Adrian?

Grandmother: In the living room, with Jorge and Hector.

Celia: And Agustin in my room, with Veva? She won't let go of him.

Grandmother: Well, yes. Put them in there.

Jorge and Nelly enter.

Grandmother: This young lady, put her with you and Vevita in Jorge's room.

Jorge: With me, Gran?

Grandmother: No, you're going to the living room!

Jorge: Ah.

Celia: The three of us won't fit in there!

Grandmother: Yes, you will. You'll see.

Celia: I'll put the girls in there and stay with you.

Grandmother: Those two? Alone? No way.

Celia: Why not?

Grandmother: Come with me and I'll explain.

(She pulls Celia by the hand and they exit.)

Patricia enters, carrying a cot and sheets. Benita enters from the opposite side.

Patricia: Now they don't want them here but in the living room.

Benita: Not Jorgito's room?

Patricia: We need one cot in there.

Jorge: Yeah, one in my room. And one in the living room.

Benita: Well, why don't they just say so?

Patricia: The wind is going to kick up, it's going to get cold and there aren't enough blankets.

Benita: I'm not going to cart things around like an idiot from one side of the house to the other.

Jorge: Here, I'll help you.

Nelly: And then you can go with me to get my ticket to Mexico City. I'm leaving.

Jorge: Hey, Nel. Wait.

Benita, Nelly and Jorge exit. Chacho enters.

Patricia: You grab me again and I'm going to tell your grandmother.

Chacho: Like it bothers you.

Patricia: Grab this. You wanted to grab something? Well, make yourself useful.

She exits, leaving him with the cot and blankets.

Chacho: And where am I supposed to take this? Wait. *(To himself.)* Fuckin' tightass bitch.

He picks up the things and exits.

The light changes.

Constanza and Hector enter slowly. They take a few steps and stop. They take a few more steps. Agustin and Adrian enter the same way, as if the four of them were crossing the house from one end to the other.

Constanza: If I had gotten married... I was going to get married. You guys remember, don't you? I was going to get married. I was... Vevita's age. But he was... he was one of those guys who want you to stay at home. "My wife doesn't work, I support her." I wanted to be independent. *(Laughs.)* Independent. That's why I never got married. *(Stops in front of the three men.)* I'm going to be an old woman. I've grown old taking care of mom and grandma. You've always done what you please, Hector. You're free. You teach your classes and write your books. But you could teach here, couldn't you? You'd probably make more than in Mexico City.

Hector: That's what you think.

Constanza: Hector, you should come and live here. If your friend, that guy, what was his name?

Hector: He hasn't died. His name is Ruben.

Constanza: Right. Ruben. He doesn't live with you anymore. I mean, you're alone. And that girl, Nelly, your student, is leaving soon for Europe...

Hector: That's still not for sure.

Constanza: She just has to take an exam. She's got the grant and she's going. You'll be all alone. Why don't you come and live here?

Hector: My work is in Mexico City. What would I do here?

Constanza: The same thing you do there! And what about you, Adrian? You talk about going north, but why not start over here? Everyone loves you. They know it was a mistake. They would give you a second chance. Running away isn't the answer. You would only feel worse. Besides, you could live here for free. Elisa and the kids could come later. Grandma adores you. This is your home. Mom and Grandma and I only fight. I'm like them, I'm a woman. I'm tense. I'm nervous. But you, they love you so much. You're the favorite, you're...

Adrian: Elisa would never live here.

Constanza: But you're here...

Adrian: For now. I don't contribute anything, nor can I.

Constanza: I can pay to keep the place up. (*He shakes his head no. He turns his back on her, leaning against the wall, his forehead against the wall, his hand raised.*) Agustin, send your two oldest children. Or ask for a transfer. They'd give it to you.

Agustin: The position here is nowhere near what I have now. And the kids go to school, as you've noticed.

Constanza: And surely you've noticed that we have schools here. Better than the ones there.

Agustin: And what would it cost to have two kids here? Grandma doesn't put up with them and clearly doesn't love them.

Constanza: It would cost you very little, because I pay for everything here, everything, and I earn a tenth of what you do.

Agustin: I send money every month.

Constanza: A token amount.

Agustin: I have five kids. I have responsibilities. No one pays for my expenses. I have to earn my money.

Constanza: And I have nothing *but* responsibilities! No social life at all. And I pay for everything, even the taxes.

Agustin: The house will be yours. It's already in your name.

Constanza: So I can wander around like a ghost, without a single living thing to give meaning to my life. No, I'm leaving. I'm telling you right now: I'm leaving. You better start thinking about what who's going to take care of this place, because it's not going to be me.

Adrian: Don't be like that.

Constanza: How would you like me to be? The three of you took off, made your lives and left me stuck here.

Hector: You act as if we'd done this to you on purpose.

Constanza: It was on purpose. Every little step we take is on purpose. It was on purpose. You left me here. (*She sits down in the chair.*)

Hector: It must be what you wanted. You chose to stay.

Constanza cries, whining and moaning, with her face in her hands. She looks at the three of them.

Constanza: All you think about is yourselves. *(She exits rapidly.)*

Silence.

Hector: Something needs to change.

Adrian: Poor thing. She's right.

Agustin: It's menopause. *(Exits.)*

They exit as well, slowly, after looking troublingly at each other's eyes. Veva and Vevita enter.

Vevita: Everyone together... I don't even feel like going.

Veva: It's the same as if went alone.

Vevita: It's not the same. Are they bringing Grandma?

Veva: Of course.

Vevita: Any nasty remarks, I'm going to let her have it.

Veva: She deserves it. I won't be the one to stop you.

Vevita: But Dad will.

Veva: Leave him to me.

Vevita: I'm going to wear my new bikini. And they'd better not say anything. They'll see. I'm so sick of them. I've had it.

Veva: Put it on, dear. Put on your bikini. If I had your body, I'd put one on, too.

They exit. Patricia passes through quickly, shouting.

Patricia: Well, I don't know who's staying where but I'm not moving these cots anymore. I'm tired. Let them figure it out.

Exit.

Elisa enters. A beautiful woman. She is wearing a very light, pale gray silk sweater and a strand of pearls. She looks around, in doubt as to what to do. She stops next to the chair, as if she were posing, like a fashion model. She remains still.

Adrian enters and stands there looking at her. They remain still, in silence.

Elisa: Darling.

Silence.

Adrian: Come in. What are you doing out here?

Elisa: Let me have a look at you. You're so thin and pale. Oh, Adrian.

She starts to cry.

Adrian: There now. Don't cry.

Elisa: Why didn't you go see me?

Adrian: Mmhh. *(He takes two steps back.)*

Elisa: I thought you'd call. Or come see me. Of course I knew you were here. News travels. I was just hoping you would call. *(Silence.)* I also thought, maybe he wants to be alone. I didn't know what to think. I felt so weird about your family. How could I be with you here, in this house?

He looks at her. She carefully wipes her eyes. She looks at him and tries to smile. Silence.

Adrian: You could have asked me about the children. At least have let me know.

Elisa: How was I supposed to tell you? You can imagine. Father was afraid the other kids at school would say things to them. Everyone was talking about it. It was in the newspapers. I... thought you would understand. They're in a better school now. They're learning English. It was better this way, without them knowing. Do you think I did the wrong thing?

Adrian: I think you could have told me.

Elisa: But how? You don't get along with my father. He wanted to visit you. I was the one who said, "Father, it's better not to go to that horrible place..."

Adrian: And how do you know it's horrible?

Elisa: ... thinking it could upset you, that you'd feel bad if Father went to see you. That's what I thought. And I... *(She stops speaking.)*

Adrian: *(After a moment of silence.)* And you? Yes, and you?

Elisa: It was all so ugly. The newspapers, everything. They had that same picture of me from the gossip pages. And the way that people talk about conjugal visits. How could I let that happen? I didn't think you would ask for that, but people would talk about it anyway. That I was going to see you like a whore. In that horrible place.

Adrian: Again, how do you know it's horrible?

Elisa: They say it's... they say... *(Looks him in the face.)* You wouldn't have wanted to see me, would you?

Adrian looks around him and speaks to her quickly:

Adrian: I've told them you visited me. On special days. Because they would all go to see me and would ask me about you. And I've told them we see each other once a week, since I got out. I leave for the whole day, and I say we saw each other. So, be careful.

Elisa: Why do you tell them that?

Adrian is about to say something but decides not to.

Elisa: I mean, I know they think I should have... but you don't. Or do you? It's unbearable to think of you there. And to see you with bars between us, I just couldn't. Adrian, tell me what you're thinking.

He moves away from her.

Adrian: I don't know what I think. Yes I do. I mean, I have plans. To go to the States, be closer to the kids, be able to see them. Bring them with us. We could go together, start over again, like the people we really are. Without knowing anyone. We could... Why are you here?

Elisa: It's only natural, isn't it?

Adrian: What do you want? A divorce?

She starts to cry.

Elisa: Why do you talk to me like that? I wanted to work things out. To be together, to talk. Give me a handkerchief; this one is too small. Let's go outside. I don't want your family to see me like this.

She takes the handkerchief and sobs.

Celia enters.

Celia: Elisa, what a surprise. Finally. How are you? Are you crying?

Elisa: No, no, I was just...

Adrian: Yes, she's crying, can't you see?

Celia: We weren't expecting to see you, Elisa. Come on into the living room. Or if you want some privacy, you can go to Adrian's room.

Adrian: They're filling it with cots. The maids are there.

Celia: I'll tell them to leave you two alone.

Elisa: Ma'am, I don't... *(Stops talking.)*

Celia exits.

Adrian: Tell her. Tell her you haven't come to stay.

Elisa: Well, no. Here? How?

Adrian: Exactly. How?

Elisa: It wouldn't be... prudent, it wouldn't be...

Adrian: You are coming to bed with me. Now.

Elisa: Adrian, let me go. No. Your family...

Adrian: Shut up. Let's go.

He presses her against his body, feeling her all over, grabbing her buttocks, her breasts.

Elisa: How can you think that... here...!

He kisses her brutally on the mouth, grabs her, squeezes her. He exits, taking her with him.

Nelly enters, carrying a small tape recorder, on which she listens to the recitation of a French poem. ("10 juin 1936" by Robert Desnos, Domaine Public, NRF). She moves her lips as she listens:

Recorded voice:

Chaque jour le ciel est si clair
Que les nuages dans l'air
Sont comme l'écume sur la mer.

Morts ! Épaves sombrées dans la terre,

Nous ignorons vos misères
Chantées par les solitaires.

Nous nageons, nous vivons,
Dans l'air pur de chaque saison.
La vie est belle et l'air est bon.

The music changes to "Menilmontant" by Trénet. Nelly sings along, quietly, exaggerating with her lips as she pronounces the words. Little by little she adopts a slightly parodied music-hall pose.

Nelly:

Ménilmontant
Mais oui, madame
C'est là que j'ai
Laisse mon cœur
C'est là que bien
Retrouvé mon âme
Toute ma flamme
Tout mon bonheur.

Quand je revois
Ma petite église
Où le mariage
Allait gaiment.
Quand je revois
Ma vieille maison grise
Même la brise
Parle d'antan

(She raises her voice as her gestures become more dramatic.)

Elle me raconte
Comme autrefois
De jolis contes

Beaux jours passés
Je vous revois
Un rendez-vous
Une musique
Des yeux rêveurs
Tout un roman
Tout un roman d'amour poétique et pathétique
Ménilmontant...

(She remains posed, like a movie star, smiling. Sudden darkness. A bright camera flash briefly illuminates her. Darkness. The next scene opens immediately, without any pause.)

THE BEACH

A beach chair located toward the back of the stage. Near the center, a pile of sand. Nothing else. The lighting changes constantly due to the passing clouds.

Elisa is seated gracefully in the chair. Same clothing. Adrian stands near the center of the stage with his back to her. Agustin, Hector, Chacho, Jorge, Adolfo and a young man – Luis – look at the sea. They all face forward in bathing suits, forming an irregular line. Patricia, also in a bathing suit, lies in the sun on a towel.

Luis: There's going to be a north wind. You can tell by the waves and the way the sky looks. The weather's going to change today.

Agustin: I remember those northern winds, and us playing hooky from school... Do you remember, Hector? We used to take Adrian to kindergarten...

Adrian: You bastards would take my money and spend it on cigarettes.

Laughter.

Hector: You see a wave, and then another, and another. Like a web of reflections on the surface. Like a tapestry of light. If you look long enough, you become colorless just like it. That only happens with the sea.

Adrian: Or with a fire. Or the branches of a tree on a windy day.

Hector: But the sea is more powerful.

Adolfo: I saw the sea for the first time not long ago. I grew up in Mexico City.

Agustin: And how did it strike you?

Adolfo: It was incredible. So this is the sea, I thought. Of course, you get used to it.

Luis: You can't go in too far, because of the currents. And the drop-offs. You're walking out and all of a sudden you can't touch the bottom. Then the current pulls you down.

Chacho: It looks awesome. So much movement. You can almost you'll see half-naked women out there.

Adrian: They say you suffer when you drown. From fighting the current, from the anguish of trying to live. So maybe it's better to sink. Just fill your lungs with water and sink to the bottom. I bet you don't suffer at all.

Agustin: What gets me about the sea is the size. It's the very picture of infinity.

Hector: What you were saying about the wind, Adrian...

Adrian: What was I saying about the wind?

Hector: And about fire. To throw yourself, lose sight of yourself. What we were talking about before.

Adrian: What about it?

Hector: They're all natural elements. To see the trees and clouds moving is to see the air itself. Or when you see a fire. They're all... natural forces, beyond our control, the world as it really is, without us. That's why you get lost in it.

Adrian: Well, the Earth is an element. But nothing happens when you stand there and look at it. . If you do look at it, nothing happens. It doesn't hypnotize you.

Hector: It's true, the Earth is just there. It doesn't say anything at all.

Adolfo: The sea isn't actually all that good for swimming. It's too big. Pools are better. You know where the edge is. A pool has limits...

Chacho: But the sea ocean is so exciting. You've got oysters, clams, turtles.

Jorge: It makes you want to see the other side. To go there in a boat, or fly. Sometimes I watch them load the boats. When they come in at night, full of lights, with the tugboat pulling the bigger ship. And the siren when the ship comes in... The lighthouse turning around...

Adolfo: I'm going to come back next time I have a vacation. Although now I want to see Acapulco.

Hector puts his hand on Luis's shoulder.

Luis: My friends must be wondering where I am. I'm going to go see what they're up to.

Hector: Of course. You should go find them.

Luis: Aren't you coming?

Hector: Sure. Let's go.

They exit.

Chacho: Uncle Hector just hooked up.

Agustin: Now there's a stupid joke. Adolfo is going to think... It's just not a good joke.

Chacho: Sorry, Dad.

Elisa: I was remembering Mazatlán. The ocean's so different. Here it's green, there it's blue. Do you remember? We could see the whole bay from the balcony. We sat out and watched it get dark. It feels like so long ago...

Adrian: That was a long time ago.

Agustin: When did you two go to Mazatlán?

Adrian: For our honeymoon.

Agustin: It's like swapping one ocean for another.

Adrian: That's right.

Elisa: I want some coconut milk.

Adrian: *(Flatly.)* Do you have any money? I don't.

Elisa: Yeah. Come with me.

As they are leaving, they cross paths with Grandmother.

Adrian: Granny, you're going to swim. That's great. *(He kisses her.)*

Adrian and Elisa exit.

Grandmother is wearing an old-fashioned bathing suit made of cotton. White, loose, with straps and lace trim. Barefoot, she has let down her hair, which is still abundant and very white.

Agustin: Granny! Are you going to get in the water?

Grandmother: Of course I am.

Agustin: I hope you'll be okay.

Grandmother: When has it ever hurt anyone?

Agustin: Well... after eating. You get cramps.

Grandmother: I haven't eaten anything.

Chacho: Gran, you have so much hair. It's so pretty.

Grandmother: I'm losing it. You should have seen it twenty years ago.

Chacho: I couldn't. I hadn't been born yet.

Vevita enters wearing her bikini.

Vevita: Look at Granny! She's in a bathing suit!

Adolfo: Aren't you going to wear one? Or are you going to tell me that those bits of confetti are a bathing suit?

Vevita: Adolfo, don't be a drag.

Adolfo: I was kidding. What do I care? Take it off.

Vevita: Dad, listen to him.

Agustin coughs.

Adolfo: I'm just kidding, sir. Don't worry.

Chacho: Don't mind her, future brother-in-law. She often walks around in less than that.

Agustin: Vevita, I think that's a bit much.

Vevita: A bit much of what? What, do you want me to dress like Grandma?

Adolfo: I want you to dress, period.

Vevita: Well, there's nothing wrong with this.

Chacho: Nothing. That's exactly the point.

Adolfo: I don't mean to stick my nose in other people's business, sir, but so many guys'll be checking her out that my jaw is going to hurt from trying to look tough.

Chacho: Don't be so selfish. Let other guys enjoy her, too.

Vevita: *(Shouting furiously.)* I'm going to go get dressed!

Grandmother: What for, dear? You look adorable.

Vevita starts to respond and leaves.

Adolfo: I'm going with her. I don't want some guy hassling her.

Exits.

Agustin: Where is your mother? How can she let her go out like that? Unbelievable! And that asshole boyfriend? What is he thinking? That he's already her husband, or what?

Chacho: With any luck he is.

Agustin: Show some respect for your sister.

Chacho: I'm just saying.

Agustin: Where is your mother?

Chacho: With yours. I mean, I saw them together, over there.

Agustin exits. Chacho laughs really hard. He then gives Jorge a kick, boxes with him, and the two exit while still boxing.

Grandmother sits down in the beach chair.

Grandmother: Who are you, dear? Hector's student?

Patricia: Ay, Miss Catita, I'm Patty, your maid.

Grandmother: I didn't recognize you. Probably because you don't have any clothes on.

Patricia: That's okay. *(She holds up her book, as she's been doing for a while, runs her eyes across it, and puts it down again. Pause.)* I'm in high school. I go in the afternoons. I already know some English. This coming year, I'm going to study cosmetics. It doesn't take all that long and it pays well.

Grandmother: What's that about cosmetics?

Patricia: Well, styling and... coloring hair, giving perms... nails... things they do in the beauty salon.

Grandmother: That'll earn some money. All the most hideous women pay for those silly procedures, just to get even uglier.

Patricia: But with that money, I'm going to study to be a secretary, or a bank teller.

Grandmother: Better a bank teller. Secretaries aren't respected. And aren't you going to get married?

Patricia: If I find a man who can keep me comfortable. If not, what's the point, don't you think?

Grandmother: If you only knew how my husband proposed to me... So you're Patricia, then. Your bathing suit's not all that bad. I've seen worse. Don't think I'm an idiot. I remember

everything. But I don't see well. I don't hear well. And I don't walk all that well. If you live forever, you have to pay the price to stick around.

Patricia: I wouldn't want to live that long. Not as long as you.

Grandmother: It was strange with my husband. I didn't even realize he was proposing. There was this big guanabano tree. You've seen that kind of fruit; so big and deformed. It's barely ripe before it falls. And then it lies there, with its flesh exposed to the air, with all those black seeds. Well, there were so many of them, and they were so sweet. And I gave one to my husband. I mean, to this man who was just a neighbor at the time, just a friend of the family. And do you know what he did? He thanked me with a poem. I read it and simply thought, "What a lovely little poem." It wasn't until my sister saw it and told me he was proposing. The little poem was just that: a declaration of love.

Patricia: Do you want to get in the water? I'll come with you. Give me your hand.

Grandmother: (*Giving Patricia her hand.*) The poem went like this...

The two exit. Vevita – with a short cover-up over her bikini –, Adolfo, Chacho, Jorge, and Nelly enter, playing ball.

Shouts, laughter, voices ad libitum. The ball goes off to one side and they all run after it.

They exit.

Adrian and Elisa enter and slowly cross the stage, hand in hand, somber.

Adrian: I know you're ashamed and that it's hard for you to be with me. That's why I'm thinking that someplace else...

Elisa: You know what my father is like... Your own pride keeps you from letting them help you... well, that would be the way for you to help yourself.

Adrian: (*Laughs sarcastically.*) Help myself.

Elisa: (*Stopping.*) Tell me the truth. Do you really think I wouldn't come and join you?

Adrian: I don't know anything. Neither do you.

She looks at the ground, then at the sea, and sighs.

Elisa: It was so nice to come here with our friends, with the kids, to watch them play, watch them make sand castles...

They exit.

Veva and Celia enter. The latter has had her hair done at the beauty salon. She carries her shoes and stockings in her hand.

Celia: Elisa is so classy. She dresses so well. You can tell she watches her figure.

Veva: I'm not going to kill myself to be thin. Agustin doesn't like bones, anyway. He likes to get his hands full. The bigger I get, the more there is to grab.

Celia: He's changed over the years. You've changed, too; you didn't used to be so crude.

Veva: I don't beat around the bush. I like being me. We're happy, we have everything. We just bought another dining room set. It's gorgeous.

Celia: Lucky you.

Veva: I like having nice things, and for my kids to have nice things. Agustin provides for all of us. Everything's mine. My husband, my children, my house. All my furniture, my kitchen, everything.

*They exit. Veva is wearing a beach cover-up. Barefoot.
Nelly enters, breathless, and stops.
Jorge enters.*

Jorge: What's wrong?

Nelly: I got tired.

They hug tightly. Silence.

Nelly: We fight every day, we get bored when we're together, we don't like the same movies, you like making me mad... And I don't even know how much you love me.

Jorge: I don't either.

Nelly: When are you going to know?

Jorge: After you leave.

Nelly: When Hector told you about my scholarship, you turned pale.

Jorge: Yeah, I did.

Nelly: But once I leave, it won't matter, will it?

They draw apart. Jorge looks at her, puts his hands on her shoulders. They speak in a factual, nonsentimental way.

Jorge: It's going to hurt.

Nelly: Really?

Jorge: Can't you see it's already hurting?

Nelly: Why then...?

Jorge: Why what?

Nelly: Why do you act as though everything but our relationship were important? You could live with me and Hector. You could try to come to Paris. We could stay together.

Jorge: We have to think about the future. About choosing a direction, and making plans. We have to consider that someday we'll be different.

Nelly: You act just like your family. And you aren't.

Jorge: It's true. I'm not like them.

Nelly: And you think I'm going to get in your way.... Or you're saying what we have isn't serious?

Jorge: We fight every day, we get bored when we're together, we don't like the same movies. And I don't know how much you love me, either.

Nelly: I do know. I love you a lot.

Jorge: And it hurts when I think about you going away. you hurt me. You can't just throw everything aside. But you can't just live in the moment, either.

Nelly: Why not?

Jorge: All those years ahead of us.

Nelly: What about today? What about here?

He hugs her tightly.

Jorge: Today. Here.

They kiss. Without any transition they run off stage. Adrian, Elisa, Veva, and Agustin enter.

Veva: *(Annoyed.)* Stop telling them that.

Agustin: I like people to know what you're like. Or do you two think it's wrong for me to talk about it?

Elisa: No...

Veva: Fortunately, I haven't had any further reason to be that way.

Agustin: But how long did we live like that? You know what a year of unemployment does. She has a real gift for selling things. She sold all the household stuff, replaced it with new, and then she sold the new stuff, too. Whenever she saw me depressed, she would whip out some cash as if she had a magic wand, and then she'd take us all to dinner and a movie. Then I would find out she'd sold two or three of her own dresses.

Veva: They didn't fit anymore.

Agustin: And why is that? She cooked, of course, but always ate in the kitchen, where we couldn't see. Eggs for the kids, steak for me. And she'd eat the beans, potatoes and tortillas. That's why she gained weight. It's easy to ruin your figure when you're poor.

Elisa: I've seen a lot of thin poor people.

Agustin: There was one thing she didn't sell: her silverware. 54 pieces of silver, a real work of art. She gave it to a friend in government, for Christmas. That's how I got my job in Customs. That's why our kids have a future. Thanks to my wife's sacrifices, and her silverware.

Elisa has been looking at her nails and playing with her necklace.

Elisa: There's just one part I don't believe, Agustin.

Agustin: What?

Elisa: That it took you so long to find out what your wife was eating.

Agustin: Why do you say that?

Elisa: Because no one makes a secret of sacrifice. Everyone else just plays dumb. They accept it. And then later they find a way to pay it back, with coldness, unfaithfulness...

Agustin: You should know.

Elisa: Of course I know, because that's how it is. *(Pause.)* Look how well Grandma swims. She's so cute.

Elisa, Adrian, Agustin slowly exit... Veva takes a few steps back.

She remains there, with her fist pressed against her mouth.

Agustin returns.

Agustin: What's wrong, dear? What is it?

Veva: Let me go. Nothing. Don't hug me. It's really hot.

They exit.

Constanza enters. She kneels by the towel on the sand, all alone, and starts to speak.

Constanza: He may not look all that educated, but that's only because of his work. He's a mechanic and wears greasy overalls. *(She giggles to herself.)* But he's different when we go out, when we go to the movies, or to the beach. His wife walked out on him and left him with a baby. I'm not ashamed to be seen with him. That sort of thing doesn't bother me. He's getting a divorce, though we don't really talk about it. Soon we might even live together. But I've seen pictures of his wife, so young and pretty. I'm ten years older than he. I don't even know if he loves me. When we... well... I suppose I can tell you: when we meet at one of those motels, it's hard for me to feel anything. I get distracted, you see, I get scared. I'm just about to climax, and then I start thinking about something else, or just looking around the room, or I hear some noise, I don't know. Maybe I'm just afraid. The one time it happened I screamed. I didn't know where I was or even who I was. I was out of control. It was like dying, like disappearing, ceasing to exist. Afterwards I was ashamed, though of course he was thrilled. It hasn't happened again...

Nelly enters, or has already entered. She sun bathes on a towel with her eyes closed. Constanza continues to speak in that direction.

He's going to Oaxaca for a few months, and he wants me to go with him. I've decided to go. I'm so afraid, but I said yes, knowing full well that I'm not coming back. I'll just stay with him, or we'll live somewhere else. I can't bring him here, saddle him with a pair of old women. They need so much attention. No, I'll take care of his son. That must be what he wants. Maybe I'm just crazy. This should all make me happy, but thinking about it only makes me want to cry.

She begins to cry. Nelly gets up and kneels to embrace her.

Nelly: Everything will be just fine. You know how hard it's going to be and that's why it upsets you.

Constanza: Maybe, but I won't be happy.

Agustin comes running up to them.

Agustin: Where's Grandma? We need to take a picture with all of us together.

He runs off stage.

Benita and Patricia enter. They don't seem to notice the other two women, who are now quiet. Benita is using a ragged old slip as a bathing suit.

Benita: You get paid more than I do.

Patricia: That's not my fault.

Benita: They say I'm like family, but it's a miracle they pay me at all. I took care of the kids when they were sick. I took them to school. I stayed up when they went out. But then, once they started to love me, Miss Celia got crazy jealous. She said all sorts of things so that they'd laugh at me. And now whenever we come to the beach, like today: Benita, put up the umbrella. Benita, carry this. Benita, screw you. Benita, go shrivel up and die. I'd rather just go home and be with my own children. I mean, what am I even doing here? None of this is mine.

Patricia: I've been thinking the same thing.

Benita: But even my children don't love me anymore. They were always jealous. I did this so they could go to college, so they wouldn't have to be servants like me. But kids don't understand that sort of thing.

Patricia: And did they go to college?

Benita: All of them. And now they look down on me.

Patricia: You're making things up. Why would they do that?

Celia peeks in.

Celia: Ah, Benita, finally. Go find everyone and get them all together. The photographer has arrived.

Celia disappears.

Benita: (*Under her breath.*) Get them yourself, you lazy old bitch.

She and Patricia exit.

Constanza: I'm not having my picture taken. That's the last thing I need.

She gets up and leaves.

Nelly: Constanza, you can't. Constanza...

She takes off after her.

Grandmother enters slowly, very slowly, with her hair flowing. She breathes deeply. She kneels and fills her fists with sand, letting it run very slowly through her fingers, as if she were trying to retain it. She then looks at her empty hand.

The photographer enters, with his outdated camera on a tripod, covered with a black cloth, and a bucket to rinse (enjuagar) the photos. He installs himself parsimoniously frontstage and to the left. He is inexpressive, calm, eternally patient.

Grandmother doesn't seem to notice him. She starts singing, softly and in tune, "Las violetas," by Lerdo de Tejada.

Grandmother: *(Singing.)*

This morning I sent you some violets
that I found in the jungle at dawn,

Agustin enters, calling to the others. Grandmother continues to sing.

Agustin: Come here, everyone. He says for us to gather here. Veva, Chacho, Vevita, come here. Get your aunts and uncles. We're going to take a family picture.

Grandmother: *(Continuing to sing.)*

And at night I brought you fresh roses
that I cut at dusk.

Do you know what such beautiful flowers
mean in figurative language?

They mean,
they mean,

that you should know how to be faithful to me during the day
and that you should know how to love me during the night.

Veva, Chacho, Vevita and Adolfo enter.

Their voices are heard over Grandmother's song as they start arguing.

Vevita: Just us?

Agustin: No, everyone. Where's my mother?

Veva: Over there, pestering Benita.

Agustin: What a mess. Go find your uncles.

Agustin, Vevita and Chacho leave. Adolfo starts to join them.

Vevita: Stay with my mom. *(She exits.)*

Adolfo: Happily.

He forces a smile and goes toward Veva. Grandmother has finished singing, repeating the last two verses:

Grandmother:

that you should know how to be faithful to me during the day
and that you should know how to love me during the night.

Veva: (*Friendly.*) Doesn't my clothing make you uncomfortable?

Adolfo: (*Innocently.*) Me? Why should it make me uncomfortable?

Veva: Well, since you like to criticize other people's clothing, you should also criticize mine, shouldn't you?

Adolfo: I... I mean... well, it's just that...

Veva: (*Hasn't stopped talking.*) You have no claim to Vevita. She asked permission for you to come and I told her, "well, everyone is free to come and be wherever we are." And that's all.

Adolfo: (*Tries to talk.*) No, ma'am, I was just saying...

Veva: (*Hasn't stopped talking.*) You didn't like my daughter's bathing suit? And why should you have an opinion? Are you something to her? Did you buy it for her?

Adolfo: I'm her boyfriend, ma'am.

Veva: Boyfriend? You might be her friend, like so many others. Only they never take anything for granted.

Adolfo: (*Softly.*) Please forgive me.

Veva: Why me? Go say that to Vevita.

Vevita enters.

Vevita: (*Clearly lying.*) Aunt Constanza is on her way.

Veva: This young man has something to say to you. (*To him.*) Tell her.

Adolfo: I ask that... that... you forgive me for what I said.

Vevita: About what, Adolfo?

Adolfo: About your bathing suit.

Vevita: Ah. But it was a joke.

Adolfo: Yeah, it was.

Veva: This young man is going around saying he's your boyfriend. Explain that to me.

Vevita: I haven't given him any reason to think that. He must think a lot of himself.

Veva: That's what I say.

Vevita: (*Giggles.*) That's not true, honey. Just a joke.

Veva: And take off that cover-up or you're going to roast.

Vevita: No kidding, it's hot.

*She takes it off, letting out a malicious giggle.
She stretches her arms and breathes deeply.*

Grandmother hasn't missed a bit of this. She goes back to playing with the sand. Adrian and Elisa enter. They line up with the others. The photographer arranges the group in an artistic fashion. He puts Grandmother with everyone else. Celia and Agustin enter.

Celia: One last time, the whole family together. Well, a few grandchildren are missing, and we've got a few who aren't family. But that's okay. It'll be beautiful.

Grandmother: Yes, these photographs are lovely. Soon enough we can start counting the dead.

Celia: Mom, you love to say the worst.

Jorge, Nelly and Constanza arrive.

Constanza: Here we are.

Chacho, Hector and Luis arrive.

Agustin: What were you guys doing?

Chacho: Having a few beers.

Agustin: Get in the photograph.

Luis: Not me. This is family. Good afternoon, everyone.

Hector: This is Luis. He's a friend of mine. I mean, we... met and we are... This is my family, Luis.

Hands wave. Fake smiles.

Nelly: With a few extras. Like me.

Adolfo: And me.

Luis: Well, I'll be an extra, too, then.

Hector: Yeah. You there, Jorge. Then Nelly. Then me...

Luis: Then me.

The photographer arranges the group again and goes to his camera.

Celia: But I can't be photographed barefoot. That's ridiculous.

Agustin: Sir, will our feet be in the photograph?

The photographer nods yes.

Celia: You see? Mine are so ugly. I'm going to get my shoes. Come with me, dear.

Celia and Agustin exit.

Agustin: Just another moment. So Mom can look gorgeous.

Celia: Oh, Agustin, how am I going to look gorgeous? I've gotten so ugly.

They leave. The group relaxes, and sort of breaks apart, as they wait.

Constanza: And so what happened, Nelly?

Nelly: Well, I was just spending everything. It felt so good to have some money. I had the radio shows, the dubbings, I was about to finish my degree. Every now and then I would think about having a home of my own, but not seriously. And then Daisy was getting ready to leave and started selling everything. Everything at a discount. When I went to see her, the only thing she had left was a refrigerator. The thing was brand-new. I had 400 pesos, and she let me have it. I was thrilled! I told everyone at the boarding house about it. That's great, they said, what a bargain. But of course I couldn't put the thing in my room. So I had to start looking for a new place. I didn't have a stick of furniture. I would have to get a bed, at the very least, and a kitchen table, and some books, and ... blankets, sheets, towels. Pictures and curtains, too, so the place would be inviting. Then a blender, and a radio, and God knows what else. As for the refrigerator, I started to get mad at that piece of junk. I started losing sleep over it. I heard the factory whistles in the morning. Everything was messed up, and all because of a refrigerator! I remembered that Myrna was about to get married. We'd had a fight and weren't talking to each other. Well, I went to make up with her and I gave her the fridge. Poor Myrna, she didn't know how to thank me. And I slept happily all morning. I even skipped a recording.

The photographer lines them up again as he sees fit. Giggles, pantomimed impersonations. Grandmother makes faces at the camera. Everyone laughs.

Grandmother: It doesn't matter. We old women are horribly ugly.

Nelly: You have beautiful hair.

Grandmother: You should've seen it twenty years ago.

Luis: Is it true that you write?

Hector: I've published three books. I paid to have the first one published. I still have a lot to write.

Luis: Maybe you'll give me a copy.

Hector: The second one didn't do well. It got good reviews, but it didn't sell. A radio station offered it as part of a promotion. For one month, the first twenty people who called the station got to choose from two gifts: a record or my book. They all asked for the record.

Luis: Well you'll have to give me a copy of that one, too.

Celia and Agustin enter.

Celia: When are they going to take our picture? What are they waiting for?

Veva: For you to take your place. That's all we need.

Vevita: Come over here with us, Grandma. Let's put her on the other side of us. Let's see where you go, Dad.

The photographer arranges them.

Adrian: Isn't Benita going to be in it?

Celia: She looks just great for a photo. Poor camera.

Hector: We all look just great.

Celia: That many people won't fit in a photo. We're already too many.

Adrian: I'm going to get Benita.

Celia: Go ahead, dear. But if we don't all fit, then no.

Adrian exits. Elisa goes with him.

Agustin: Just another moment, sir.

Chacho: Patience, pal.

Hector: Mom, how would you like it if I came here to live with you and grandma? Would you like that?

Celia: Dear, I'm only happy when you're all here with me. Do you mean move here?

Hector: That's what I was thinking.

Celia: But dear, you live such a free life. I don't know how you'd feel coming back here. It's so small, everyone knows us.

Hector: I'd be fine. And the he place, who knows? Constanza could take a vacation, take a break from all the responsibility. She certainly deserves it.

Celia: My dear, Constanza was born to live like that, with us. Look at her: she's always happy.

Vevita: The sky is getting cloudy.

Adolfo: The photo isn't going to come out.

Luis: Of course it will, if we just stay still a little bit longer.

Benita: I don't know why you want me here.

Adrian: It's a family photo. We're all here and you should be here, too.

Benita: Not everyone is here. Your children didn't come. You don't need me.

Adrian: Come on, Benita. Come stand with the two of us, in the middle.

Chacho: Patricia, come over here by me.

She goes to the other side.

The Photographer goes to his camera and looks through the lens.

Photographer: You are fine just like that. Don't move. It's going to take time. I'm going to count to three. Don't anyone move until I say "three."

Adolfo: And since there aren't any little birdies, everyone look at that wave.

Chacho: Yes, there are little birdies.

Veva: Be quiet.

Vevita: Find a wave that's calm and different from the others.

Hector: They're all calm and different.

Luis: Some are bigger than others. They stand out.

Adrian: They crash faster and make more noise.

Hector: You know, Adrian, what we were saying about the elements. From a different perspective, over time, you might be able to see the very waves of the earth. We might see them rise up and erase whole cities. Niniveh, Palenque, Babylon. Nine waves to wash away the nine Troys. And the bones of those who drowned. With a little snorkeling gear you could look in at the cemetery, see that tapestry of white coral.

Patricia: It's getting dark...

Elisa: *(Softly.)* It wouldn't really be a separation. You know that, right? And you know I'll always love you. Why don't you say something?

Photographer: The cloud is moving out. Don't move. Everyone look at the sea.

He rearranges them just a bit.

Luis: *(To Hector.)* I tried to kill myself once, when I was fourteen. I hung myself from the shower with a laundry line. I jumped from the edge of the tub, felt myself kicking, felt the tug, felt something immeasurable. Then I blacked out; a big flash. Afterwards, I was all bruised, lying there, which is why I think I must have fallen. And my neck was torn up. I wore a scarf for days, despite the heat. The laundry line wasn't broken. I never knew what had happened. I never knew why I'm alive.

Hector: And do you think we know?

Photographer: Now, please, everyone be still. I'm going to count.

Chacho: Think about something pleasant.

A brief, still silence. The sound of the sea rises.

Photographer: One...

Everyone adopts that special "photo" expression.

Patricia: The whole day is mine. No one is giving me orders.

Elisa: No tears, no fear. I can hear the dance music.

Vevita: A giant mirror.

Celia: My skin, so smooth and unblemished, my neck like it was before...

Adolfo: They've put my name on the office door.

Chacho: Women find me attractive. People like me. I can be whatever I want.

Adrian: I remember my youthful dreams and they don't hurt anymore.

Veva: To have something.

Grandmother: To remember...

Photographer: Two...

From this moment on, their faces remain smiling. Set, photographed faces. Their expressions do not correspond to what they are going to say.

Jorge: After what happened to Nelly, which devastated my uncle, I just kept working. I was making more and more money. I was about to get my degree. Bucktooth, as Nelly called her, would visit my relatives and make plans for us. My own plans were actually happening, but they were starting to look a little empty, a little sad. There was nothing else for me to do. Chacho had already gotten married, and Vevita, too. It was my turn. That's when the accident happened. I was on a motorcycle. I didn't feel anything. I just turned my head and something was running over me. And then I wasn't there.

Nelly: As we entered the curve, someone shouted. We were in the Alps, with this incredible view. I never knew who shouted. Later I heard them say in French that my face was crushed and that I might be blind, or paralyzed, if I survived. I heard this whimpering for such a long time. It was me.

Benita: You should have seen her cry, the poor thing. She didn't want to close my eyelids. She was afraid to touch me. I realized we don't need to share blood to be family. Celia's my sister, though she might not know it.

Adrian: Some people have multiple heart attacks. I only had one. I went down right in front of Grandma. A huge burst that wouldn't let me breathe. It didn't last long.

Grandmother: *(Shouting.)* Adrian! I haven't forgotten. Neither has Constanza.

Constanza: *(Softly.)* The two of us alone here in the house. Looking at this old photo, counting the dead. Just Grandmother and I. The photo has begun to fade.

An intense white light.

It gradually turns yellow and blurry.

The sound of the sea rises.

CURTAIN

Begun in Madrid, October 1, 1974

Finished in Mexico City, June 12, 1977

EMPTY BOTTLES

By Oscar Sanz Cabrera

Translated by Matthew Ward

The action of 'Empty Bottles' takes place in a squalid flat in the Sant Antoni area of Barcelona, but the play could be set in any other place. What I mean is that Sant Antoni is not an especially poor or problem area, rather, it is a central district of working class residents and trades people. That is the reason I situated the play there and did not want to locate it in the suburbs. The prologue of the edition published in Spain refers to the action taking place in the bosom of an 'ultra lower class' family. To be more precise I would say that there exists a kind of limbo, or rather a kind of purgatory, between a lower class and an ultra lower class. In that place any false step may plunge you irretrievably into the abyss. And it is there, in that purgatory, where the members of this family are truly to be found.

When you are born into what is considered a lower class you live with the latent presence of that abyss, of that purgatory. That omnipotence can plunge you into a grey acceptance of your precarious existence or, on the contrary, it can serve as a powerful incentive to leave it behind. As an author I am interested in characters that live in that purgatory. This is where we find the true heroes. The most dreadful dramas and the cruellest, and by definition, the funniest comedies. 'Empty Bottles' is a cocktail of those two extremes.

-- Oscar Sanz Cabrera

I worked very closely with Oscar at all stages of translating 'Empty Bottles', which I believe greatly helped me to capture the spirit and richness of the original work. The play is translated into what I would call a 'rough and tough' London English, which I felt was the closest equivalent to the colourful language and ribald humour of the Barcelona residents that make up the cast of Oscar's characters. I have striven to capture the colloquial nature of the characters' speech, their jokes, their irony and wordplay but without making them too 'cockney'. I did not want to risk an audience stopping to ask themselves whether someone from Barcelona would ever use such and such an expression and thus being distracted from the play itself

-- Matthew Ward

Oscar Sanz Cabrera: Playwright, director and screenwriter.

In 2008 Oscar wrote and directed his first play 'La Partida', for which he was awarded two of the three main prizes at the 13a Mostra de Teatre de Barcelona; the 'Special Jury Award' and the 'Public's Award for Best Show'. In 2009 'La Partida' ran for seasons in Barcelona and in Madrid, which were extended on two occasions. The play was published in 2011 by the University of Lérida. In the same year it was translated into Italian and was premiered at the Teatro del Trastévere in Rome.

Oscar's second play 'De la Misma Pasta' won the 'Premio Kutxa Ciudad de San Sebastián' in 2012 and was published by the Alberdania publishing house. 'De la Misma Pasta' has been translated into English under the title of 'Empty Bottles'.

In 2013 Oscar wrote and co-directed his third play 'Paquito (Lágrimas, Mocos y Sangre)'. It was premiered in March 2014 at the Off del Teatro Lara in Madrid, where it will be staged again in the autumn.

In addition to the three plays already mentioned, Oscar has also written 'El Último Mordisco' and 'El Pastor Lobo'. He is currently finishing his first full length screenplay 'Protegido'.

Matthew Ward, translator, has lived in various parts of Spain on and off for over twenty years. During that time he has worked as a translator, interpreter and proof-reader on a freelance basis, in addition to teaching English and doing office and agricultural work. He has a BA in Spanish and Latin American Studies from Birkbeck College, University of London, and has also written a number of screenplays in English and in Spanish. He is currently living and working in a cooperative in the mountains of Catalonia, northeast Spain, and is translating another play by Oscar Sanz.

Empty bottles

Oscar Sanz Cabrera

Translated by Matthew Ward

Kutxa Prize, City of San Sebastián 2012

CHARACTERS

LUCAS, son. 40 years old

LUISA, mother. 62 years old

MARÍA, daughter. 25 years old

ESTEBAN, eldest son*. 44 years old

Autumn. An old and dreary flat in the Sant Antoni area of Barcelona.

A spacious kitchen-diner occupies the whole stage.

The walls are stained with damp and there are exposed electrical cables.

At the back and on the right there are the usual kitchen appliances, cooker, sink, fridge, cupboards and shelves. Everything is old and coated in oil and grease.

From the wall behind, a hallway leads to the front door on the right, and on the left to a passage leading to the bathroom and the bedrooms.

Off the hallway we can only see a coat hanger on the wall with the odd jacket and an umbrella.

In the centre are a table and three chairs.

On one side up against the wall are a couple of chairs piled high with dirty and crumpled clothes.

On the other side stands a bookshelf packed with old books.

The third scene takes place in a hospital room.

*It is important that the character of Esteban does not have an overly effeminate manner.

Note: On occasions the characters interrupt each other or begin to speak before the other has finished their reply. These interruptions will be marked with a series of full stops at the end and the start of the interrupted dialogue. For example:

LUCAS: Mum loves me as I am...

ESTEBAN: That's what I can't understand.

LUCAS: ... and that's why I've come back again.

1.

First day, in the afternoon. LUCAS, 40 years old. He has a week's stubble and is barefoot and wearing a moth-eaten vest and threadbare cotton underpants. He is sitting on a chair with an empty bottle in his hand. His mother, LUISA, 60 years old, enters. Her hair is clumsily tied leaving several strands loose. She is wearing an old knee-length coat and underneath it a stained kitchen apron over a nightdress. She is carrying several plastic bags. She walks with difficulty. LUCAS appears not to see her.

LUISA: Can't you see there's none left you wretch?

LUCAS: Where were you?

LUISA: I'm not buying you any more.

LUCAS: Where've you been?

LUISA: Unless you have a bath there won't be any more booze in this house.

LUCAS: Have you been shopping?

LUISA: Since when have you been interested in what I do? And I'm not talking about when I'm cooking.

LUCAS: I'm not hungry. Have you been to see her?

LUISA: Of course you're not hungry, you haven't eaten a thing for two days. It's normal.

LUCAS: You've been to see her, haven't you?

LUISA: If you don't eat your stomach closes up.

LUCAS: Answer me!

LUISA: I don't have to tell you anything.

LUCAS: I knew it, you've been to see her. It's obvious, I can tell.

LUISA: Is that right?

LUCAS: Yes, I can tell by her rat's smell.

LUISA: Talking of smells do me a favour and have a bath for God's sake.

LUCAS: You've seen her, haven't you?

LUISA: Even if it's only a quick shower. I'm sure you'll feel better at least a little cleaner.

LUCAS: I'll never be clean if you don't stop going to visit her.

LUISA: Listen your lordship I'll tell you something. Nobody's got the right to tell me where I must and mustn't go. Understand? She's my granddaughter, you bloody drunkard. I'll give you a kick in the liver if you start ordering me about again. You got that? And go have a shower for fuck's sake. You're disgusting.

LUCAS: She doesn't need anything from you. She doesn't need anything from anyone. She's a rat and rats know how to survive on their own.

LUISA: Look what I've got (*takes out a bottle from one of the plastic bags*).

LUCAS: Give it here.

LUISA: Give it here? Is that how you ask for something?

LUCAS: You love torturing me!

LUISA: You've seen it, haven't you? Well I'm not even going to give you the cork.

LUCAS: Why are you doing this to me?

LUISA: Not a drop not a miserable drop. Not until you have shower.

LUCAS: Fuck off.

LUISA: Fuck off yourself.

LUISA takes off her coat and leaves it on the hanger.

LUCAS: What did she say?

LUISA: Not a bit of shame! After eight years without seeing her...

LUCAS: That's a lie I've seen her. At a distance at her mother's funeral, at her bitch of a mother's funeral.

LUISA: Shut it you wretch! You're nothing more than a sack of worms. Not a thought of her in eight years and only then to insult her and...

LUCAS: What the hell did she say?

LUISA: So now you're interested what your daughter has to say?

Short pause.

LUCAS: No.

LUISA: So come on, the shower. Your sister'll be here in a minute.

LUCAS: Oh yeah? (*Crosses his arms and puts his feet on the table*) Well, good-o.

LUISA: Look son if you don't want to have a shower don't have a shower. It's all the same to me but at least do me the favour of putting on a shirt and trousers. I don't want your sister seeing you like that. Do me that favour.

LUCAS: Give me a drink and your wishes will be my commands.

LUISA: If I give you a drink will you have a shower?

LUCAS: I'll be a good boy.

LUISA: You sure?

LUCAS: Of course. Don't you trust anyone?

LUISA: Not even my own shadow.

LUCAS: Relax your shadow doesn't trust you either.

LUISA: Alright, I'll give you just a little.

LUCAS: That's right a drop of petrol and the little car will be on its way.

LUISA: Here.

LUCAS: A drop more.

LUISA: No, with what I've given you you've enough to reach the bathroom. After you've had a shower I'll give you as much as you like.

LUCAS: Don't make promises that you're not going to keep.

LUISA: Shut up you wretch!

LUCAS knocks back the brandy his mother has given him. He gets up and walks towards the bathroom.

LUCAS: I'll be right back. Pour me another one, I won't be long dear.

LUCAS enters the bathroom and closes the door.

LUISA: Use the yellow towel! It's already dirty and ready for the wash.

LUISA touches her forehead with her hand and closes her eyes a moment. She sits down and she pours herself a little brandy and knocks it back it one. The front door bell rings.

LUISA: It's open.

MARÍA, 25 years old, enters.

MARÍA: Why are you always leaving the door open?

LUISA: To let a little air in.

MARÍA: Hello.

LUISA: Hello sweetie you're so early! I still haven't had time to make lunch.

MARÍA: Not to worry, I've already eaten. Anyway, it's four o'clock.

LUISA: I know it's four. Are you going to start criticising me?

MARÍA: If it's not a good time I'll be off.

LUISA: Come here silly. Give your mum a kiss.

MARÍA gives her a peck on the cheek and looks at the bottle.

MARÍA: I see you haven't changed your perfume.

LUISA: And tell me, how's work?

MARÍA: Fine, I'm fine.

LUISA: They haven't sacked you at the cake shop.

MARÍA: I said I'm fine.

LUISA: Look what a figure she's got! Shame you haven't got a bosom. Me at your age I was just as good-looking but with more bosom. Don't pull a face, do you think I was born looking like this? No sweetie no. You'll end up like this as well so make the most of it while you can before the veins start climbing up your legs. Don't you want me to make you something to eat? Come on sit down.

MARÍA: Mum I've got something I have to tell you.

LUISA picks up the bottle and pours herself a drink.

LUISA: Sit down sweetie and make yourself at home. That's it. Do you fancy a drink? I mean something else, water, milk... well I don't have any milk. Would you like me to pop out and buy you some juice?

MARÍA: I don't want anything. Don't bother, there's no need. I don't want anything.

LUISA: Not even a little water?

MARÍA: OK, a little water.

LUISA: It'll have to be from the tap.

MARÍA: From the tap is fine.

LUISA: Wait a moment, I'm going to wash a glass. Where the fuck is the scouring pad?

MARÍA: It doesn't matter I'm not thirsty.

LUISA: No it can't have gone far.

MARÍA: Honestly mum I don't want anything.

LUISA stops searching and fills one of the dirty glasses and sits down. She takes out a bottle of pills from her pocket. She opens it and she pops a couple into her mouth and drinks the glass she has filled. She makes a grimace of disgust.

MARÍA: What are you taking?

LUISA: Calm down. They're for my head though I don't know why the hell I take them. They don't do anything. My head's been splitting for a week. What about you? Have you got a boyfriend or something?

MARÍA: Do you want me to go out the way I came in?

LUISA: Calm down sweetie and relax. When I say boyfriend I mean to say if you're with someone who cares about you. Even if she's a tart. That's the only thing that matters that they care about you. I don't like you being on your own.

MARÍA: I am on my own mum. I've always been on my own.

LUISA (Pours herself a drink): So you're not going to have anything?

MARÍA: Any news of Lucas?

LUISA: I like you asking about him.

MARÍA: How's he getting along?

LUISA: Fine, really fine. You'll see for yourself in a minute.

MARÍA gets to her feet.

LUISA: Sit down and calm down. He's having a shower.

MARÍA: You didn't tell me he was here.

LUISA: He'll be very pleased to see you.

MARÍA: Why didn't you warn me he was at home?

LUISA: You didn't ask me sweetie. Sit down and calm down.

MARÍA: When did he come back?

LUISA: He's having a shower. When I told him you were coming he went to spruce himself up.

LUISA takes a swig. MARÍA hesitates a moment and sits down.

MARÍA: How is he?

LUISA: Better, much better. He has his days but he's better. What he needs is a job. Hey you couldn't get him in where you are?

MARÍA: Are you mad or are you back on the pills?

LUISA: Why sweetie anyone would think.

MARÍA: Tell me the truth, can you imagine Lucas selling cakes in a cake shop?

LUISA: Sweetie as a shop assistant no but I'm sure you need someone to scare the flies away or take out the rubbish and that kind of thing.

MARÍA: I came to tell you something.

LUISA (Standing up): OK sweetie OK. You can be really snappy when you want to be. You're like your father, may he rest in peace.

MARÍA: Do you reckon he deserves to?

LUISA: He deserves what?

MARÍA: It doesn't matter. Sit down. Please.

LUISA: OK OK I'll sit down, I'll sit down.

MARÍA: Look mum you know I've never asked you for anything...

LUCAS comes out of the bathroom with his hair wet and uncombed. He is barefoot and is wearing dark trousers with braces and the same vest as before.

LUCAS: Well look who's here, my dearest sister.

MARÍA: Hello.

LUCAS: Mum, the bottle.

LUISA: Give your sister a kiss, won't you?

LUCAS: You promised that you'd give me the bottle if I had a shower!

LUISA: Take it you brute!

MARÍA: I think I'll be off, OK? I'll come back another day.

LUISA: No María darling sit down and don't pay him any mind. You know what he's like.

(Moves towards the hallway) I'll be back in a minute. I'm going to look for something to eat. It's been ages since we all had lunch together all three of us... I'm going to make a potato omelette.

MARÍA: Mum please don't bother I've already eaten and it's five o'clock. I have to go. I've got to talk to you please mum.

LUISA (*Putting on her coat*): Back in a minute.

LUISA exits.

LUCAS: Bring some beer!

Silence

LUCAS: Don't think that I'm not happy to see you, eh?

MARÍA: You say such sweet things. You've always been a poet. .

LUCAS: I mean what I say. You're looking good. It's a shame you're a dyke.

MARÍA: What are you doing here? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

LUCAS: I'm in my home. I was running around here before you were born, a long time before. So it should be me asking you what the fuck you're doing here.

MARÍA (*Standing up*): I'm off. Tell mum that I'll pop in another day, I don't know... I'll talk to her another time, OK? (*Moves towards the hallway*).

LUCAS: You leaving already? Well, that's fine. Don't think I'm going to stop you. You can throw yourself out the window for all I care. Come to think of it if you're in such a hurry it'll be the quickest way down.

LUCAS laughs to himself at his own joke. MARÍA stops turns around slowly and returns to the table.

MARÍA: How is your daughter?

LUCAS: What?

MARÍA: Your daughter.

LUCAS: Fuck off!

MARÍA: Mum says she's doing really well at college.

LUCAS: I haven't got a daughter.

MARÍA: You're right you haven't. You had one but now you haven't. You've got nothing left.

LUCAS: You're wrong! I've got a bottle and a thumping headache. You haven't got any painkillers, have you?

MARÍA: You're pathetic.

LUCAS: Sit down for fuck's sake! The one day we see each other. Bloody hell! You're so uptight your arse squeaks! Do you fancy a drop?

MARÍA appears to laugh. She sits down reluctantly.

LUCAS: And to what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?

MARÍA: Nothing, I just wanted to see mum.

LUCAS: Well mission accomplished, no? Now you've seen her.

MARÍA: I've got... a matter I need to talk to her about.

LUCAS (*Pours himself a drink*): A matter hum... sounds mysterious. You want some?

MARÍA: The only mystery is how you can keep on drinking without your liver exploding.

LUCAS: Our family is made of iron. Rusty and twisted maybe but pure iron.

MARÍA: Yeah and how are things with Esteban?

LUCAS: How's it going to be with him... the lucky-arse? He's got no worries. He gets paid every month... with his boyfriend the cobbler.

MARÍA: Is he still seeing Mr Tomás?

LUCAS: Like two lovebirds. I'm sure they'll be celebrating their silver wedding anniversary soon.

MARÍA: But the old boy must be getting on a bit, isn't he?

LUCAS: Yes, I don't know.

MARÍA: Has he still got the heel bar?

LUCAS: No way, he retired. It seems he wants to go back to his village in Camona and wait for it... he's asked Esteban to go and live with him.

MARÍA: Well, that's what he should do.

LUCAS: But he won't. Esteban is a ladies man he can't leave mum. It's like he's still got his fucking umbilical cord.

MARÍA: And is he still at the Sant Antoni market?

LUCAS: Of course. What else is he going to do?

MARÍA: True enough. I forgot that 'he doesn't drink'.

LUCAS: He spends the day looking for old books in rubbish bins or with his little chums at the Arenas cinema. You know how much he's always liked the cinema though he spends half the film with his head between his legs... I mean someone else's legs.

MARÍA: What's he got to say about you being back here?

LUCAS: What's he going to say? Not a peep.

MARÍA: I only ask because he was running around this place a long time before you were born.

LUCAS: What a bitch! You're a sharp one eh? I've always thought you got the best of the genes.

MARÍA: Compared to you that is obviously the case.

LUCAS: Maybe sperm is like wine it gets better with age.

MARÍA: That'll be it.

LUCAS: Then it's clear that Esteban prefers a young wine.

LUCAS roars with laughter. MARÍA cannot contain herself and joins in. The door opens and ESTEBAN enters. He is wearing brown horn-rimmed glasses and trousers hitched right up to his navel, which reveal his socks, a shirt buttoned to the collar and a woollen waistcoat with buttons. His hair is dirty and oily with a side parting and the crown is an unruly mess. He has a pile of books under his arm and a rolled-up newspaper in his hand. He launches himself towards LUCAS. He does not see MARÍA.

LUCAS: Look who we have here, the 'wine taster'.

ESTEBAN: Where are the comics I left under my bed?

LUCAS: Aren't you going to say anything to your sister?

ESTEBAN: Tell me where are the comics I left under my bed? Hello María.

MARÍA: Hello.

LUCAS: Don't be unsociable. Aren't you going to give her a kiss?

ESTEBAN: I want you to give me back the comics. Now!

LUCAS: But what comics? What a fuss come on sit down and don't be rude to the guest.

MARÍA (*To Esteban*): How're things with you?

ESTEBAN: Fine.

LUCAS: They're fine.

ESTEBAN: They were under my bed all in a parcel. Thirty-five issues of the first edition of Flash Gordon from one to thirty-five. The first set and in perfect condition. Please, I'm asking you to give them back.

LUCAS: Do me a favour and shut up my head's going to explode. What's more it wasn't me. Come on, get me a painkiller mate.

ESTEBAN: I've got a buyer.

LUCAS: I'm sure you'll find them again. Don't panic, you always do.

MARÍA: Alright boys, I'm off.

ESTEBAN: I won't find those they're unique.

LUCAS: Is that right?

ESTEBAN: And much sought after.

MARÍA: Tell mum I'll come round another time (*moves towards the door*).

LUCAS: And how much might those comics be worth? I mean if a bookseller like you wanted to buy them. How much would they cost?

ESTEBAN: A collector would pay, if they're in good condition, which they are, about five hundred Euros.

LUCAS: Never.

ESTEBAN: Maybe more. A bookseller could pay two hundred or even three hundred if he has a buyer like I have.

LUCAS: And they're as good as sold?

MARÍA exits. LUCAS and ESTEBAN do not even notice.

ESTEBAN: That's right. Five hundred Euros. I'm going to lose five hundred Euros.

LUCAS: Bastard. (*To Esteban*) I'm going to help you look for them.

ESTEBAN: Oh yes?

LUCAS: I promise.

ESTEBAN: And where do you propose looking?

LUCAS: I don't know but if you're prepared to pay me a small reward I'll bring them to you. I mean if I find them of course.

ESTEBAN: It was you, you bastard!

ESTEBAN approaches LUCAS threateningly. LUCAS stands up and begins to slowly circle the table.

ESTEBAN: It was you, I know it!

LUCAS: Don't shout, I've got a headache.

ESTEBAN: I'll kill you, you drunken shit. I'll kill you I swear. One day when you're sleeping it off with your mouth wide open, I'll empty a bottle of sulphuric acid into your filthy gob. Your teeth will be all dazzling white and not a trace of plaque.

LUCAS: You haven't got the balls shirt-lifter.

ESTEBAN leaps over the table and grabs LUCAS by the throat.

LUCAS: Get off me you filthy slag!

They engage in a pathetic struggle. ESTEBAN has LUCAS by his throat and his face. LUCAS bites ESTEBAN'S finger and breaks free. ESTEBAN shouts in an exaggerated manner.

LUCAS: Come here and I'll bite your ear off!

ESTEBAN: You've broken my finger!

LUCAS: I can't have broken it, it's not even bleeding.

ESTEBAN: I can't move it.

LUCAS: You started it.

ESTEBAN: I'll have to go to hospital.

LUCAS: You haven't given me an answer. If I find them will you give me reward?

ESTEBAN: Yes I'll fucking give you something. Of course I'll give you something.

LUCAS moves towards the pile of clothes on one of the chairs. He picks up a crumpled shirt, smells it and puts it on.

LUCAS: This is no time for vagueness Esteban. It is time for specifics. *(Buttons up the shirt)*
How much will I get?

ESTEBAN: A hundred.

LUCAS: That's profiteering.

LUCAS picks up some boots without laces and starts to put them on. LUISA enters with a bag of potatoes.

LUISA: Where's my little girl?

ESTEBAN: OK, a hundred and twenty-five.

LUISA: María?

LUCAS: Alright, a hundred and fifty. I'll go now.

LUCAS picks up a jacket and exits, he still has a boot in his hand. LUISA leaves the bag of potatoes in the kitchen.

ESTEBAN: Bastard.

LUISA: Where's he off to?

ESTEBAN: He's broken my finger.

LUISA: And María has she gone as well?

ESTEBAN: It hurts. I can't move it.

LUISA opens the fridge.

LUISA: I was going to make an omelette but they've gone. Oh just as well, there aren't any eggs left.

ESTEBAN: Why did you let him come back here again?

LUISA: You're brothers and you know I don't like you talking like that.

ESTEBAN: He only comes here when he wants something. He's a vampire, don't you realise?

LUISA: Of course I realise. Do you think I'm an idiot? Let's have a look at that hand. Just so you understand, there's nothing nicer for a mother than to be able to look after her children. There's nothing wrong with it.

ESTEBAN: He bit me! He almost took my finger off!

LUISA: I don't like you two fighting.

ESTEBAN: He's stolen a collection of comics that I've sold. Well sold no but almost. I'll sell them soon. It's a great batch and they're mine and he's stolen them.

LUISA: Well these things have a solution Esteban...

ESTEBAN: He's stolen them!

LUISA: ... you only have to worry about the things that don't. The rest doesn't matter.

ESTEBAN: But mum...

LUISA: Shhh remember my boy, the rest doesn't matter.

LUISA caresses his head as if she were combing him. ESTEBAN sits and leans against her breast and closes his eyes. LUISA seems to hum a lullaby. ESTEBAN abruptly removes his head and gets up and angrily walks towards his bedroom. LUISA watches with indifference as he moves away. She walks towards the kitchen while she continues humming the lullaby.

2.

Second day, in the morning. ESTEBAN sits with his hand clumsily bandaged reading a newspaper. LUCAS emerges from his room barefoot and wearing the same vest and underpants as in the first act. He opens a cupboard then another. He finds an empty bottle of brandy and examines it.

LUCAS: And mum?

ESTEBAN: Working.

LUCAS: What a woman! She never stops.

ESTEBAN: By the way, did María say anything to you yesterday?

LUCAS: No well yes but I don't remember.

ESTEBAN: I don't know what the hell she wants in such a hurry but she's called and she says she'll be round and that she's got to talk to mum. Someone else who only comes here when they want something.

LUCAS: Don't get jealous you'll always be her favourite.

ESTEBAN: Yes, her favourite.

LUCAS: You're the apple of her eye. Anyway she only wants to talk about 'a matter'.

ESTEBAN: A matter?

LUCAS: That's what she said: "I've got a matter I need to talk to her about".

ESTEBAN: I don't trust that butch cow. I'm sure she's after something. She didn't tell you anything?

LUCAS: Yes, she told me... she had a matter she wanted to talk to her about.

ESTEBAN: Forget it, it doesn't matter (*returns to his newspaper*).

LUCAS: Eh, do you know where mum hides her medicine?

ESTEBAN does not pay him any attention and reads.

LUCAS: You know I won't give you a minute's peace until you tell me.

ESTEBAN (*Still reading*): Under the sink and with a bit of luck you'll confuse it with the bleach.

LUCAS: Here it is.

ESTEBAN: Leave her a little for when she gets back. If you don't she'll be like a scalded cat.

LUCAS: How's your hand?

ESTEBAN: Bad really bad. A little better than yesterday but bad.

LUCAS: It's just that I got a little agitated.

ESTEBAN: A little agitated! You almost tore my finger off!

LUCAS: I'm saying sorry for fuck's sake! Or can't you see that? You like it when someone grovels at your feet. If you don't control your fucking pride your heart is going to end up full of pus.

ESTEBAN: What do you know about the comics?

LUCAS: I'm on to it. We'll have some news soon partner. What do you reckon María wanted? I mean do you think she came here because of mum's money?

ESTEBAN: Money?

LUCAS: Yes money.

ESTEBAN: What money?

LUCAS: Come on, don't act the retard. You're enough of one as it is.

ESTEBAN: But what money?

LUCAS: Mum earns a wage and you earn a wage. She's still working like a dog and you live in fucking squalor. Don't tell me what money! Don't fuck with me Esteban we're having a quiet little chat!

ESTEBAN: So that's why you've come, isn't it? Well you can shove off hyena. A hyena, that's what you are.

LUCAS: A hyena?

ESTEBAN: That money if there was any. I repeat if there was any, would be, and I stress, would be, ours. It's mum's and mine. If there was any.

LUCAS: If there was any, if there was any...? If I'd known I would have strangled you when we were still kids. Like this, just playing. No one would have suspected.

The telephone rings.

LUCAS: Saved by the bell laddie.

ESTEBAN: *(To telephone)* Yes? (...) Yes, I'm her son. What's happened? (...) *(Worried)* When? (...) We're coming now. *(Hangs up)* It was the hospital. Mum's been taken in. We'll get a taxi. Come on! ^

LUCAS: Eh... it's just... Look you go so meanwhile I'll take a shower and... I... it's better I stay... and tidy up all this a little.

ESTEBAN: You're right, better you don't come. I don't know what I was thinking.

ESTEBAN exits hurriedly.

LUCAS: Say hello from me! *(smiles, picks up the bottle and pours himself a drink)* And from the genie.

3.

An hour later. A hospital room. LUISA is in bed completely sedated. She has been put on a drip. Beside her is MARÍA. MARÍA touches LUISA'S hand and her hair.

MARÍA: Think it over. You don't have to give an answer now but just picture it. Getting up in the morning and looking out the window and being in your village. In the village where you were born. Pure mountain air and walks in the meadows... just picture it.

LUISA: I don't know sweetie, after all this time.

MARÍA: It's always been your dream.

LUISA: Yes, has it?

MARÍA: Of course, you've always said so. Just picture it. Just you and me in your village in a lovely little new house they've built where the chemist was. You remember? You wait to you see it. It's a chance we can't let go by. Besides, the house is really near the station. If you want to come to the city to see them you'll be able to. You're not going to be cut off.

LUISA: It sounds all so lovely but I don't know.

MARÍA: What is it you don't know?

LUISA: I don't know if I want it to stop being a dream. Dreams are perfect and life isn't.

MARÍA: But what have they been telling you? You're talking like a nun. Are you OK? Listen, it's better we talk when the tranquilisers have worn off. I just want you to think about the possibility of leaving that tip where you live and leading a better life, just you and me. You deserve it, we deserve it. You can't keep looking after those two. They're two men, two adults. You have to let them live their own lives. You deserve a rest.

LUISA: Yes, do I?

MARÍA: Of course you do. Rest and think it over and we'll talk, OK?

ESTEBAN enters, he gives the impression that he has been listening for some time.

LUISA: Look who's come.

MARÍA: Hello.

ESTEBAN: What's happened?

LUISA: I'm fine son. Mum's fine and you don't have to worry.

ESTEBAN: But what happened?

MARÍA: She came over faint at work and lost consciousness and she took an hour to come round. They're carrying out tests. We'll have the results this afternoon.

ESTEBAN: When are you coming home?

MARÍA: I've just told you, they're carrying out tests and...

ESTEBAN: I wasn't talking to you.

LUISA: Soon Esteban soon. What about Lucas?

ESTEBAN: Well, he was going to come but he... he wasn't able to you know. He's... he's stayed behind cleaning.

LUISA: Cleaning?

ESTEBAN: Yes. When the hospital called me he was in the middle of cleaning. Well, we were both cleaning the flat a little.

MARÍA: Well don't take your eye off him because the last time Lucas cleaned the flat he took everything including the fridge. Don't you remember mum when we went to visit Auntie Flora? We got back to find that he hadn't even left the skirting boards.

LUISA: But that was years ago you were still a child. I don't know how you can remember.

MARÍA: He stole my radio-cassette, my textbooks and my skates. How can I ever forget?

LUISA: That's water under the bridge, sweetie.

ESTEBAN: Mum. I want to tell you that we are very worried about your health and we miss you a lot and we want you to come home to look after you.

MARÍA: You...! But she only left the house less than four hours ago!

LUISA: I know son, I miss you too. Mum'll be back soon. Don't you worry.

ESTEBAN: We're also going to clean the kitchen.

LUISA: There's no need, don't you worry.

ESTEBAN (*Takes her hand*): We're going to look after you a lot. A lot.

ESTEBAN repeatedly kisses the hand. LUISA caresses his hair. MARÍA is annoyed.

4.

Third day. Midday. The two brothers are in the dining room. ESTEBAN still has a bandage on his hand. LUCAS is seated at the table. He is barefoot and wearing the same trousers with braces.

LUCAS: She said that?

ESTEBAN: Like I told you she said: "You can't keep looking after those two".

LUCAS: Those two?

ESTEBAN: Exactly and with contempt. And later she said: "They are two men. You have to let them live their lives".

LUCAS: Live their lives?

ESTEBAN: That's right: "Live their lives" and later to top it all the little bitch says to her: "You deserve a rest".

LUCAS: A rest.

ESTEBAN takes out a bottle from under the sink and picks up a glass.

ESTEBAN: Fancy a drink?

LUCAS: Thanks Esteban, I'll have a little.

ESTEBAN: Here.

ESTEBAN amicably pours LUCAS a drink. LUCAS drinks.

ESTEBAN: María's come to take it all. We can't allow it.

LUCAS: No, no we can't.

ESTEBAN: We can't let her take what belongs to us. To you and to me. To the both of us. She left.

LUCAS: You're right, she left.

ESTEBAN: That's it and so she hasn't any right to claim anything.

LUCAS: No she doesn't.

ESTEBAN: Exactly, she doesn't.

LUCAS: Everything will be for us two, right?

ESTEBAN: Well of course brother. Everything.

LUCAS: And the flat as well?

ESTEBAN: The flat?... Well... well of course everything. That's what I've been telling you. A drop more?

LUCAS holds his glass closer. ESTEBAN fills it obligingly. LUCAS drinks.

LUCAS: So we're together in this, are we not?

ESTEBAN: That's it, together until the end. You need me and I need you. We're a team.

LUCAS: A team?

ESTEBAN: That's it a team.

LUCAS: Sounds good.

Pause. ESTEBAN fills LUCAS' glass again.

LUCAS: Does it still feel stiff?

ESTEBAN: Eh?

LUCAS: Your hand. God damn it, your hand.

ESTEBAN: Ah...

LUCAS: What were you thinking? That at my age I'm going to start camping it up?

ESTEBAN: Fine just fine. Not completely but fine.

LUCAS: Didn't I tell you I was sorry?

ESTEBAN: Yes more or less, why?

LUCAS: In case I'd forgotten to tell you.

ESTEBAN: Yeah listen and...

LUCAS drinks, ESTEBAN watches him while he bites his nails.

ESTEBAN: Listen, what are we going to do?

LUCAS: Eh?

ESTEBAN: About María and about mum.

LUCAS: I'm thinking.

ESTEBAN: I reckon that...

LUCAS: Shhh I'm thinking.

The doorbell rings. Silence. LUCAS and ESTEBAN look at each other.

ESTEBAN: Someone's at the door.

LUCAS: Yeah.

ESTEBAN: What shall we do?

LUCAS: You expect me to open it?

ESTEBAN: It might be her.

LUCAS: Mum?

ESTEBAN: No, 'her'.

LUCAS: Yeah.

The doorbell rings again with more insistence. ESTEBAN is waiting on LUCAS.

LUCAS: Open it. We'll talk.

ESTEBAN: That's it, we'll talk.

LUCAS: Leave it to me eh. I know how to deal with women.

ESTEBAN nods and opens the door while LUCAS adopts a solemn pose in his chair. MARÍA enters.

MARÍA: Hello.

LUCAS: Well look who it isn't.

MARÍA: I thought you weren't in.

ESTEBAN: "I thought you weren't in". *(to Lucas)* You see? She's sniping away already.

MARÍA: I want to talk to you.

ESTEBAN: 'We' want to talk to you, *(to Lucas)* don't we?

LUCAS: That we do. We want to talk to you.

MARÍA: Mum is coming to live with me.

ESTEBAN *(To Lucas):* What did I tell you?

MARÍA: Mum isn't well, in fact she's in a bad way. She needs to be looked after. She needs someone who's there for her and that...

ESTEBAN: ... and just by chance that person is you, isn't it?

LUCAS: Let her finish for fuck's sake!

ESTEBAN: Let her finish no! Who's been with mum all this time? Eh? Who? Me.

Who's had to put up with her and... look after her and...? *(To María)* And where were you then eh, where? When things got difficult you left. You took your things and you left only thinking of yourself. You said: "I'm fifteen years old and I don't have to take your shit". And now you turn up and you want to give us lectures. You turn up as if you were the grown-up and responsible daughter and you want to take control of this family.

MARÍA: I've spoken to the doctor.

ESTEBAN: What?

MARÍA: I spoke to the doctor this morning.

ESTEBAN: I should have spoken to the doctor, understand? Me. I am the eldest son. I am the head of the family. I should have spoken to him and not you, 'me'.

MARÍA: Maybe he didn't speak to you because you weren't at the hospital. Maybe it was because in the two days that she was there you were with her for two minutes. Maybe the doctor spoke to me because I was the only person who's been with her day and night.

LUCAS (*To Esteban, admiringly*): Take that.

ESTEBAN: Me... as head of the family... that is... my duty eh is to look after the house. And that's what I did, exactly. That is what I did. And don't come round here now giving me lectures you fucking dyke.

MARÍA: Lectures?

ESTEBAN: I know why you're doing it. I may be backward but I'm not stupid. You want her money. You want mum to go with you so that she'll die in your arms and you'll get all her money.

LUCAS: Exactly, to finish off the job.

MARÍA: You're both mad. I don't need her money I earn my living. I'm not mentally retarded like you two. I can manage on my own I always have done.

ESTEBAN: Oh yeah? And how are you going to buy a house in mum's village with your meddling dyke cake-maker's wages?

MARÍA: What house?

ESTEBAN: Yes a house and don't play dumb. I heard it in the hospital. You were telling mum about it. (*To Lucas*) She was hissing in her ear like a fucking viper.

MARÍA: I still don't know if I'll buy it or not. At first I'd be renting. Anyway that's got nothing to do with it. I've come here to explain to you what the doctor said and...

ESTEBAN: Well smartarse, what did he say?

MARÍA: ... and the only thing that you're worried about is mum's fucking money.

LUCAS: Wait a minute, wait a minute. It's clear that not one of us is remotely interested in mum's money. What we are interested in is that she gets well and that she leaves hospital soon and all that crap.

ESTEBAN: That's right. And that she comes home soon to 'her' home.

LUCAS: Let's let her continue. Please, María...

LUCAS makes a solemn gesture to continue. MARÍA looks at them and she takes her time.

MARÍA: Mum is ill, she's very ill. They've found a tumour in her brain. It's really big and it takes up all her frontal lobe. And that means that it's a serious problem, very serious.

LUCAS: OK but the operation will be covered by the insurance, won't it?

MARÍA: There won't be an operation.

ESTEBAN: And you're going to decide that as well or what?

LUCAS: Well, so they remove this globe thing: 'if thine globe offend thee pluck it out'.

ESTEBAN: Lobe Lucas lobe.

LUCAS: Yes that's it. They take out the globe and the problem's solved. Besides, if it's covered by the insurance... *(He pours himself a drink).*

MARÍA: They can't do anything. There's no operation, no treatment, nothing. They have given her two months to live. Maybe more, maybe less. It depends on how the tumour develops.

ESTEBAN: And does she know?

MARÍA: No, no, it's better she doesn't. *(To Esteban)* And that's not me mind, the doctor says so. Apparently in these cases it's better to say nothing to the patient.

LUCAS: Well, I'd like to know if I was going to die *(drinks).*

ESTEBAN: Of course you're going to die idiot. And if you don't stop sucking on that bottle it'll be very soon.

LUCAS: You're going to croak as well shirt-lifter but in your case it'll be from an overdose of 'man milk'.

MARÍA: Listen to me a moment! Please above all not a word of this to mum. *(To Esteban)* And not just because I say so. Really, it's what the doctors say.

LUCAS: Two months.

MARÍA: Two months

ESTEBAN: That's two months she'll spend in 'her' house in 'my' house, is that clear?

MARÍA: Listen to me a moment if only for a moment please. I want to tell you something else. Mum has spent her life working, right?

ESTEBAN AND LUCAS: Yes.

MARÍA: She's spent her life fighting.

LUCAS: She had balls did mum.

ESTEBAN: Do us a favour and don't talk about her in the past. She isn't dead yet.

MARÍA: Well I reckon that after the life she's had she deserves a rest and she deserves some quiet.

ESTEBAN: Are you implying that she doesn't get any quiet here?

MARÍA: I'm not implying anything for God's sake! I'm saying that her dream should come true.

ESTEBAN: 'Her' dream? Or... 'your' dream?

LUCAS: But what dream? Whose dream?

MARÍA: She's always wanted to go back to the village where she was born.

ESTEBAN: To her village? Come off it. She left when she was a kiddie and she's never been back.

LUCAS: They chased her out like a dog when her stepbrother got her pregnant. *(He pours himself another drink).* Just as well the baby was born dead.

MARÍA: It's always been her dream to go back to where she was born and if mum meant anything to you two, you'd know that.

ESTEBAN: Her dream has always been to die here. So mum'll leave this house feet first.

LUCAS: Do us a favour and don't talk about her in the future. She isn't dead yet.

MARÍA: Mum is coming with me.

ESTEBAN: Bollocks!

MARÍA: There's nothing more to say.

ESTEBAN: Fucking bollocks!

MARÍA: I'm off.

ESTEBAN: That's it, go. That's your answer to everything, running away.

MARÍA turns around and returns to the table.

MARÍA: OK. Let her decide.

ESTEBAN: There's nothing to decide.

LUCAS: Seems fair to me.

ESTEBAN: Fair? Who do you think you are now fucking King Solomon?

LUCAS: If I was fucking King Solomon I'd cut mum in two and you could take away half each.

In fact if you can't reach an agreement it could always be a solution.

Silence. ESTEBAN bites his nails pensively. MARÍA stares at him.

LUCAS: Although, really the fairest solution... would be to cut her into three parts.

LUCAS laughs at his own remark.

LUCAS: I'd ask for the hindquarters.

LUCAS laughs again. There is a staring contest between ESTEBAN and MARÍA.

ESTEBAN: OK, let her decide.

MARÍA: Let her decide.

LUCAS: That's it let her decide. How about we toast the deal?

5.

Fourth day, first hour of the afternoon. ESTEBAN is in the bathroom. In the dining room LUCAS is clumsily cleaning the floor with a mop. He is wearing some old unlaced boots and the same vest and underpants as in the first scene. He approaches the table. He wrings out the mop and he runs it over the surface. He then does the same with one of the chairs.

ESTEBAN (OFF): Have you put bleach in the water?

LUCAS: Of course I've put bleach in the water. How many times have you asked me? Do you think I'm a fucking retard like you?

ESTEBAN (OFF): OK OK. I only wanted to know if you've put bleach in the water. You have, haven't you?

LUCAS: Go bugger yourself with a cactus. If you don't want me to help you, say so and I'll stop.

ESTEBAN (OFF): Of course I want you to help me Lucas. Of course I want you to help me.

LUCAS: Well then, shut your fucking trap.

Silence.

ESTEBAN: Eh eh, let's be clear. You're not helping me. It's in both our interests that mum gets a good impression.

LUCAS: Well stop fucking me about with the fucking bleach.

LUCAS approaches the sink. He bends down and picks up a bottle. He opens it, smells it and takes a drink. He gets out another bottle, he smells it, and holds it away from his face with disgust and tips a good measure into the bucket.

LUCAS: I hate fucking bleach. It smells of prisons and hospitals.

He puts the mop into the bucket. He twirls it between his hands and sits down without letting go of the mop. He picks up the bottle and he pours himself a drink. ESTEBAN enters with a cloth and a bucket in his hand. He is wearing a floral apron and pink rubber gloves.

ESTEBAN: You've finished?

LUCAS: Yeah, look I haven't let go of the mop yet.

ESTEBAN: And you've got hold of the bottle already.

LUCAS: You want some?

ESTEBAN: No.

LUCAS: So don't bugger me about.

ESTEBAN: Have you cleaned the floor?

LUCAS: Yes, the floor and the table and that chair over there. What's up?

ESTEBAN: Don't get angry but... I don't smell bleach.

LUCAS: You calling me a liar?

ESTEBAN: I'm not calling you anything.

LUCAS: Let's play a game. You stick your fucking nose in the bucket and if there isn't any bleach you drink it.

ESTEBAN: I'm not saying there isn't any bleach, I'm only saying it doesn't smell.

LUCAS: What time's she arriving?

ESTEBAN: I don't think she'll be long so you'd better have a shower.

LUCAS: We didn't discuss that.

ESTEBAN: We said that mum ought to get a good impression. Better she doesn't see you like that.

LUCAS: Mum loves me as I am...

ESTEBAN: That's what I don't understand.

LUCAS: ... and that's why I'm back here.

ESTEBAN: Dogs and drunks always find their way home.

LUCAS: What?

ESTEBAN: Nothing, I was talking to myself.

LUCAS: Listen, one thing. Why did you accuse María of wanting to get hold of mum's money?

ESTEBAN: Well, because that's what she wants.

LUCAS: No, no, I know that already. I'm saying... why did you accuse her of wanting to get hold of the money if according to you there isn't any money?

ESTEBAN: Me?

LUCAS: Yes you. You were like a she-wolf with her cubs.

ESTEBAN: It's just...

LUCAS: If we're in this together it's better you don't lie to me.

ESTEBAN: I'm not lying. There's no money, I swear to you.

LUCAS: You'll think I'm paranoid but I'd rather you didn't lie to me.

ESTEBAN: Agreed, you're right. There is a little money.

LUCAS: You know I hate your 'littles' Esteban.

ESTEBAN: Let's see. It's not that there's much but there is a little something.

LUCAS: We're partners and it's better you don't lie to me.

ESTEBAN: OK, mum has a savings account at a fixed rate that she's never touched. She started it before you were born. Every month she pays in something. It's not much but of course after so many years I reckon it must be a tidy little sum.

LUCAS: And that money is supposed to be for us two, right?

ESTEBAN: I already told you it'll be for us two.

LUCAS: Fifty-fifty.

ESTEBAN: That's it.

LUCAS: Great. You see how easy it is?

ESTEBAN: Yeah.

LUCAS: Well from now on no more lies, OK?

ESTEBAN: No more lies.

LUCAS: That's the ticket.

ESTEBAN: Good. So let's finish clearing away the things. They'll be here soon.

LUCAS: Esteban.

ESTEBAN: Go ahead.

LUCAS: Sit down a minute mate.

ESTEBAN: But they'll be here any minute and I'd prefer to finish clearing away all this and ...

LUCAS: Sit down for fuck's sake. The one time that we're having a relaxed conversation.

ESTEBAN: Alright, just for a little while.

LUCAS: We don't talk much, do we? I mean talk like we are now.

ESTEBAN: Well no, not really.

LUCAS: It's good to talk.

ESTEBAN: Yeah.

LUCAS: Do you remember when we used to go to school?

ESTEBAN: Of course I remember.

LUCAS: The two of us with the same outfits.

ESTEBAN: In those days mum was well and she used to make our clothes.

LUCAS: Really? I don't remember that.

ESTEBAN: What I mean to say is that she didn't spend the day shouting.

LUCAS: I don't remember her before the shouting.

ESTEBAN: Don't you remember the brown trousers?

LUCAS: What trousers?

ESTEBAN: The shorts, the ones made of wool.

LUCAS: Do I remember? How can I forget those fucking woollen trousers?

ESTEBAN: They itched liked mad. Mum made those as well for the two of us. She had this thing about making little matching outfits. Later she sold the machine and she didn't ever sew again. Not even a sock. But before she sold it she made us a big pile of clothes. We were always dressed the same.

LUCAS: Like two good little brothers.

ESTEBAN: When we were small we used to sleep together.

LUCAS: In the same room?

ESTEBAN: And in the same bed.

LUCAS: Fuck me. I don't remember that.

ESTEBAN: Yes, until they started me on medication. It was when we lived in the old flat. The one near the railway line. Don't you remember that you were scared of the trains? At night, every time one went passed you used to hug me so tightly...

LUCAS: So we used to sleep together?

ESTEBAN: Yes, the room was so small that there was only space for one bed.

LUCAS: I take it that you respected me.

ESTEBAN: Bloody hell Lucas, you were almost a baby.

LUCAS: Well, I don't know.

Silence.

LUCAS: How time flies.

ESTEBAN: Yes, it does.

LUCAS: Can you picture us two now in one of those matching outfits we used to have?

They laugh.

ESTEBAN: Well, it wouldn't be a bad idea to welcome mum with those woollen trousers. Can you imagine?

LUCAS: Shut it, shut it, I'm itching just thinking about it.

ESTEBAN: The two of us there nice and smart...

LUCAS: With the fucking side partings.

ESTEBAN: What's the matter with a side parting? I like to comb my hair with a parting.

LUCAS: Yes, so I see. Some things never change.

ESTEBAN: We were happier in that flat.

LUCAS: Happier?

ESTEBAN: Well, I don't know. Better off.

LUCAS: It's a shame I don't remember.

ESTEBAN: Sometimes it's better not to remember.

LUCAS: And do you remember when we changed schools?

ESTEBAN: Of course.

LUCAS: And do you remember Tebas and his gang?

ESTEBAN: Yes, I remember. Of course I remember.

LUCAS: And do you remember when they grabbed you in the toilets and pulled off your trousers and pants and all your clothes and they threw them out of the window into the street?

ESTEBAN: Why are you bringing that up now?

LUCAS: They left you stark naked the bastards. Tebas got out a penknife and said he was going to cut off your willy. If you hadn't managed to run off he would have cut it off. That fucking bastard would have cut it off. As it was time to go back to class after playtime the corridor was jam-packed with kids. You had to walk along the whole corridor starkers to the headmaster's office. What an uproar that was. The whole school seeing you there in your birthday suit.

ESTEBAN: I don't know why you have to remind me of that.

LUCAS: And to top it all that bastard headmaster only dragged you out of his office by the ear and made you walk all the way back down the corridor to your classroom to get your coat. What a sadist! Everyone was falling about with laughter. What bastards! They were laughing like mad. Do you remember?

ESTEBAN: How do you expect me not to remember?

LUCAS: I swear I stopped laughing when the bastard headmaster dragged you out of his office by the ear.

ESTEBAN: Yeah.

LUCAS: And when you had that fit and the ambulance came I was really worried about you I swear. You were my big brother. I was dead scared. I was only a kiddie. I went straight up to Tebas and told him that if anything happened to you I was going to stick a biro in his eye and I'd leave him half blind like that one-eyed man in the market. He laughed at me and shoved me aside but I swear that if anything had happened to you I would have done it.

ESTEBAN: Why are telling me all this?

LUCAS: It was me.

ESTEBAN: Who what?

LUCAS: It was me who gave Tebas the piece of paper you used to keep in your blue pencil case with the heart drawn on it.

ESTEBAN: What?

LUCAS: The sheet of notepaper with the heart coloured in with the crayons you never let me use: 'Esteban loves Tebas' inside a little pink heart. You even drew a fucking cupid's arrow. You were always good at drawing.

ESTEBAN: Why did you do it?

LUCAS: Do what?

ESTEBAN: Why did you have to give him the heart?

LUCAS: I don't know. That's the truth. I don't know. I suppose it was because you wouldn't let me use the crayons. Because I found that heart with his name and yours. And because... Oh, I don't know!

ESTEBAN: Have you finished?

LUCAS: I think it was out of shame... shame that someone might find out.

ESTEBAN: Have you finished now?

LUCAS: Yes. Well, no. I mean... that now I wouldn't do it. I mean to say that if I was in the same situation now I want you to know that I wouldn't do it. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

ESTEBAN: No Lucas, I don't know. I don't know why the fuck you've had to tell me.

LUCAS: I don't know either. Maybe it's because of what we said before. You know, about no more lies.

ESTEBAN: I would have preferred not to know.

LUCAS: OK then, calm down. I won't tell you anything more.

ESTEBAN: What else do you have to tell me?

LUCAS: Didn't you say it was better not to know. Make your mind up or you're going to drive me round the bend as well.

ESTEBAN: Do me just one favour and forget about me. Fucking forget about me for once and for all!

ESTEBAN gets up and continues tidying up.

LUCAS: Listen don't be angry mate, it's not a big deal.

ESTEBAN (Shouting): Leave me alone!

LUCAS: What a sensitive lad!

LUCAS watches him. Silence.

LUCAS: By the way, I've got news about the comics.

ESTEBAN: The comics? *(He approaches with interest)* Have you got the comics already?

LUCAS: Not yet but very soon. It's just that the bloke I sold them to doesn't want to give them to me but I've given him an ultimatum. *(Esteban glares at him angrily)* Don't look at me like that we've said no more lies, or haven't we?

ESTEBAN: OK, agreed. And who did you sell them to?

LUCAS: What does it matter?

ESTEBAN: It matters to me. I know all the booksellers. I demand to know.

LUCAS: Some bloke called Rovira.

ESTEBAN: To Rovira? But what were you thinking doing business with that bloodsucker? That bastard's never ever going to let you have them back.

LUCAS: Yes, he's going to let me have them back.

ESTEBAN: No, no he won't. He knows perfectly well what they're worth. He won't let you have them back.

LUCAS: Calm down. I told you that I've given him an ultimatum. He either gives me back the comics or I burn his shop down. I went there with a can of petrol and a box of matches. The can was empty but of course he didn't know that. While I was talking to him I put a cigarette in my mouth and I lit it with a match, see? You should've seen him. He went as yellow as my fingernails.

ESTEBAN: Ha, ha, yes I've had loved to have seen him, yes. And what did he say?

LUCAS: He told me that he'd bring me them. That he didn't have them in the shop but that he would bring me them.

ESTEBAN: Good!

LUCAS: But...

ESTEBAN: But what?

LUCAS: He asked me for money and...

ESTEBAN: Of course.

LUCAS: ... now that we're partners I reckon we should cover the costs of the operation between the two of us.

ESTEBAN: Like hell. I'm not giving him a cent.

LUCAS: I reckon it's fair. I sold them to him, didn't I? Well now it seems logical that if I want them I've got to pay for them.

ESTEBAN: Alright, alright. And how much is he asking?

LUCAS: Double what he paid me.

ESTEBAN: I knew it. I told you he was a bloodsucker, I told you. And how much is double?

LUCAS: It doesn't matter. We'll work it out later.

ESTEBAN: No, how much is double?

LUCAS: Fifty Euros.

ESTEBAN: Fifty Euros? You wretched swine! You sold him thirty-five issues of Flash Gordon first edition in perfect condition for twenty-five miserable Euros?

LUCAS: I don't know! But to me they were just some old comics.

ESTEBAN: I can't believe it.

LUCAS: He took advantage of me. Of my circumstances and my good faith.

ESTEBAN: Twenty-five Euros! ... You're a fucking mad drunk and totally brainless!

LUCAS: Esteban, we've got something more important in hand than those fucking comics. Don't provoke me or the team goes down the shit hole.

ESTEBAN: You're right, you're right and for that reason I'll shut up. But let me tell you something. If you don't get them back...

LUCAS: Don't threaten me or I'll rip off your ears, shirt-lifter.

ESTEBAN (*Looking at his watch*): Come on, go and get dressed. It's late.

LUCAS: The money.

ESTEBAN: What?

LUCAS: The money.

ESTEBAN: What money?

LUCAS: Don't act the dizzy mare. Twenty-five Euros.

ESTEBAN: It's just that right now I don't have it. I'll give it to you when you bring them back. Anyway I've got a buyer and we agreed that I'd give you a hundred and fifty for them, didn't we?

LUCAS: That's right.

ESTEBAN: Well OK. I'll give you a hundred and seventy-five and that's it. No, better still, I'll give you a hundred and eighty. Nice round numbers. When you bring them back.

LUCAS: Done, a hundred and eighty. But when I bring them back, eh?

ESTEBAN: That's it, you pain in the neck, I've already told you.

LUCAS: A little drink?

The door and some voices are heard.

ESTEBAN: Shit, they're here already. Remember, we've got to impress her.

LUCAS: Job done, as soon as she sees me with the mop and you with those... gloves. By the way, they really suit you.

Enter LUISA in a wheelchair. She is sedated. MARÍA is pushing her and she is carrying a large bag on her shoulder. The brothers wait for them beside the table. ESTEBAN is still wearing the pink rubber gloves and holding the cloth. LUCAS holds the mop as if he were in a parade ground inspection.

LUISA (To María): Did you bring the biscuits that were in my bedside drawer?

MARÍA: Yes mum, I've brought them. And that's the last time I'm going to tell you.

LUISA: And the juices?

MARÍA: Yes, the juices as well.

ESTEBAN: Hello mum.

LUISA: My boys!

LUCAS: What a lovely chair.

LUISA: I've been dying to see you!

ESTEBAN: Us too mum. We've missed you so much. *(To Lucas)* Isn't that right?

LUCAS

Eh... yes of course. So much.

MARÍA: Didn't you remember how to light the cooker?

LUISA: Come here you two and let me give you a kiss.

The two brothers look at each other. MARÍA gestures that LUISA is acting a little strangely. ESTEBAN approaches and leans over his mother. LUISA holds his face with both hands and gives him five big kisses on the cheek. ESTEBAN straightens up. He takes his brother by the arm and indicates that he move closer. LUCAS bends down and LUISA gives him another barrage of kisses. LUCAS touches his face and moves towards the bottle. LUISA speaks to them as if they were children.

LUISA: So have you two been behaving yourselves?

The two brothers look at each other in surprise. MARÍA shrugs her shoulders.

ESTEBAN: Eh... yes, we have mum *(elbows Lucas)*.

LUCAS: Yes, of course we have.

LUISA: That's what I like to hear. I've brought you a little something. María, give me the biscuits.

MARÍA takes out some packets of biscuits from the bag. They are typical hospital fare.

LUISA: Here you are. Two for each of you.

The brothers take their respective packets and force a smile.

ESTEBAN: Thanks mum. You shouldn't have bothered.

LUCAS: Hum... biscuits.

LUISA: Eat them up and you'll see how nice they are.

MARÍA: They're delicious. I already had to eat mine in the taxi.

LUISA: I always asked the nurse for an extra packet and later I hid them away. The old lady in the bed next to me used to give me hers as well. As the poor thing was full of tubes she never ate a thing and she used to give me all her food.

MARÍA: If she'd spent another week in the hospital she'd have opened her own snack bar.

LUISA: Come on. Let me see you eat up those biscuits.

The two brothers look at each other. LUCAS shakes his head. ESTEBAN gestures to LUCAS to go ahead. MARÍA smiles maliciously. LUISA waits for them to start eating. ESTEBAN opens one of the packets and he raises a biscuit to his mouth.

ESTEBAN: Very nice, aren't they Lucas?

LUCAS: I'll save them for later.

LUISA: Try them. You can't go without eating and be drinking all day.

MARÍA: That's true. Better you eat them. They're really nice.

LUCAS: Do you want to eat something that's also 'really nice'?

LUISA: I saved them especially for you son.

ESTEBAN: Eat one at least.

LUCAS reluctantly opens a packet and takes out a biscuit. Everyone watches him. LUCAS hesitates and then bites it.

LUISA: Nice, aren't they?

ESTEBAN: Very nice.

LUCAS: ... icious.

LUISA: I've also brought you some juices.

As soon as LUISA turns towards MARÍA, LUCAS spits out the biscuit.

LUISA (To María): Give them the juices sweetie.

LUCAS: No! ... Juice no please.

ESTEBAN: It's only that we had breakfast just now. Just a minute ago, (to Lucas) didn't we?
LUCAS nods.

LUISA: Well, for a snack then. Come on. Take me to the bathroom sweetie.

MARÍA: Let's go.

LUISA: Pour me a little drink first.

MARÍA: You heard the doctor. No little drinks.

LUISA: What does the doctor know?

MARÍA pushes the wheelchair and heads towards the bathroom.

ESTEBAN: You'll see mum, I've just cleaned it.

LUISA: What a darling son I have!

LUISA and MARÍA enter in the bathroom.

LUCAS (*To Luisa*): And I mopped the floor!

LUCAS picks up the bottle and pours himself a drink.

ESTEBAN: Have you noticed? She's in a terrible state.

LUCAS: I'm telling you I'm not going to eat one more biscuit.

ESTEBAN: She's kind of... kind of affectionate.

LUCAS: I reckon it's that globe thing. It must be pressing on part of her brain (*knocks back his drink in one*).

ESTEBAN: Being in the state she's in María can do with her what she likes. We've got to be on the lookout.

LUCAS: You what?

MARÍA enters and approaches the table.

MARÍA: Well, you've seen how she is.

ESTEBAN: She's not that bad. I thought she'd be worse, (*to Lucas*) didn't you?

LUCAS: Err yes. We thought she'd be in a terrible state, (*to Esteban*) didn't we?

MARÍA: What are you two playing at?

LUCAS: Nothing, but if you want we could play doctors and nurses. Do you remember?

MARÍA: You haven't noticed that she can't walk and can hardly move her arm?

ESTEBAN: What are you insinuating?

MARÍA: I'm not insinuating anything. It's obvious that she needs me.

ESTEBAN: She's never needed you. Why's she going to need you now?

MARÍA: Maybe because she can't manage on her own and you two can hardly take care of yourselves.

LUCAS: I don't know what you're driving at and I don't like the road you're taking.

ESTEBAN: We're perfectly capable of looking after mum and helping her with everything she needs. (*To Lucas*) Aren't we?

LUCAS: Absolutely.

LUISA (OFF): Can you give me a hand?

MARÍA: Well, now's your chance to show it.

ESTEBAN: Show what?

MARÍA: Your mother or are you both deaf? She's asking you for help.

LUISA: Can you hear me or what?

ESTEBAN: I'm coming mum! (*To María*) You'll see. Lucas, put the bottle down and go and help mum.

LUCAS: Me?

ESTEBAN: Yes. We're going to show your sister that we're capable of looking after her.

MARÍA: You're so pitiful that I don't know whether to laugh or throw up.

LUCAS: Oh yeah? You'll see.

LUCAS leaves the bottle and glass on the table and moves solemnly and decidedly towards the bathroom.

MARÍA: I'm staying here until mum makes a decision.

ESTEBAN: No way. This isn't your home anymore. It stopped being your home the day you walked out.

MARÍA: You need me.

ESTEBAN: We've never needed you.

Enter LUCAS. He appears uncomfortable. He is carrying something in his hand that he is hiding behind his back.

ESTEBAN: And mum?

LUCAS: It's better that you go.

ESTEBAN: What's happened?

LUCAS: I just can't do it.

ESTEBAN: What can't you do?

LUCAS hands him a roll of toilet paper.

LUCAS: Here.

ESTEBAN: What?

LUCAS: Mum says you go.

ESTEBAN: Me? And... why me?

LUCAS: For fuck's sake I'm a man and despite being our mother she is still a woman and... it's better that you do it. You've got more of a feeling for these girly things.

ESTEBAN: You miserable swine!

LUISA (OFF): Isn't anyone coming to help me?

ESTEBAN looks at the toilet roll in his hand. He looks towards the bathroom and looks at the toilet roll again. MARÍA smiles.

MARÍA: I'm coming!

MARÍA approaches ESTEBAN smiling. She snatches the toilet roll and she heads towards the bathroom. Before entering she turns around and looks her brothers up and down.

MARÍA: By the way, start thinking which of you is going to let me have their room.

MARÍA enters in the bathroom and closes the door. ESTEBAN casts a look at his brother.

LUCAS shrugs his shoulders.

6.

Fifth day, in the morning. ESTEBAN and LUISA are having coffee.

ESTEBAN: All I'm saying is that we've always been alone and alone we've always got by.

LUISA: Do you know how long it's been since the last time the three of us were together in this house?

ESTEBAN: Well I don't know. Well yes, since María abandoned us.

LUISA: You're wrong son.

ESTEBAN: I am?

LUISA: Yes, she didn't abandon anyone. It was me who abandoned her. It was me who abandoned you all.

ESTEBAN: No way. It was her who walked out. Besides she said: "I'm never coming back". And now look at her. It hasn't taken her long to come back. As soon...

LUISA: As soon as what?

ESTEBAN: Look, I didn't want to tell you but if she's come back it's for your money. For your patrimony, for 'our' matrimony. Ours.

LUISA: No one's going to take the money.

ESTEBAN: And Lucas is the same.

LUISA: Lucas?

ESTEBAN: Why do you think Lucas has come, eh? To keep you company?

LUISA: I don't know and I don't want to know. I only know that I'm happy to have you all here again.

ESTEBAN: Me too. Deliriously happy. Look at me sleeping in the dining room! As if I was a dog! In my own home!

LUISA: Esteban, son. I don't like to see you like this.

ESTEBAN: I don't like it either but what do you want me to say?

LUISA: Calm down. Have you taken your pills?

ESTEBAN: Calm down no! I could have done a lot of things. Great things but no you always had to have me tied to your apron strings. It's not fair. It's always been me who's had to take all the shit of this sick family. All your shit!

LUISA looks at ESTEBAN who remains with his head bowed down.

LUISA: Very well son, you're right. Do you want to tell me something more?

ESTEBAN: Tell you?

LUISA: Yes, maybe there's something more you want to tell me.

ESTEBAN: About what?

LUISA: I don't know. Perhaps about your father?

ESTEBAN: I've got nothing to tell you.

LUISA: About what happened?

ESTEBAN: No.

LUISA: Are you sure son?

ESTEBAN: I've told you no.

ESTEBAN is growing more and more agitated.

LUISA: Me... me yes I want to tell you something. I want to tell you that... that I've always tried to give you all the best and that... I know that I wasn't the...

ESTEBAN: ... I don't see why you're bringing this up now.

LUISA: Listen son. I know we've never talked about what happened but...

ESTEBAN: ... Mum please.

LUISA: And I know I didn't deal with things well and that...

ESTEBAN: Forget it!

ESTEBAN covers his ears with his hands so as to stop hearing.

LUISA: Forget it no! I can't keep forgetting there isn't time for that. I regret so many things that...

ESTEBAN: Drop it mum!

LUISA: ... I feel... Son, you have to know that I never knew what was happening and that if...

ESTEBAN: There's no need mum.

LUISA: Yes there is. For me there is.

ESTEBAN: No, now no. That's enough.

LUISA: I know that's enough! But let me just tell you that I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. And if I had known that your father...

ESTEBAN: Shut up!

LUISA: Son, please, I'm only asking you to forgive me that you don't...

ESTEBAN interrupts her by shouting. He is sitting with his hands over his ears and with his eyes closed.

ESTEBAN: Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!

Silence. ESTEBAN is leaning forward over his knees, rocking compulsively backwards and forwards. Little by little he calms down while LUISA begins speaking as if nothing has happened.

LUISA: Do you know what I'd like to make for lunch? ... Macaroni with sausages. It's been years and years since I've made that, hasn't it? ... It used to be my speciality. Do you remember? If you go shopping we can make it the two of us... It used to be your favourite dish, didn't it? With the sausages well done just as you like them. With lots of fried onions and a small bay leaf and a little white wine before adding the grated tomato. Grated tomato is better. Tinned doesn't give the same flavour. And then the last swish-swish with the macaroni and they're finger-licking good.

ESTEBAN: And cheese.

LUISA: That's it. And then grated cheese on top. So delicious, you'll see. We'll all have lunch together. Well, I don't know if your sister'll be coming. If she doesn't we'll reheat them when she gets here. And we can open a little bottle of a good wine. Do you think I'll be able to drink a little wine?

ESTEBAN: The doctor said no alcohol.

LUISA: It's true, you're right. Son, will you give your mum a kiss?

ESTEBAN does not raise his head. LUISA approaches him in her wheelchair until she positions herself at his side. ESTEBAN, initially suspicious, ends up leaning towards her and resting his head on her breast. LUCAS appears. By the state of his hair it he has just got up. He is dressed in the same vest and underpants as in the first scene. He sees ESTEBAN and LUISA in an embrace.

LUCAS: Eh! Take a breather lovebirds! Control your emotions you're not alone.

ESTEBAN sits up and picks up the newspaper.

LUISA: Son, why don't you put on some trousers?

LUCAS: What with these legs that God gave me? It's a shame not to show them off, don't you think?

LUISA: Lucas son, do it for your mother.

ESTEBAN looks at his brother disapprovingly and gestures that he should pay attention to his mother.

LUCAS: Alright, alright. I'll be a good boy. If you want I'll put on some trousers. Though I'm only doing it to stop my brother from getting jealous.

He moves towards a chair covered in a big pile of clothes that is leaning against the wall.

LUCAS: That's if I can find them.

ESTEBAN pulls out a rumpled handkerchief from his pocket and blows his nose.

ESTEBAN: Lucas.

LUCAS: I'm coming for fuck's sake! Can't you see I'm looking for them?

LUISA: Shh, don't squabble.

ESTEBAN: I want to know when you're going to bring me the comics.

LUCAS: Good morning first, isn't it?

ESTEBAN: Good morning.

LUCAS: That's better. *(To LUISA)* How's the belle of the house? *(To ESTEBAN)* And don't you go taking offence.

LUCAS bends down and he gives his mother a good morning kiss on the lips. She smiles and pats his bottom.

LUISA: What a rogue you are! Come sit down with us.

LUCAS picks up the bottle and a glass.

ESTEBAN: I've asked you a question.

LUCAS *(Pours himself a drink):* Me?

ESTEBAN: Of course. Who was the cretin that took my comics?

LUCAS: What an arse. First thing in the morning on about his fucking comics!

ESTEBAN: You remember I had a buyer.

LUCAS: Alright, this afternoon you'll have them here.

ESTEBAN: I'm counting on that, eh?

LUCAS *(To Luisa):* But how could you give birth to such an arse?

LUISA laughs, delighted with her sons. She puts her hand over LUCAS'. He takes her hand and gives it an exaggerated long and intense kiss. LUISA laughs in amusement. LUCAS continues the game and begins to wink and pout. LUISA cannot stop laughing. ESTEBAN observes the scene with irritation and he gets up.

LUCAS: You off already?

ESTEBAN: Yes.

LUISA: Aren't you going shopping to make the macaroni?

ESTEBAN: No. I don't want macaroni.

LUISA: Alright.

LUCAS: Going to the Arenas cinema? I didn't know they have morning 'sessions' on Thursdays.

ESTEBAN: Get fucked.

LUCAS: Ah, OK. Well if you're going to Mr Tomás' house say hello from me.

ESTEBAN makes a gesture of contempt at LUCAS. He picks up a pile of old books that are beside the table and he moves towards the door. He turns around before going out.

ESTEBAN: Mum, we'll make macaroni another day, OK?

LUISA: Of course son. Another day.

ESTEBAN nods and he exits. LUCAS sits in front of LUISA and he pours himself another drink. LUISA follows him with her eyes.

LUCAS: Has María gone as well?

LUISA: Yes, she went off early to work.

LUCAS: So... it's my turn to babysit?

LUISA: Son and you? Why don't you look for a job?

LUCAS: Why don't I find a job? That is the question.

LUISA: Well and why don't you find one?

LUCAS drinks. LUISA watches him and swallows saliva.

LUCAS: Because I don't look. What responsible businessman would dare to employ me? Tell me. And me, I'm not going to work for any old scumbag.

LUISA: Why don't you ask your sister to see if they need someone at the cake shop.

LUCAS: Yeah, right!

LUISA: Yes, I'm sure she could ask.

LUCAS: You reckon?

LUISA: Of course son. She's not your sister for nothing.

LUCAS: Well, I could see myself working in a cake shop (*drinks*).

LUISA: I could as well.

LUCAS: I'd cut my nails, I'd have a shave...

LUISA: ... and a good haircut and some clean shoes.

LUCAS: Well I'll tell you something. If I put my mind to it I could become a great salesman.

LUISA: I reckon you could too. Every day I'd wash and iron your shirts.

LUCAS: 'A man with clean nails and an ironed shirt can go as far as he likes'. That's what my old gypsy cellmate used to say.

LUISA: Well even though he was a gypsy he was right. An ironed shirt looks like a new shirt.

LUCAS: Hey, but you. When have you ever had an iron?

LUISA: We'll buy one.

LUCAS: Of course. Well yes, I'll ask María.

LUCAS pours himself another drink.

LUISA: Let's have a drop?

LUCAS: No (*he drinks as if savouring an exquisite liquor*).

LUISA: Don't be mean to your old mum.

LUCAS: It's not that I don't want to. It's just that you can't drink. If it was down to me.

LUISA: A little won't do me any harm. I haven't had a drop for three days. What are laughing about?

LUCAS (*With the bottle in his hand*): You see it? Well I'm not even going to give you the cork.

LUISA: Don't be mean.

LUCAS: I'm not mean, I'm giving you a taste of your own medicine .

LUISA: You love torturing me!

LUCAS: You were my teacher.

LUISA: Come on stop messing about, I'm a little poorly.

LUCAS: Alright, I'll pour you a drink.

LUCAS gets up and picks up another glass.

LUISA: Thank you son. At least you understand me.

LUCAS pours two drinks but he does not give her the glass.

LUCAS: Mum, I've been thinking. Now that you're ill. Well that... of course that...

LUISA: Tell me son.

LUCAS: What will happen to your things?

LUISA: My things?

LUCAS: That's it, your things. I mean... when you aren't here. And let's hope that's a long way off before you're not here. Well...

LUISA: I'm listening.

LUCAS: Well that's it. Fuck, that your things. I mean your face creams, your clothes..., the money, the flat..., you know. Well, if you've thought about what will happen to everything. I mean. Who will it go to?

LUISA: Son, you don't have anything to worry yourselves about.

LUCAS: It's not a worry. It's more like a matter of organisation.

LUISA: You can all rest assured because there's nothing to organise.

LUCAS: Ah no? Well that's not what Esteban told me.

LUISA: And what did he tell you?

LUCAS: He let drop that you two have some 'little savings'.

LUISA: He told you that?

LUCAS: Aha.

LUISA: I find that odd.

LUCAS: You find that odd.

LUCAS empties his glass. LUISA stretches out her arm.

LUISA: Give it here.

LUCAS: Give it here? Is that the way to ask for something?

LUISA: Why are you doing this to me?

LUCAS: I'm not going to give you a drop not one miserable drop. Not until you tell me about the 'little savings' that you and my idiot brother have tucked away.

LUISA: Alright. Give it to me and I'll tell you what you want.

LUCAS: You sure?

LUISA: Of course. Don't you trust anyone?

LUCAS: Not even my own shadow.

LUISA: You're just like your mother.

LUCAS: We're two of a kind. *(He moves the glass towards her)* Go on, take it.

LUISA: Thank you son.

LUISA knocks back the glass in one.

LUCAS: It tastes fantastic when your tank is dry, eh?

LUISA: Let me have another little drop.

LUCAS: Easy, savour it.

LUISA: You gave me so little...

LUCAS: OK. Well tell me about the money. What'll happen to it?

LUISA: Esteban told me that's why you're here.

LUCAS: You know what a hypercritical girl's blouse he is.

LUISA: But I'm not bothered, truth be told. Deep down I know all of you aren't to blame.

LUCAS: Let's get to the point mum. What happens to the money?

LUISA: It's alright son. If you're here for the money you can shove off now. You can all shove off if you like.

LUCAS: Why do you say that?

LUISA: Because there's nothing left.

LUCAS: That's not true.

LUISA: I swear it is.

LUCAS: But... No, no it can't be. You're having me on.

LUISA: There's nothing left.

LUCAS: And... does Esteban know?

LUISA: No, not yet.

LUCAS gets up and begins walking and rubbing his head.

LUCAS: Nothing?

LUISA: Not a thing.

LUCAS: And the flat?

LUISA: Do you know who came to visit me in hospital?

LUCAS: I didn't go because I can't stand the smell of bleach.

LUISA: My granddaughter.

LUCAS: I'm not interested. Besides, I asked you a question.

LUISA: Your daughter.

LUCAS: Don't fuck with me I haven't got a daughter!

LUISA: She asked me about you.

LUCAS: Fuck that! What happens about the flat?

LUISA: She's quite the little madam. She asked me how you were. We were talking about you. About you two when she was little. She told me about when you went to a Mexican restaurant to celebrate her birthday and you broke a fishbowl.

LUCAS: It was an accident. And it wasn't a Mexican it was a Chinese. And it wasn't a fishbowl it was an enormous aquarium. It took up half the wall like a partition. And I didn't break it. It was an accident.

LUISA: Yeah, an accident.

LUCAS: It's true for fuck's sake. I swear to you. I'd left my wallet at home, so what? It was an accident. I realised when they brought me the bill and the fucking flower liquor. I reached for my wallet and it wasn't there. It was an accident. It could have happened to anyone.

I told the Chink waitress. I don't know if she understood me or if she didn't understand me but she turned around and called her boss. Fucking hell I was with my daughter! We were celebrating her birthday! And her bitch of a mother sided with the other Chink waitress that appeared. I told her that there wasn't a problem and that she should bring another ice cream for the kid and another Gordon's for her fucking mother while I went to look for my wallet. I was sure I'd left it in the car or at home or I don't know where. That I wouldn't take long. But they didn't let me. Starting off with my wife. The bitch said to me: "What, are you going to do the same as last time?". But that time was different. That time my daughter wasn't there. We weren't celebrating her birthday and I hadn't bought her a stuffed giraffe that looked like a donkey with measles. That's what the bitch said to me: "Aren't you ashamed to give your daughter a donkey with measles?". The kid started crying and her mother started shouting at me. She was as drunk as a skunk and I was shouting at her as well. We had been drinking a little. The manageress of the restaurant took me by the arm. My crazy wife began hitting me with her handbag. Chinks started coming out of the kitchen. It looked like a fucking karate film. The kid kept crying. Everyone was shouting. The table went over. I picked up the bottle of flower liquor and I threw it with all my might at the fucking aquarium.

Ever since we'd arrived I couldn't stop looking at it. And they didn't stop watching me. Those fucking obese fish didn't stop watching us. Watching me. So I threw the bottle with all my might and that was the end of the show. The floor was covered in fishes that bounced around like tennis balls. Ten or fifteen Chinks grabbed hold of me. I could hardly move. Then we heard the sirens. My psychopath of a wife kept hitting me with her handbag. She slipped and fell on the floor. I think that's when she cracked her fucking vertebra.

I felt a tremendous blow and I woke up in a police car. I only asked about my daughter: "where's my daughter?". Nobody answered me, no one. It was an accident, a fucking accident. After that they didn't let me see her. And later it was her who didn't want to see me. And I don't care if it was her mother or that bitch's fucking mother or the fucking mother of that bitch of a judge who didn't let me go near her.

Silence. LUCAS pours himself and glass and drinks it.

LUCAS: It was an accident. It was a fucking accident.

LUISA: That's all water under the bridge now son.

LUISA shows her empty glass to LUCAS. LUCAS picks up the bottle and he fills both glasses.

LUCAS: Do you know how many times I tried to call her? See her? Touch her?

LUISA: She was only a child. A manipulated and frightened child. But now she's strong like us. She's one of our kind.

They drink. Silence.

LUCAS: Did she really ask after me?

LUISA: Of course. She said that when she gets back perhaps you could see each other and have a chat.

LUCAS: When she gets back from where?

LUISA: From making her dream come true.

LUCAS: More fucking dreams.

LUISA: She's going to study in Berlin.

LUCAS: Berlin? The little bitch. She's the smartest of the family but where's the money coming from?

LUISA: Come on, give me another drop.

7.

Some hours later. LUISA is in her wheelchair looking at some photos. On the table there is an old biscuit tin full of photos, a glass and the bottle, now almost empty. The door opens. LUISA closes her eyes and pretends to be asleep. MARÍA enters with a plastic portfolio. She is out of breath and it appears she has been running.

MARÍA: Hello.

Silence. She approaches LUISA.

MARÍA: Mum?

She eyes the bottle with disapproval. She picks up the glass. She smells it and bangs it down on the table.

MARÍA: Great. Lucas? Esteban?

Silence. MARÍA takes off her jacket and she leaves it on a chair. She takes out her mobile. She looks for a number and calls. LUISA opens one eye and observes her without being seen.

MARÍA: Good morning, I mean good afternoon. I'd like to know what time the office closes. (...) I see, and can't you wait a moment until I get there? I'll be there before two (...) OK, and

what time do you open in the afternoon? (...) You don't open? Shit!, sorry (...) Tomorrow the problem is I wanted to take the authorisation signed and sealed to the bank. Do you understand? (...) No, I don't think you do understand me. (...) No, no, you don't have a fucking clue! (...) I'm sorry. It's just that I left work early in order to arrive on time and... the metro took ages. I ran all the way home and... and I've been delayed. Really it will only be a moment, please. I can bring it over in a moment. I won't be long. (...) But... (...) Alright, I'll bring it tomorrow. (...) Yes, of course I'll bring it all signed. (*Hangs up*). Fucking bastards!

LUISA goes back to pretending to be asleep. MARÍA angrily puts away her mobile and paces the dining room. She approaches the table and hesitates before pouring herself a drink in LUISA'S glass. LUISA opens an eye and watches MARÍA drink. MARÍA eyes the box of photos and picks up one. She looks at it and puts it back. She picks up another and then another. The hard expression on her face turns into a smile. LUISA watches her out of the corner of her eye. MARÍA sits down and pulls the box closer. She continues looking at the photos.

LUISA: Do you remember when you were little? You always wanted to see the photos.

MARÍA: I suppose I was trying to understand this family.

LUISA (*Eyeing the bottle*): Are you going to let me have a little?

MARÍA: You can't. Anyway, you've already had some.

LUISA: Me? Cross my heart and hope to die if..

MARÍA: No, don't you die before you sign.

MARÍA picks up the portfolio and puts it in front of her mother. LUISA looks at the portfolio. She looks at the bottle and at MARÍA again. MARÍA picks up the bottle and pours LUISA a drink.

LUISA: Thank you sweetie.

LUISA drinks the glass and she gives MARÍA a photo. MARÍA takes it without paying it attention.

MARÍA: You have to sign at the bottom.

LUISA: Look sweetie, (*she shows her one of the photos she has on her lap*) in this one the two of us are on the beach.

MARÍA (*Takes it reluctantly*): Which beach was it?

LUISA: El Prat, next to the scrapyard where your father used to work.

MARÍA: Sounds idyllic.

LUISA: You had to see it. As you were so little you weren't afraid of the water. There was no way to get you to come out. Oh, how you loved the water!

MARÍA: Yes look I loved the water. Esteban loved comics and Lucas loved brandy just like his mother.

LUISA: We used to go there because your father could come and have lunch on the beach with us. He only had an hour but we used to have a great time together, the five of us. It was the only way to see him sober. He never used to talk as you know but I know that for him it was important. I mean that you should see him sober.

MARÍA: Yeah. All I remember was that he used to arrive with his hands black with grease and as he was eating the tips of his fingers would slowly turn white.

LUISA: Potato omelette, Russian salad, pork with peppers...

MARÍA: I'll never forget those enormous black hands.

LUISA: ... potato salad, escalopes... your father loved escalopes.

Silence.

MARÍA: Did you ever forgive him?

LUISA: Forgive him?

MARÍA: Dad.

LUISA: I don't know. While he was alive no.

MARÍA: Perhaps it was unforgivable.

Pause.

LUISA: And me?

MARÍA: What about you?

MARÍA looks at her defiantly.

LUISA: Nothing.

LUISA lowers her eyes. She picks out another photo from the box.

LUISA: Do you remember this?

MARÍA (*Closing the box abruptly*): Well, that's enough of the photos. (*She holds out a biro in front of Luisa*) These are the papers for the banker's reference. Everything's ready now. You only have to sign here at the bottom.

LUISA: Sweetie...

MARÍA: And the rest of the copies as well. Tomorrow morning I have to take them without fail.

LUISA: It can't be done.

MARÍA: What?

LUISA: I wanted to tell you but what with the hospital...

8.

Afternoon. MARÍA is wearing her jacket. She is finishing packing clothes into a travel bag. She is visibly angry. LUCAS arrives with a packet of comics and a bottle wrapped in paper. He leaves the comics on a chair.

LUCAS: You off already?

MARÍA: Yes, I'm going.

LUCAS opens the new bottle and pours himself a drink.

LUCAS: Don't you like Esteban's room?

MARÍA: No, it's not that.

LUCAS: If you like I can let you have my bed. When all is said and done I'm used to sleeping anywhere. Even in a closet.

MARÍA: It's not necessary.

LUCAS: I mean it, seriously. More than anything I did it to fuck Esteban over. Metaphorically speaking, eh.

ESTEBAN arrives.

MARÍA: The one who's fucked us over is your daughter.

LUCAS (*To Esteban*): Hey look at him. You weren't listening from behind the door, were you?

ESTEBAN: Have you brought the comics?

MARÍA: My-o-my, butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

LUCAS (*To María*): So she's already told you, eh?

MARÍA: Yes, she's told me.

ESTEBAN: Who's told you what?

MARÍA (*To Lucas*): In the end it turns out you were right.

LUCAS: I'm always right sweetie.

ESTEBAN: But what's happened?

MARÍA: Lucas was right. His daughter's worse than a rat.

LUCAS: Eh, let's keep it polite. Only her father can call her a rat.

ESTEBAN: Can someone tell me what the fuck's happened?

MARÍA: Nothing. Your darling niece. She's got everything.

ESTEBAN: What everything?

MARÍA: Everything, Esteban. Everything. Do you know what everything means? Well that, everything.

ESTEBAN (*To Lucas*): What's she talking about?

LUCAS: My daughter, she's got all the money.

ESTEBAN: It can't be true!

LUCAS: Oh yes it can. She's sharper than a knife.

ESTEBAN: And the flat?

MARÍA: The flat was mortgaged years ago.

ESTEBAN: It can't be true. That can't be true. Mum isn't well. Mum has a tumour in her head the size of melon. She's not in her right mind. Not in front of a judge.

MARÍA: It was all signed and counter-signed months ago. I've just seen the documents. She's left your niece her last fucking cent so if you're thinking of getting something you'd better think again.

ESTEBAN: It can't be true, mum promised me...

MARÍA: Mum's been taking advantage of you all your fucking life. Knowing that afterwards she'd throw you away like an empty bottle. The same as me. The same as all of us. Mum treats people like bottles. She's only interested in them while they're full. And we're empty as far as she's concerned. Actually, I reckon that we were born already empty in her eyes. When it comes down to it I'm not surprised. I already knew I couldn't expect anything more from her than a string of sweaty kisses every time I came to see her. (*Looks at Esteban, who is devastated and sits down on a chair*) Poor little you. What a disappointment it must be. What an idiot you were

Esteban! You thought you'd inherit all the estate, didn't you? That you'd be the only fucking heir. Well there you go you've got your inheritance. You're going to look after her until she dies. But don't you worry. You can relax because according to the doctors she won't last long.

LUCAS: You, don't you act the smartarse now. You thought you'd be the only heir as well. If not what the fuck were you doing here playing the prodigious daughter?

MARÍA: Prodigal.

LUCAS: Yes that, the fucking *prudigal* daughter.

MARÍA: Look's who's talking. And you by any chance aren't here for exactly the same thing?

LUCAS: I'm here to see what I can scrape up like I've done all my fucking life. But with my head held high and face-to-face without hiding behind a mask. That's the difference.

MARÍA: You two disgust me. This family is a rubbish tip. I'm going.

LUCAS: See you next time.

MARÍA: No, Lucas. There won't be a next time.

LUCAS: Well OK, you go.

MARÍA picks up the travel bag and moves towards the door.

LUCAS: Hey, and now do you trust us to look after mum?

MARÍA stops without turning around.

LUCAS: I mean... if you have any advice.

Silence.

LUCAS: Not to worry. We'll handle things.

It appears that MARÍA is going to turn around, but she leaves. LUCAS pours himself another drink and he sits down. He begins to take off his boots and his socks.

LUCAS: We'll handle things, won't we brother?

ESTEBAN: I've no intention of handling anything. I'm never going to forgive this in all my life. In all my fucking life!

LUCAS: Don't be melodramatic. We've survived a lot worse. In the end it's only money.

ESTEBAN: But how didn't I realise? How didn't I realise? She never stopped calling her granddaughter and buying her knickers and nail varnish and taking her croquettes... And me? Not a clue. I am a fucking retard!

LUCAS: Too right or do you reckon that they give disability benefit to just anybody.

He picks up some scissors and tries to cut his toenails. He squints. It is clear that he needs glasses.

LUCAS: Listen, why don't you do me a favour?

ESTEBAN: I sacrificed my whole life to be with her, so as not to leave her alone, and then...

LUCAS: Help me cut my nails. I need glasses and I can't even see my toes.

ESTEBAN: Are you mad?

LUCAS: Eh, I've got some scissors. It's not as if I'm asking you to cut them with your teeth.

ESTEBAN: Leave me alone! How can you think about cutting your nails at a time like this!

ESTEBAN sits down devastated. LUCAS offers him the scissors.

ESTEBAN: It can't be true.

LUCAS: Come on be a good boy. The last time I tried I almost cut off one of my toes. The floor was covered in blood.

ESTEBAN: Do me a favour and cut your wrists instead and leave me alone.

LUCAS: You miserable selfish shirt-lifter.

ESTEBAN: Me miserable? But don't you realise that she's left me without a penny.

LUCAS: When all is said and done it was hers.

ESTEBAN: No, it wasn't hers! It was mine as well, mine!

LUCAS: Yours? Come on don't snivel and blow your nose. Your comics are over there.

ESTEBAN raises his head and changes his tone.

ESTEBAN: Where?

LUCAS: There on the chair.

ESTEBAN approaches the comics and begins to examine them meticulously.

LUCAS: You were right. That Rovira is a one-off. He ended up offering me up to a hundred and ninety Euros. And I told him: "You can shove your money up your arse. Those comics belong to my brother, to my brother".

ESTEBAN does not appear to listen to LUCAS, he continues examining the comics obsessively.

LUCAS: You listening to me or not? He ended up offering me up to ten Euros more than you. But we had a deal, didn't we? We're partners. We're a team, isn't that right? Brothers and partners. Are you listening to me or am I going to have to throw these scissors at your head?

ESTEBAN: Yes, I'm listening. Many thanks.

ESTEBAN picks up the comics and goes to his room to leave them there.

LUCAS: Many thanks...? If I'd known you wouldn't help me cut my toenails I'd have sold them to Rovira.

LUCAS squints. He bites his tongue and goes back to his toenails. ESTEBAN appears.

LUCAS: Well you used to cut mum's.

ESTEBAN: You said it. I used to. Now she can get fucked. No more being her fool. I'm going.

LUCAS: Oh yes? You as well?

ESTEBAN: I'm going to Carmona with Tomás.

LUCAS: Well may you and your Prince Charming live happily ever after.

ESTEBAN: I'm off right now to tell him that I'm going with him.

LUCAS: The money.

ESTEBAN: Eh?

LUCAS: My money.

ESTEBAN: Your money?

LUCAS: I've brought you the comics now you have to give me the money.

ESTEBAN: Yes, now.

LUCAS: Now when?

ESTEBAN: As soon as I've sold them I'll give you your share.

LUCAS: That wasn't what we agreed.

ESTEBAN: Calm down we're partners, aren't we?

LUCAS: You told me they were sold.

ESTEBAN: It's a good batch. I'll soon sell them and when I sell them we'll have the money.

LUCAS: We said we were a team and no lies.

ESTEBAN: I'll give you more. I'll give you a hundred and ninety.

LUCAS: You've swindled me.

ESTEBAN: Two hundred.

LUCAS: I want my money now!

ESTEBAN: OK, I'm going to make a call. Maybe I can line something up today.

LUCAS: You've let me down. I thought we had a deal.

ESTEBAN: And we do Lucas, we do.

ESTEBAN approaches the telephone, he takes out a small pocketbook and searches for a number.

LUCAS: I told you no lies. Look I told you.

ESTEBAN: You'll see how they'll snatch them up.

ESTEBAN dials a number. LUCAS gets up and he picks up a lighter from the kitchen and checks to see if it works. He picks up the bottle of brandy and goes out without ESTEBAN noticing.

ESTEBAN (To telephone): Yes, hello, it's Esteban and I'd like to speak to Mr Ibáñez, on behalf of Esteban (...) Yes, I'll wait (*he sees that Lucas is not there. He covers the receiver*). Lucas?...

Lucas?... (*To telephone*) Yes, yes, I'm here. How are you Mr Ibáñez? (...) Well we're not so bad. I'm calling because I have a batch that... (...) Ah, yes, yes, it's true, she was taken in but now she's better, thank you. As I was saying, I have a batch of... (...) Nothing, it was nothing she had a bump on her head, nothing serious. It's a magnificent batch that I'm sure that... (...) No, no she's now at home, yes. Well I have the complete first set of... (...) Yes, I'll pass on your best wishes, thanks, thanks. What I was saying was it's a first edition in perfect condition of... (...) Well my mother must be around sixty something or seventy. (...) Yes, yes, she's still very young like you Mr Ibáñez, like you. (...) Of course, many thanks, from you I'll tell her (...) No, no, don't hang up. I called you because I have the first edition of the first set in perfect condition of Flash Gordon. (...) That's right.

LUCAS returns with the bottle, he sits down at the table and continues with his toenails.

ESTEBAN watches him, he winks and signals to the receiver smiling.

(...) Yes of course, the thirty-five first issues in perfect condition. I wanted to know if you're interested. (...) Of course you'll have to see them. It's only logical. When would be a good time for you? (...) Very good, well tomorrow morning if that is convenient for you. I'll come by your shop. (...) That's right, goodbye, good morning, goodbye, goodbye.

He hangs up.

ESTEBAN: You see? It's almost settled.

LUCAS: Too late.

ESTEBAN: What's that smell?

LUCAS: Could be my feet?

ESTEBAN: No, it smells of...

A trace of smoke is coming from the passage.

ESTEBAN: What's that?

LUCAS: I told you it was too late.

ESTEBAN: What have you done you wretch?

LUCAS: We were a team and you swindled me.

ESTEBAN launches himself towards his room. Shouts are heard. LUCAS cuts his toe and shouts. The smoke increases.

LUCAS: Ah! God dam fucking toenails!

ESTEBAN (OFF): Fire! Fire!

ESTEBAN enters running and grabs the mop bucket full of water from next to the sink.

ESTEBAN: You're mad! What have you done! I had a buyer!

ESTEBAN disappears with the bucket. LUCAS begins to make himself a crude bandage for his toe with a sock.

ESTEBAN (OFF): You're mad!

LUCAS: You're right. I didn't stop until I cut myself. I really don't know what's the fucking point of toenails.

He pours himself a drink. ESTEBAN emerges with his head down and with traces of ash on his face and hands. He appears to be totally gone.

ESTEBAN: I'm going to kill you.

LUCAS: Have you put it out properly? We don't want the whole place to burn down because of a few fucking comics.

ESTEBAN (Picks up Lucas' full glass): I'm going to kill you.

ESTEBAN throws the glass in LUCAS' face. The brandy goes in his eyes. LUCAS shouts with pain and falls to the floor. ESTEBAN kicks him several times in the stomach and pounces on him grabbing him by the throat. They struggle and roll over a couple of times. LUCAS bites ESTEBAN'S arm. ESTEBAN shouts and lets him go. LUCAS seizes the opportunity to turn ESTEBAN over, pin him down and sit on his chest. Out of control, he grabs ESTEBAN'S throat with one hand and with the other he blindly searches for the scissors that have fallen to the floor. He manages to pick them up and he waves them towards ESTEBAN'S face. His hand trembles.

ESTEBAN: Kill me! Murderer! Kill me!

LUCAS remains frozen for a few seconds and then lets ESTEBAN go. He gets up slowly and he sits down while he rubs his eyes. ESTEBAN sits up with difficulty clutching his throat.

ESTEBAN: You're a murderer!

LUCAS: Don't you say that again.

ESTEBAN: You're a mad drunk and a murderer!

LUCAS: Shut up!

ESTEBAN: What are you going to do? Are you going to kill me as well?

LUCAS is in shock. ESTEBAN picks up the bottle and gives him a drink. When the alcohol passes down LUCAS' throat, he begins to cough.

ESTEBAN: You didn't have the right to do it.

LUCAS: I was just a kid, it was an accident.

ESTEBAN: Dad loved us.

LUCAS: It was just an accident.

ESTEBAN: It was his way of showing it! He loved us and you killed him!

LUCAS: I was only defending you. He was on top of you. I smashed the chair into his ribs so you could escape. He threw himself at me like a mad dog. I was only defending myself. You saw it. I only pushed him. It was an accident. The bathroom floor was wet. He slipped and he hit the back of his neck. You were in front of him, you saw it.

ESTEBAN: Why did you do it? Why did you have to do it? He was our father.

LUCAS: He was a monster!

ESTEBAN: You're a monster! What kind of son is capable of killing his own father! You destroyed this family. You didn't have any right to do it but you did it. Everything could have been different. You had no right to interfere, none. It was something between the two of us. Between Dad and me. No one more than the two of us. It was our secret. And you had to stick your fucking nose in and fuck everything up as usual. No one would have found out. And you fucked everything up. Everything.

LUCAS: But I thought that...

ESTEBAN: Dad loved me. He loved us. In his own way but he loved us.

ESTEBAN slowly walks away. LUCAS watches him closely.

LUCAS: It was just an accident.

He picks up the bottle and drinks from it compulsively.

9.

A week later. The bookshelves in the dining room are empty. There is no trace of any books anywhere. LUISA is in her wheelchair next to the table. She is just finishing ironing a shirt. On a chair there are some recently ironed trousers with a belt in place. LUISA is humming a popular song. She has a serene smile.

LUISA: Lucas, it's ready now.

LUCAS comes out of the bathroom barefoot and he approaches the table. He is wearing a new vest and underpants. His hair is wet. LUISA gives him the shirt. She speaks to him sweetly.

LUCAS: What a lovely bath!

LUISA: Here, put it on. Be careful.

LUCAS: It's hot.

He puts on the shirt and begins to button it. LUISA touches her head with a gesture of pain.

LUCAS: Are you OK?

LUISA: Yes, I'm fine. The trousers are over there.

LUCAS: Are they new?

LUISA: No, they're washed and ironed.

LUCAS: Well they look new.

He puts on the trousers. He looks at himself.

LUCAS: If the gypsy could only see me now...

LUISA: Tuck the shirt in.

LUCAS: You mean...?

LUISA: Of course. Come here let me help you.

LUCAS moves nearer and LUISA tucks his shirt into his trousers. She hoists the trousers up high and does the belt up.

LUCAS: So high?

LUISA: Of course. You can't go around with your pants hanging out. Look how handsome you are.

LUCAS: I don't know. I'm getting the sensation I've been possessed by Esteban.

LUISA: Quiet, quiet. Come on pass me the comb.

LUCAS: The comb?

LUISA: Relax, it doesn't bite.

LUCAS passes her a comb that is lying on the table.

LUISA: Bend down a little I can't reach.

LUCAS: Alright, but no tugging.

LUCAS sits on the floor with his back leaning against the legs of his mother. LUISA begins to comb him. LUCAS closes his eyes. He appears to fall into a state of ecstasy.

LUISA: Like this, see?

LUCAS: Eh, that's lovely that comb.

LUISA: Of course

LUCAS: Hummm... it's so relaxing.

LUISA: And once you get used to it, it's no trouble at all.

LUCAS: Ooooh... lovely.

LUISA: When you were all little I combed your hair every day. I washed your little faces and I dressed you in clean clothes and I combed you. Combed you so well. I made your sandwiches for lunch. I put them in the checked bag that I'd embroidered with your names and I took you to school. Do you remember the woollen jackets that I made you?

LUCAS (*With his eyes closed*): Of course, and the little woollen trousers. I remember them as well.

LUISA: You were so cute the two of you. You must have been about two and Esteban around six. Your brother absolutely adored you. You were his little doll. He used to spend the whole blessed day with you. He was the only one who could understand you. We used to say to him: "What does the baby say?". Your tongue was more twisted than a corkscrew.

LUCAS' breathing is becoming more and more resonant. He is moving from relaxation to sleep. LUISA keeps combing him very slowly.

LUISA: It was so long ago. So many things... I don't remember when it all began to change. I swear I don't remember.

One day you wake up surrounded by dirty clothes, empty bottles and unpaid bills, and reproaches, and shouts and fights. And it doesn't seem you're awake. It seems you're trapped inside a nightmare. But it isn't a nightmare, you're awake. Confused and lost but awake. And that's the worst nightmare. To be awake.

LUCAS begins to snore. LUISA leans over to look at his face. She sees he is sleeping. She smiles and caresses his head. She picks up a mirror from the table. She looks at her reflexion. She slowly caresses her face and she takes the mirror away, leaving it resting in her lap.

LUISA: Lucas, son.

LUCAS (*Opening his eyes*): Eh?

LUISA: You were asleep.

LUCAS: I nodded off. That comb is so relaxing!

LUISA (*Gives him the mirror*): Here, see how handsome you are.

LUCAS: Let's see (*Taking the mirror*) It's like I said before. The spitting image of my brother.

LUISA: Don't talk rubbish, you look just fine. By the way, do have any news of Esteban?

LUCAS: Esteban? ... well ... I don't know. But fine I'm sure he's fine.

LUISA: He's fine?

LUCAS: Yes, he called me and he told me he was just fine and that he'd come round as soon as he'd finished helping María.

LUISA: María?

LUCAS: Well... yes. He's... helping her with the move. That's it, helping her with the move.

LUISA: So, María's now got the house?

LUCAS: Yes, and apparently it's very nice. With lots of light and little birdies...

LUISA: So Esteban is with María.

LUCAS: Yes, they went together the two of them. They now get on like a house on fire. Esteban's lending her a hand with the decorating. You know he's got a way with those things.

LUISA: I'm glad that you are all helping each other.

LUCAS: Of course, we're all of a kind.

LUISA raises her hand to her forehead.

LUISA: It feels like my head's going to explode.

LUCAS: Would you like a pill?

LUISA: No, I don't want any more pills now.

LUCAS: You'll soon get well in your village, you'll see. They've promised me that when the house is ready we'll all go and live there. They're really looking forward to seeing you.

LUISA: Lucas, son, promise me something.

LUCAS: Tell me.

LUISA: Promise me that you'll talk to my granddaughter. To your daughter.

Silence. LUISA closes her eyes, she speaks with more and more difficulty.

LUCAS: Alright, I promise. I'll speak to your granddaughter. With... my daughter.

LUISA: That's what I like to hear my boy. No bitterness.

LUCAS: No bitterness.

LUISA: Can I tell you something?

LUCAS: Go on.

LUISA: I don't want to go back to the village.

LUCAS: Ah no? Well don't worry. If you don't want to go to your village we won't go. We'll stay here just the two of us nice and quiet.

LUISA lets the arm holding the comb fall.

If I tell you the truth I don't give a shit about going to your village either. Nor about being surrounded by trees, or about the bloody birds. We can get by very well just the two of us here in our own home.

The comb falls from LUISA'S hand. LUCAS does not notice.

With this bible student get-up I'll soon get a job and you'll see. On my first payday I'll buy a kilo of prawns and a box of Ribeiro white wine. If one day you drink a little it won't do you any harm.

LUISA'S head falls slowly forward until it is motionless.

And I'll also buy some calamares in breadcrumbs and some salted almonds, and some fresh cockles.

LUISA stops breathing.

Oysters no, they're aphrodisiacs and no one's made of stone... I'll even wear a tie. And you'll have to dress up too, eh? If you like we can take some photos. Yes, I'll buy a camera and we'll take some photos. The two of us together. We'll be able to send them to Berlin.

Darkness.

TALC: A POWDER ROOM DRAMA

By Abel González Melo

Translated by Yael Prizant

Talc is part of Abel González Melo's reinvention of the theatrical trilogy. Like the unified tragedies performed at the Dionysian Festivals in ancient Athens, the three plays that form González Melo's *Winterscapes* have closely related subjects. The characters all encounter a series of fortuitous circumstances, they learn, they realize, they suffer, they die. Along with *Chamaco: Boy at the Vanishing Point* and *Nevada*, *Talc* depicts the Cuban underworld and its secondary economy. Yet González Melo doesn't suggest a sequence in which to produce the three texts - the characters do not reappear from play to play, nor does the plot continue from one piece to the next. Instead, González Melo offers three episodic, stand-alone pieces that work individually as well as together to portray the daily challenges of life on the fringes.

Talc is a brutal play, seen from the perspective of a voyeur watching the struggles, the pain, and the shock waves that occur during one Havana winter. An uncharacteristically chilly winter and the severity of the conditions in the city play key roles in this fable. The narrative paradoxically occurs in a crumbling cinema, in the shadow of Cuba's iconic Capital building, which becomes a nerve center for prostitution and drug trafficking. The play is based in realistic elements, like strong sexual content and explicit verbal and physical violence, yet also relies on González Melo's poetic language and narrative artistry. His characters are undoubtedly selfish and callous, but each one offers something we almost recognize, or likely ignore, in ourselves.

ABEL GONZÁLEZ MELO (Havana, 1980) is one of the most important contemporary Cuban playwrights. With a degree in Theatre Studies from the University of the Arts in Cuba, González Melo has also studied at the Royal Court Theatre in London (where he did an international residency) the Maxim Gorky Theater in Berlin, Complutense University in Madrid, and Panorama Sur in Buenos Aires.

His body of work includes 15 plays: *Epopéya* (2014), *Mecánica* (2013), *Cádiz en mi corazón* (2013), *Sistema* (2012), *Talco* (2009-10), *Ataraxia* (2008), *Manía* (2008), *Por gusto* (2006), *Nevada* (2005-08), *Adentro* (2005), *El hábito y la virtud* (2005), *Chamaco* (2004), *Vendré mañana a despedirte* (2004), *Ubú sin cuernos* (2002) y *La gansa de plata* (1998).

González Melo's plays have been translated into dozens of languages, published in several countries, and staged by theatre companies such as Repertorio Español (New York), Aguijón Theater (Chicago), Akwara Teatro y La Má Teodora (Miami), Semaver Kumpanya (Istanbul), Albanta Teatro (Cádiz), Argos Teatro (Havana), Origami Teatro (Havana), Rita Montaner (Havana), Teatro El Portaz (Matanzas) y Teatro Icarón (Matanzas).

González Melo's work has garnered many honors and accolades, including the Prize for Playwriting from the Spanish Embassy in Cuba, First Prize for Theatrical Pieces from the Goethe Institute, the Villanueva Awards for Theatre Criticism and Literary Criticism, and the Alejo Carpentier Award.

He has also published three books of stories, three collections of theatrical essays, and one book of poetry. Since 2000, he has been the Literary Editor of *Tablas-Alarcos*, a serial specializing in scenic arts. As a writer, he has also produced two films: *Chamaco* (2010) and *La partida* (2012). In 2014, he founded the Company of Impertinents and directed *Kassandra*, by Sergio Blanco, at the National Theatre of Cuba.

At the moment, González Melo lives in Spain, where he is Director of Theatre Courses at the University of Carlos III in Madrid and Professor of Playwriting at the University of King Juan Carlos.

Yael Prizant (Brooklyn, 1973) is a dramaturg and translator. She has three degrees in theatre, including an M.F.A. in Dramaturgy from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a Ph.D. in Theatre from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research has centered on Cuban theatre since 2002.

Prizant's recent book, *Cuba Inside Out: Revolution and Contemporary Theatre*, was published by Southern Illinois University Press in 2013. In collaboration with photographer Christopher Stackowicz, she created two art gallery exhibitions based on her texts about Cuba: *The Currency of Cuba* at the Jewish Federation of the St. Joseph Valley and *Cuba Inside/Out* at Langlab South Bend. She also published nearly a dozen online articles for the Havana Times while covering the 2011 International Theatre Festival in Havana and contributed an essay about Cuban-American theatre to *Performance, Exile and America* (Palgrave International Performance Series, October 2009.)

Prizant also works as an adapter and production dramaturg. She spent many years working on productions with several leading Los Angeles theatre companies, including The Grace Players, Company of Angels, and The Actors' Gang. While working as an Assistant Professor at the University of Notre Dame, she adapted and produced two plays for TheatreLanglab in South Bend, Indiana. The process of creating one of those productions, based on Stanislav Stratiev's *The Suede Jacket*, was made into a short documentary by Kevin DeCloedt (*The Jacket: A 24 Hour Theatre Project*.) In 2012, she and a creative team founded Ulteia, Inc., a not-for-profit organization dedicated to cultivating the arts and education in the Michiana area.

Recently commissioned by Ohio Northern University, Prizant is translating González Melo's *Nevada* for production in January 2015. She is also translating part of a contemporary

Uruguayan novel and teaching academic writing from her home in Bologna, Italy. She'd like to dedicate this publication to Virginia Scott.

TALC

A powder room drama

(2009-2010)

Abel González Melo

(English translation by Yael Prizant)

Cuban-German First Prize for Theatre Pieces, 2009

(Goethe Institute, Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin, Casa Editorial Tablas-Alarcos)

Villanueva Critics Prize for Cuban Theatre, 2010

The final script for this play was created after its staging in Cuba by Argos Teatro, under the direction of Carlos Celdrán, with actors Waldo Franco, Yuliet Cruz, Alexander Díaz, José Luis Hidalgo and Totó the dog, on Friday, September 3, 2010 at the Sala Argos Teatro in Havana, Cuba. This staging garnered the Villanueva Critics Prize for Cuban Theatre as the Best Show of 2010, also Caricato Prizes from the Association of Scenic Artists of UNEAC for Direction (Celdrán), Acting (Cruz), Acting (Hidalgo), as well as two other Acting nominations (Franco y Díaz).

The world premiere of *Talco* was by La Má Teodora in the United States (in collaboration with Arca Images and the Cuban Theater Digital Archive of the University of Miami). The production was directed by Alberto Sarraín, with actors Juan David Ferrer, Oneysis Valido, Ariel Texidó, Norberto Correa and Miki the dog, on Friday, April 16, 2010 at the Teatro Abanico in Miami. *El Nuevo Herald* considered it the most important staging of a Hispanic play in Miami that year, and Ferrer was awarded Best Actor, Valido was awarded Best Actress and Eduardo Arrocha was awarded Best Lighting Designer.

Powder Room Elements

- I. Haircut
- II. Old Spice
- III. Cosmetics
- IV. That powder box without a puff
- V. Smearred makeup
- VI. So much rouge and so much mascara
- VII. An eyelash in the eye
- VIII. Two peas in a pod
- IX. Eau de toilette
- X. Lips and lipstick
- XI. Blushing Desperately

Powdered people

Máshenka the Rough
Álvaro the Pansy
Javi the Russki
Zuleidy the Guanty
Miki, a dog

All the action occurs in El Mégano Cinema, right next to the Capitol Building of Havana, on four planes that co-exist on stage: the front sidewalk, the lobby, the dark auditorium, and the bathroom.

The first six scenes, February 14, 2009, at mid-afternoon. The following four, a year earlier, at midnight. The last scene, 2009 again.

I Haircut

On the background of the set, for a few seconds one can read: "Havana, 2009".

With super tight shorts and sandals at the point of breaking, Máshenka waits in the lobby for someone to enter the cinema. While she listens to her iPod, she obsessively fixes her hair, an intense platinum blonde, with a chopstick, although it's not as long as she wants, it continually angers her because it is beyond repair and some piece always falls down in front, which she detests.

Álvaro passes on the sidewalk with a little dog. He sticks his head in.

ÁLVARO. What are they showing today?

MÁSHENKA. *(Takes off her headphones.)* Are you blind, boy, don't you see the poster? It's stuck to the marquee, under where it says El Mégano Cinema.

ÁLVARO. What poster?

MÁSHENKA. Don't play dumb with me when you come here every day.

ÁLVARO. Me?

MÁSHENKA. Yeah, you. *(With contempt.)* With that dog...

ÁLVARO. I think you've mistaken me.

MÁSHENKA. Everyone thinks I've mistaken them. And I have an eye for these things... ÁLVARO. Are you gonna tell me what's playing?

MÁSHENKA. Are you really interested in the movie or are you gonna go in there so that you can...?

ÁLVARO. So I can what?

MÁSHENKA. Say, to sleep, like most people.

ÁLVARO. No. I wanna see if someone will jerk me off in there, sound good to you?

MÁSHENKA. Ay, how crude, boy...

ÁLVARO. I go by on the sidewalk, I ask you because you work here and you go busting my balls, insinuating I-don't-know-what. I have a house, I don't need to sleep here, or do whatever other thing crossed your mind. I should complain to your boss. Trash!

MÁSHENKA. Then complain, complain...

ÁLVARO. It's because of people like you that we're the way we are.

MÁSHENKA. How are we? We can't be worse off than we are. Complain, complain!

ÁLVARO. No, because they'll kick you out.

MÁSHENKA. And do I care if they kick me out? You think I make my living like this? Go ahead, complain, complain!

ÁLVARO. Hey, I'm not gonna complain! Don't insist anymore.

MÁSHENKA. Uff.. This heat gets everyone in Havana in a bad mood...

ÁLVARO. I'm just asking that you treat me right.

MÁSHENKA. Ay, okey, okey, this guy... what a pain you are... treat you right.

ÁLVARO. As if you didn't have to.

MÁSHENKA. Who has to? Who's obligated? Go, hang up the dog's leash for a minute and help me fix my hair decently, I look like a hurricane hit me, 'cause I can't see here in the back... Come 'ere.

ÁLVARO. I'm not gonna fix your hairdo.

MÁSHENKA. (*Intent on starting her hair.*) This style kills me, I can't pull it up or put it in a clip, or use chopsticks. (*Annoyed.*) Ay, fuck!

ÁLVARO. Alright, I'll help you.

Ties the doggy's leash to a hook on the wall and approaches her.

MÁSHENKA. Lemme sit so you're more comfortable. Go there, behind me.

She sits on a bench and he, behind her, contemplates her wig.

MÁSHENKA. On with it, boy, don't be bashful.

ÁLVARO. No, no, I'm not bashful.

MÁSHENKA. Take this chopstick in one hand, and with the other make a bun with all my hair... (*Gestures a lot with her fingers.*) What can hold all my hair, you get it? Do you know what a bun looks like?

ÁLVARO. (*Taking the chopstick that she gave him.*) Yeah, and a croissant, too.

MÁSHENKA. Ay, how cute. Go on, do it quick but carefully, don't pull so hard that it hurts me.

ÁLVARO. (*Intently.*) But is this really your hair?

MÁSHENKA. Of course, it's my natural hair, what da you think? So I like strange colors, but it's my hair!

ÁLVARO. Ah.

The doggy hits the wall with his tail, impatiently.

MÁSHENKA. And that cocky little dog?

ÁLVARO. I thought you didn't like dogs.

MÁSHENKA. (*While he tries to style her hair.*) Yeah, yeah I like them. Not when they start to bark, if they bark I hate them! Those fucking dogs hidden behind a fence that bark at you when you come around the corner: jaujau, jaujau, jaujau... How rude! But if they're little calm ones, yeah, like in paintings, of queens with feathers on their heads... or in their crowns? Who seem all dolled up, with hunting dogs at their sides. Do you know what I'm talking about? Those dogs, even if they're sad, they're prettier than yours, truthfully, because they have floppy ears, like velvet, and of course, they have more class, more stature, like the "Saint Bernard". Yours, on the other hand, doesn't seem like a saint... neither do you.

ÁLVARO. And you?

MÁSHENKA. The closest I come to sainthood is the altar to Santa Barbara in my house. Other than that, nothing.

Silence.

MÁSHENKA. Ah, the movie starts at five, or at six. It's a Kien Lasky movie.

ÁLVARO. Who?

MÁSHENKA. (*Repeats slowly, so that he'll understand.*) Ki-en-las-ky. A Russki. The movie's called *A Short Film About Killing*.

ÁLVARO. Ah, but it's not Russian, it's Polish. Kieslowski, that's his last name. His first name's Kristoff.

MÁSHENKA. Alright, I saw the little letters and they looked like Russian to me. Russian like me, whose name is Máshenka.

ÁLVARO. Máshenka?

MÁSHENKA. Máshenka the Rough. (*Provocative.*) Like a scratch.

ÁLVARO. Ready.

MÁSHENKA. (*Touches her hairdo.*) Great! Now I'll wait... I have to be here at four fifteen, how early, no? It's 'cause I clean the auditorium before, well, I say I clean it, you know, I'm not gonna pick up all the condoms and mop up the gunk that's over there because I'd never finish. I sweep the stuff that shows and then I wait for Javi.

ÁLVARO. Is Javi coming?

MÁSHENKA. You know him?

ÁLVARO. More or less.

MÁSHENKA. There was a reason your face rang a bell. You don't look like the kinda friend Javi has. You're very refined.

ÁLVARO. You never know.

MÁSHENKA. I always wait for him, except today. He got here before me. He's up there, in the projection room. Finishing a report.

ÁLVARO. Can I wash my hands?

MÁSHENKA. Hey, I don't have dandruff.

ÁLVARO. It's not that.

MÁSHENKA. Or lice.

ÁLVARO. (*Smiles.*) It's a compulsion.

MÁSHENKA. There's been no water in the theatre since last year, so wash your hands at your house.

ÁLVARO. Alright.

MÁSHENKA. Should I call Javi for you?

ÁLVARO. No, no. (*Gets the dog and makes to go.*)

MÁSHENKA. Should I give him a message?

ÁLVARO. (*Thinks a second.*) That the Pansy was here.

MÁSHENKA. The Pansy?

ÁLVARO. Tell him that. And that I'll be back later.

Álvaro goes with his doggy. Máshenka leans on the door and watches him go until she loses sight of him.

II Old Spice

The bathroom, on the floor above, is partially divided and has very high windows. Zuleidy is crouched down in front of Javi and sucks his dick. With his hands Javi strongly presses her head, guiding her by her pigtails, while he moves and whispers.

JAVI. Like that, bitch, take it all in...

ZULEIDY. (*Choking.*) Gug, gug...

JAVI. Open up, come on, like that, deep throat it, like that, cunt, like that... *(The gestures are more intense each time.)*

ZULEIDY. *(Detaches herself a second.)* Fuck, Russki, you're so rough, so hard isn't gonna make it come.

JAVI. Come on, mami, you'll see that yeah, sure it'll come out, it always comes out...

ZULEIDY. I said no, Russki...

JAVI. You'll see how you get into it on your own. *(Returns to grabbing her by the pigtails and sticks his dick into her mouth as far as he can. He takes her and moves quickly.)*

ZULEIDY. Ag, ag, ag, ag, ag...

JAVI. Yeah, mami, I'm almost there, go on...

ZULEIDY. Gug, gug, ag, ag, ag...

JAVI. Ay, fuck, I'm coming, take it. *(With his right hand, he slaps her and with his left hand, he continues to push her head. He writhes in pleasure.)* Take it, bitch, fuck, swallow it, cunt... ah, ah!... Ah... Ay, fuck, ah, ah!...

Suddenly Zuleidy, choking, throws herself back, writhes and vomits between the floor and the toilet. Javi ejaculates leaning against the wall.

JAVI. *(Wiping himself off with his underpants.)* So hot, fuck...

ZULEIDY. *(With her head resting against the toilet.)* I don't see it, Russki... *(Looks at the floor.)* Didn't it come out?

JAVI. Why didn't it come out?

ZULEIDY. It didn't come out, Russki, I swallowed it.

JAVI. *(Buttons his pants.)* What?

ZULEIDY. *(Tries to get up.)* I'm wiped out, man...

JAVI. Then use your finger, go on. Shove it in.

ZULEIDY. *(Staggers, twiddles her thumbs.)* Later, Russki, it'll be better in a bit, let me stretch out a little back there, I'm dead tired.

JAVI. No stretching out. Go on, shove your finger in, it should've come out already. Let's see.

He comes closer. Zuleidy puts up little resistance. Javi takes her hand, raises her index finger and makes her put it in her mouth as far as possible. She writhes but doesn't throw up.

ZULEIDY. Ay...

JAVI. Open up, I'll try it with two fingers. Fuck, bitch, what a stench you made with all that puking.

With obvious disgust Javi takes two fingers on her left hand, the index and the middle, and makes her put them down her throat.

JAVI. Don't take them out until you hit the throat come on. *(He pushes her hand.)*

ZULEIDY. Ag, ag... *(Writhes.)* Ag, ag, ag...

Turns and vomits on the floor. Javi sifts through the vomit and wipes his filthy hands on his jeans.

ZULEIDY. *(On all fours, weakly.)* Did it come out?

JAVI. *(Walks around the vomit and looks.)* Nothing fucking came out.

ZULEIDY. *(Delirious.)* It's probably in the chunks. You're sure you're not confusing it with the puke...? No matter what, it'll shine.

JAVI. This crappy puke is also shiny, and what's worse, it's so dark in here...

ZULEIDY. Let me lie down a little now, I'm gonna pass out, Russki..

JAVI. Tell me how it went.

ZULEIDY. I already told you, a silvery capsule.

JAVI. Silvery as always?

ZULEIDY. As always. I think it was smaller, but silvery...

JAVI. Smaller how?

ZULEIDY. I don't know, it's the impression that I got... It was the same as always, I'm sure it was the same.

JAVI. *(Takes her by the hair.)* Why did you say it was smaller?

ZULEIDY. *(The delirium makes her stronger.)* When I put it in my mouth and had to swallow, or did he put it in?

JAVI. He put it in? Didn't you swallow it on your own? You didn't open it, you didn't check it when he went into the bathroom?

ZULEIDY. Yes, I did it like I always do, I don't know...

JAVI. *(He pulls her hair.)* And you swallowed it?

ZULEIDY. *(In pain.)* Ay, Russki..

JAVI. You're lying to me, whore.

ZULEIDY. I'm not, Russki, I told you what happened... I put it under my tongue when he came into the bathroom, but he walked out immediately, he suspected something, no, no, he didn't suspect... he came out because he had to go, yeah, that, he came out and started to kiss me.

Javi lets go of her for a moment and steadies his gaze.

JAVI. He already knows.

ZULEIDY. No, no.

JAVI. Yeah he knows.

ZULEIDY. No, Russki, I did it really good, I've been doing this for months, he didn't realize... I swear to you that he didn't suspect anything.

JAVI. You fucked up the deal, didn't you, whore? Isn't that it? *(He forces her to sit up and shakes her.)* Tell me, bitch!

ZULEIDY. Not again, Russki, please, not today...

JAVI. *(Squeezing her even more.)* Of course. You put it under your little tongue and he sucked away on you. You put off swallowing the silver capsule and the guy knew. *(At her ear.)* And he didn't say anything? He didn't whisper something while he was fucking you? He didn't hint at anything? Ah, because he's an imbecile! The little whore did as good as usual, but the capsule never got here.

ZULEIDY. It wasn't like that...

JAVI. Now you're gonna have to shit it out.

ZULEIDY. What?

JAVI. If it doesn't come out going up, it will come out going down, no?

ZULEIDY. Ay, Russki, I'm gonna pass out.

JAVI. And you're gonna like it. (*Throws her onto the toilet.*)

Zuleidy pants. Javi squats at her side.

JAVI. And then you're gonna let it go, no? It's gonna come out in your shit, right?

Zuleidy cries.

JAVI. I'm gonna find you a laxative. (*He sits up.*)

Zuleidy keeps crying.

JAVI. Shut your mouth, people are gonna start coming into the theatre and they're gonna hear you. (*Makes to go.*)

ZULEIDY. Russki...

JAVI. What?

ZULEIDY. Nothing, nothing... (*Sobs.*)

JAVI. Shut the fuck up! (*He kicks her twice.*)

Starts to go out. Looks at his watch.

JAVI. And that shithead's about to get here. Chst.

Goes and closes the door to the bathroom. Zuleidy remains strewn on the floor.

III Cosmetics

Javi enters the lobby. Máshenka listens to her iPod: she has headphones on and her legs outstretched and crossed on an old flowerpot that holds a withered palm.

MÁSHENKA. You done already?

JAVI. That bitch is gonna make me crazy. (*Sighs.*)

MÁSHENKA. What's up?

JAVI. (*Takes out a cigarette.*) Got a light?

Máshenka takes off her headphones, takes out a box of matches and lights one.

JAVI. She didn't spit anything up.

MÁSHENKA. No?

JAVI. And they're gonna be here at five.

MÁSHENKA. A guy just came called the Pansy, was that him?

JAVI. He was here already?

MÁSHENKA. Yeah.

JAVI. Why didn't you call me?

MÁSHENKA. He didn't want me to. He needed to wash his hands, I dunno, he went home.

Silence.

JAVI. Did he say anything?

MÁSHENKA. That he'd be back.

JAVI. *(Goes to the phone and dials a number.)* Mónica? *(He pushes the button for the hearing impaired so that he can hear better.)* Is this Mónica?

MÁSHENKA. *(Low.)* I can get to the pharmacy in a minute if you want.

JAVI. *(Makes a negative gesture to Máshenka. Talks on the phone.)* Mónica? How's it goin', doll?

Máshenka puts her headphones on again, approaches the door, goes out to the sidewalk.

JAVI. See if you have something for you-know-what. That, that... Citrogal no, of course. Some kinda laxative? Ah, yeah, that, laxagar or... bisacodil... Nothing, right?

MÁSHENKA. *(To hear it, enters again, whispers.)* Ask her for an expectorant, it's the same.

JAVI. Hey, and a little syrup that upsets the stomach?... No, she's not sick, but she has to... you understand me.

MÁSHENKA. She also needs to drink enough water, if you don't make her drink water...

JAVI. *(To Máshenka.)* Ssss... *(In the phone.)* Good, make me something and bring it to me when you can. I'm not gonna be here but leave it with the witch who watches the door...

Javi winks at Máshenka, who rolls her eyes.

JAVI. *(Into the phone.)* Okey, doll, kiss kiss. Yeah, yeah, she'll give you the dough. Don't worry. Alright. *(Hangs up.)*

MÁSHENKA. Gimme the dough now, 'cause you'll forget and Mónica'll come and bitch 'cause I can't pay her.

JAVI. Ay, give it to her, girly, and I'll give it back to you later.

MÁSHENKA. No, Russki, I don't have a penny.

JAVI. Got any talc left?

MÁSHENKA. *(Sighs. Apathetic.)* If you're gonna get high, at least I should close the door, no?

JAVI. Don't close it, come here, we'll do it behind the counter.

MÁSHENKA. What's up, Russki, if you want, we'll do it with the door closed, I'm not up for what happened last time, with the cops, scared shitless, pretending that I powdered myself with talc after taking a bath, so I wouldn't have to deal with the voodoo around the corner from the Capitolio, and then later that night, with blisters all over me from the coke.

JAVI. *(Strong, demands that she close her mouth.)* Ssss.

MÁSHENKA. Sprinkling it like it was talcum powder so they wouldn't think I was up to something.

JAVI. *(Insistent.)* Ssss.

MÁSHENKA. It's true.

JAVI. Ok, girly, it's alright, close the door and put out the sign.

Máshenka peeks out to the street, sees that no one's coming, closes the glass doors, turns a poster around, usually hanging from a hook, where it can be read from outside, writes with chalk: "Closed for fumegashun, sorry for the inconvenience". Through the opaque glass doors, we continue to see what's happening inside.

JAVI. You haven't answered if there's any more talc.

MÁSHENKA. There's no talc, but there's chalk. Patepuerco's son stole it from his teacher and brought it to me, I had to give him a lollipop for it. There's no white chalk anywhere.

JAVI. (*Disgusted.*) Fuck, but chalk isn't the same for mixing.

MÁSHENKA. I know it's not the same, Russki, don't yell at me.

JAVI. It's your fault, because whenever that whore shows up, everything always turns to shit.

MÁSHENKA. You're wrong, babe, it's your fault, you made her think this business was easy and that things fall from the sky. If you wouldn'ta returned her call, she wouldn't...

JAVI. (*Interrupts her, so that he doesn't have to hear her.*) Ok, ok, ok... (*From below the counter he takes out a wooden box where he has various accessories: knife, bowl, roller...*) Give me the chalk, come on.

MÁSHENKA. Let's go inside, Russki, the glass is filthy but you can see right through it, okey?

JAVI. Alright, let's go.

Telephone rings.

MÁSHENKA. (*Picks it up and speaks.*) Yes?... Yes, this is El Mégano Cinema, can I help... No, I'm the usherette, Javi's not here... He's not here, sir! Me? Máshenka. But why do you need that? Alright, it's fine... the Rough... Yes, all together, the-Rough, Máshenka the Rough, that's my last name. No... Yes, Javi is the manager but at the moment, I repeat, he's not here... Ah, ah... (*Changes tone, is more friendly.*) Fuck, he's on his way here, sir. (*Listens, covers the mouthpiece and says quietly to Javi.*) From the provincial bureau. (*Returns to the mouthpiece.*) Yes, of course... No, they're fumigating because the place is fulla mosquitos... And we can't let the public in like this... I guess... around six, yeah, for sure, when the show starts, they started at five but were still going at six... Javi will be here then for sure. (*Coughs, falsely.*) I coughed my way in just to talk to you... Alright, yeah, goodbye. (*Hangs up.*)

JAVI. What did they want?

MÁSHENKA. To talk with you about I-don't-know-what complaint.

JAVI. A complaint?

MÁSHENKA. From Public Health.

JAVI. Alright, get the chalk.

Javi enters the dark auditorium with his wooden box and turns on a light bulb that glows weakly. Máshenka takes the box of chalk from her bag and approaches Javi. The lobby goes dark.

JAVI. (*Takes the chalk and throws two pieces in the bowl.*) It's been a while since I made this, and the truth is I hate it... After the clients start to bail, to say that it isn't a quality product... I only sell quality stuff, Máshenka.

MÁSHENKA. I know that, but when you can't, you can't.

JAVI. Peddling dust is not my strong suit.

MÁSHENKA. You only mix what you have to and you don't overdo it...

JAVI. (*Extends the mortar.*) Go ahead, crush!

Máshenka begins to crush the chalk.

JAVI. (*Opens a small paper envelope and flattens, on the sheet of glass, the white powder.*) I always throw in a little, you know, a little yes, in order to stretch the product... But not much... You can only push it to a point, or else they don't buy from you anymore and go to another source.

MÁSHENKA. (*Without stopping the grinding.*) You have your loyal clients, they're not gonna take a chance and go someplace else. It's safe here.

JAVI. (*With a little roller, he spreads, on the glass, the powder, that he's going to turn into a fine layer.*) Until one day.

MÁSHENKA. Yeah, until one day. Like everything else, Russki.

JAVI. Done already?

MÁSHENKA. Done, throw it in?

JAVI. Wait, wait, before we mix it... (*With a long knife he separates a little line of the pile of dust and lets it fall on the piece of cardboard. He arranges it into two lines.*) Want some?

MÁSHENKA. No.

JAVI. It's really good stuff.

MÁSHENKA. I know, but not today. I'll eat chalk later and I'll feel good.

JAVI. Eating chalk is disgusting.

MÁSHENKA. I got used to it when I was little.

JAVI. It's not the same as doing a line. (*He puts his nose to the glass and snorts, first in one nostril, then the other.*) Uf... (*Raises his hands to his face.*) Ay, fuck...

MÁSHENKA. (*Watches him with a deep frown.*) How ya doin'?

ZULEIDY. (*Heard from the bathroom, weakly, supplicant.*) Russki... Russki...

JAVI. (*Stretches out his hands, enjoying the effect.*) Ufff...

MÁSHENKA. (*About Zuleidy.*) And what're you gonna do with her?

JAVI. (*Rubs his nose.*) Let's see, we're gonna mix it.

Máshenka dumps the white powder from the bowl onto the glass. With the knife Javi starts to roll it slowly, giving it a great deal of attention.

ZULEIDY. (*From the bathroom.*) Russki... Russki...

JAVI. (*Ignoring the voice.*) The humidity kills everything.

MÁSHENKA. Why do you say that?

JAVI. The chalk powder is already starting to clump.

ZULEIDY. (*Insistent.*) Russki...

JAVI. (*Crushing the powder with enthusiasm.*) Luckily the edge of the knife is sharp.

MÁSHENKA. Don't go overboard, it's good enough like that.

JAVI. It needs a little more.

MÁSHENKA. I don't know why you did a line before doing that.

JAVI. (*In his delirium.*) So I could do it better.

MÁSHENKA. (*Smiles.*) You gotta project the movie in a little bit and you're gonna be a zombie.

JAVI. There's still time.

ZULEIDY. *(Again.)* Russki..

MÁSHENKA. I don't want to push, but...

JAVI. *(Indicates to Máshenka with the knife and speaks to her. Slowly and strongly.)* Go see her and tell her I don't want her to call me again.

A knock on the door of the cinema.

MÁSHENKA. And now what?

JAVI. Wait.

MÁSHENKA. It'll be better if we open up. Is there a lot left?

JAVI. No. Give me ten capsules.

Máshenka checks in the wooden box and takes out various dual-colored plastic capsules. Separates one into two halves.

JAVI. Hold it, don't move it.

With the point of the knife, Javi takes a bit of powder and slides into a capsule. A more insistent knock on the door.

JAVI. I'm gonna beat the crap...

MÁSHENKA. Hold on a minute, I'm gonna check it out.

JAVI. No, you stay here.

Fills a capsule. Máshenka closes it and puts it separately on the floor. They do the same thing with the second capsule. There's another knock at the door.

JAVI. Go tell them that we'll open up in a second, go, so they don't bug me anymore.

MÁSHENKA. That's what I was saying a minute ago.

She goes. Javi continues in his labor alone. Even if it's more difficult, he fills a third capsule. Máshenka returns.

JAVI. *(Without looking at her, concentrating on what he's doing.)* Who was it?

MÁSHENKA. The woman from the pharmacy.

JAVI. Did she give you the syrup?

MÁSHENKA. Yeah, she said this'll make her throw up or take a good crap. And she also gave me plastic to make tablets and aluminum foil. *(Puts everything on the floor and goes back to holding the capsule that Javi is filling.)* You ask for that?

JAVI. No, but she assumed. You paid her?

MÁSHENKA. I paid her.

JAVI. With what?

Máshenka is silent.

ZULEIDY. *(From the bathroom.)* Russki..

JAVI. (*Focused on what he's doing, serene.*) But we're not gonna take time making the capsules into tablets and the packets with foil, right?

MÁSHENKA. No, and besides, the iron doesn't work.

JAVI. There isn't a way to seal the foil without an iron?

MÁSHENKA. It'll fuck it up, it's better to put the capsules in loose. Like that. It's the same to them.

JAVI. If it weren't for the cops in the street... They always want tablets because of the cops, so they can pretend it's medicine if they say anything.

MÁSHENKA. That's natural... How many are left to fill?

JAVI. Four.

They work.

JAVI. Years ago we were the best, Máshenka, we used to do it in two seconds.

MÁSHENKA. Yep. Before.

JAVI. You were rougher. Now you're more mature. (*Laughs.*)

MÁSHENKA. And you don't seem Russian at all, but you kept the nickname.

JAVI. Since the round-up. Even if Márquez, the ex-lieutenant, was also getting a blowjob inside.

MÁSHENKA. And Riqui, the sector chief, asked me for a chance to go in the bathroom with Cholo's retard son.

JAVI. And one time, he did a pair of lines with me.

MÁSHENKA. And when I came up with: Russki, Russki, don't keep jerking off, Máshenka's always watching from above.

JAVI. (*Laughs more.*) It's true... it's not like before.

MÁSHENKA. That's the last capsule, no?

JAVI. The last.

A knock at the door of the cinema.

JAVI. I'll go. (*Gathers all the capsules in a little bag and stashes it in his pocket.*)

Máshenka collects the scraps and puts them in the wooden box.

JAVI. (*Closes the box and picks it up. About Zuleidy.*) Stay in the bathroom with her and make her take a few sips of syrup. She's gotta puke it up.

MÁSHENKA. Lemme know when you're done.

Javi goes out.

IV

That powder box without a puff

The auditorium goes dark and the lobby is illuminated. Javi hurriedly stashes the box under the counter and goes to the door.

JAVI. (*Opens it.*) Pansy?

ÁLVARO. Yep.

JAVI. Come in, come in.

Álvaro enters and Javi closes the door behind him.

JAVI. And the dog?

ÁLVARO. I left him at home.

JAVI. It'd be better if you'd brought him. He helps hide it.

ÁLVARO. Nah, it's a joke, I have him here.

Álvaro puts his backpack on the floor, opens it and out comes the doggy with his collar.

JAVI. (*Smiles.*) Ah, yeah.

ÁLVARO. He takes care of me. (*Attaches his leash to a hook on the counter.*)

JAVI. Yeah.

ÁLVARO. Alright, so then?

JAVI. I'll show you the material.

ÁLVARO. Okey. Right here?

JAVI. Yeah. Right. You have the money?

ÁLVARO. 'Course.

Javi takes an envelope of capsules from his pocket, puts two in his hand.

ÁLVARO. And the packets?

JAVI. No... we're not putting them in packets.

ÁLVARO. Ah, then nothing.

JAVI. El Bola didn't send you?

ÁLVARO. Sure, El Bola.

JAVI. And he didn't tell you we're good to go?

They look at each other.

JAVI. I've known El Bola since we were kids.

ÁLVARO. What happens... Look, there are stories of people who rip people off and I... getting into... fine, I won't put anything in my nose.

JAVI. (*With a capsule between his fingers.*) It's pure coke. I guarantee it.

ÁLVARO. And how can I trust you? How do I know you didn't put Artane in it?

JAVI. It would have been cheaper to add aspirin. People from all over Havana come here, brother... I'm not gonna fuck myself over by lying to you.

ÁLVARO. Can I smell it?

They go back to looking fixedly at each other.

JAVI. Of course. (*Takes out another little envelope with powder in it and offers it to him.*)

ÁLVARO. Not that. The stuff in the capsules.

JAVI. It's the same.

ÁLVARO. Exactly.

Javi opens a capsule and brings it to Álvaro's nose, where he smells it. The doggy cries.

JAVI. *(About the doggy.)* He seems very fond of you.

ÁLVARO. Can you cut up a line?

Javi looks at him, unsettled.

ÁLVARO. To see. Just to see. I've never done it.

JAVI. *(Making a joke, smiles.)* And how come you're into it all of a sudden?

ÁLVARO. ...

JAVI. Because you're feelin' it, right? *(Takes out a laminated ID card from his wallet.)*

ÁLVARO. I have cancer.

Javi freezes.

ÁLVARO. Of the throat.

Javi swallows hard.

ÁLVARO. But don't worry, I'm not gonna kill myself. I wanna get through it alright, nothing more. And El Bola said that this is the best.

JAVI. *(After a pause.)* Yeah. You'll get through it fine.

ÁLVARO. You'll do a line?

JAVI. 'Course. *(Goes to put powder from the envelope on top of the ID card.)*

ÁLVARO. Not from there. From what's in the capsules.

JAVI. Those are the ones I made up for you, like El Bola told me to. There are ten, and they're ready for you to take.

ÁLVARO. I don't care, I'll pay for them.

JAVI. If that's how you want it..

ÁLVARO. I'll pay first. *(He gets up, opens the back pocket of his pants and takes out some bills.)*
Count it.

Javi takes it and counts it.

ÁLVARO. Why do they call you Russki?

JAVI. *(Without looking at him.)* Because it rhymed with brewski?

ÁLVARO. A brewski made from pansies?

JAVI. *(Gazes up, seriously.)* They call me Russki because I was born in Kazakhstan.

ÁLVARO. But that's not Russia.

JAVI. *(Continues telling him.)* People here don't know shit.

ÁLVARO. They're close.

JAVI. Who is?

ÁLVARO. Russia and Kazakhstan.

JAVI. Like we are now.

ÁLVARO. Whaddya mean. We're far apart.

JAVI. And why do they call you Pansy?

Álvaro returns to the view of his dog.

JAVI. Because you're a faggot, I guess.

ÁLVARO. No. Because I used to smell good.

Silence.

JAVI. The dough's all here.

ÁLVARO. Now lemme see how you do it.

JAVI. I can also swallow a capsule. Works the same.

ÁLVARO. Better if you snort it.

Very slowly, Javi opens the capsule and pours out the powder in a straight line.

JAVI. You're right. I like to snort... See? It's simple.

ÁLVARO. You're a pro.

JAVI. A very fine line, as flat as you can get it. Two lines, always two. So they go in as a pair. If not, it bites.

ÁLVARO. Nah, it won't bite.

JAVI. You're not asthmatic.

ÁLVARO. Yeah I am.

JAVI. Then try to inhale really fast.

Javi closes his left nostril and in the right does a line. Does the same with the other. Closes his eyes. They don't speak. Álvaro watches him with pleasure.

JAVI. *(He presses his face with the palm of one hand. Speaks quietly.)* At first there's a bad moment that's...

ÁLVARO. How's it bad?

JAVI. Actually... it's really good.

ÁLVARO. Like what?

JAVI. I don't know... Like when you're about to come, and you rush it and your balls hurt a little... but you still enjoy it, you come and you love it...

ÁLVARO. It's like that?

JAVI. *(Sits up, slowly staggers.)* Yeah. *(Looks at him.)* It's great.

ÁLVARO. *(Smiles.)* It made you red.

JAVI. My eyes?

ÁLVARO. No, it made your face red.

JAVI. Look, brother... It's like foreplay, it's thankless... You have to do it when...

ÁLVARO. When I can't take the pain anymore.

JAVI. *(Sits next to him.)* No. I was gonna say when you're with your girlfriend.

ÁLVARO. I don't have a girlfriend.

JAVI. Or boyfriend.

The doggy cries.

JAVI. Don't we know each other?

ÁLVARO. From El Bola's place?

JAVI. I don't know, from somewhere...

ÁLVARO. I gotta go. Gimme the capsules?

JAVI. You gonna put 'em in your backpack?

ÁLVARO. No, I don't want to leave them out in the open. *(Indicates the dog.)*

JAVI. What?

Álvaro gets up and unties the doggy. Brings him in his arms to the bench.

ÁLVARO. Gimme 'em and I'll make him swallow them.

JAVI. What?

ÁLVARO. Like this. Let's see, gimme the first one.

JAVI. No, no, it's... Look, something could happen to the dog, you're gonna lose the coke... If they open in his stomach, so many of them... There's too many grams. Half would be enough to kill a person.

ÁLVARO. Miki's a champ...

JAVI. At least... I don't know...

ÁLVARO. Your job was to sell 'em to me, no?

Javi doesn't know how to respond.

ÁLVARO. You already sold 'em. Now let me do what I want with 'em.

JAVI. I've got condoms. We could wrap the capsules.

ÁLVARO. I'm running late. Help me hold his mouth. I always give him vitamins, he's used to it. He's my prize possession. He'll let us.

The doggy barks. Álvaro caresses him. The doggy wags his tail, happy.

ÁLVARO. Come on. He won't bite you.

JAVI. I'm not afraid of him.

ÁLVARO. *(Holds down the animal's body with his legs.)* Open his mouth.

Javi does it. Álvaro introduces the capsules, one by one, in the doggy's throat. Until he gets to four. Puts down the animal, who feels free and begins to run around the lobby.

JAVI. You're missing five.

ÁLVARO. They're for me. *(Swallows one.)*

JAVI. *(Holds down his hands.)* What're you doin'?

ÁLVARO. Lemme do it. If not the police can find them on me, and that's worse. *(He swallows the second one.)*

Javi lets him go.

ÁLVARO. Your friend told me that there's no water, right? *(He swallows the third.)*

Javi shakes his head no.

ÁLVARO. Good, nothing else to do then. *(He swallows the fourth.)*

JAVI. You're crazy.

ÁLVARO. *(He swallows the fifth, it slows a little, but finally goes down. Sighs.)* The end.

The doggy barks. Álvaro approaches him, pets him, takes him in his arms.

ÁLVARO. I gotta piss. Can I use the bathroom a second?

JAVI. Sure.

Javi approaches the entrance to the dark auditorium.

V Smeared makeup

In the bathroom, Máshenka seated on the empty tank, next to Zuleidy, who is lying on the floor.

MÁSHENKA. *(Smokes and talks, without looking at her.)* You deserve everything that's happening to you, because you're a slut. Acting naive, like you don't know anything, into everything and wanting to be the smartest, the hottest, the best blowjob and the one who does it most. Trying to compete with me, who's tougher than the island of Cuba. You think that a pair of tits and a shake of the hips are enough to keep a man at your side, like this, getting down, eating out of your hand, and you don't realize that it's just the beginning of the shit... And of your downfall. And what man cares about a stupid chick who's just his cum bucket? And that guy, even less! You can't conquer him with just hips and ass! Don't you see that he's got one on every corner? Haven't you been in the street with him and he's kissed another slut in front of you? Or did you forget when he made you fuck a woman? And you do it all the time... A few months ago, yeah, when you were still a little angel, a little girly whose pussy he could play with. Not anymore... I don't know why you came back from Guantánamo after everything that happened the last time, the punches, the scar on your thigh... *(With disgust, she raises her hands to her face.)* Even if he called you, you didn't have to come back. Didn't I warn you? I warned you, right? Then deal with it. Deal with being trapped in this hovel, with this stench, wanting to die, with that filthy hair, doing whatever the fuck he asks you, throwing you to foreign drug dealers in those hotels where you're the queen and waiting for, look... *(With her thumb, makes a gesture of slicing her throat.)* For them to kill you. But here? No. You're not queen here, don't kid yourself. I'm here, ground to dust but still fighting! And you don't have anything to do. He doesn't fuck me anymore, no, he doesn't fuck me anymore. But he respects me. And in this city, right now, that's a luxury.

ZULEIDY. *(Moans.)* Dad...

MÁSHENKA. Don't ever say that again and drink this syrup, go ahead, see if you finally get those goddamned capsules out and make the Russki happy... *(She raises the bottle to her lips, intent that she drinks.)*

ZULEIDY. *(Sipping a little.)* Dad...

MÁSHENKA. Don't call me dad, fuck! It's been years since I was your dad! *(Leaves the bottle and grabs her by the throat.)* You know I hate it, you know I hate it! Don't you know that, eh, don't you know it?

ZULEIDY. I want to... puke... but it doesn't come out...

MÁSHENKA. And don't you go and puke on me. You're gross enough already. Let's see, let me wash your face... *(Takes a ripped piece of the mop and wipes her face.)* Not that we can make you clean...

ZULEIDY. Dad...

MÁSHENKA. *(Accentuating the syllables, grabs her, shakes her.)* Why do you insist on calling me dad? I'm a woman! I'm not your dad! I was, listen good... I was! I was your mom... Now you're just a common whore. Did you hear me?

ZULEIDY. *(She writhes, her mouth upward, inadvertently laughs, speaks with difficulty, sarcastically.)* Ahhh... No, no... That's what you want... Huge tits! A little hole in front... and a little hole in back... But you have a cock!

MÁSHENKA. Shut up!

ZULEIDY. *(Weak.)* And you'd like... you would like... to be a whore like me!

MÁSHENKA. *(Covers her ears.)* Ssss...

ZULEIDY. *(Tries to stand up.)* And to get fucked by a man... Not now... never! The Russki never fucked you... And he fucked me! *(Sings, in her delirium.)* I might fuck him for free but he did everything with me...

MÁSHENKA. *(Grabs her by the throat.)* You dirty pig!

ZULEIDY. *(Continues singing.)* Máshenka the rough, who the priest won't fuck enough...

MÁSHENKA. *(Hits her against the wall.)* Shut up, shut up!

ZULEIDY. *(Sings louder.)* You wish you had a cunt but instead your cock's in front...

MÁSHENKA. *(Covers her mouth.)* Enough!

Zuleidy bites her, pulls her wig.

MÁSHENKA. *(In pain, from the pulling.)* Ay!

Zuleidy pulls off the blonde wig, which falls in the vomit. Máshenka gives her a huge smack that throws her to the floor.

ZULEIDY. *(Sings, without any strength.)* The Russki is a pimp but with you, he just goes limp.

MÁSHENKA. *(Kicks her.)* Enough, enough! Shut up already!

Zuleidy wretches, moans, can't form words. Máshenka steps on her belly and tramples on it over and over again. Takes the drenched wig and beats Zuleidy with it.

MÁSHENKA. *(With anger, jumping on her, kicking her, hitting her.)* Enough, enough, enough! Fuck, enough!

From outside, Javi's voice is heard.

JAVI. (*Yells.*) Can a guy use the bathroom?

Máshenka doesn't move. Zuleidy sobs and moves on the floor.

JAVI. (*Yells again.*) Can somebody come in?

MÁSHENKA. (*Reactions, yells.*) Wait a second, I'm just finishing cleaning up!

Máshenka drags Zuleidy inside one of the toilet stalls.

MÁSHENKA. Be calm, you hear me? (*Wiggles her chin.*) You hear me?

ZULEIDY. Hmm...

MÁSHENKA. Don't act like an idiot, you can hear me fine. Don't open your mouth until that guy goes.

ZULEIDY. Hmm...

MÁSHENKA. Deep down I pity you.

Zuleidy spits in her face. Máshenka, furious, closes the door of the stall from outside. Takes the wig and the bottle of syrup.

MÁSHENKA. (*Yells.*) Tell him to come in, Russki!

She goes out of the bathroom and is lost in the darkness of the auditorium.

VI

So much rouge and so much mascara

The bathroom remains tenuously lit from a high window. Álvaro enters.

ÁLVARO. (*Talks to the doggy, which he carries in his arms.*) It's a bit filthy, Miki, but it's what there is... What's left to us, anyway... (*He puts the doggy on the ground.*) Be quiet, I'll pee right away and we'll go...

The dog approaches the stall where Zuleidy lies. He wags his tail and whimpers.

ÁLVARO. (*Approaches the urinal and takes out his dick.*) Stop chasing your tail, you're gonna get dirty...

ZULEIDY. (*From inside, weakly.*) Russki...

ÁLVARO. (*Turns his head, surprised.*) Fuck... (*Finishes urinating abruptly and guards his dick.*)

ZULEIDY. You here, Russki? I swallowed... I'm sorry, I swallowed it... Or is it that I didn't put it in my mouth?

ÁLVARO. (*Bends down, looks under the door of the stall.*) Who's there?

ZULEIDY. Lemme out, please... Lemme...

The dog whines. Álvaro opens the door and Zuleidy falls on him.

ÁLVARO. What happened to you? I'm gonna call Javi, wait...

ZULEIDY. (*Pleading.*) No, no, please... Don't call him.

ÁLVARO. You're bleeding.

Zuleidy hugs him. A little blood comes from between her legs, enough so that one can tell it's dripping on the ground, it'll soon become a puddle.

ZULEIDY. I... (*She lets go, touches her belly.*) Here... I lost, I don't know... I gotta vomit... (*Delirious.*) He kissed me but he didn't take it out... I swear to you...

ÁLVARO. What're you doing?

ZULEIDY. (*Puts a finger in her mouth.*) Don't raise your voice, no... If you raise it, he's gonna come...

ÁLVARO. Who?

ZULEIDY. The father.

ÁLVARO. Your father?

ZULEIDY. (*Touches her stomach again, with two hands.*) No... The father of my baby... Russki... I have a Russian baby... And a daughter in Guantánamo... (*Sings poorly, flatly, invoking the melody of 'Katyusha'.*) Snow, fields, apples and pear trees, they still cover the white river, and Zuleidy looks out the window and seeks love in everything... (*Falls to the floor.*)

ÁLVARO. (*Attempts to hold her in his arms.*) You have to tell him, you're bleeding... He's right there, outside...

ZULEIDY. No, don't call him, he doesn't know... It's better if he doesn't come in, he's not gonna like this.

The dog wags his tail insistently. Starts to lick Zuleidy, who is already on the ground, and then licks the blood.

ÁLVARO. Do I call him?

ZULEIDY. No.

Álvaro squats next to her, observes her quietly.

ZULEIDY. What day is today...?

ÁLVARO. Today?

ZULEIDY. Yes, it was the fourteenth, right? Last night I went to a party for Valentine's Day.

ÁLVARO. Ah ha...

ZULEIDY. You... are you in love?

ÁLVARO. (*Doubtful.*) Yes.

ZULEIDY. (*Smiling, delirious.*) With me?

ÁLVARO. No. With me.

ZULEIDY. (*She seems as if she's going to kiss him. In a hushed tone, almost whispering.*) When you were a boy... your mother... didn't your mother put talcum powder between your balls and your thighs?

ÁLVARO. Talc?

ZULEIDY. Talc, yes, talc... With a powder puff...

ÁLVARO. *(He's too close to her to react in a timely manner. That's why he's slow to understand. Speaks timidly, discretely.)* Ah... Ah, no, no. Because... talcum powder gave me asthma.

ZULEIDY. Could it be... could that be why...

ÁLVARO. Of course.

ZULEIDY. Well, to write, I... to write on the chalkboard I'd get the chalk and wet it with my tongue... *(Smiles softly.)* My lip would stick to my gums after and it was a little gross, you know what I'm saying? It would stick because chalk has plaster in it... understand? And the plaster... *(Most delirious.)* One time I fell and they put a cast on my elbow for the break... Ha, ha... But I took it off by myself, I took it off alone... *(Tries to stand up.)* I was alone at the party for the clowns, too... The clowns of Circuba didn't make it out to Guantanamo, but we saw them on television... I saw it... we saw Russian clowns with long noses, even if I didn't like the ones that came... I loved the woman who swallowed the swords, yeah, her, and the fireeater... Ah, ah... *(Collapses to the floor.)*

From afar comes the sound of a military chorus that sings 'Katyusha' in Russian.

Álvaro goes to touch Zuleidy but reconsiders: he crosses his arms very slowly, as if he felt a chill, sits on the ground and studies her.

The dog stops licking. Runs over to where Álvaro is and climbs up his legs. Then, for the first and last time in his life, he barks.

The lights slowly fade, and with the military chorus now playing loudly in the background, the time and the characters travel back a year.

VII

An eyelash in the eye

On the backdrop it reads: "One year earlier."

Midnight. The door to the cinema is wide open and Máshenka, with her left arm in a cast from shoulder to wrist, douses the floor, immersing the mop once in a while in a rusted metal bucket. Her hair is parted and she has big hoop earrings on. From the tape player on the lobby counter she hears the voice of a female singer.

Javi enters from inside the theatre.

JAVI. Did the telephone ring?

MÁSHENKA. It's not working, 'cause of the storms.

JAVI. Was there thunder?

MÁSHENKA. It's strange, but there was thunder.

JAVI. Then, if something happens, she won't be able to call.

MÁSHENKA. No.

JAVI. I'm gonna look for her at the terminal.

MÁSHENKA. Stay calm, she'll come.

Javi goes out to the sidewalk, lights a cigarette and smokes. Máshenka continues cleaning.

MÁSHENKA. One of these days you're gonna have a heart attack.

JAVI. Very early tomorrow Cholo comes to collect.

MÁSHENKA. And you don't have enough?

JAVI. I had to pay eighty bucks in kickbacks... for the fucked up cooling motor.

MÁSHENKA. Wasn't the company gonna pay that?

JAVI. If we wait for the company...

MÁSHENKA. It'll break again.

JAVI. I also bought these Adidas, I had my eye on 'em for a while.

MÁSHENKA. You spend everything on that shit.

Javi is silent, sits on the steps.

JAVI. It's the only thing that makes me happy.

MÁSHENKA. And now you're up to here in debt.

JAVI. I'll figure something out.

MÁSHENKA. Tonight you'll have to parade Zuleidy around the park, to see what she can do.

JAVI. It's better if you go and bring us something... It's her first day.

MÁSHENKA. Not that you give a shit about that.

JAVI. Now she'll get here and we'll have to explain everything from the start.

MÁSHENKA. She knows more than a thing or two....

JAVI. I hope so, because teaching has never been my strength.

MÁSHENKA. I think you woulda made a good teacher. Little magic classes, with disappearing things...

JAVI. And you'd be a good clown instructor, because you're so charming. The star of the Russian Circus!

Máshenka grimaces.

JAVI. And if she doesn't come?

MÁSHENKA. You'll go out and scrape by, it wouldn't be the first time.

JAVI. It's burning, Máshenka... A bunch of old faggots at the Prado... If you go down to El Parque del Curita the cops get you and harass you... And the tourists always like the weirdest games... It wasn't like this before.

MÁSHENKA. It's always been like this. And you've always done what you pleased. It's all in what you need, in what excites your head and fills your wallet. Selling your ass is not a sexual problem, it's your income.

JAVI. I grew up in Batabanó, with crass and trashy people. Those kinda guys have never liked me.

MÁSHENKA. Ay, Javi, go give another dog that bone, we know each other too well, and in Batabanó they fuck plenty and there's no shortage of faggots... You come to me with that story? Not you, anybody else, anybody who wants to rest sits down.

Javi looks at her.

MÁSHENKA. Did I say something that wasn't true?

JAVI. I'm going to the Payret to buy cigarettes. I don't have enough to get through the night.

He gets lost.

VIII Two peas in a pod

Máshenka lowers the volume of the music.

In high heels, with a shawl that drapes over her shoulders and covers her head, Zuleidy appears on the corner. She carries a suitcase. From the sidewalk, she calls out:

ZULEIDY. Máshenka?

MÁSHENKA. *(She turns.)* Yes?

Zuleidy smiles at her.

MÁSHENKA. Girl!

Zuleidy comes close to her. Máshenka accepts her embrace.

MÁSHENKA. Come, come in. Be careful, as you can see there's a puddle because I can't wring out the mop so good.

ZULEIDY. What happened to your arm, dad?

MÁSHENKA. *(Dryly.)* Dad?

ZULEIDY. Ay, excuse me. Masha, Máshenka...

MÁSHENKA. We don't know each other. Don't forget that. If Javi finds out, he won't want you to work for him.

ZULEIDY. It won't happen again.

MÁSHENKA. *(Observing her slowly.)* And what are you disguised as?

ZULEIDY. It's the best I had, to wear to Havana.

MÁSHENKA. But you look like Betty Boop... And that wrap? Take it off your head. *(Goes to take off the wrap.)* It's for the cold. Who would guess that you were born in Guantánamo?

ZULEIDY. My cousin Yoyita lent it to me, Pacho's granddaughter, don't you remember her?

MÁSHENKA. *(Turns to look at her. Whispers.)* Do you want me to make you disappear, to turn you into ashes? Do you want to go backward, to never see this place again, not the Capitol, not the Payret, not the big hotels? Is that what you want? *(She pretends to lament.)* You haven't seen anything yet, poor thing... *(Knowingly, she closes in.)* And if you put your foot in your mouth again, you'll never see them.

Máshenka closes the door to the cinema. They talk inside.

ZULEIDY. *(Blabbering.)* I swear not to, Máshenka.

MÁSHENKA. We can be two peas in a pod, do you know what that means? Inseparable, accomplices. Or on the other hand, I can hate you with all my heart.

ZULEIDY. Ok, ok... We'll be friends.

MÁSHENKA. I didn't say friends. I was talking about closeness, not intimacy.

ZULEIDY. As you wish... *(Smiles.)* Thank you for trusting me.

MÁSHENKA. I haven't trusted you. Javi needed a young girl like you and someone mentioned Zuleidy. A neighbor talked to me, the one who works in the pharmacy, Mónica, told me that you'd be good for this, that you'll bear anything... I don't know you, I couldn't have found you any other way. Okey?

ZULEIDY. Clear.

MÁSHENKA. I'd like to be a good person. A mature woman who can make space for a young girl.

ZULEIDY. I don't want to take anything away from you.

MÁSHENKA. I won't let you do that. *(Takes out a bottle of rum from under the counter.)* Javi left it for me to open and share with you. He'll take you to do something nice at daybreak. But at least we'll celebrate like this, together. *(She opens the bottle and pours a little bit on the floor.)* For the saints, as usual. It's not pure, but it's what there is. *(She serves her in a plastic cup.)*

ZULEIDY. I don't drink alcohol, it makes me sick.

MÁSHENKA. Come on, drink it, to warm up and so that you won't care.

ZULEIDY. What?

MÁSHENKA. About everything that comes. It doesn't stop. It's a machine.

Drinks directly from the bottle. Zuleidy raises the glass to her lips.

MÁSHENKA. Let me look at you. Stand up.

Zuleidy does it.

MÁSHENKA. Turn around.

Zuleidy turns around.

MÁSHENKA. Yep. You've got style. You're a little shorter than Gloria, but you'll do.

ZULEIDY. Who's Gloria?

MÁSHENKA. The girl before you.

ZULEIDY. *(After a silence.)* And what happened to her?

MÁSHENKA. She left.

ZULEIDY. Where'd she go?

MÁSHENKA. *(Annoyed by the insistence.)* She left.

She approaches the closed crystal door.

ZULEIDY. But I'm not gonna leave.

She approaches her. Touches her shoulders, her back, almost embraces her. They look at the street. Máshenka sighs.

MÁSHENKA. You'll wanna leave. *(She moves away.)*

ZULEIDY. I don't believe it. I'm into Havana...

MÁSHENKA. At night it's different and mysterious. During the day nobody can match it... I haven't asked you how your trip was...

ZULEIDY. The train stopped all the time. In Las Tunas four pigs got into my car and filled it with a smell that...

MÁSHENKA. You'll adapt to the smells here.

Silence.

MÁSHENKA. I'll show you the place where you're gonna sleep. For a few days, until we find something better. Follow me.

Zuleidy grabs her suitcase and follows Máshenka to the bathroom, a bit cleaner than before, even if terribly lit.

MÁSHENKA. (*Pointing to a hidden shelf, on top of the stalls.*) There's space for your things up there. When you get ready to lie down, bring down that raft and toss it over here.

ZULEIDY. And the people?

MÁSHENKA. The people piss in the afternoon, in the evening, when the theatre is open and there's a showing. At this hour you're never gonna be here. You'll enjoy sleeping during the day, when no one'll hassle you.

ZULEIDY. I don't sleep during the day.

MÁSHENKA. You'll get used to that too. Today I cleaned the toilets with chlorine, tomorrow will be your turn. And the next day. And the day after that...

ZULEIDY. That doesn't bother me.

MÁSHENKA. It's a roof, there are those who have nothing.

ZULEIDY. Better than in Guantánamo.

MÁSHENKA. You'll always eat outside, with the clients. Don't even bring a cookie in here, okey? I can't deal with the cockroaches. Or the rats.

ZULEIDY. There are rats?

MÁSHENKA. Javi.

Zuleidy laughs.

MÁSHENKA. And me.

Zuleidy is silent.

MÁSHENKA. The others won't trouble you.

ZULEIDY. Nothing scares me.

MÁSHENKA. One last thing. Don't get me wrong.

ZULEIDY. About what?

MÁSHENKA. About what's gonna be. You don't have an address in Havana, you're illegal here. (*Emphatically.*) You're on loan. The police can throw you in a truck and send you back to Oriente. You know that, right?

ZULEIDY. I know that.

MÁSHENKA. Watch it. Don't force me to turn you in. (*Notices the iPod, that hangs from Zuleidy's neck.*) I've been wondering what this is for a while.

ZULEIDY. An "aipod". For listening to music. A client gave it to me.

MÁSHENKA. (*Takes it all the way out.*) Air-por? Like airport? (*She looks at it.*) It's not a good idea for you to have it, somebody could mug you. I'll keep it. (*Puts it in her pocket.*)

She hears the sound of the door to the cinema opening.

MÁSHENKA. Must be Javi. Get comfortable.

She goes out. Zuleidy has remained quiet. Observes the roof of the bathroom. She's going to open her suitcase but stops. She sits on top of it.

IX Eau de toilette

In the half-light of the lobby one can see Máshenka and Javi exchange a few words. Soon Máshenka disappears and Javi goes into the bathroom.

JAVI. How are you?

ZULEIDY. So what?

JAVI. What what? (*Undoing his fly and approaching the urinal.*) I'm gonna piss. I won't bother you, right?

ZULEIDY. No, no, go ahead.

JAVI. (*While peeing.*) How's Havana been treating you?

ZULEIDY. Like this, see, I'm already listening to you pee.

JAVI. Sorry. It's not what gentlemen do, right?

ZULEIDY. You call yourself Javi, no need to introduce yourself.

JAVI. (*Laughs. Closes his fly. Goes toward her.*) Oh yeah, don't call me Javi, but Russki... And they call you Guanty, for being a Guantanamera.

ZULEIDY. I hate that song.

JAVI. But it's a good nickname... Mónica gave it to you.

ZULEIDY. Yep.

JAVI. How do ya know each other?

ZULEIDY. Known her since I was a little girl.

JAVI. Since you were a girl, how?

ZULEIDY. (*Stands up.*) I also hate the police. (*Above him.*) And the questioning. You didn't check everything out before you brought me?

JAVI. I always try to leave something unknown, to surprise me.

ZULEIDY. In front of that faggot-made-up-like-an-entrance that's in the lobby, it's better if I pass as a good girl. Not with you. I know guys like you really well. If I have to deal with fucking you, perfect. My role at night and at dawn and whatever, I'll kick ass at. But drop the questions.

JAVI. Aren't you a little pushy?

ZULEIDY. A fair amount.

JAVI. Lose that tone if you don't want me to welcome you with a smack. Whaddaya think? That we brought you here as a tourist?

ZULEIDY. In Guantánamo I met all kindsa people. Nothing new is gonna happen to me with you.

JAVI. If you were that good you wouldn't be in this shitty country. Some Spaniard would've invited you out. Or some Italian.

ZULEIDY. I'm tired. I spent 22 hours on the train.

JAVI. I didn't push you. I suggested it, but I didn't force you. I'm gonna pay you, one day more, one day less, but you're always gonna earn. You're not doing me a favor.

ZULEIDY. You like me.

JAVI. That doesn't matter. Here you need smarts and speed. Not emotion.

Takes out a cigarette. Gives her one. They smoke.

ZULEIDY. *(Looking upward.)* That roof is gonna cave in any minute. Look at that beam.

JAVI. It been years since it chipped by the corner, it can bear everything.

ZULEIDY. Nope. It's the support beam, it's gonna split down the middle.

JAVI. And what are you, a fortune teller?

ZULEIDY. Architect.

JAVI. You playing?

Zuleidy shakes her head no. Javi watches her.

ZULEIDY. If you don't watch out, I'll take out a tape measure and strangle you.

JAVI. Like in that Hitchcock movie?

ZULEIDY. Thrillers aren't my favorites.

JAVI. I've seen everything here.

They smoke.

JAVI. If you behavior yourself and things go well I'll take you outta this place.

ZULEIDY. Go well how?

JAVI. Maybe it won't work. Not because of you, but because of luck. There are people that have a lotta drive but little aura. Do you believe in auras?

ZULEIDY. Yeah. In bad auras.

He looks at her intently. They smile.

JAVI. You see that one can be pleasant?

ZULEIDY. One can.

JAVI. Tomorrow I'll give you a tour of the neighborhood. So you know the area, we'll go to Mirtica the pick up, Cholo's son... There are strategic points.

ZULEIDY. If you want we can go out now. I'm tired but I can stand a little.

JAVI. Now? *(Laughs.)* Now there's work.

ZULEIDY. You'll go out in the street again?

JAVI. No. He'll come here.

ZULEIDY. Who?

JAVI. Are you interrogating me now?

ZULEIDY. Who's coming?

JAVI. I can't tell you his name. Or how he walks. Or the color of his skin. I don't know who he is. Máshenka'll bring him. Whatever guy she meets in the park, an idiot with money looking for pleasure, for distraction. Things are bad and we'll take what we can get.

ZULEIDY. I'll have to take a bath, at least.

JAVI. Behind the raft there's a drawer, and inside it there's a bottle of perfume. Don't bathe. Bathe yourself in a hotel, when you get the chance. The water's never on around here.

ZULEIDY. Ok.

JAVI. There's no water but there are hotels close by, cash, touristy, full of gringos... When the movies end, that's when life starts in this theatre. Otherwise we'd be dead.

ZULEIDY.

JAVI. You get it?

ZULEIDY. *(After looking at him in silence for a few seconds.)* I get it.

JAVI. I'm gonna get ready downstairs, in the theatre. He'll arrive, we'll get it over with quickly. In an hour you can lie down and sleep if you want to. But for now, as you know, you'll do everything he asks you to. I'll keep an eye out so that he doesn't go too far.

ZULEIDY. Yeah.

JAVI. I'll let you know. *(Does a half turn and goes to leave. He stops.)* Then you're an architect...

ZULEIDY. But my house in Guantánamo is still falling down. And mama takes care of my three year-old girl there. I need to send them money.

JAVI. I didn't know you had kids.

ZULEIDY. I won't have another one. One is enough.

JAVI. There's one last detail... Don't call Máshenka faggot again. We can kill each other here, but not with unnecessary insults. She is the soul of El Mégano. And I love her like she was my mom. You copy? It'll be better if you earn her respect.

ZULEIDY. Why does she have a cast?

JAVI. Don't mess with things that don't concern you.

ZULEIDY. Me, no, but they'll concern you.

JAVI. It's a white lie. It's cut underneath. She puts it on sometimes to get pity.

Javi goes out. The bathroom slowly goes dark.

X

Lips and lipstick

Dressed in a black suit and dark glasses, his hair gelled, Álvaro approaches the sidewalk to the door of the theatre. He looks around suspiciously but doesn't dare knock. Máshenka, who has followed a few steps behind him, fervently gestures that he make up his mind. In the end Álvaro knocks twice on the glass. Máshenka makes another sign and the young man knocks again. She vanishes.

Javi opens the door.

JAVI. Oh-la...

ÁLVARO. (*Smiles.*) Hello?

JAVI. Espanich?

ÁLVARO. No, Cuban. From Luyanó.

JAVI. Fuck, man, come in...

Álvaro comes into the lobby. Javi looks in both directions in the street and soon closes the door. Turns on a light bulb.

ÁLVARO. Turn it off, please...

Javi turns it off. They speak in the half-light.

ÁLVARO. It's better like that.

JAVI. What's up, what's goin' on?

ÁLVARO. I prefer it dark.

JAVI. No one's gonna see here.

ÁLVARO. Yeah, you.

JAVI. Who cares. Only you're gonna see the chick who's waiting for you and me. But we forget all faces, we have that down. The only condition is that you pay me here first. You'll be with her soon. I guarantee she's the best.

ÁLVARO. I want the special.

JAVI. The special. They're twenty bucks more, each one. The powder is really expensive and we gotta watch our backs, with the cops, you know...

ÁLVARO. I have the money.

JAVI. Okey.

ÁLVARO. What're they like?

JAVI. Little half-inch bars. They come like lipstick. Powder bound with solid Vaseline, orange-reddish, to disguise it.

ÁLVARO. How come?

JAVI. Because it's easier to stick it in like that.

ÁLVARO. Yeah?

JAVI. You're gonna draw circles around her asshole with it, very slowly, and shove it in. The coke will feel delicious. If you lick it, uf... (*Makes a gesture of added pleasure.*) Pay close attention and when its halfway in, hold it three seconds and then pull it out. And then stick your dick in, you copy?

ÁLVARO. All except one thing.

JAVI. What?

ÁLVARO. I want you.

JAVI. The chick and me.

ÁLVARO. No, no. You.

Silence.

JAVI. Can you take off your glasses so I can try... to see you a little?

Álvaro takes them off.

JAVI. Sure I shouldn't call her?

ÁLVARO. I'm sure.

JAVI. Just like that... Me, all alone, that's what you want?

ÁLVARO. And the lipstick.

JAVI. You won't need it with me.

ÁLVARO. Of course... of course I'll need it.

JAVI. But... It's not fun. With a chick it's cool even if...

ÁLVARO. Chicks distract me. Men, we get right to it. You have the lipsticks?

JAVI. Got 'em.

ÁLVARO. *(Takes two bills from his pocket.)* Gimme three.

JAVI. *(Checks the bills and stashes them. Goes to the counter, ducks, opens the box and takes out three lipsticks.)* One, two, three. Wrapped in cellophane, in case you happen to give them as gifts.

ÁLVARO. This is for me. *(Opens it, looks at it, puts it away.)* This, for you. *(Javi puts it away. Álvaro looks at the third, and in the end, puts it in his pocket, too.)*

JAVI. And that one?

ÁLVARO. What do you care.

JAVI. Don't treat me like shit, brother. I'm making an exception for you. Tough guys aren't my thing.

ÁLVARO. I paid you. Don't think you're doing me a favor.

Javi shuts up.

ÁLVARO. Let's get on with it, man?

JAVI. I'm gonna put some music on. Just in case you squeal.

ÁLVARO. Put it on. In any case, you're gonna squeal, you.

They look at each other intensely. Javi goes to the tape player and turns it on.

Over the music, Álvaro turns around to Javi and begins to kiss him on the back. He's brutal with him, throws him against the wall. Javi dodges and Álvaro begins to penetrate him. They rub together in a corner of the lobby. Javi's moans are confused with the singer's voice.

The lights fade out.

XI

Blushing desperately

The backdrop reads: "2009, one more time". A return to the action of the afternoon of February 14, where we left off. Máshenka and Javi, as they were then, in the lobby.

MÁSHENKA. Why did you let the Pansy into the bathroom? You couldn't say it was under construction?

JAVI. *(Wasted by the drug.)* He's crazy...

MÁSHENKA. Crazy or not crazy. I'm the crazy one for always doing what you want. How about that little tramp who bit me on the hand...

JAVI. No one normal swallows five capsules, one after the other.

MÁSHENKA. Chst. He's from the hood. I know his face from I-don't-know-where... And now that mangy dog is gonna fill the theatre with fleas.

JAVI. Did you bolt the stall door?

MÁSHENKA. Ay, enough already, Russki! I'm tired of this shit and you giving me orders all the time... Of course I bolted it!

JAVI. And she didn't spit it up?

MÁSHENKA. We gotta leave her a bit to see if she feels better.

One hears the weak voice of Zuleidy who sings the melody of "Katyusha" from the bathroom.

MÁSHENKA. Who's singing that?

JAVI. I don't hear anything.

The voice is no longer heard.

MÁSHENKA. I don't know what I'm hearing already.

From the ceiling, a bit of dust falls on Javi, who looks up at it.

JAVI. And this dust?

MÁSHENKA. It's nothing new...

Silence.

JAVI. What's left of this old theatre is crumbling.

MÁSHENKA. I've spent my whole life listening to this.

Another silence. Javi, nauseous, slumps down in a corner.

MÁSHENKA. *(Pushes him with her foot.)* Hey, get up from there, Russki, you have to open up... I'm not up for another inspection where they'll catch us and fine us. I've had it with this Kien Lasky movie! Especially that shot of the cat, it's so gross that it gives me goose bumps...

JAVI. *(He rubs his face.)* Do we have to open?

MÁSHENKA. I hate it when you get like that. You don't have any limits. *(She continues going at him with her foot, so that he'll get up.)* You don't put an end to things.

JAVI. I'm gonna sleep a little, shut up...

MÁSHENKA. The same thing happened to you with that one... *(Signaling the bathroom.)* You don't know when to stop... How come you had to bring her here again?... Now everything's worse. She's gonna get knocked up. I know that someday she's gonna have your son, she wants to tie you down with a son... Of course, she'll have it if you don't mangle her first.

JAVI. Don't talk more shit, about a son or no son.

MÁSHENKA. You're gonna knock her up over my dead body. *(Losing her way in the darkness of the interior of the lobby.)* Zuleidy! Zuleidy!

One begins to hear a military chorus singing “Katyusha”, and each time it’s clearer. One hears Miki barking.

Máshenka returns, very slowly, with her hands covered in blood. She throws herself against the wall. She slides down it until she lands on the floor, with Javi.

JAVI. *(Mumbles.)* Is there a parade?

MÁSHENKA. *(Overwhelmed. Slowly.)* Who came up with this song for Valentine’s Day?

The light fades until it disappears.

In the bathroom, the central beam gives way and the cinema comes down. The “Katyusha” reaches its paroxysm. Sound distortion that gives way to a deafening, prolonged roar: a catastrophe that consumes all.

In the end, only silence and darkness.

Soiree for the Fifth of June
By Sa`dallah Wannūs
Translated by Roger Allen

In spite of the period of almost half a century that separates us from the June War of 1967--an event commonly referred to in Arabic as "*al-naksah*" (the setback, *déba*che), the event itself and its many consequences continue to resonate throughout the Arabic-speaking world and far beyond. It is that particular event that lends itself to the title of the play, *Haflat samar min ajl khamsat Huzayran* (Soirée for the Fifth of June), by the late Syrian playwright and theoretician of drama, Sa`dallah Wannus (1941-97), that is presented in this English translation.

The central core of Wannus's play deals with the conflict itself and its immediate aftermath, something that, needless to say, serves to greatly enhance its impact. For, not only is it set during the war, but the device of presenting a play that is primarily focused on putting on another play allows Wannus to mount a direct challenge to official versions of the events themselves, and that in a context where the peoples of the Arab world were in the process of discovering that they had been systematically lied to by their various regimes for most of the duration of the conflict. This war was no episode of glorious heroism, they learned, as their media had loudly proclaimed for several days, but instead an abject defeat from almost the very outset. In order to convey such a highly controversial message to his audience, Wannus makes use of this piece of theater to further one of his continuing goals in play-composition, namely an attempt to radically break down the divide between stage and audience--a process that in his theoretical writings he terms "*masrah al-tasyis*" (theater of politicization).¹

The play was initially performed in Beirut; I have not been able to discover the exact date, but its appearance in textual form in the 1968 volume of the literary journal, *Mawāqif*, edited by the renowned Syro-Lebanese poet, Adūnīs, suggests that it cannot have been later than late 1967 or early 1968. This translation of the play presents a combination of two separate versions of the text. The first is the *Mawāqif* version.² Given the time-frames involved, one must assume that it represents as closely as possible the script used for the initial performance, not least because it contains a fair amount of local and contemporary reference that was omitted or altered in the later version to be discussed below. Following that initial performance, the play was immediately banned; when we bear in mind the combustible brew of shock, despair, and fury that was being felt in many, if not most, Arab societies in the wake of the June 1967 defeat, such a reaction is perhaps hardly surprising. To that factor however we can add the very deliberate way in which Wannus's stage directions require the presence of actors in the audience who are to represent invited senior members of the security services. The way in which they are (re)presented and indeed the manner in which they are shown to react to the events of the play itself at its conclusion make it likely that the actual persons involved in Lebanese security matters were

¹ I discuss Wannus's theoretical writings, as well as this and other plays (up to the mid-1970s), in "Arabic Drama in Theory and Practice: the writings of Sa`dallah Wannus," *Journal of Arabic Literature* Vol. 15 (1984): 94-113.

² *Mawāqif* no. 3 (1968): 5-68.

anxious to suppress as firmly and rapidly as possible such a totally subversive commentary on their own conduct and indeed on the official versions of what had happened during the June War itself.

If the initial reaction to the 1967 war was, as we have suggested, one of combined despair and fury, then the aftermath also provoked a widespread and profound consideration, or indeed reconsideration, of the very bases of post-independence Arab society and of Arab values in general. Many myths had just been completely shattered; in the words of the Egyptian theater critic, Faruq `Abd al-Qadir, it was "a defeat of regimes, foundations, structures, ideas, and leaders."³ It would appear however that, by 1972, that process of self-reflection had led a number of people to prefer and espouse a more direct confrontation with the realities and implications of defeat, in that, among other developments, Wannus's play was put on in Damascus in that year and, according to the Syrian critic, Badr al-din al-`Urudki, was seen by some 25,000 people over the course of its run. It is not clear whether the script for these performances was the same as that for the initial one, but, whatever the case may be, the second version of the play on which this translation is based, printed in Wannus's complete works (published shortly before his early death from cancer), shows some significant changes--references to which are included in the notes to the translation.⁴

Wannus was to express frequent frustration at his audiences, because, even though his studies of the history of the dramatic medium in the pre-modern eras of Arab-world history, and indeed of its earliest modern beginnings in the 19th century, had convinced him that the audiences on such earlier occasions would traditionally be vociferous participants in the performance, the audiences at his own plays had become accustomed to Western-acquired habits of a more tacit involvement.⁵ In the case of this particular play, he solves the problem by placing multiple actors in the audience. Not only are members of the government placed in the front row, but the author of the play that is supposed to be performed is also seated in the audience and interacts with the "Producer" on stage as the entire production begins to fall apart. Just a couple of years earlier, the Austrian playwright, Peter Handke (b. 1942), had written a play in German entitled *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (Offending or Insulting the Audience, 1966) which at the time was termed an "anti-play," but in Wannus's contribution he seems to take the process yet further: the audience is made to watch as, at the play's conclusion, the theater is closed by actors dressed as soldiers and the "participants" on stage who have been involved in this subversive activity are all arrested. Theater in this case not only offers a telling commentary on the events of the recent past, but also comes disarmingly close to the actual situation in the public domains of much of

³ Faruq Abd al-Qadir, *Izdihar wa-suqut al-masrah al-misri* (Rise and Fall of Egyptian Theater). Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Mu`asir, 1979, p 164.

⁴ Sa`dallah Wannus, *Al-Athar al-kamilah*, Vol. 1, Damascus: Al-Ahali li-al-Tiba`ah wa-al-nashr wa-al-tawzi`, 1996.

⁵ I explore this problematic in "Drama and Audience: The Case of Arabic Theater," *Theater Three* no. 6 (Spring 1989): 7-20.

the Arabic-speaking world, that very space that in 2014 is being contested in many of its regions following the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" of 2011.

Sa`dallah Wannus is one of the most significant figures in the history of modern Arabic drama: actor, playwright, theoretician of drama, producer, and major cultural figure in the cultural sector of his homeland, Syria. Born in the Alawite community in Syria, he received his basic education there before earning a journalism degree in Cairo during the early 1960s, a period in which Egyptian theater was in one of its most productive periods. In the same period he composed several one-act plays and, following his return to Syria, worked in the cultural sector. Later that decade, he went to Paris to study the theory and practice of drama, and there he encountered the experimental works of writers such as Ionesco, Anouilh, and--it almost goes without saying-- Brecht and Piscator. Following his return to Syria, he wrote a great deal about the theory of drama, advocating "politicization theater" as one response to the dire events of 1967. *Haflat samar*, the play translated here (1968), was followed by a number of highly experimental works, including *Mughamarat ra's al-mamluk Jabir* (The Adventure of Mamluk Jabir's Head, 1970), *Sahrah ma`a Abi Khalil al-Qabbani* (An Evening with Abu Khalil al-Qabbani, 1972),⁶ and *Al-Malik huwa al-malik* (The King's the King, 1977; English translation by Ghassan Maleh in *Modern Arabic Drama: an anthology* ed. Salma Jayyusi and Roger Allen, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 77-120). Following the shocking Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982, Wannus wrote no plays for almost a decade, but in the 1990s he returned to the task with renewed vigor, with a series of continuingly controversial works, including *al-Ightisab* (The Rape, 1990), *Munamnat tarikhyyah* (Historical Miniatures, 1994), and *Tuqus al-isharat wa-al-tahawwulat*, (Rituals of Signs and Transformations, 1994). He died of cancer on May 15th 1997.

Roger Allen retired from his position as Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania in 2011, but continues to teach there part-time. Among his published works are: *A Period of Time* (1st [microfiche] edition, 1974; 2nd edition 1992); *The Arabic Novel: an historical and critical introduction* (1st edition 1982, Arabic edition, 1986; 2nd edition 1995, 2nd Arabic edition 1998); and *The Arabic Literary Heritage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; abridged paperback edition: *Introduction to Arabic Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Arabic translation: *Muqaddima li-al-adab al-`Arabi*, Cairo: Al-Maglis al-A`la li-al-thaqafah, 2003). He has also served as the editor of several journals, and has translated a large number of works of modern Arabic fiction into English.

⁶ A short sequence from a performance of this play--along with carefully orchestrated audience-involvement, can be seen as part of the television series, *The Arabs* (hosted by Basim Musallam), that is available in DVD form. The particular program is called "The Power of the Word," and is devoted to the place of literature in Arab societies.

SOIREE FOR THE FIFTH OF JUNE

Sa`dallāh Wannūs¹

Translated into English by ROGER ALLEN

.....

A play involving the public, history, [officials]² and professional actors.

[NOTE]³

The day after the June War [1967], the majority of ministers and heads of cultural foundations--especially the official ones--were, with their habitual enthusiasm, hell-bent on confirming the existence of their foundations. When state events are involved, official foundations have to be there. As far as they were concerned, the June War was simply one of those state events, no more.

An official theater invites the public to attend a play entitled "*Clarion of Souls*" by the playwright, `Abd al-ghanī al-Shā`ir [the poet]. It is opening night, the night when the events of our performance takes place. Traditional invitations have been sent to officials and political figures; not only them, but to refugees and people in the "third level" category as well. These latter invitations actually misrepresent the current situation and its essential details.

As is usually the case in our country, in this play-production the producer is also the director. I can add at this point that he is also an actor. He is in charge, and his involvement here carries with it implications beyond this particular theater stage and the building itself.

This play does not involve "characters," in the accepted sense of the word. All the personalities involved conform with this principle: the producer, the writer, `Abd al-rahmān, Abū al-faraj, and `Izzat. All of them, like everyone else, are merely voices, participants in a specific historical situation. The individuals here have no particular dimensions to them. Their features are only depicted in accordance with the lines and details that they furnish to the general historical picture. That is what simultaneously constitutes both the shape and content of the play.

¹ This translation is based on two versions of the text of the play: the first published in the Beirut journal, *Mawāqif*, no 3 (1968), pp. 5-68; the second in the complete works edition: Sa`dallāh Wannūs, *Al-Āthār al-kāmilah*, Vol. 1, Damascus: Al-Ahāfī li-al-Tibā`ah wa-al-nashr wa-al-tawzī, 1996. As will become clear from the footnotes to this translation, the two versions differ and, at one point later in the play, completely diverge.

² Added to the complete works edition: Sa`dallāh Wannūs, *Al-Āthār al-kāmilah*, Vol. 1, Damascus: Al-Ahāfī li-al-Tibā`ah wa-al-nashr wa-al-tawzī, 1996: pg.21.

³ Added to the Complete Works edition, pg. 23.

The theater is illuminated. The stage itself is also lit, and there is no curtain. Right at the front is a blackboard on which is written: "At precisely 8.45 on the 5th of June 1967, Israel, the most dangerous and problematic of imperialist manifestations in the world, launched a lightning attack on the Arab nations and defeated their armed forces. It occupied new segments of their territories. While this attack may have been a clear and savage indication of the imminent danger of imperialism, it also provided the clearest possible demonstration of our urgent need to take a closer look at our own selves and in our own mirrors. Who are we, we might ask ourselves, and why?"

The performance was supposed to start at 8.30 precisely, but the exact timing can be adjusted in accordance with the program preceding it. As a result, time has passed, and no actors have yet appeared on the stage. Indeed there has been no indication of when things might begin.

The audience starts getting restless and complaining; a whispered buzz grows ever louder in all parts of the theater. From the back rows a whistle is heard. As heads turn, there's laughter. Another whistle, and the buzz gets louder. Heads come close and then move apart again as patience wears thin. A variety of comments are heard:

"What's this? We're not your parents' slaves."

"What a farce. Is this a hotel or a theater?"

Another whistle, and yet another, even louder.

"We didn't come here to fall asleep!"

Whistles from every part of the theater. The spectators are fidgeting in their seats, and there's a general hubbub. Meanwhile, the stage remains fully lit but completely empty, looking for all the world like a broad, careless eye. That may help explain why the spectators are getting more and more angry:

"What an artistic fiasco!"

"Just like a printing error: an easy excuse for all sorts of idiocies."

[Another whistle.]

"Maybe there's a problem backstage."

"Or the actors have lost their scripts."

[Laughter...]

"Whatever the case, it's an insult to the audience..."

"It's an imperialist plot."

[More laughter...]

"But it's not right."

"Absolutely, it's not right."

"They're making fun of us!"

"It's almost nine o'clock!"

[Now the voices get confused. Signs of irritation and anger grow and grow. The atmosphere becomes even more tense when the producer comes on to the stage, trying his best to walk confidently. He is fat and self-assured. His bronzed, healthy-looking face has a slight tinge of banality to it which is difficult to pin down exactly. He makes his way across the stage till he is standing in front of the audience. For a moment he scans the audience, hardly able to conceal his panic. The crowd noise gradually diminishes and dies away. Once there is complete silence, he starts talking.]

PRODUCER (in a quavering voice): This is tough, really tough. But I beg you all not to think badly of us. The whole thing can be termed a betrayal, and we're already its victims even before all of you.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): So what's happened?

What a story!

So we're never going to get started!

[The words fuse into each other. The din in the hall gradually rises again.]

PRODUCER (in a loud voice): Quiet! Please be quiet. I'll give you all the details, the whole truth. I imagined anything else as possibly happening tonight, but not what has actually transpired. As artists, we're always prepared for all sorts of surprises, but this one goes way beyond anyone's expectations. Let's say that we've all suddenly been robbed of our roles; we've fallen into a nasty trap. But no, I'm not going to get ahead of things. I'm going to rely on your patience and show you the kind of dilemma we're in, and in full detail. Today you've no idea how far we're going to have to rely on your understanding in order to get out of this fix we're in.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): Scrap the introduction and get on with it!

Let's get to the point.

What's been happening?

Isn't there going to be a play?

[Once again, the words fuse into each other, and the general din in the hall rises.]

PRODUCER: Gentlemen, I beg you to help me perform this very difficult task. I've hesitated for a long time before agreeing to undertake it. But what's to be done? Officials have actually received their invitations, and most of the seats in the theater have been reserved...

SPECTATORS (from the hall): Oh no! So...

PRODUCER: Quiet, please, quiet! (He wipes his forehead angrily.) What's more, you have an absolute right to learn the truth in full. Otherwise how can you have any confidence in us? (A pause as he wipes his forehead again.) You're all undoubtedly aware of the difficult historical moment we're passing through at this point in time. We've lost our foothold,[and our lives have almost been turned upside down].⁴ We've all had to taste the bitter food of a struggle that I'm going to term 'dramatic.' Needless to say, I don't want to pick the scab off our wound. Our purpose tonight was more noble and lofty than simply reviving sorrowful memories. I'm not going to dissimulate: memory is not a feature of theater; a specialty of historians perhaps. Our only specialty is art, something that reveals itself on every possible occasion, particularly on every possible occasion. Since the events began, I've been thinking to myself that our play cannot remain in the shadows. Haven't we been in evidence on all possible occasions? Haven't we celebrated every process of change?! For that very reason, it's most appropriate for our demonstration this time to be starker and more violent. These events have been far from normal, not simple at all. (A moment's pause.) At first I had a dream, when the sound of bombs falling was still flashing across our vision and minds, a dream of presenting a soirée of poetry, one in which the very best poems from our era or one close to it would be presented in an effective dramatic mode. (He starts to act it out.) The lights would be low, and gun-shots would be heard. (The lights go down, and gun-shots are heard.) The actor comes toward the front of the stage like some kind of legend enveloped in a halo of light (He is picked up in a beam of colored lights.) He will stand right here, in front of you all, staring directly into your faces. Music bursts forth from various parts of the theater, music punctuated by bursts of gunfire. (Music pulsating with the sound of gunfire now bursts forth, and there is a general atmosphere of terror.) The actor will now commence his recitation with an effect just like an explosion:

Fear is the fabric of a country we know not.

A troupe of dry-eyed men appears hesitantly. They are wearing earth-colored smocks with hems touching the ground. (A group of men appears at the back of the stage, wearing earth-colored smocks. Dry-eyed, they come forward steadily and gather around the Producer, solemnly reciting):

Fear is the fabric of a country we know not.

PRODUCER: The actor continues, and the troupe echoes his statements.

The time is pregnant with sorrow, with calamities,

Days beget days.

There pours forth dead blood,

Menses and babies insects.

Bodies of the dead disintegrate,

Swallowed by the thirsty earth.

⁴ Omitted from the Complete Works edition, pg. 26.

[Yet fear is the fabric of a country we know not.]⁵

TROUPE: Fear is the fabric of a country we know not.

PRODUCER (still acting his part):

Invaders pass by,

Hunger comes,

Plague comes,

Decay comes and comes again.

Yet fear is the fabric of a country we don't know.

TROUPE: Fear is the fabric of a country we don't know.

[A moment's pause]

The time is pregnant with sorrow, with calamities.

Days beget days.

There pours forth dead blood,

Menses and babies insects.

[The Producer claps his hands. The Troupe stops and its members withdraw. The lights gradually dim, and the spotlight focuses again on the Producer. The little scene is over.]

PRODUCER (returning to center-stage): I wanted to draw a moral for you all. Recently I've noticed--and I devoutly hope this is something purely temporary--that you've started looking down on poetry and rejecting it. That's why I've abandoned my idea and started preparing a dramatic presentation. Don't imagine that it's been easy. The choice of a text is always the most difficult aspect facing people who work in the drama in our country. We need a text that resonates with this particular period, but the bookstores have nothing to offer. I'm inclined to say they're totally empty! Of course, I've read through Tawfiq al-Hakim's works before anything else, but unfortunately he despises politics and has no interest in wars. Then I've leafed through some other authors' works too, but found them all, for one reason or another, out of sympathy with the needs of our particular era.

PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE: That's an insult to our literary tradition.

Tawfiq al-Hakim's a great writer!

You're belittling our literary talents and our entire heritage!

PRODUCER: No! I had no intention of criticizing or insulting anyone. Like all of you I have the greatest respect and admiration for all of them. But I'm talking now about a special situation.

⁵ Omitted from the Complete Works edition, pg. 28.

I've been looking for a text that would fit our current circumstances. There's nothing available in the current repertoire. That's why I thought that I'd prefer to do what I'm doing, namely to work with an author to create a text, the subject of which would meld with recent events. I've done it before, cooperating several times with `Abd al-ghani al-Sha`ir. Actually I was wrong; I love working with him [it was a mistake to work with him].⁶ How bitter betrayal can be, and how savage the blows administered by friends. But no! I won't digress....I'll start again. The story begins in my library. I invited Mr. `Abd al-ghani to visit me, and he came. It was night-time, and our city was still sobbing; gloomy blue light...

[He moves over to the left by the wall; blue light on the stage. An actor comes on stage with two chairs. He is followed by another actor carrying two pictures: one of Molière, the other of Samuel Beckett. He hangs them up on the wall behind the Producer, then leaves. The first actor places the two chairs facing each other, leaving a space between them where there's supposed to be a desk. The Producer sits down, and the actor who will play the role of the writer follows suit.

PRODUCER (using his memory): Welcome! It's been a while since we last met.

`ABD AL-GHANI (performing his actor's role): Yes indeed, it's been a long time.

PRODUCER: I was afraid you'd left the city.

[At this point, the real `Abd al-ghani al-Sha`ir stands up in the audience and comes toward the stage.]

`ABD AL-GHANI (the real one, in a loud voice): As long as I'm actually here, there's no need to have your actors play my part.

[`Abd al-ghani is tall with delicate features. His entire expression is marked by a fixed smile of uncertain significance.]

PRODUCER (surprised): You! You're here!

`ABD AL-GHANI: I don't believe I'm not allowed to enter.

[He comes up on to the stage itself.]

PRODUCER: So tell me then: have you got what you want? Just look at the fix you've put me in!

[At this point the actor gets up and stands to one side.]

`ABD AL-GHANI (his face wreathed in smiles): I thought you wanted to tell the audience the story of that meeting we had.

PRODUCER (angrily): Exactly right! That's what I wanted. Sit down.

[The actor now goes offstage.]

⁶ The two versions differ at this point. The passage in brackets is in the Complete Works, pg. 29.

We're going to do the right thing; we'll say everything that needs to be said. My goal in all this was clear enough, wasn't it?

`ABD AL-GHANI: No! I'd say it wasn't.

PRODUCER: Okay, then sit down. Let's rehearse for our esteemed audience here the conversation we had.

[Abd al-ghani sits down. The Producer starts acting as though he is recalling what happened.]

PRODUCER (with a smile): I was afraid you'd left the city.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Are we going back to that again?

PRODUCER: Yes, to the very first expression.

`ABD AL-GHANI: As you wish.

PRODUCER (repeating): I'm saying that I was afraid you'd left the city.

`ABD AL-GHANI (he too now starts acting as though he's remembering): Me leave the city? Where would I go?

PRODUCER (with a knowing wink): You know. Where most of our friends went. Even now they're scattered all over the place, in remote villages and the northern cities.

`ABD AL-GHANI: I never even thought about leaving. I was never that scared.

PRODUCER: You're just like me. My wife kept yelling and screaming that we should go to her family village, but I refused to be defeatist.

[He raises his eyebrows and shakes his head.]

What days they were! Impossible to sleep, impossible to understand. Events piled up in shock waves. What days they were! I almost came to the conclusion that our entire structure was collapsing and the future would turn into one enormous riddle. But, as it is, here we are, still standing on our own feet.

SPECTATORS (from the hall itself): On our feet or our faces?

Our feet have been crushed like corn-stalks.

We been running so much, they're all scratched and torn.

Let's hear what they both have to say!

Disgraceful talk!

No, but it's all true!

No, no, no one can possibly accept that.

[The general din gets louder and louder.]

PRODUCER (pointing angrily at the audience): Are you happy with what's happening here?

[Abd al-ghani smiles. The Producer stands up nervously and heads toward the front of the stage to quiet the audience with a hand gesture.]

PRODUCER: You're making our task that much harder tonight. We've been through enough already.

[There's still a certain amount of noise in the audience, along with some whispering. He raises his voice.]

If things go on this way, we'll never get to the end.

[Turning toward the wings, he claps his hands. One of the workers comes on stage.]

Let the play begin!

WORKER: Very good.

PRODUCER (directing his words at the front rows): Gentlemen, I'm very sorry. But you'll soon be able to see for yourselves if I'm to blame for all this.

[He goes back to his seat, and the curtain is lowered. There now follow three minutes, during which the lights go down. The noise stops, and the curtain is raised again. The stage itself is bathed in a wan blue light, except for the corner occupied by the Producer and Author. A beam of white light falls on them. They are both seated as in the previous scene.]

PRODUCER (rehearsing his previous situation all over again): How about you? What happened to you during those tumultuous days.

`ABD AL-GHANI (looking distracted): A veritable cloud of noise, sweat, and big words. (He smiles.) By now I've learned very well how to distinguish the voices of radio announcers.

PRODUCER: We're both the same from that point of view. I still feel as though there's a number of broadcasts buzzing in my ears at the same time. But I meant something else by my question. I was asking what thoughts these events have triggered in your mind.

`ABD AL-GHANI (after a pause in which the smile never leaves his face): They made me want to burst into tears, but none came. They also made me want to go to sleep; that I could do.

PRODUCER: Who is there among us whose heart was not torn apart like some old piece of fruit? Each one of us could hardly dry his eyes.

SPECTATOR: How easy it is to choose fancy words!

And play the phony!

(A loud voice): For shame, you people! Let them continue...

PRODUCER: Look, I'm talking here from an artistic viewpoint. Savage events like these don't get repeated very often. They must be a fruitful source for your art and writing. In fact, they're a fruitful source for every kind of artist.

`ABD AL-GHANI (sarcastically): You're making me feel proud! Maybe the events only happened so my writing could be enriched. Now I recall the story of the thirteen lines...

PRODUCER: Thirteen lines?

`ABD AL-GHANI: Haven't you heard it before?

PRODUCER: I don't think so.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Okay then, listen. Once upon a time a revolution occurred in one of our brother countries, one that was enthusiastically welcomed by a lot of young people. In fact, some of them decided to travel in order to participate in it. Among them was a young man who aspired to become a writer, a political leader, or a movie star--it makes no difference. Later on he became one of his dreams. When this young man and his colleagues reached the capital city of this brotherly country, he booked a room in a hotel. He went to his room at once, took off his clothes, and put on his pyjamas. He then spent a few hours poring over the table, writing thirteen lines about the revolution. Then he left the room and read out what he had written to his colleagues, asking them--with all due pride and amazement--whether the revolution had actually occurred precisely so he could pen these lines. It seems that he spent a long time thereafter reading his lines to his friends and posing the same question.

PRODUCER (laughing): I can see that you still have your sense of fun. An earthquake may have happened, but you can still find a joke to tell. So let your friend in the story go on asking his question till Judgment Day! But what about us? What's important is that we can't afford to tie our hands and waste time on stupid questions.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Do you have a plan for a counter-attack?

PRODUCER (smiling): If the time was right, I'd play along with your sense of humor.

`ABD AL-GHANI (distracted): So it's a new play then?

PRODUCER: Of course! The things that have happened provide us with a golden opportunity to create something superb.

`ABD AL-GHANI (disconcerted): Are you quite sure people these days really want to watch a new play?

PRODUCER: What about you? Do you think it's even right to ask such questions? Our theater's a public utility; it can't grind to a halt or boycott events. Theater's a necessity, or should be.

`ABD AL-GHANI: I'm sorry. I think there's a phrase missing in what you're saying. We shouldn't get tied up in what interests the public. Theater's always a necessity, or should be.

PRODUCER: Really? Okay, so be it. In any case, human memory's different from printing presses and tape-recorders.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Of course, of course! But you seem keen to revisit the entire thing. That's all I'm saying. I think we can continue on that basis. (Invoking his memory.) The play, yes indeed, the play. But this time it's on a bigger stage than the small one in this theater of ours.

PRODUCER (delighted). You see? You know how much I enjoy working with you. I admire your imagination and the way you manage to use symbols and warmth to give weight to the scene. The thing we did together for 1956 garnered some well deserved success.

`ABD AL-GHANI: It was easy to sing and chant.

PRODUCER: Chants, characters, and situations as well.

`ABD AL-GHANI: It was so easy to let imagination take flight.

PRODUCER: Yes, and your imagination was not short of either wings or colors. From events of even less significance you've managed to produce wonderful works. I can only imagine what a wonderful piece we can put together today. (He waxes enthusiastic). We'll make history shout on stage!

`ABD AL-GHANI: But haven't history's legs started sagging from so much shouting?!

PRODUCER: [That's why I say that]⁷ There's a rich opportunity here, and our field is full of possibilities.

`ABD AL-GHANI: So let's thank the events once again. They've made our task that much easier.

PRODUCER: Listen. You've no right to keep repeating things!

`ABD AL-GHANI (blending sarcasm and bitterness): You'll never acknowledge necessity, will you?!

PRODUCER: If you want the truth, that's right. We all want to bind time's circles together and fill the gap that opens up. But stopping work is not an option in any circumstance. We're all summoned to achieve something or other.

`ABD AL-GHANI (with extreme bitterness): I can confirm that this morning I've read the official newspaper and listened to three news-broadcasts and all the commentaries on the news. I've studiously avoided chatting to any citizen and steadfastly refused to spread rumors. I've walked along the sidewalk, looking neither around me nor in front. I've stared at the ground, so much so that I can describe for you in detail every single paving-stone on the streets I've traversed. I've done all this as a loyal citizen. You keep going on about necessity! Do you believe I'm one of those people who fall short when it comes to doing what's necessary?

SPECTATORS (from the hall): What a farce!

True enough, what's a loyal citizen supposed to be?

We're all loyal citizens!

⁷ Added to the Complete Works edition, pg. 35.

If I don't read newspapers, I can't be a citizen?

A perverse mockery of everything!

(In a loud voice, someone standing from his seat): At least show some respect for your guests, even if you don't for the place you're in.

[The hubbub dies down.]

PRODUCER (shaking his head): So that's how it is. Maybe you're feeling happy. Okay, that's fine. (A few moments pause, then he resumes his role.) We haven't come here to waste time on humor; there'll be other opportunities for that. What we need to do now is work as fast as humanly possible; we have to produce something within a few weeks. I need you to roll up your sleeves; you don't have a lot of time. Do you hear me? A few weeks, no more! I'm confident that your imagination won't let you down.

`ABD AL-GHANI (hesitantly): But...you must remember that the defeat has had a very negative effect on the imagination.

PRODUCER: Defeat?!

`ABD AL-GHANI. Yes, defeat. Does that word shock you, or is it that it has a weird effect?

PRODUCER: God's curse on the word 'defeat!' Who's talking about a 'defeat'?

`ABD AL-GHANI: So what is it then?

PRODUCER: What I have in mind is heroism, not defeat. Do you understand? You're operating in one sphere while I'm in an entirely different one. As you're well aware, heroism brings with it an inexhaustible supply of inspiration.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Yes, particularly when it's all illusion and dream.

PRODUCER: Don't exaggerate! I'm convinced that there's always heroism. (A pause). And, even when it doesn't exist, what does that matter for an artist? Mere trivial details!

`ABD AL-GHANI: Perhaps. I'd forgotten how much you hate anything to do with realism.

PRODUCER: Tell me, `Abd al-ghani, what's realistic? We've discussed all this before. We're not here to manufacture events or fuss about them. Our task is to be creative, to invoke art.

`ABD AL-GHANI (his voice tinged with a tired sarcasm): Art! Really? You really mean art?! Forgive me. It's only natural for things to be a bit confused inside my head.

PRODUCER (with an affectionate smile): If I weren't used to it, your cynicism would sting. But I'm not going to let your mockery slow me down. Let's get our work organized. I've some general ideas and scenes in mind.

`ABD AL-GHANI: I'm sure you've got almost everything ready.

PRODUCER: No. Just the broad outlines, that's all. I can envisage some of the scenes, of course. The ending, for example. It's very clear in my mind. I can start work on it at this very moment. It's going to be a scene of truly affecting splendor. Just imagine...

`ABD AL-GHANI (interrupting): It's a bit sad to start with the ending!

PRODUCER: The scene makes me feel genuinely enthusiastic. But okay. You're right. Let's leave the ending for now. I'll lay out for you what I have in mind. I'm convinced it's the most appropriate basis for the overall structure of a new dramatic work. For example, just imagine the way it starts: with no introduction. I want to place the spectator right in the middle of the events.

[He raises his voice.]

It is war.

SPECTATORS (from the hall):

But the war's over!

The war's not over yet!

You're going to have to wait a long time before you get to see the second round!

Quiet!

PRODUCER (ignoring the comments from the audience): We can make use of a number of factors to convey the atmosphere. There'll be a loud explosion from the wings (and there's a loud explosion in the wings), followed by prolonged interference on the radio (and we hear such interference on the radio).

`ABD AL-GHANI (shocked, but still retaining his sarcastic grin): I really had my doubts that you'd do that!

PRODUCER (aggressively): I've a perfect right to present scenes that I've thought about.

`ABD AL-GHANI: A shrewd move on your part.

PRODUCER (angrily): There's no trickery involved. Those are my ideas. It's only natural for me to present them in my own theatrical way. Or do you want me to strip them of all the dramatic devices we have at our disposal? You could protest if it were parts of your play we were presenting, but I can assure you we won't be doing that. To the maximum extent possible I'm going to try to deal with your own inclinations.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Hey, don't lose your temper! I only wanted to acknowledge how clever you are. (He shakes his head.) It would be better for us to continue. I'm coming to the conclusion that we've kept them all waiting longer than you envisaged.

PRODUCER: {Never mind!}⁸ I want them all to realize clearly what my intentions were tonight. Then you can see whether or not I've been playing games. But where are we at this point? Yes,

⁸ Added to the text of the Complete Works edition, pg. 38.

I was saying (invoking his memory again) that the sound of radio interference comes from behind the stage. Then there's a loud explosion (Loud explosion.) The siren goes off (we hear the sound of the siren going off.) The buzz of planes overhead (Plane noises.). An announcement on the radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (from the wings): Following a sneak attack launched by the enemy on our southern territories, war has broken out. At 8.40...

PRODUCER: The sound of sirens dies down, and the announcer's voice fades away. A number of distressed people come on to the stage. They're rushing panic-stricken in all directions. (Actors of various ages and sizes enter; some of them snatch glances at the newspapers they are carrying, while others listen to the transistor-radio. As they stumble around with expressions of alarm on their faces, they seem to have no idea where they are going.) I sense that silence is a more profound expression in this scene; everything will be focused on people's eyes. Even so, there will be a few expressions, such as:

ONE MAN (scared): It's war.

ANOTHER MAN: God help us all! It really is war.

PRODUCER (continuing): The number of people on the stage keeps increasing. Their movements get faster and more confused as they wander all over the stage. At this point I envisage a young child entering (A young child enters and does everything the Producer says.) He has no idea where he is going. As he walks among the crowd of people, he tries to avoid getting crushed underfoot. When other explosions are heard in the distance and the roar of planes overhead drowns out everything else, he looks up at the sky and burst into tears.) Amid all the chaos no one pays him any attention. Whenever there's another explosion, he puts his hands to his ears and starts running and screaming without knowing where he is going. Do you see? This child can serve as a symbol, a deeply meaningful token of a truly extraordinary period such as the one on which the curtain has now been lifted. Then, as the wailing sirens continue to blare, the stage now empties of all the confused passers-by, and the child looks even more scared and confused. Now only the solitary child remains on stage, not understanding what is happening. He has no idea how he has strayed away from his mother and father. After a lengthy period of total panic, he rushes off. The stage now turns into a vacant space, from every pore of which emerges a cacophony of noise--buzzing, sirens, explosions in the distance (All of which are replicated on the stage. But then it all dissolves, and the Producer carries on.) I think this is a good way to start, propelling the spectator straight into the events at their core. But afterwards...needless to say, I'm not claiming that all the subsequent scenes are as clear in my mind. Even so, we can...

[From the middle of the hall, a spectator with a gruff and powerful voice, stands up.]

SPECTATOR (harshly): What fairy-tales are you telling us? You're a clown, and so are your silent, panic-stricken characters. That child of yours is simply a rag-doll.

OTHER SPECTATORS: That's inappropriate talk!

God protect us! What's this show we're watching tonight?!

PRODUCER (angrily addressing his remarks to the hall): Kindly clean up your remarks, Sir. You're not in a cafe!

SPECTATOR: That's what needs to be said, and a lot more as well. What are you telling us? Where did you see such ragged people floundering about? The war didn't happen last century; it started less than a month ago. We can all remember that morning vividly. Our war is different from all the others; our war is an ancient and just hope. We can all recall that morning. Streets were filled with people. We all embraced each other, tears falling from sheer emotion and enthusiasm. We weren't stumbling around with stupid expressions on our faces like those sickly shadows you've just presented to us.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): That right!

The women in our quarter were cheering so hard, their throats were sore.

What do you want? That's the way wars start in American movies!

No, Sir, enough!

PRODUCER (distressed, while `Abd al-ghani's smile broadens): True enough. I don't understand what all this fuss is about. Who disagrees? I was one of those who cried for joy. All I wanted to do was to present a dramatic picture of the way the war started.

SPECTATOR: We lived through the real thing.

PRODUCER: We all did. I'm not pretending that we're offering a documentary version of what happened. Our context here is dramatic art. You've clearly misunderstood. If you got the impression that I was intending to depict people as panic-stricken and cowardly, then you're flat wrong. If you would be patient for just a while, you would see for yourself if that was what I really had in mind. It's a symbolic image intended to establish an affecting, humane atmosphere of the loftiest kind. This tragedy of mine shows my intentions without the slightest obfuscation or shading. So, I beg you all, please follow our actions quietly and stop interrupting us.

(He turns toward `Abd al-ghani and notices that he is smiling. He grits his teeth, then ploughs ahead.) Where was I? (He thinks for a moment.) Oh yes, [In any case we can help each other tie this whole thing together. At the moment it's all in separate fragments. It'll be up to you to give it structure and provide depth to its various dimensions. For example..]⁹ Now I can see four soldiers in battledress coming on stage, and it's turned into a battle-field...

[The light on the stage now changes. It turns into a muddy arena, with accompanying dust, gas, and bomb flashes. Stage-hands come on, carrying wooden boards covered in mud and dust. They put them down stage-right and set them up as a kind of trench. Four soldiers in army uniform now come rushing on to the stage, covered in mud, thorns, and tree-branches. They are carrying their automatic weapons and are clearly on the alert. They jump into the trench and take up ready positions with their guns pointed directly at the audience.]

⁹ This section is omitted from the Complete Works edition, pg. 41.

PRODUCER: What I'm envisaging with this scene is one where the soldiers are totally blended with the soil, its stones and pebbles, everything connected with the earth. They're part of it, an extension of it, part of the basic concept. Can you imagine what I have in mind?

`ABD AL-GHANI (scoffing): I'll give it a try!

PRODUCER: You're obviously more capable of such a conception than other people. What I mean is, are you following me?

`ABD AL-GHANI (quietly): I follow you.

PRODUCER (sensing the sarcasm and getting annoyed): Fine, OK! Let's forget about that. So what I'm saying (acting out his words again...) The soldiers are huddled close to the ground, lying in wait. There's a heavy silence permeated by frenzied glances on their part. No enemy's going to get past here; that's what their eyes keep saying. We're death; that's what we've become. That's what their expressions keep proclaiming. As the din of battle subsides a little, their dry mouths blurt out a few isolated words:

SECOND SOLDIER: The raid's over.

THIRD SOLDIER: They're planning something else.

FIRST SOLDIER: For sure.

PRODUCER: Then there's silence again, as heavy as molten lead. Anticipation hovers overhead like fate or disaster...

`ABD AL-GHANI (disgusted): I'm supposed to get involved at this point, right?

PRODUCER: Of course!

`ABD AL-GHANI (pauses for a moment, then shakes his head and mutters): Er...um...At first I was being sarcastic; I remember it very clearly. But who knows how...even now, I don't know how...Bit by bit I found myself being pulled in...

PRODUCER: At the time you intervened to use some different words, I think.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Yes indeed, different words, but with no significance.

PRODUCER: There's no time now to put up a defense for a piece of work that is indefensible. (Gloating) We're narrating another event here.

`ABD AL-GHANI (nodding his head): Fine, fine! I'll admit that you're clever. So be it! (A pause, as he invokes his memory) The third soldier turns to his colleagues...

THIRD SOLDIER: Now we're four.

SECOND SOLDIER: Our fate will be no different from the others'.

PRODUCER: And the fourth one says...

FOURTH SOLDIER: It's only bad luck that's kept us here in their place.

PRODUCER (continuing): An explosion rings out in the distance, and they fall silent again.,

`ABD AL-GHANI: The Second Soldier says:

SECOND SOLDIER: Ahmad wants you to deliver his letter to his wife.

`ABD AL-GHANI: And the Third Soldier replies:

THIRD SOLDIER: But what about our letters? Will they ever get there?

`ABD AL-GHANI: And the First Soldier follows up with:

FIRST SOLDIER: Don't people say that the heart's the best guide? In that case, back there hearts are undoubtedly pounding. At such a moment, lights will flicker, and hearts will pound once just like an earth tremor. Wailing voices will burst forth, and a lengthy period of tense waiting will come to an end.

PRODUCER: That's an effective follow-up, no doubt, but I think...(he hesitates) Is it really useful to mix up our daily business with truly heroic situations like this one?

`ABD AL-GHANI: What are you trying to say? What do you mean by 'daily business'?

PRODUCER: I mean...(he pauses)...I mean to say that this soldier, as you're already aware, is primarily a symbol.

`ABD AL-GHANI: In other words, he's superior to normal human beings.

PRODUCER: And to our trivial concerns in general.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Way above any emotional ties, and those paltry feelings that regularly inhabit our hearts: fear, love, panic, and regret.

PRODUCER: Don't take things so far! I keep asking myself whether this symbol of ours is not weakened if we infuse it with trivial links to everyday things.

`ABD AL-GHANI: The one thing I know for sure myself is that soldiers marry and have children; they have family and relatives. Just like us they like the good things in life and own more of them than we do.

PRODUCER (after a moment's reflection): I know, I know. But...(he pauses)...that's not important. At any rate you'll be the one to work out the ideal way to build the characters and plot the situations they're in. All I want to do is to lay out the general concept I've in mind; that's all. The rest of it is where your specialization comes in. Let's continue. (returning to the play...) taking up again the sad, intermittent conversation between the four soldiers...

FIRST SOLDIER: I once heard Shaykh `Abd al-Ghaffar say...anyone who dies a martyr has his name proclaimed by melodious voices in heaven.

SECOND SOLDIER: Floating on white wings.

FIRST SOLDIER: Greeted by lovely songs, his wounds brushed by luminous fingers like balsam.

THIRD SOLDIER (looking up with a sigh): Our companions are waiting for us now. Maybe they were smiling.

`ABD AL-GHANI: I think the Fourth Soldier will join the conversation last and say:

FOURTH SOLDIER: Then I hope the mangle gets you! Forget about heaven and voices. Otherwise you're going to see fire-flies in front of you instead of fighters.

PRODUCER: At such a transparent moment I think that comments like that are very harsh.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Are they supposed to be at the battlefield or taking part in a Sufi ritual?

PRODUCER: It doesn't matter. I envision the scene as having a spiritual dimension. The Second Soldier now responds:

SECOND SOLDIER: No blaspheming! What can we do if we lose heaven's assistance?

THIRD SOLDIER: In days of old the heavens would rain down 'stones of baked clay' on our enemies.¹⁰

FIRST SOLDIER: Yes, and 'birds in flights.'

FOURTH SOLDIER: Today the stones and birds are all raining down on us. (angrily) But I don't understand why it's quiet all of a sudden. What all those devils planning now?

FIRST SOLDIER: Did you see their tanks? Full-scale demons!

THIRD SOLDIERS: Their other weapons too! Almost magical...

FIRST SOLDIER (after a pause): What defeatist calculations!

SECOND SOLDIER: But we're a solid phalanx, each one of us a steadfast wall, defiantly confronting both them and all their demons. We're going to make them curse their own ancestors!

PRODUCER (enthusiastically): Yes, that's almost right. That's the way I imagine the scene going. A period of silence, then one of them gets up carefully (the Third Soldier does exactly what the Producer is saying) and looks around: ground stretching away, stones, and dug ditches. He senses the loneliness of their position.

THIRD SOLDIER: It's as though we're in a wilderness.

SECOND SOLDIER: It won't be as long as we're here.

FOURTH SOLDIER: If only we had some idea of what's happening in other places!

FIRST SOLDIER: They lost just like us, with no orders or communications.

¹⁰ This soldier's speech and the next contain quotations of phrases from the Qur'an.

SECOND SOLDIER: But we're in our trench and on our own territory. We're doing the one thing we're supposed to be doing.

PRODUCER: Another bubble of tense silence hovers over them. Their eyes look this way and that, as feverish as the flames of battle.

ABD AL-GHANI: Then one of them mumbles feebly:

THIRD SOLDIER: I haven't had a letter from my family in over a month. I promised them I'd take a leave a week ago, but then these events happened, and all leaves were cancelled. My little brother's expecting me to bring him a toy that works. [If I'd been able to go, I'd have bought him a small car.

SECOND SOLDIER: I've no idea what's happened to my son, Isam. The last letter I got from my family said that his body had some gangrene. (He smiles.) Never in my entire life have I seen a child more lovable than he. Can you believe it? He almost never cries. He puts up with the pain like a grown man. I've never met such a serene child. (A pause.) How I wish I could have the chance again to carry him in my arms, if only for a moment, to kiss him, play with him, and hear him calling my name...

FOURTH SOLDIER: They won't be waiting all that long before showing up?

THIRD SOLDIER (nervously): Bastards! Let them show their faces!

SECOND SOLDIER: I'm asking anyone who survives to visit my family and kiss my son.

THIRD SOLDIER: And I'm asking anyone who escapes to buy a small toy car and send it to my younger brother.]¹¹

FIRST SOLDIER: When my last leave was over, I had a row with my family. But now, it all seems so sad!

SECOND SOLDIER: Why did you have a row?

FIRST SOLDIER (with a sigh): It's a long story about love and marriage.

PRODUCER (running out of patience): The sound of planes is heard in the distance.

FOURTH SOLDIER: So now they're attacking again.

THIRD SOLDIER: Cowards! They only dare to move an inch if they have air-cover!

PRODUCER (in his enthusiasm, the words come tumbling out): I don't know how we're going to construct the conversation between them. What we're doing now is simply coming up with general ideas; that's all. (He now acts out his words.) Planes approach from a distance; a series of bomb explosions; the sound of machines everywhere; armored cars, tanks advancing. Fighting breaks out again. (The audience hears all these sounds, and the atmosphere of conflict pervades the stage.) My idea is that the sheer scale of the attack and the small number of fighters resisting it can provide a bitter lesson with the most profound implications!

¹¹ This entire bracketed section is omitted from the Complete Works edition, pg. 45. See *Mawāqif*, no 3 (1968), 18.

[The soldiers are all terrified, and show exaggerated emotions. They then plunge nervously into the battle.]

SECOND SOLDIER (aghast): To the right.

FIRST SOLDIER: Here come the armored cars.

THIRD SOLDIERS: The bastards!

FOURTH SOLDIER: One bullet per man. Aim carefully, and let death do its worst.

[The soldiers aim their guns towards the audience, and there follows the clatter of gunfire.]

PRODUCER: The battle commences and soon turns into a living hell.

THIRD SOLDIER: Take that!

SECOND SOLDIER: Take that...and that...

[Amid the general din of battle the sound of machine-gun fire is almost rhythmic.]

SECOND SOLDIER: Don't forget the pledge I made.

PRODUCER: Some shrapnel comes flying in (the Third Soldier falls on his gun).

FIRST SOLDIER (quickly checking the blooded body): He's dead.

SECOND SOLDIER: Take that!

FOURTH SOLDIER: OK, let them run over corpses. That's what it'll be, corpses.

PRODUCER: More shrapnel comes flying in.

FIRST SOLDIER: Agh! (he falls on the edge of the trench).

SECOND SOLDIER: He's dead.

FOURTH SOLDIER: What a lousy war! Let's give them a taste of death. Aim carefully.

PRODUCER: More shrapnel (the other two are killed as well. The firing stops, and the din fades away).

PRODUCER: Can you picture them, lying there by the edge of their trench, as silent as dry screams emitted by an angry earth--an earth whose sanctity is being violated? In addition, music will enable me to display the many aspects of a fervent scene, as though it were history...a tableau ends here.

[The Soldiers get up from their trench and go back to the wings. After a pause, the Producer continues with his narration.]

PRODUCER: I envisage the din of war continuing during the interval, assuming that there will be one. I'm anxious that the spectators' emotions and reactions should not be interrupted and the general atmosphere should remain tense when our more comprehensive tableau begins...

`ABD AL-GHANI (we have no idea whether he's being sarcastic or not): Tell me...have you finished with the soldiers?

PRODUCER (astonished): Weren't they killed in their trench. Haven't you been following me?

`ABD AL-GHANI: Certainly I've been following you. I'm aware that they've been killed. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they're finished.

PRODUCER: I don't get what you're talking about.

`ABD AL-GHANI: What I mean to say is: even though they've been killed, why don't you let them still have a part in the play. That will enrich their possibilities as characters and give the entire production a powerful symbolic dimension.

PRODUCER (letting his mind wander slowly): Still have a part in the play...still have a part in the play...(lost in thought).

SPECTATORS (from the hall, at the same time): Here they are, reviving the dead, and killing the living.

What a funny play!

Who can revive people who've actually been killed?

'They are truly alive with their Lord and well provided for.'¹²

PRODUCER (emerging from his contemplation with a smile on his face, and clasping `Abd al-ghani by the shoulders): Do you see why I love working with you? 'They still have a part in the play.' What an amazing idea, one that no one else could have come up with. Ah yes. This is going to be amazing. It'll tie the scenes together and give the final image additional force; not only that, but it'll also allow for their development and make their actions that much more profound. I envision them as arriving in the middle of a fierce argument, a surprising and fresh element in a discussion that has been limited, in spite of its tremendous significance.

`ABD AL-GHANI (with a cryptic smile): What argument is that?

PRODUCER: I'll show you, I'll show you. Another scene (while the Producer is talking, theater workers come on stage carrying different decor and start setting up a new scene.) I'm now absolutely certain that we're going to produce a work that will definitely demand careful attention. At the very outset I told you that I only had a number of disconnected images in my head. But at this point, thanks to your imagination, they're all fusing and coming together. At first I was envisaging a frontline village that woke up to the sound of bomb-blasts and the din of war--a normal village like hundreds of others in our countryside. (As the Producer is talking, the stage-hands set up a village close to his description.) Clay houses scattered around with no particular pattern, but, as is usually the case, clustered around a pond in the middle of a space constituting the village-square. To the right is a stone mosque, with its minaret pointing up into the sky. In this village, the inhabitants are like other people living in the provinces: stolid men displaying their self-esteem and courage like the white kaffiyehs that cover their heads. As the

¹² A quotation from the Qur'an, Sura 3, v. 169.

curtain rises again, we hear the last phrases of the call-to-prayer. Just then, the scene discloses a group of men running from every direction; gruff expressions on their faces reflecting both the stubborn posture of rural folk and panic. Young children also run in between the older men, likewise not knowing what is happening. Everyone meets in front of the mosque.

[The stagehands finish erecting the decor representing the village as described. Distant echoes of the call-to-prayer. The men remain silent, but their expressions are those of surprise and panic; they start congregating in front of the mosque, with young children running in between them.]

PRODUCER (continuing): Have you noticed? Now the picture is more comprehensive. Needless to say, I'm not trying to constrain your work with too many images and minor details. You get my intentions: a village in wartime. I envisage that the play's structure will come together that way; I don't know exactly how you'll construct things, but what I'm interested in is the overall scenario itself: a noble struggle upon which a difficult future is to be founded. People here are faced with two choices, and in their small world, one that's based on a simple life and constructive values, the issue becomes just as difficult and pressing as war itself. So here they all are, gathered in the village-square. (There's a general hubbub, although no particular words can be clearly heard. The Producer continues.) The children all look scared, and their eyes are full of questions. It is because of the young children that the moment acquires additional importance and weight; they make the questioning that much more intense. It will be better if, as in the previous scene, the external linkages are still severed. Do you agree with my ideas? (The din increases.) This village is detached from the body of the homeland, and yet it is by virtue of its severance in this way that it comes to symbolize the entire homeland. It is up to these people to choose their own destiny through free will. Do you see what I'm getting at?

`ABD AL-GHANI: Absolutely. You don't want any cowards in your village.

PRODUCER: You'll see, you'll see. Cowardice has no place in this situation, replete as it is with its own glory. In fact, my conception is even more profound than that. Two situations, each with its own pretext. Now the struggle acquires its own purpose and value. As you can see, events have caught them by surprise.

[Now there's movement among the crowd of people on stage. The din dies down, and words can now be heard.]

VOICES: God is greatest!

God help us!

It's war.

As though there's been an earthquake!

The border's close by.

May God save us from His wrath!

God curse them all till the Day of Judgment!

And all heretics!

I was expecting some kind of treachery on such a morning!

Our homes will collapse on our heads!

And our children will die.

Are we starting to moan like a load of women?

We're not moaning.

So what do you call this kind of scared talk?

God curse every coward till Judgment Day!

Who's talking about cowards?

Honor before all else.

No puny weakling was ever born in our village!

People, what is this kind of talk?

It's better to have opinions than fight about things.

Yes indeed, but what the opinion in question?

That's what we need to discuss.

[The sound of gunfire grows louder, and a distant explosion is heard.]

Help us, Lord all-powerful!

God is greatest!

God is greatest! (now the voices come all at once.) God is greatest! God is greatest!

God is greatest!

[The repeated expressions acquire a rhythm of their own, a combination of fear, worry, and bewilderment.)

VOICE (from far away, but getting closer, yelling): Fire! Fire!

[A peasant comes on stage looking distressed. He comes forward, panting):

PEASANT: God alone knows what's happening. (Still out of breath.) Fire...fire! The Almighty One have mercy on us all! I watched as it filled the horizon; the smoke from it obliterated the sky.

VOICES: Fire!

Fire! Fire!

Where?

Where did you see it?

PEASANT: In `Ali Na`us's orchard, for sure, close to it.

VOICE: You said, my orchard? My orchard is on fire?

[He tries to run off, but men grab him.]

VOICE: Let me go. My orchard's on fire, my orchard's on fire!

VOICES (all talking at the same time): O God Protector.

What's the point. What can you do?

Trust in God and calm down.

The fire's at the orchard. That's closer than we think.

PEASANT (continuing): I went to my land early this morning. I needed to plough it.

VOICE: Ah me! My orchard! What'll be left? (he bursts into tears.)

PEASANT (carrying on): I heard noise and gunfire. I didn't think it was dangerous. I rushed to finish my work, then went home. But those planes...Your kindness and mercy, O God!..I watched as the planes crossed the sky over my head, like angry black birds. The earth shook and so did people's feet. God have mercy on us all! Who dares to stay here in this place. The fire! With my own eyes I watched as it consumed everything, greenery and dry twigs.

VOICE: My orchard's on fire...my orchard.

PEASANT: It's moving in our direction. God have mercy on us! What are we going to do now?

VOICES (all at once): Yes, what are we going to do?

What's to be done?

Let's decide quickly.

Decide what?

[There's a loud explosion close by, which terrifies everybody and send them all into a panic.]

VOICES: The very mountains are shaking.

To God alone belongs the majesty!

What are we waiting for?

The fire's getting closer.

And bombs keep exploding.

We can't dilly-dally.

So what do people think?

What...what's to be done?

VOICE: The mukhtar should say something.

VOICES: That's right, the shaykh should talk.

[The shaykh now appears in the middle of the group.]

VOICE: Or the village elders.

VOICES: Yes, the village elders.

[The village elders now stand apart.]

VOICES; Anyone with an idea should speak.

What's to be done?

What are we going to do?

`ABDALLAH (a sturdy man with a fierce expression. He's wearing a white kaffiyeh): Are there a thousand choices before us?

VOICES: So what's your idea?

The fire's getting closer.

We've women and children.

Anyone with an idea should talk. Let's hurry!

MUKHTAR (angrily): Listen, people. Let's discuss things calmly. If everyone speaks at once, we won't make any decisions.

VOICES: Yes, let's discuss things calmly.

Quiet!

We can't hang around.

But my orchard's burning!

Everything's going to burn. God alone knows what's happening...

MUKHTAR: People, what's the point of all this fuss? Let's discuss things reasonably and logically.

VOICE: Quiet!

MUKHTAR: `Abdallah, what do you want so say?

`ABDALLAH: What I want to say is quite clear, Mukhtar. Invaders are attacking our land and our houses. What do you intend to do?

VOICES: Fight them.

Don't forget that they're stronger than us.

Let's slaughter them like sheep.

The land's precious, but our children are even more so.

`ABDALLAH (in a loud voice): I'm beginning to smell the stench of cowardice and humiliation.

[The children are running between the legs of their parents, playing war-games. A child imitates the sound of explosions; another one acts like a soldier with a gun; they chase each other while they play. With each explosion, they scream...]

VOICES; Courage is one thing, but dying's something else.

That statement's clear enough.

Indeed...the stench of cowardice is making itself felt.

Such accusations are inappropriate.

What have you been saying?

At this point there's a cost to every minute!

MUKHTAR: If everyone speaks at the same time, we'll never make a decision.

VOICE (one of the elders): God help us all. Everyone should control their nerves and tongue!

MUKHTAR: So, `Abdallah, you think we should stay.

`ABD ALLAH: Of course. There's nothing else we can do.

VOICES: God preserve you, `Abdallah!

Yes, we should stay.

We'll give them a taste of death before they can enter our square.

VOICE (one of the elders): Don't be too hasty in making decisions!

VOICE (another of the elders): How exactly are we going to give them a taste of death?

VOICE. Using every fighting instinct I possess: my axe, my cane, my hand. We'll teach them what it means to be a man.

VOICE (one of the elders): There's a big divide between courage and sheer folly. Are you planning to fight guns with a cane?

`ABDALLAH: And what about you? Do you want to give the land that I inherited from my grandfathers to some son of a bitch who's invading us?

VOICES: Death's preferable to that!

The only way they'll take our land is when it's covered with corpses.

What are we going to do with our children?

And our women?

It's despicable to even think about running away.

Their army is massive. How many people do we have?

VOICE (loud, overtopping the din): 'How many small groups have managed to defeat larger ones, with God's permission.'¹³

VOICES (sounding scared): God has spoken the truth!

But why isn't the shaykh saying anything?

Yes, the shaykh should say something.

SHAYKH: Today God Almighty is testing the hearts and wisdom of His believers. I cannot leave God's house empty. I shall remain steadfast for Him inside and await whatever God decrees for me. The rest of you can be guided to a sensible decision by the mukhtar and the village elders.

VOICES: Why don't we remain steadfast?

We won't allow them to desecrate God's sanctuary.

[The sound of jet planes is heard in the distance, and ear-splitting explosions are heard. The children scream.]

Do you hear?

What have you to say, Mukhtar?

Merciful God, look on us with kindness!

VOICE (one of the elders): Give us your opinion, Mukhtar.

VOICES: Yes, Mukhtar, give us your opinion.

`ABD ALLAH: Be careful, Mukhtar. Your words may be taken as a blueprint for action.

¹³ A quotation from the Qur'an, Sura 2, v. 249.

[The scene freezes at this point, and the voices recede.]

PRODUCER: A tricky situation. You can see how I'm portraying things. The Mukhtar is not a coward, nor are those people who are suggesting that it would be better to run away than to stay. And yet the situation is a delicate one that does not allow words to be discrete and to offer separate messages. For that very reason they soon divide up into separate groups.

`ABD AL-GHANI (with a smile): So here prudence involves a confrontation with courage!

PRODUCER (trying to ignore the sarcasm): If you want to put it that way...Each posture has its extremes. But the events are brutal; there's no room for delay. I can see the mukhtar hesitating to act, while the village itself divides into two groups and the children keep on screaming.

`ABD AL-GHANI: And what about the dead soldiers?

PRODUCER: Their turn will come...their turn will come.

[The scene starts to move again. The noise gets louder. The children are still playing: one of them pretends to shoot a rifle, while another jumps on him, pretending to brandish a dagger, and hits him on the shoulder. The two children fight each other.]

MUKHTAR (hesitantly, to the Peasant): Was fire all you saw?

[Someone pulls the two children apart and scolds them both.]

PEASANT: By God Almighty, all I saw were planes shooting by like arrows.

`ABD ALLAH: Why the hesitation, Mukhtar. The situation's as obvious as the mosque minaret. The enemy is hell-bent on violating the sanctity of our lands and homes. Shall we turn our backs and run away as fast as our legs can carry us?

VOICE (signs of division appearing): May we live no more if we do that!

MUKHTAR: How are we supposed to remain steadfast? We have no weapons, and, as you can see, we're few in number.

`ABDALLAH: We can stay here, steadfast till death. That's quite enough time.

VOICES (they begin to gather around `Abdallah): We're with you.

That's what men are supposed to be.

God preserve you!

VOICES (who start clustering around the Mukhtar): That's sheer folly.

We don't want to commit suicide!

Let's think of the future.

MUKHTAR: We've been taken by surprise. We've not made any preparations.

VOICE (one of the village elders): Before anyone makes a decision, he should look at the situation as it really is.

MUKHTAR: In my opinion, we've no choice but to...

`ABDALLAH (interrupting him angrily): So then, Mukhtar, your choice is to run away.

MUKHTAR (furious): I'm not running away. You know very well that I'm not one of those people who piss every time there's danger. If it were my decision alone, I would be just as ready to stay as you are. But I have responsibilities. I have to think about people's safety, not to mention protecting women and children.

VOICES: That needs to be said.

Yes indeed, a certain composure is better than sheer recklessness.

What can our life be after our children?!

`ABDALLAH (getting more and more annoyed): What about our land? Are we going to give it to those bastards as a free gift?!

MUKHTAR: People's lives are more important than land.

`ABDALLAH: Why should people stay if the rest of their lives is going to involve humiliation and degradation? What will we tell our ancestors in the next world when they ask us about the land they bequeathed us?

MUKHTAR: We'll get the land back, `Abdallah.

`ABDALLAH: Anyone who's willing to surrender his land to the first invader doesn't deserve to keep it.

MUKHTAR: We'll leave now, but only so we can come back again fully prepared and organized to fight.

`ABDALLAH: That's a flimsy excuse for losing your homeland.

MUKHTAR: We have to think about the future. We have no right to commit suicide for nothing. We must take care of our women and children. Once that's done, we can return to the battlefield unencumbered and better armed.

`ABDALLAH: Cowardice doesn't have seven names. What a disgrace!

MUKHTAR: Don't be so quick to pass judgment. You'll be wrong.

VOICES: It's a disgrace to call the Mukhtar a coward.

Is this the right time for name-calling and disagreement?

The fire's getting even closer, and we're still wasting time talking.

What do you call a situation like this?

Cowardice and shame.

[TWO VOICES (children, all blending in with the general din): You're a coward.

Are saying that to me?

Yes, you.

My father's with `Abdallah.

And you're a coward.

(One starts chasing the other.)]¹⁴

VOICE (one of the village elders): For shame, people! Are we going to confront the enemy amidst discord and arguments?

YOUNG MAN (who moves away from the group and stands facing `Abdallah): We all realize that your attitude is noble and manly. If the circumstances were different, no one would be able to disagree with you. But just look how things are turning out. (There another explosion.) A powerful and deceitful enemy is taking us by surprise. We've nothing to fight with. If we were to stay here, we'd all die and there'd be no hope left. But, if we withdraw now, we'll be keeping children and women alive. The light will still be there, and so will we; it won't be the end of time.

`ABDALLAH: Hiding behind our women's skirts and turning our backs on the enemy; that's what you're suggesting I would not be a man if I accepted such humiliation. I'm staying, and there's no point in arguing about it. For shame! They're attacking our lands and homes, and you're going to leave it all to them. So leave, if you want to, Mukhtar! Get your women together and leave. Anyone who wants to stay can join me here. You'll learn that only death can quash a man's honor.

VOICES: I'll stay with you.

It's not just clothes that differentiate men and women!

We'll stay till the last person is alive.

With you till the very end!

I'll teach them about burning people's orchards.

[There's a general din as a number of village people join `Abdallah. People cringe as a huge explosion rocks the place. Children scatter as well and are scolded by their parents. One of them tries to join `Abdallah's group, and his father slaps him.]

`ABD AL-GHANI: Now's the point at which the soldiers need to appear, I think.

¹⁴ This entire section in brackets is omitted from the Complete Works edition, pg. 45. See *Mawāqif*, no 3 (1968), 27.

PRODUCER: Exactly! It's as though you're reading my mind! As the two groups are separating, the four soldiers appear. Their faces are covered in dust and dirt, and their eyes stare blankly without blinking. They walk with heavy tread like specters in chains. `Abdallah is still shouting:

`ABDALLAH: Listen, men, let's protect ourselves against shame. We need to look for things to fight with.

VOICES: Soldiers (and everyone looks in their direction).

Yes, they're soldiers.

They're exhausted.

What's the story?

What are you carrying?

They look so pale!

`ABDALLAH (viciously): What have you brought us? Are you looking for somewhere to hide?

PRODUCER: So...are we going to let the soldiers tell their story?

`ABD AL-GHANI: No, of course not. They'll simply smile and say nothing. `Abdallah's going to get even angrier.

`ABDALLAH: Say something! What have you come here for? We're not opening our homes to run-aways.

`ABD AL-GHANI: One of the soldiers now answers with a disarmingly calm neutrality.

SECOND SOLDIER: We've been killed.

VOICES: Killed?

`ABDALLAH: Killed? Okay then, find yourselves a grave and lie in it! (He turns towards the men in his group.) Okay, men, we've not much time. (Another loud explosion) Anyone who's decided to stay can protect himself from shame. He should carry whatever weapon he has.

VOICE: What do you mean?

`ABDALLAH: We're tied down by our possessions, so let's get rid of them and our shame. Follow me.

[He leads his men away.]

VOICES: What are they going to do?

That was a cryptic message he used.

He had a fiery look in his eye.

Your forgiveness, O God!

SHAYKH. O Merciful and Compassionate One! I seek refuge inside your house and await my death, extolling Your name.

[He withdraws inside the mosque.]

PRODUCER: What a fearful moment! `Abdallah and his men have left, with decisions written in their expressions that are enough to make people quiver in terror. The people still left in the village-square look at each other, hoping that their suspicions are not correct. They look totally overwhelmed, unable to move. I envisage this as the climactic scene in the play. The lights gradually dim. Music with a strong beat to it accompanies the sound of explosions (all these statements are replicated on the stage). The entire place resounds to a woman's terrified scream..then another..wailing...shrieks. The music gets even louder. Black birds hover overhead, and dire panic too. Men shudder, and words start emerging from their mouths...in utter disbelief.

VOICES (throttled by fear): How appalling!

They're killing their women.

[The noise of jet-planes comes closer.]

What's this?

I beg God's forgiveness.

Let's do something.

Woe is me! Unbelievable...

Terrible.

Horrific.

`ABDALLAH (his voice comes roaring out, hysterical, from the back of the square): Now there won't be any shame to scare us.

[The planes start bombing, and everyone is scared to death.]

VOICES: They're bombing us.

God Almighty!

It's fire they're bombing us with.

Let's hide.

They'll bring our houses down on top of us.

Let's split up and hide.

O Powerful God!

[They scatter in all directions, panic-stricken. The air-raid intensifies.]

`ABD AL-GHANI: All this time the four soldiers remain on the stage as witnesses, unblinking, their muddy faces calm and serene. Bombs hail down and fires spread. They talk to each other.

FOURTH SOLDIER: They're napalm bombs.

FIRST SOLDIER: Which can even melt steel.

[A long pause. The raid continues.]

THIRD SOLDIER: Houses are being destroyed.

[Another long silence...]

FOURTH SOLDIER: They're napalm bombs, for sure.

SECOND SOLDIER: They make steel flow like water.

[Another long silence. For a while the bombing intensifies, then the planes start moving away.]

FIRST SOLDIER: The planes are moving away.

SECOND SOLDIER: The raid seems to be over.

FOURTH SOLDIER: Their ground forces will be here soon.

FIRST SOLDIER: Like so many creeping locusts!

[The planes move away. Wailing, cries, shouts. The villagers start emerging from their hiding-places and running all over the place, dragging their moans and fears behind them. Isolated comments can be heard as they move beyond the square to stables and sheds at the back. The whole scene is utterly chaotic as people keep rushing around aimlessly.]

VOICES: Woe is me!

My son...my son.

`Abd al-rahman al-Duri's house is demolished.

God Almighty!

My back. I'm on fire. Help!

What sorrow!

Fire.

Your help, O God!

My family's buried under the rubble.

Woe is me! Please help me.

My boy!

Everything's going to burn up.

Hurry up...

[`Abdallah now appears carrying a hunting rifle. He looks crushed. He approaches the four soldiers.]

`ABDALLAH (his voice sounding like the smoke from the fires): I'll show the bastards; I'll show them.

FOURTH SOLDIER: They'll soon be here.

`ABDALLAH: Let them come. I want them to come. Then we'll see.

[At this point a man appears carrying his small son. The boy is groaning, and his face has been marred by napalm. The man runs around aimlessly with the boy and comes up to `Abdallah.]

MAN: Take a look, `Abdallah. See what they've done to my son. Are we supposed to stay here and watch our children being burned alive? Just look at his face. He was as pretty as a picture. Didn't you see him before? Ah me...he was as pretty as a picture.

[He cannot control himself any longer and bursts into tears. `Abdallah's expression turns even more furious.]

MUKHTAR (from somewhere else in the village, out of sight): Listen, people. Grab what you want, and let's get out of here.

FOURTH SOLDIER: They really will be here soon.

FIRST SOLDIER: Yes, like creeping locusts.

`ABDALLAH: Fine then, let them come before my heart explodes in pieces.

VOICE (crossing the stage): No, no, we can't waste time digging up rubble.

MUKHTAR (still out of sight): Hurry up, people. Let's gather as quickly as we can.

[Three of the men in `Abdallah's group approach, with frowns on their faces. Their hands and clothes are covered in blood. One of them is carrying an axe, the other two have hunting rifles. The two approach `Abdallah and address him calmly, but in a tone that blends suppressed sorrow and anger.]

FIRST MAN: You slaughtered my wife, `Abdallah.

SECOND MAN: You slaughtered my two little girls, `Abdallah.

THIRD MAN: You slaughtered my entire family, `Abdallah.

`ABDALLAH (choking up): I know...I know. `Abdallah was even quicker than you in killing his own family. No..no...don't smell the stench of their blood, or else our resolve will freeze.

Now our backs are to the wall, so let's leave our anger to seethe like the raging seas. We have concealed our honor in the folds of death, so let our desperation plunge its way ahead like so many wounded bulls. But when will they arrive?

FOURTH SOLDIER: They won't be long.

THIRD SOLDIER: That's right, they won't be long.

`ABDALLAH (yelling): I'm ready for them! My patience is running out...

VOICES (the villagers gather on one side of the square, carrying pots and pans along with all their moans and fears): What about the corpses?

Woe is me!

Mercy, O God!

Let's think about the living.

Ah me! My mother is dead.

God have mercy on her!

What's the point of mourning?

O Wise God, Your wrath is mighty indeed!

We're all in the same boat here.

Dirgham's house is on fire.

It may reach every house in the village.

Let's save ourselves.

[A young man enters carrying on his shoulders a girl screaming in agony.]

YOUNG MAN: Ah me! Her body was just like a tree in leaf. If only you could see what's happened to it now.

MAN: My son. Just look at his face. He was as pretty as a picture.

YOUNG GIRL (moaning): I'm going to die.

YOUNG MAN (stunned): No! I'll carry you to the ends of the earth. I'll save you. You can't die; I'm going to save you.

VOICES (all mingled): Woe is me!

O God, look at Your servants and have pity!

The world's turning upside down. I feel as though I'm falling.

Lord of the heavens, be gentle with us!

[Abdallah stares at them, his expression full of humiliation and agony.]

MUKHTAR: As you can see, we can't possibly stay here. Let's ask for God's help and leave.

THIRD SOLDIER: Yes, you should all leave!

VOICES (a blend of sobs, groans, and children's tears): What about my family...Am I going to leave them buried under the rubble?

What about the fires?

And the wounded.

O God...!

What's happening to us?

What an enormous sin!

MUKHTAR (out loud): That's enough hesitation! Let's save what's left and get out of here.

FIRST SOLDIER: That's right, don't hang around.

FOURTH SOLDIER: That's right, don't hang around.

THE OTHER TWO SOLDIERS: That's right, don't hang around.

VOICES (all mingled, expressing pain, not questions): Our lands.

Our family, our homes.

Our livelihood.

FOURTH SOLDIER: We'll stay here.

SECOND SOLDIER: We won't abandon the land.

FOURTH SOLDIER: We won't abandon any land.

FIRST SOLDIER: We won't let the houses stay empty.

THIRD SOLDIER: We'll stay until you come back.

ALL THE SOLDIERS: Till you come back. We're going to stay on all the land and in every house.

MUKHTAR (amazed, then enthusiastic): You're going to stay here?! You'll guard land and home till we come back...

ALL THE SOLDIERS (in unison): Yes, that's what we're going to do.

MUKHTAR: You'll stop them settling here. You can disturb their peace and quiet.

ALL THE SOLDIERS (in unison): Yes...we'll do that.

MUKHTAR: You'll fill their nights with nightmares and their catnaps with terror.

ALL THE SOLDIERS (in unison): Yes indeed...yes.

MUKHTAR (enthused): That's terrific! Do you hear? They're going to stay here and wait till we all come back. No houses will be empty, and no land will be deserted. So then, let's put our trust in God and leave in good hope. (He turns to `Abdallah) Come on, `Abdallah, bring your men with you.

`ABDALLAH: Us?

MUKHTAR: Don't be stubborn.

`ABDALLAH: What's left for us?

MUKHTAR: What's left is worth more than what's been lost.

`ABDALLAH: Our despair is a heavy load to bear. We can't walk with it. We'll stay here with the soldiers, Mukhtar. You leave, and don't delay.

MUKHTAR: That's your final word?

`ABDALLAH AND HIS MEN (in unison): There's no more to be said, Mukhtar.

MUKHTAR: Then may God take you all into His care. Let us embrace.

[The Mukhtar embraces `Abdallah and his men one by one. When he gets to the soldiers, he hesitates.]

FOURTH SOLDIER: If only we could embrace people like the others.

[The sound of weeping is heard.]

MUKHTAR: May God grant your souls peace.

SOLDIERS: To us you shall return...to us you shall return.

MUKHTAR: Farewell, farewell! (to the villagers) Let's go with Our Lord's blessing.

[Men and women burst into tears.]

PRODUCER: (everything he says is reproduced on the stage, both images and sounds. The movement is slow and deeply moving. The Producer's voice sobs dramatically): They begin their departure: columns of oppressed humanity walking away with their heavy load of anger and pain. The progress is painful, accompanied by mournful music--napalm people, people who have turned into napalm. The initial chaos becomes more orderly, step by step, while the rhythm is established by the sad tone of the music. Napalm may disfigure bodies, but it also clarifies thought and will (a pause here). They exit with their heavy load of anger and pain. A muted

mumbling sound can be heard in their ranks that turns into a chant whose rhythm intensifies along with the sad music. They broach the future along clear tracks, with no curves and no defeat. The music gets louder and louder until it melds into a powerful chorus. Slowly the curtain falls, ever so slowly.

PRODUCER (getting up abruptly from his seat and moving toward the audience, followed by the spotlight, while the author stays in the shadows): So that was my conception of this evening performance.

`ABD AL-GHANI (head lowered, in a muted tone): I shook my head.

[There is no conversation between the two of them. Instead each one keeps talking, totally oblivious of the other. They both address the audience; sometimes their remarks coincide, while at others there's a gap. The Producer seems to be continually complaining about `Abd al-ghani's comments.]

PRODUCER: He promised to think about it.

`ABD AL-GHANI: At first I was being sarcastic.

PRODUCER: He hesitated for a while, but then he accepted the idea.

`ABD AL-GHANI: I remember clearly being sarcastic at first.

PRODUCER: Based on that idea, he wrote the play, "Clarion of Souls," that you've all come here tonight to watch.

`ABD AL-GHANI (he too gets up and moves toward the audience. He stands in a shady spot at the front of the stage, looking and sounding dismal): That's what happened. I accepted the idea and constructed the play, "Clarion of Souls," around it.

PRODUCER: I acknowledge that it's a fine play, even though it emphasizes the heroic aspect less than I would have liked.

`ABD AL-GHANI: Yes, but who on earth knows how? Right up till now, I have no idea... (A moment's pause) When in life we go through a series of momentous events, everyone believes that things will all have changed afterwards: the earth tottering out of control through space, and mankind seeing its days transformed and its conditions turned upside down.

PRODUCER: He waited days and weeks before putting it all down, but eventually he did write it.

`ABD AL-GHANI (still using the same melancholy tone): After one of the raids, I went out into the quarter. I shuddered when I saw everything still in its proper place, people exchanging the usual chatter and doing what they normally do, and streets winding their way through the houses.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): We were carrying out instructions from above.

PRODUCER (raising his voice so as to squelch any uproar): He composed the play and placed it in our hands. We've got it ready as quickly as possible.

`ABD AL-GHANI: I hesitated for a long time, but then I told myself that maybe I was mistaken. Newspapers had not altered the way their columns were arranged, and writers had not changed their normal words. Ideas kept flowing uninterrupted as well..

PRODUCER: For the past three weeks we've been working night and day. We wanted this soiree of ours to be as momentous as the events we've been living through...

`ABD AL-GHANI: Maybe I'm wrong. I took my old words and started putting them together.

PRODUCER: If you had any idea of how much trouble we've had with this work. Every single day there have been adjustments, but we've never complained. One of the actors almost lost his nerve, but we've not complained.

`ABD AL-GHANI: My words (shaking his head and raising his voice)...but I could smell their scent above the lines, a scent that reminds me of prostitute's cunts. I said that maybe I'm wrong. Other people don't smell the same scent while they're using them...just the way they were before the events happened--no doubts or misgivings.

PRODUCER: But today we were struck by a piece of fiendish trickery. My entire body oozes sweat every time I recall today's events.

`ABD AL-GHANI: But there's still a stench that keeps sticking around. It's just like hurling garbage at people. That's the way I've been feeling about the way words have come together.

PRODUCER: Oh dear! Maybe you won't believe it, but it actually happened. Even in the current exceptional circumstances and in our homeland where theater is coming into its own, it happened. Mr. `Abd al-ghani al-Sha`ir showed up just a few hours before the show was supposed to begin and announced that he absolutely refused to have his play performed under any circumstances. Just imagine: he showed up just a matter of hours before the show was supposed to start. He then proceeded to threaten us all with all manner of idiocies.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): In which case, that was a good deed he performed!

So that's the story!

It's all folklore.

[A whistle from the back rows.]

They're making fools of us, that's for sure.

PRODUCER: Gentlemen, gentlemen! (He uses his hands to calm the audience down.)

`ABD AL-GHANI: Yes, that's what actually happened. It was as if I were waking up from a prolonged stupor. I told myself that everyone needs to stop talking when there's a foul stench in his mouth!

PRODUCER: We made every conceivable effort, but without success. We pleaded, but it was no use. What a day this has been! Everything's gone wrong, a total contempt for art, for the public, the huge problem we're struggling with. Needless to say, our august theater tradition will know how to avenge itself.

`ABD AL-GHANI (shaking his head and preparing to return to his seat): So who's worried about that?

PRODUCER (continuing): We were like people drowning, doing our best to save what could be saved. With the time we still had left, we kept working as hard as we could. We'd already prepared the scenes that you've all watched. Inevitably there were things wrong with it; we weren't able to achieve the kind of artistic quality we really wanted. But at least by now you've realized the cogent forces that have beset our show; it's just been a glimpse at the kind of thing we wanted to present. At that same time it's a kind of simple apology, something we hope will satisfy you, so you won't think too badly of us. (some stagehands now appear carrying chairs and music stands which they set up at the back left-hand corner of the stage). For sure we're not going to finish things here. Now that you've learned about our situation and our original intentions, you certainly have a right to get some other kind of compensation, by which I mean some entertainment and amusement. The boards representing the village are still on the stage, and the empty square puts you in mind of ancient festivals. It is in this central square that our popular troupe is going to perform its show: country dancing and singing, nostalgia and delight in the very same place where heroism has been extolled.

`ABD AL-GHANI (speaking now from the hall): All's well that ends well.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): That a traditional kind of ending.

At last here's something amusing.

It's all folklore!

PRODUCER. Gentlemen, gentlemen. (He waits till the noise dies down) I'm not going to bang your heads any more. Once again, please forgive me. Now I'm going to wish you all a dream-filled evening show full of songs and folk-dances.

[The light focused on the stage changes. Back left, where the chairs and music stands have been set up, musicians take their assigned places and start tuning up.

At the back of the hall, `Abd al-rahman, a man from the countryside wearing wheat-colored pants and a dark-brown jacket, stands up and puts his *kaffiyeh* and *'iqal* on his head. Even though his expression is humble enough, it still manages to convey a stubborn and bitter feeling that builds up in his eyes--like jet-black rocks. His voice comes across clear and simple. In spite of his apparent hesitation, he seems to be well aware of what he's going to say.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (from the hall): Good grief. Esteemed Sir, what's the name of this village supposed to be?

[Heads turn in his direction. A young man who is his son, `Izzat, does his best to pull his father back by the sleeve and make him sit down again.]

SPECTATORS (guffawing): It's all folklore!

Who knows how this is all going to end!

We were all involved in history, but now it's turned into geography!

PRODUCER (who was about to leave the stage): What was that question you asked, Sir?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (emerging from the back rows, while his son still tries to pull him back): I was asking, esteemed Sir, what's the name of this incredible village?

SPECTATORS (all at once): He wants to know the village's name.

Name and location.

[Abd al-rahman walks toward the stage.]

PRODUCER: Its name? Huh...what a question!

`IZZAT (still pulling his father back and talking to him in alarm): What are you trying to do, Father? This isn't right.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Why, son? There's nothing wrong with asking a question.

`IZZAT (as they keep getting closer to the stage): They were kind enough to invite us to the show. There are important folks here. It's not proper...

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Who's not acknowledging their kindness? I simply want to find out what's the name of the village we've been watching. Who says there's anything wrong with that? If you ask, `Izzat, you can find out; and, as they say, knowledge is light!

PRODUCER: Listen, this isn't a precise village. It's any one of our villages, or even all of them.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Excuse me. What I'm saying may be off target. I didn't go to school; there weren't any schools then. As you know, those times were very different from now. But, esteemed Sir, people will be assuming you know this village as one of its people. Maybe you were there when these momentous events took place.

PRODUCER: There when they took place? (angrily) This is a story!

SPECTATOR (from the hall): A fairy story.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: But, esteemed Sir...

PRODUCER (interrupting him angrily): Stop calling me that!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (still talking modestly)): Forgive me. I'm just an ignorant peasant. I don't know the proper forms of address. How am I supposed to address you?

PRODUCER: Just say Sir, or anything else. In any case, we haven't a lot of time to waste here. Don't you hear the music? There's a program we want to get going. What you've been watching is a story. As you're aware, stories differ from reality.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: So you don't know the village or the people who live there?

PRODUCER; Of course I don't know them. It's not a real village (now resorting to a phony kinder tone) Let's stop this. We shouldn't keep our guests waiting any longer. Let's get on with the program.

[The musical instruments start playing; a song using the *mijana* melody takes shape and continues, forming the background to the action that continues.]

`IZZAT: Let's go back to our seats.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (staying where he is): But it's a story which has nothing to do with reality. By God Almighty, the whole thing boggles the mind.

`IZZAT: Father, this isn't right!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (staring angrily at his son): Do you think I'm senile or something? For you to tell me what's appropriate or not, that's all that's left! Gentlemen, if what I'm doing is somehow out of line, you can tell me so straight to my face. By God Almighty, when I watched what I've just seen, I couldn't control my tears. I imagined I was looking at my own village. (looking behind him) Abu al-faraj, do you remember our village?

ABU AL-FARAJ (from the back rows): What's happened to us, `Abd al-rahman?!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Come up here and take a closer look. You'd say it was the square of our own village, although the pond is a bit closer to the mosque-door.

ABU AL-FARAJ (with a sigh): Yes, it's just like our own village square.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Now it's empty. Well, Abu al-faraj, we've lived a lot and seen a lot. Nights when the moonlight was as bright as the day. Esteemed Sir, night-time in our square was never to be forgotten. No more tiredness, no more cares. We... (he comes on to the stage with confident strides as though he is fully aware of what he is doing).

PRODUCER (protesting): Where are you going. What do you want?

`IZZAT: What are you doing?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (carrying on without paying any attention to his son): In summer we'd gather every evening and sit around the pond. The evening session would begin. Esteemed Sir, if you'd come to our village just once, you'd have wanted to keep on coming back for visits. It's just a village; true enough, but it's just like a resort. So, Abu al-faraj, when will we be going back for those magic evenings in our village square?

ABU AL-FARAJ: Don't add to our sorrows! God's mercy is wide.

`IZZAT (following his father on to the stage): Father...

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Esteemed Sir, please excuse me. I ask the audience to forgive me if I'm doing something inappropriate. We're people who've left their village. Our own village is just like this one, by God Almighty. It's called Kafr `Aziz; I don't know if you've ever heard of it. Come here, Abu al-faraj, come on! I haven't understood everything, but, unless I'm wrong...

`IZZAT (ashamed): Father, come down off the stage...

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (angrily): So, `Izzat, now you've gone even further; you're my son, and here you are ordering me around?! Where's any sense of upbringing and respect for parents?

Abu al-faraj, do you see what's going on? Our children have started interrupting us while we're talking. If we were still in our village square, would such a thing be happening?

ABU AL-FARAJ (getting up and approaching the stage): What is there that hasn't changed ever since we left our village square?

[These men and all the others who follow them are intruding on the stage. Even though the way they interrupt the performance may appear hesitant, it is nevertheless cogent. Their conversation is defiant, even though the Producer tries to ignore them or to protest.]

PRODUCER: Listen, this is unbelievable! You're holding up the rest of the show.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: But, esteemed Sir...

PRODUCER (interrupting angrily): Good grief, are we back to 'esteemed Sir' again?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Forgive me. Anger is the work of the devil. I'm an old man who's no good at talking. Don't be so unkind. We're the kind of folk who've abandoned their houses and livelihoods, just like the ones we've seen abandoning their villages. (with a sigh) What a huge difference! Have you seen, Abu al-faraj, how well organized they seem to be?

ABU AL-FARAJ (by now close to the stage): Oh yes, by God Almighty, I've seen!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: I keep on saying that, where we live, people will never learn what good order means as long as they live. Our voices get hoarse simply trying to get them organized, if only for a short while.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Thank God for keeping it under wraps.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He deserves our praise every second, every minute. But on that particular day I never really believed we'd reach the stage we did.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Everyone can have their own opinion.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: And their own needs as well.

[This conversation between `Abd al-rahman and Abu al-faraj is a kind of continuous narrative divided up between two separate voices. It's actually more of a monologue than a dialogue.]

ABU AL-FARAJ: And then there's the women!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Bird-brains, the lot of them! One of them wanted to go back because she'd forgotten her son's shirt, and another couldn't remember whether or not she'd shut the window. We'd been going for three hours when Zaynab Amina wanted to go back and see about the window. After that no one could convince her to shut up and keep walking.

ABU AL-FARAJ (Comes on to the stage. The Producer approaches him angrily. Even so, he carries on as before without hesitation): Then there's Umm Muhammad Dalila, a wizened old woman with a brooding hen. She spent the entire time moaning and wailing about her hen. If I hadn't hit her and forced her to keep on walking, she'd have gone back to the village for sure.

PRODUCER: No, no! You're abusing our tolerance here. What's all that got to do with us? What stupid stories are you telling?

`ABD AL-GHANI (from the hall): This is terrific. Carry on!

SPECTATORS (from the hall): We want to hear their story.

What about the play?

These men are peasants, not dancers!

Carry on!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (talking to Abu al-faraj): The Producer's yelling at us.

ABU AL-FARAJ: No one wants to hear our story.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We're strangers here, Abu al-Faraj!

ABU AL-FARAJ: We've nothing left.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: People don't trust strangers who have nothing to call their own.

PRODUCER (trying to keep his own nerves under control): Please, gentlemen, go back to your seats.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Good heavens, have we said something wrong? (A pause) True enough, right now we're strangers with nothing to our name. But we used to be part of a village like this one (pointing to the decor). Then God decreed that we had to leave it on a very hot day.

[The two monologues now continue even faster and more insistently. In spite of the Producer's best efforts, even he gets sucked in. He completely fails to insert himself into their conversation. The music changes and gets quieter. Gradually the two men attract everyone's attention.]

ABU AL-FARAJ: Do you still remember. Yes, by God, the sun was frying people's heads. Everywhere was as hot as hell.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: There was no way of getting people together and organizing them.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Everybody did their own thing. One woman wanted to deal with her son, but he held back because he needed to be sick under a tree.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Women wailing and men taking bets as to how long or short the walk would be.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Kids screaming all around us, getting into scraps and fighting. Their families had to run after them.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Good God, there was almost a blood-bath over two of the boys.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Muhammad `Ali Daba. There's a story about him and his donkey!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: God curse greed and the greedy!

ABU AL-FARAJ: His donkey was loaded with all the provisions he had in his house: flour, olive oil, and wheat-germ. Even the salt-jar and gas-canister. He left absolutely nothing behind.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We all realized that the donkey was overloaded and wouldn't be able to go very far before it collapsed.

ABU AL-FARAJ: In fact the poor donkey stumbled after just a few meters. Muhammad `Ali Daba got angry and cursed.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We told him the load was too heavy; bringing everything from his house was a mistake.

ABU AL-FARAJ: He yelled back at us: 'What's it got to do with you? I haven't bust my ribs in order to buy enough provisions for the entire army!'

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He tried to divide up some of the load between himself and his wife, but it wasn't long before exhaustion and the intense heat wore them both out.

ABU AL-FARAJ: He put it all back on the donkey, and it fell down again. By now he was so tired, he realized he'd made a mistake by bringing everything from the house.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He started discarding things on to the road. For him it would have felt easier to pull his own teeth out or wrench off his hands.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Eventually only the salt-jar was left. He was so angry that we were worried he was going to rub the salt into his own eyes.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: But just then he started kicking his wife and the donkey.

ABU AL-FARAJ: If we hadn't interfered and he had not been so exhausted, he would have done away with both of them. Eventually he burst into tears and said nothing else for the rest of the journey.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: That was a black day, we're still living it.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Didn't we believe that Abu `Ali al-`Izzati would go mad?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He kept wailing like a woman. He was moaning about the way his house had been destroyed and remembering every single person who owed him money.

ABU AL-FARAJ: He grabbed Shaykh Ja`far's copy of the Qur'an and made all his debtors swear to pay him back, even if it took a while.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Some of them did swear, but others refused. He was frothing at the mouth, and his eyes looked like pools of blood. There were several altercations. We may have been running away from fires, but we almost managed to start some of our own.

ABU AL-FARAJ: It's so easy for men to start fighting, and so hard to get them to make peace later on!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (with a sigh): There's no way to get people together and organize them.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Every time we moved forward, other groups joined us, with old folk and youngsters all yelling and screaming.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Al-Takharim, Al-Kafir, Al-Ruwaysa, Banu `Izz, the people from all those villages left them behind and squeezed panic-stricken on to narrow, muddy tracks.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Every new group brought with it wailing women and similar tales.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: There was no way of telling whether they were true or false--nightmarish visions inducing panic and terror.

ABU AL-FARAJ: The nightmare that the shaykh from Al-Takharim told was one I can believe. It certainly had a powerful effect on everyone.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: I ask God Almighty's forgiveness! That was a nightmare with the ring of truth to it. He saw--O God, Your prayers on the Prophet!--the world in its vast entirety like a colorful and beautifully crafted dish of straw; the whole world like a dish of straw, God's prayers for the Prophet! When he stretched his hand out to touch it, it burst into flames, and countless groups of worms started crawling across the dish's surface. He was amazed. 'We only ever see this many worms,' he told himself, 'on corpses.' Just then a loud shriek rang out, and with a fearful ear he heard a voice that told him: 'Shaykh,' it said, 'take a good look at what the world's become.' 'God forgive us,' he said to himself. Just then I saw the dish break into pieces; it wasn't a dish, and there was no straw either. Instead it was a spotted snake long enough to wrap around himself. O God, envelop us all in Your mercy! The worms started falling into deep crevices, yelling 'Mercy, mercy!' just like human beings.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We were yelling the same things too, and we still are.

PRODUCER (almost in a daze as he yells): Is this ever going to end? I don't want to be rude, but...enough! Go back to your seats.

[The music gets louder; it's a long *mawwal*.]

ABU AL-FARAJ: Wherever we go, we're greeted by angry voices.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: And frowning expressions.

ABU AL-FARAJ: We had no idea where we were going or what was going on around us.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We left our homes and fields. We abandoned our fields at harvest time, when the stalks were ripe and our scythes were aching to cut them. We left it all behind.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Ah...every time I think of it, my heart wants to burst open like a fig.

[The Producer is getting more and more annoyed, but cannot find a way to interject himself.]

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: For an entire year we toiled, exhausted and sweating in our fields. Isn't that so, `Izzat?

`IZZAT (shyly): That's right, Father.

ABU AL-FARAJ: We ploughed the soil, scattered the seeds, and tended them like our own children. In springtime the fields burst into green as though it were a feast-day. It was a wonderful season this year.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Some years the soil has not been as generous as it was this year. `Izzat, do you remember how the stalks were bent over, there was so much seed?

`IZZAT: Yes, I saw it for myself. But what's the point, Father? By now our fields are far away.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Yes, far away, and we've no idea why!

ABU AL-FARAJ: What's happened? What's going on?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Good heavens, Abu al-faraj, how tricky the world is! There's no way of understanding its ups and downs. No sooner do we sharpen our scythes to do the harvest than war breaks out.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Yes, war breaks out, but no one thinks about us or tell us what we're supposed to do.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: If war were something we're used to, then everything would be a lot easier. But war's changed. It's all baffling, and no one can make out what's happening.

ABU AL-FARAJ: That's right! The things we've learned about war are completely different!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Before there was a truce between us and the village of Al-Takharim, we hardly ever finished one war before starting a fresh one. People still tell each other stories about those conflicts right up to today, don't they, Abu al-faraj?

ABU AL-FARAJ: They certainly do. But that was all very different. Men clustered behind their leader, then, carrying their sticks, they all made their way down the valley to face the enemy coming from the other direction.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Someone would yell out a challenge, and the fighting would start--man-to-man combat, with sticks colliding and clashing with each other.

ABU AL-FARAJ: But now...

PRODUCER (interrupting in fury): This is plain stupid. You're turning the show into a farce. It was obviously a silly idea to invite you.

[They look at him with calm, sad expressions, but with no other reactions.]

SPECTATORS; For shame!

They've a right to speak.

It's all folklore!

That's a nasty way of talking!

ABU AL-FARAJ (continuing): All that's left now is machines, some that fly, others that don't.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Good grief! Explosions and fire. We lose all sense of direction.

ABU AL-FARAJ: The sky is split open, and the earth shakes.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: When a war like this starts and you don't understand anything, all you can do is close up your house and leave with your family.

ABU AL-FARAJ: We left, but had no idea where we were going.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Every time we reached a town, we found the people had left before us.

PRODUCER: Oh my, what a day! We didn't invite government officials to the show to listen to your silly stories.

ABU AL-FARAJ: While the roads we tramped were in flames, we came across lots of soldiers.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: They all looked exhausted and disoriented. Their clothes were soaked in sweat.

ABU AL-FARAJ: They were just like us, with no idea what was happening.

PRODUCER. No, no...we're not going to spend the entire night listening to your nonsense.

[At this point, one of the people sitting in the front row turns round and gives a hand signal. A number of men stand up in the dark and make their way toward him. He says a few words to them, and they distribute themselves to spots beside the theater exits. Others station themselves in the aisles.]

`IZZAT (maintaining his shy posture as he joins the conversation): That's right. The soldiers had no idea what was going on.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Some of them were telling stories that were obviously false. Good heavens! One of them went so far as to say that the enemy soldiers had wings and could fly like birds.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Another said that they weren't really human at all, but machines made of metal. Walking, talking machines, with bullets that never missed.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: But some of them laughed when we asked them about such stories. One of them said he'd come back from the front without setting eyes on the enemy.

`IZZAT: And we saw other soldiers crying for sheer exasperation.

ABU AL-FARAJ: That's right. They were sobbing like women.

`IZZAT: They'd been defeated, but they didn't know why. Like us, they had no idea what was happening.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We met other soldiers who were laughing, having a good time firing off the ammunition they had left.

ABU AL-FARAJ: They were taking bets to see who could hit rocks or tree trunks.

PRODUCER (yelling): This farce has got to stop!

SPECTATOR (to his companion): Do you hear that? They leave the front and make war on rocks and tree trunks!

ANOTHER SPECTATOR: Then they paint a portrait of their own victory on them!!

PRODUCER (obviously feeling that this is a moment when he can explode; in a threatening tone): Now you're talking about soldiers. Don't you know that our soldiers are the bravest in the entire world, much braver than a hundred soldiers of any other nation? In any case they're worth a thousand times what trash like you are worth!

SPECTATOR: It's not right for you to insult them like that!

SPECTATOR: Do you want us to applaud?!

PRODUCER (looking anxiously at the audience): Gentlemen, instead of helping me keep things on track, you're only making the chaos worse. (He now speaks directly to the front row, softening his tone as he does so) I don't know how best to apologize to you. What I was aiming for was to break down the drama, but not to reach this level of absurdity. But you'll have noticed that I'm not one of the people here who has been in any way happy about what's happened. (He goes back now, and addresses the people on the stage) Now kindly put a buckle on your stupid mouths and go back to your seats. (He claps as a cue to the musicians) Let's begin.

[The music starts. A folkloric dance troupe appears. The members take their places on the stage and prepare to start their dance.]

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (stolid in his defiance, his tone of voice still simple, yet insistent): Good heavens, Abu al-Faraj, are we telling a pack of lies?!

ABU AL-FARAJ: May God cut out our tongues before we are accused of falsehood! But don't forget that we're strangers here. We own nothing.

`IZZAT (sadly): Let's go back, Father. There's no place for us here.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Song and dance, Izzat! That's what they want.

`IZZAT: That's right: song and dance.

PRODUCER: Don't you understand plain words? Do you prefer force instead? What's the story?

`ABD AL-GHANI (from the hall): Carry on! This is exactly what my own feeble imagination had in mind...

PRODUCER (gritting his teeth): I can hear your malice, `Abd al-ghani!!

SPECTATORS: Let them speak!

Huh, what a great time for song and dance!

The enemy is a mere stone's throw away, and here he is offering us song and dance!

ABU AL-FARAJ: The only thing left for us, `Abd al-rahman, is to sing and dance as well!

[Two spectators get up and try to leave the theater. They come back, exchanging these words as they do so.]

FIRST: He says it's forbidden.

SECOND: Why? We want to leave.

FIRST: I've never heard anything like it.

SECOND: In our country, it seems we must expect every possible kind of eventuality.

FIRST: I knew this soirée would not turn out well.

[The word "forbidden" is whispered among several spectators.]

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: The way they treat monkeys is worse.

`IZZAT: Monkeys with no land and no honor.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Did you realize, son, that we were coming to a song and dance show?

`IZZAT: I don't know anything about it, Father. It would be best for us to go back to our seats.

PRODUCERF: That's right! That's the best for you to do. Go on...!

ABU AL-FARAJ: You mean, to our tents which don't protect us against cold at night and heat by day.

`IZZAT: We've no right to complain. They'll say we weren't living in mansions before those tents.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: But we did have homes, didn't we, houses with foundations and roofs? Not only that, but the scent of our ancestors still wafts from their alcoves!

`IZZAT: Now those homes are far away, and the fields are still further.

ABU AL-FARAJ: The wheat...

PRODUCER: You devils! When's this record going to end?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Is the wheat going to wither on its own land?

ABU AL-FARAJ: God knows!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Or will it be harvested by people who never sowed it in the first place or wore themselves out doing so?

ABU AL-FARAJ: God knows!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: If we pluck up the courage to ask some official what's going to happen to our wheat, they laugh at our stupidity and yell at us.

ABU AL-FARAJ: They tell us they've more to worry about than our harvest.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: You and your harvest can go to hell, they say.

ABU AL-FARAJ: What do you expect. They didn't sow the seeds or wear themselves out doing it.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (sighing after a pause): Good heavens! If only we know what was happening!

ABU AL-FARAJ: How are we supposed to know. No one's talking to us, or even coming close. The questions we have to ask are like thorns on our tongues.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Every since that day, we've been blindfolded, not seeing or knowing anything.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Wherever we've gone, we've been greeted with angry voices and frowning faces.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: And when we've got something to eat, it's been blended with curses!

`IZZAT: Begging would be better!

ABU AL-FARAJ: You're right, `Izzat, begging would certainly be better.

`ABD AL- RAHMAN: Fair enough, once in a while if there was no rain, we'd get hungry on our farms,. There could be barren times on our land, but we never had our honor sullied.

ABU AL-FARAJ: What honor is left now? There was the time when we said that hell was preferable to staying, and they spat in our faces.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (bursting into tears): I wish my mother had never given birth to me. What waste of a life, when I've had people spit at me before I'm dead and buried.

`IZZAT (grabbing his father's hand and holding its with a tender sorrow): Let's go back to our seats, father!

PRODUCER (going over to `Izzat): You're obviously a young man who understands. Please take them back, and let's be done with this!

[`Izzat stares vacantly at him.]

ABU AL-FARAJ: So...this is the way things go with people who left their villages on that searing hot day. Disease reduced our numbers, and every day brought fresh insults.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Because we're strangers with nothing to our name, they assume that all our senses are moribund.

ABU AL-FARAJ: That's the way things go. We can't stay here, and we can't go back either.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: In those tents that cannot handle either heat or cold, the questions pile up, but there's no response.

ABU AL-FARAJ: What's happening? What's going to happen?

[By now, the Producer has lost all patience and signals to the troupe. Popular music now gets louder, and people start moving their feet.]

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Everyone around us is singing and dancing.

ABU AL-FARAJ: That's the way things work for people who left their villages on that searing hot day.

SPECTATOR (who gets up in the middle of the hall. He is portly, wears spectacles, and sounds angry)" Why did you leave? (adjusting his tone of voice) We can understand your predicament; it can't have been easy. But why did you leave before the fighting started?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Why did we leave?

`IZZAT (as though talking to himself): The meaning's clear enough, but it's not the first time we've heard those words.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (talking as the Spectator leaves his row and moves toward the stage): Good grief! If they'd been in our shoes, wouldn't they have left too? What could we do?

PRODUCER (spotting the Spectator approaching the stage and standing threateningly in his way): No, no, Sir! Please. This is total chaos, and we can't allow it. Drama has its rules that need to be respected.

SPECTATOR (calmly): Excuse me. These are questions that need to be asked.

PRODUCER: No, no. You can ask them somewhere else. We've had quiet enough disruption for one day.

SPECTATOR: I can appreciate your position. I realize that spectators usually keep their mouths shut. But, as you can see for yourself...in spite of all your dogged efforts, the ulcer's still festering. That's something we can't ignore.

PRODUCER (angrily): What ulcer? What's festering? It's simply chaos and rowdy behavior. Don't make things even worse! Please go back to your seat, and you others as well. You've been prattling on enough for an entire city! We've a program to get through.

SPECTATOR: Stop trying to suppress things, now that everything's out in the open. These are crucial issues, and it's much more important to explore them.

PRODUCER: Crucial issues? They're just stupid trivialities. Let us continue, Sir. The troupe's all ready, and we're ashamed to keep blaming our guests.

SPECTATOR: All the things we've been through, are they just stupid trivialities?

PRODUCER: Don't drag me into an argument here. You're simply wasting our time, just like the others. Now, before everyone in the audience runs out of patience, please go back and sit in your seat so you can see how excellent the folk-dance is going to be.

[The dance-troupe is still trying to start dancing.]

SPECTATOR (raising his voice): You and your folk-dance troupe. For shame! Do you seriously think that we're only interested in an hour of folk-dancing? Take your folk-dancers to another country where there are no problems! Once there you can settle down and cheer everyone up! But we're currently living in a country with tents for homes. People have left their farms behind without knowing why. The ulcer is still festering, and the *mijana* dance won't cauterize it. (He comes up on to the stage and goes over to the other group) Yes, I'm asking you why you left your farms behind.

PRODUCER (astonished). What's this. What's going on? How about a bit of courtesy here? Are we still in charge of the stage or not?

[The music intensifies, then stops altogether. The dance-troupe stops its movements.]

SPECTATOR (looking at him dispassionately): Try just once to be a spectator. That'll teach you how to live.

PRODUCER: God Almighty! So we've no choice.

SPECTATOR. Just leave us alone and listen. (To the group) So once again I'm asking you why you abandoned your village.

[Words now fail the Producer, almost as though the Spectator's dominant tone of voice has come to him as a shock. He continues to scowl, while he stares around him in despair.)

`IZZAT (sounding distracted): That's the very question everyone keeps asking.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Good heavens! What did they expect us to do? Once the fighting started, how could we stay?

SPECTATOR: Why couldn't you stay?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (hesitantly): Because...er...because the fighting started.

`IZZAT: And who's supposed to know that you have to stay behind when war starts?

PRODUCER (trying to get involved once again and resorting to a kinder tone of voice): Now then, brothers...

[They pay him no attention. The conversation continues.]

ABU AL-FARAJ: There's no one to offer us advice, and we've no idea what to do.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We listen to [Yusuf `Abd al-Hadi on]¹⁵ the radio, but we don't stand what he's saying.

SPECTATOR (from the hall) That implies that what he's saying is understandable!

ANOTHER SPECTATOR (from the hall): We're all in the same boat on that score!

SPECTATOR: Even so, you knew that foreigners were invading your homeland. At least that's clear enough.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: The fighting started. That's all we knew.

ABU AL-FARAJ: War's different now...

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Ah me! In our day there was no confusion; things weren't kept secret. Before God brought about a truce between us and Al-Takharim, things were totally different. One of the village elders stood up and addressed us; we understood what he was talking about. He explained what the villagers of Al-Takharim had done in clear words, and we understood him. 'Listen, you people of Kafr `Azuz.' That's the way he addressed us. 'The villagers of Al-Takharim have assaulted our women gathering firewood, grabbed their scythes, and prevented them from collecting any more wood. That's the kind of insult that no real man can accept; not only that, but it's not right. What do you all say? In the long run that's what matters.'

ABU AL-FARAJ: Yes indeed. We all responded with one voice. We'd be women if we let that happen.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: With that he yelled at us to grab our sticks and head down the valley. We'd see if the men of Al-Takharim were under the impression that our women had no men behind them. We kept waving our sticks in the air and yelling angry taunts. We went down the valley to confront the men of Al-Takharim; we were no cowards, and the thought of fighting didn't scare us either. Were we ever scared of fighting, Abu al-Faraj?

ABU AL-FARAJ: Good heavens no! We never ran away, and no hand clasping a stick ever wavered. But that was all so utterly different...

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Now, no one brings us together; no one visits us to explain what's going on. Has anyone ever visited us?

PRODUCER: Listen, brothers...

[They're not listening to him. The conversation continues.]

ABU AL-FARAJ: No one ever visits poor people like us.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Don't forget the gendarmes!

ANOTHER SPECTATOR (from the hall): Not to mention tax-collectors!

¹⁵ These words omitted from the Complete Works edition. See *Mawāqif*, no 3 (1968), 45.

`IZZAT (as though he's dreaming): The one evening a real man did visit us. After greeting us, he said he was hungry.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: You always think about that visit, don't you?

`IZZAT: How can I ever forget it? (His eyes glisten as he acts out the story of the man's visit, simply but with great intensity) He was a real man, and yet simple. He didn't have a lot to say, but, when he started talking, it was amazing. He knocked on the door and came inside. After just a short while, he felt like one of us, like a relative or neighbor paying a visit.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He blessed our food and ate some of it. He blessed our water as well, and then drank some.

`IZZAT: He was carrying a rifle, as though he had come from far away. Even though his face was etched with sheer exhaustion, what he wanted was clear enough.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He was carrying a rifle like a soldier, but he wasn't wearing an army uniform. He was different from soldiers.

`IZZAT: He soon became one of us. He told us he was a farmer, just like all of us, loving the smell of animals, grass, and muddy cattle pens. He told us how raiders from across the seas had stolen his house from him, and then the government had prevented him getting his revenge. 'They're turning us all into indigents,' he said, 'so we'll grow weak and they can control and humiliate us because we're so feeble.' What he said was very clear. He knew what we had to do.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: When someone's house gets stolen, he has to go after it.

`IZZAT: Anyone who stops me going after my house has an encounter with a thief.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Let's open our eyes. There are loads of thieves.

`IZZAT: And even more people protecting the thieves...

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: They the ones making us indigent and hungry, turning us into a bunch of animals who don't know their East from their West. They're the ones who keep us humiliated with their regime. They're some of the thief-protectors.

`IZZAT: How rare it is to find judges who are fair!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: The fairest judge is someone who can reclaim the rights he has lost.

`IZZAT: The man clasped his rifle as though it were his only son. That's what he told us, and we understood him

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He was carrying a rifle like a soldier, but he wasn't wearing an army uniform. He was different from soldiers.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Oh yes! Now I remember you telling me the story of this amazing visitor.

`IZZAT (his voice still dreamy and intense): A real man. His expression was fierce, but he still had eyes as clear as springs. You had the feeling that once in a while life would be changing. He

passed through one evening, just like a cloud, and I felt drawn to him. I wanted to become his companion or shadow. He told us that, provided the rapacious thieves didn't kill him on one of his operations, he'd come back to us....But he never came back to visit us, he didn't return.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: He was the only one to visit us.

ABU AL-FARAJ: No one told us what we were supposed to do.

SPECTATOR (gruffly): So here was someone telling you what you needed to do.

IZZAT: One man only. He visited us just once, like a passing cloud, but never came back.

ABU AL-FARAJ: As if that's not enough, `Abd al-rahman, now we're being blamed.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Good grief! It's war, and it's not the way it used to be. What do they want us to do?

SPECTATOR: To stay with your land and defend it.

ANOTHER SPECTATOR (from the hall): Don't you think you're exaggerating?

PRODUCER (recovering his voice and sounding threatening): Listen, brothers...

ABU AL-FARAJ: Is it even possible to stay once the fighting starts?

SPECTATOR: Why isn't it possible? I know of farmers and indigent folk in distant lands who've put up a fight against enemies who are stronger than the ones attacking us. What do you suppose they're doing?

ANOTHER SPECTATOR: He's talking about the Vietnamese.

SEVERAL SPECTATORS (talking from the hall as though in unison): What have we got to do with the Vietnamese?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We never hear any stories about countries far away.

SPECTATOR: So listen now to the things that the farmers and indigent people in that far off land have been doing.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN and ABU AL-FARAJ (together): So what do those farmers and indigents do?

SPECTATOR: They bind their bodies to the soil and take root. They turn rocks into devils and soil into snakes.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN and ABU AL-FARAJ (together): Devils out of rocks? Snakes out of soil?

SPECTATOR: They die in their hundreds...thousands. But they still hold on to their land. Because of them the greatest power on earth is left shaking.

ANOTHER SPECTATOR: He's talking about the Vietnamese.

SEVERAL SPECTATORS (talking from the hall as though in unison): What have we got to do with the Vietnamese?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: They all do it without anyone telling them what they need to do.

ABU AL-FARAJ: And without knowing what's happening.

`IZZAT (still dreamily): If only other men had come to visit us. If only that man had come back.

SPECTATOR: None of this can justify abandoning your villages even before the fighting started.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): This is what they call philosophizing.

[He gets up from his seat and moves toward the stage. From now on, the Spectators will be identified by number: Spectator 1, Spectator 2, and so on.]

PRODUCER: Utterly uncouth and inappropriate behavior, that's what I call it.

SPECTATOR 1: Who calls it philosophizing?

PRODUCER (seeing the other man approaching the stage): And where are you going, pray?

SPECTATOR 2: I'm the one who called it that.

SPECTATOR 1: Why should it be philosophizing?. Like everyone else, they're responsible for what's happening to them.

PRODUCER (exploding in rage as the Second Spectator comes on to the stage): Where are you going? Where are you going? Has the stage turned into a public forum? Have you forgotten where you are? One outrage after another! Everyone wants to spill his guts in front of us, it seems. This isn't a guts exhibition, you know, nor muscles either! (To the troupe) Get started! (The members of the troupe look at each other in confusion) I said, start! If you let them, they're going to crank out words all night! (He claps his hands) The music has to start! (The musicians are hesitant too, and a few segments of melody emerge from different instruments) Music...I prefer what you have to offer.

[After a short pause the musicians get their act together. A noisy *dabke* dance melody is heard. The dance troupe starts its routine, although, needless to say, the fact that other people are on the stage cramps their movements.]

PRODUCER: Gentlemen, vacate the stage for our troupe. Please go back to your seats.

[The popular melody has a clear, strong beat. The troupe begins to coalesce, while `Abd al-rahman, Abu al-faraj, and `Izzat all stare at them with vacant expressions which only manage to reflect the wan shadows of a profound sense of grief. For a while the others on stage are taken in by the spectacle, but then the first Spectator adopts a furious expression. As the troupe of dancers approaches him, he yells at them.]

SPECTATOR 1: Stop! (The troupe looks worried)

PRODUCER: No...

SPECTATOR 1: Stop! This is shameful. (The troupe is confused and stops dancing. The music also becomes disorganized and gradually fades away). This is a disgrace. How can you dance? How can you possibly agree to dance?

A MEMBER OF THE TROUPE (in a neutral tone): We're government employees.

SECOND MEMBER (equally neutral): We're just doing our job.

PRODUCER (at the same time, upset): No, no! Let them continue. I'm the one to give orders around here, not you!

SPECTATOR 1 (ignoring the Producer and turning toward the troupe): Whatever the case may be, our conversation concerns you as well.

FIRST MEMBER: Don't forget that we're government employees. That's how we make a living.

SECOND MEMBER: Come on, dance!

MEMBERS OF THE TROUPE: We are dancing.

SECOND MEMBER: Don't dance.

MEMBERS OF THE TROUPE: OK, let's not.

[They go back to their former position on the stage.]

SPECTATOR 1: That's disgraceful!

PRODUCER: It certainly is. Next thing, we're going to get shoved off the stage.

SPECTATOR 2: Be logical! We have a right to speak.

PRODUCER: Am I someone who is incapable of speech?! (Gruffly) No, no, you don't have the right to speak. The stage is ours, and the seats in the theater are yours. That's the most basic form of logic.

SPECTATOR 1: As I've told you before, just try to put yourself in the spectator's shoes. You'll find out a great deal of stuff that you don't know.

[A man and woman stand up in another row and head for the exit. The man whispers that it was a waste of time leaving their home.]

PRODUCER (angrily): Are you giving me instructions? Are you making me give up my function? I'm in charge here. Do you hear me? Here I'm the one who gives the orders.

SPECTATOR 1 (he is angry too): And what about us? Are we supposed to be puppets in your hands? We're all crammed into this small hall here. The doors are locked, the windows are shut, the lights have been turned off. And then you expect us to sit here and watch the illusions and fantasies you've dreamed up.

PRODUCER (moves toward him threateningly) OK, there are limits to everything.

SPECTATOR 1: Yes indeed, there are limits. Stop interrupting us.

SPECTATOR 2: At the very least, these men have had enough courage to bleed before our very eyes.

[The man and woman return to their seats, exchanging words in a low but audible voice. Needless to say, the conversation on the stage continues with no interruption.]

WOMAN: Good God, that's amazing! That means that we're being forced to stay.

MAN: Don't raise your voice.

WOMAN: Why? Is this a theater we've come to or a prison?

MAN: Who knows. Let's sit down again.

[That word "prison" gets whispered by a number of spectators.]

SPECTATOR 1: When something genuine appears and it's possible to talk about our real situation, here you are proposing that we sit and watch a song and dance routine.

SPECTATOR 2: Is it all supposed to keep these men's bitter suffering a secret?

SPECTATORS (from the hall): He wants to celebrate the victory!

You can do that in the wings!

It's all folklore!

SPECTATOR 1: We've said clearly that we don't want any song and dance.

SPECTATORS; We don't want it.

The enemy's song and dance routine has been quite enough for us!

[The Producer is flummoxed. He keeps looking angrily at the people on stage and then at the audience.]

Why don't we take a short break?

Go and take your break with them!

We need to continue the conversation.

PRODUCER: But...

SPECTATOR 1: We'll continue then. We have the right to complete the evening's entertainment in the way we want.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): That's our right!

Indeed!

Why not? Are we going to have the beginning and ending imposed on us like this?

PRODUCER (so flustered, he cannot formulate the words): B-b-but...

SPECTATOR 1 (speaking fast): You can join in the discussion if you like.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): He doesn't discuss anything.

He just gives instructions.

[A whistle from the back rows.]

PRODUCER (distracted, and almost falling apart): Discussion and bickering are not part of our program.

SPECTATOR 1: OK then, forget about it and listen.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): But he's in charge.

PRODUCER: Yes indeed, I am. I...

SPECTATOR (from the hall, interrupting him): Just calm down and let them speak.

PRODUCER: Inconceivable, utterly inconceivable!

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Calm down.

ANOTHER SPECTATOR (from the hall): You've bothered us enough tonight already.

PRODUCER (at his wits' end, not knowing how to react; he moves over to the troupe) Have we ever witnessed anything like this in our professional careers?

[The members of the troupe stare vacantly at him, but there's no response.]

SPECTATOR 1 (to no. 2): It's no use. Let's just leave him and go back to the question.

SPECTATOR 2 (perking up) The question!

SPECTATOR 1: What kind of philosophizing do you notice in what I'm saying?

SPECTATOR 2: Damn! I've lost my chain of thought. (Pause) Yes...actually I can't see why you're being so cruel to them unless it's actually a deep sigh emerging from some kind of suppressed bitterness on your part.

SPECTATOR 1: Bitterness, fury, and a lingering internal sense of being suffocated--it's all those. But I'm talking about something more far-reaching than that. If we've been supposed to indulge in a game of self-justification, then it's supremely easy to find an excuse for any action.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (in a quiet neutral tone of voice): They're talking about us, Abu al-faraj!

ABU AL-FARAJ: Yes, about us.

SPECTATOR 2: If self-justification's a game, then so is condemnation and indeed the question itself. Did you listen to what they were saying? Their situation's clear enough, and so are their circumstances. In the simplest of terms they've managed to dig up that truth over which our own crippled existence stands quivering. They've dug it up and hurled it in our faces. A total and complete truth that transcends questions and tricks of condemnation.

SPECTATOR 1: The truth does not rule out the notion of responsibility. If a single village had stood firm, many things would have turned out differently. But they all left their homes before the fighting even started. They left lands, homes, and cities to the enemy, places with no people. That implies a significant truth; like dirty armpits, it stinks.

SPECTATOR 2: It's naive of us to expect anything else from them. You heard what they've said. Their words are as clear as day, with no shades of grey. What they know of war is fighting with sticks, ancient village feuds. They're all isolated in their villages, and no one ever visits them. They've no idea what's going on in the world around them. They live lives of poverty, ignorance, and a lengthy heritage of agony and humiliation. How can we expect anything else of them?

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (the same neutral tone): They're talking about us, Abu al-faraj.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Yes, about us.

SPECTATOR 1 (at the same time): Those other people are poor farmers too. If bombs burn their rice, they go hungry.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): The Vietnamese!

SEVERAL SPECTATORS (almost in unison): What have we got to do with the Vietnamese?

SPECTATOR 2: But they're not strangers on their own land. They may live on isolated islands, but they're not simply numbers scattered in tattered public records.

SPECTATOR 3 (from the hall): They're not insects, ants and worms creeping across the land.

[He gets up and stands in the aisle.]

SPECTATOR 4 (from the hall): They're not animals either, to be fed on grass and fond hopes!

[He too gets up and stands in the aisle.]

PRODUCER (baffled, talking to the members of the troupe): Do you see what's happening. Outrageous! No, no, we won't let them..

[The participation of the Spectators in the discussion comes in waves, almost like explosions. The conversation draws them in, and the sequence of events encourages even more to get involved. They overcome their own internal caution and go along with the inspiration that the ever-growing movement arouses in them, a movement whose momentum is now unstoppable.

Everyone turns in amazement to the new set of speakers who leap out of their seats and distribute themselves in the aisles. There's sudden sense of alarm, coupled with a breathless mood.]

SPECTATOR 3 (continuing in an angry tone): Farmers and poor folk carry weight.

SPECTATOR 4: Out there farmers and poor folk have their own country, and it's theirs.

SPECTATOR 3: They plant themselves in the land because it's theirs.

SPECTATOR 4: They blend with the soil because they have an identity.

SPECTATOR 5: Because they know they have an identity.

PRODUCER (like a madman): Ayyy! It's getting worse by the minute!

SPECTATOR: They don't have tanks as commanders...

SPECTATOR 4: No castles to mount their guns. Their balconies serve for keeping a watchful eye on things.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Watch out. That's dangerous stuff you're talking about...

SPECTATOR 5: They learn how to move and how the world moves around them.

SPECTATOR 3: Yes, they learn as the bombs are dropping.

SPECTATOR 5: It's in the earth's cracks that they learn.

SPECTATOR 5: Their teachers aren't crooks, and they don't divulge their knowledge.

SPECTATOR 6: No lying broadcasts and stupid newspapers.

SPECTATOR 5: They're not ignorant either, nor are they corrupt merchants.

SPECTATOR 2 (pointing at the men who have just spoken): So here we are: the difference between here and there. You've all heard. Just like us, you've heard them describing the time they're living in and the miserable exile they endure. Now a series of events, wider and greater than any of them, has suddenly beset them. They're ignored, cast out, and no one gives them a thing. People don't even remember they exist until they want to exploit them for something.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: (the same neutral tone): They're talking about us, Abu al-faraj.

ABU AL-FARAJ: Yes, about us.

`IZZAT: Teachers came to our village school; every year one came. We had teacher `Abd al-hafiz, Teacher Muhammad, and Teacher Ibrahim, but none of them liked living with us.

ABU AL-FARAJ: We'd give them the best room in the whole village and make them presents of everything we had.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: We'd invite them into our homes, welcome them at our assemblies, and honor them like gendarmes.

`IZZAT (with a sad, vacant expression): But none of them liked our homes or assemblies. They rarely spoke to us. They regularly cursed the people who sent them to our village and begged to be transferred somewhere else. They were always going somewhere.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (trying to digress): There was one occasion...

SPECTATOR 1 (interrupting him in a harsh tone): But these are all useless details. They're not worth talking about when we're discussing the disaster we're living through now.

SPECTATOR 2: If ignorance can be called details!

SPECTATOR 3: And poverty.

SPECTATOR 5: And exile.

SPECTATOR 4: And daily oppression.

SPECTATOR 2: So then, what's left as a basis?

SPECTATOR 1 (plunges in): What's basic is that a rapacious enemy has declared war on us and invaded our territories. They've discovered that our country had its legs as wide open as some ancient hag. People have abandoned the land more easily than the time it takes to pee and run away. No sense of pride--or at least some basic instinct of that kind. So no...if we want, we can always come up with a way of avoiding responsibility. They're responsible, and so is everyone.

SPECTATOR 2: Making each other responsible is easy enough; or at any rate it's easier than trying to understand.

SPECTATOR 4 (angrily): And what about you? What did you do, for heaven's sake? Where were you at that time? I imagine you weren't in one of the villages at the front. I suppose you don't eat onions and bread twice a day. After lunch I assume you read theoretical works about revolutions and peoples, then settle down for a siesta full of rosy dreams about revolutions and peoples. Do I have things wrong?

[The Spectators who have been standing in the aisles now come up on to the stage. The entire theater hall now comes to resemble a genuine meeting-place. The man sitting in a front row signals to one of the men guarding the doors. He whispers a few words, and other men start distributing themselves around the hall. Once again, a Spectator tries to leave, but comes back, saying "That's weird!"

The conversation on the stage continues with no break.]

PRODUCER: Let's do something. Yes indeed, we have to do something...

SPECTATOR 1 (gruffly, as though his anger is only partially suppressed): Yes indeed, I'm just like that: one of those people who reads theoretical books about revolutions and peoples, someone who wasn't in one of the villages at the front, and who does have rosy dreams. I'm like them, so just see how I look at things: I'm part of their flight, so are you, so are all of us. We're the process of fleeing personified. That's my opinion. They're a reflection of my own face in the

mirror; I oppose that face in the mirror; I feel my own shame in the mirror. I'm responsible, so are you, so are we all. This time no one can escape the responsibility.

SPECTATORS (from the hall, all at the same time): Responsibility?

That's the truth!

What a dreadful discussion!

It's as though he's judging history itself.

Some kind of song and dance number would be better than never-ending argument.

Why are we responsible?

SPECTATOR 3: We're all responsible.

SPECTATOR 2 (in a mechanical tone): Are we really responsible?

SPECTATOR 2 (like an echo): Are we really responsible?

SPECTATOR 1 (in the same gruff tone): The answer to that question shouldn't provoke any disagreement.

SPECTATOR 4: We're all responsible. That's one of those splendid aphorisms you can fill your mouth with whenever you talk, but that's all.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): The action's all theirs, and the consequences fall on us!

PRODUCER (utterly lost): And what about ruining this evening? Who's responsible for that, if not you?

SPECTATOR 2 (still distracted): So now we're to be accused. Are we really responsible?

SPECTATOR 5 (like an echo): Are we really responsible?

SPECTATOR 2 (leaping up as though he's made a decision and motioning vigorously. He acts out what he's saying): It's a mirror, you say.. Fine...Let's set up a mirror in front of us, right here...(he draws a rectangle in the air). We'll put it right in front of us. A large mirror big enough for our purposes...we'll stare deep into its recesses. We'll be looking really hard. (turning to the audience) In order for us to take on the responsibility, we have to be present and have an image in the mirror. Fine...Are we here?

SPECTATOR 3: That's an essential question. Do we actually exist?

SPECTATOR 1: That's not the essential question. The real issue is: what kind of existence?

SPECTATOR 2: Don't answer too fast, or else you'll overlook the most important questions.¹⁶

¹⁶ The wording of the Complete Works edition differs from that of *Mawaqif* here, but the meaning is essentially the same.

SPECTATOR 1 (angrily): So let's admit it: we run away...we slink away from a foul stench that's oozing between us and all around us.

SPECTATOR 2: Before we throw the rule-book at ourselves, it's crucial that we know who we are. Here's the woman (once again he traces the rectangle in the air) Come on, let's ask her who we are! (Spectators 3, 4, 5, and 6 join in the game. They act out staring at the woman) Let's check deep inside her, in every nook and cranny. Let's ask who we are.

SPECTATORS 3, 4, and 5 (in unison): Right...who are we?

SPECTATOR 2: That question was around before the defeat. All the defeat did was to brush the dust off it, that's all. (Going back to the game) Let's look in the mirror and question its smooth surface relentlessly: who are we? At the very base, the bottom, in every nook and cranny...There...stare hard. (After a pause, he suddenly bursts out, distracting the others playing the game) Don't tire your eyes. You won't see anything. There's nothing in the mirror: no face, no image.

SPECTATORS 3, 4, and 5 (like an echo): There's nothing in the mirror.

SPECTATOR 2: Absolutely nothing, but do you know why?

SPECTATORS 3, and 5 (together, along with others from the hall): Why?

SPECTATOR 2: Because our images have all been erased.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): Erased? Our images erased?

SPECTATOR 2: Yes, erased by national interest before they could even take shape or become visible. I'll tell you how that came about.

SPECTATORS 4, 5, and 6: How did it come about?

SPECTATOR (from the hall): What are you saying? Be careful!

ANOTHER SPECTATOR (from the hall at the same time): Words cost more than silence, you know!

SPECTATOR 2 (continuing regardless): It's happened year after year. (A new game. He starts acting it out in a commanding tone) No talking! Tongues lead you astray; words are a trap. Cut out your tongues in the national interest.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Cutting your tongue out is the safest solution!

SPECTATOR 6: We've cut our tongues out.

SPECTATOR 1: Why have we done that?

SPECTATOR: Supposing we didn't do it, you shouldn't forget that the national interest has prisons where the sun never reaches even once a year.

SPECTATOR 4: So then, we're millions of severed tongues piling up behind closed doors, closed mouths, and closed toilets.

PRODUCER (going crazy): Do you see? Do you see where we've finished up?!

[The segments that follow are more collective; there's a kind of rhythm to their sequence.]

SPECTATOR 2: The ear can lead you astray; the voice is a trap. For the sake of the national interest, only listen to what we tell you.

SPECTATORS 3, 4, 5, and 6, along with others¹⁷ from the hall, all together): We've blocked our ears so we can only hear what they tell us.

SPECTATOR 1 (even more angrily): And why have we blocked our ears?

GROUP: Suppose we didn't, you shouldn't forget that the national interest has prisons where the sun never reaches even once a year.

SPECTATOR 4: So we're millions of blocked ears only hearing one single word, one expression.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): No, you mean one pack of lies!

One load of nonsense.

One pile of tripe.

PRODUCER: This is awful, what's happening here.

[The conversation accelerates and is continuous. The spectators keep up a relentless pressure.]

SPECTATOR 2: Thoughts can lead you astray; the mind's a trap. For the sake of the national interest, get rid of your minds.

GROUP: We've got rid of our minds.

SPECTATOR 1: But why? Why did we get rid of our minds?

GROUP: Suppose we didn't, you shouldn't forget that the national interest has prisons where the sun never reaches even once a year.

SPECTATOR 4: So we're millions of minds discarded in the closets of people's houses, in empty wastes, on dead sidewalks.

SPECTATOR 2: That's the way people talk about meddling, about eyes and noses.

SPECTATOR 4: Let the questions fester inside your mouth, but don't ever ask them.

SPECTATOR 5: Don't ever look around you or poke your nose into things that don't concern you.

¹⁷ I shall call these voices 'the group.' [A footnote in the original text]

PRODUCER: What a scandal!

SPECTATOR 2: Questions are a trap and looking is a trap. So what's left of an image where tongue, nose, eyes, ears, and thought processes have all been eliminated?

SPECTATOR 4: A wan shadow where you can't make out shape or details.

SPECTATOR 2: That's our existence. Let's set up the mirror and look deep inside it, in every nook and cranny. Nothing. There it stays, a faded relic on the neck of national interest.

PRODUCER: How can such foul words be used in my hall? What a huge scandal!

SPECTATOR 1: No people can simply turn into a pale shadow!

SPECTATOR 2: That may be, but that's all we've got left of our rights.

SPECTATOR 4: Of course, there's also going out to cafes, prayer, black tea, tobacco, backgammon, and card-games.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): Don't forget hashish!

And listening to mournful songs.

And procreating too!

SPECTATOR 3: But those are just some of the ways they have of leaving us with no rights, so that we're just erased images.

PRODUCER: Do you hear the things they're saying? See what our show has turned into?

SPECTATOR 2: Erased images scattered over the earth, like limitless clouds in the sky. Torn to shreds, we're treated by events the same way as winds do with clouds. That's what our existence is, like jelly or a lie, with no roots to it and no branches in the air where things can open and bloom. The hours go by with the world spinning around us, but like all nightmares it's all scrambled and vague. Our history's a burden we carry, and the earth heaves and sways beneath our feet. What kind of bonds to the earth are these that we proceed to erase every instant? The earth becomes a fairy-tale; geography's a fairy-tale too.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Geography...yes indeed, geography. Good God, it's incredible for you to be talking about geography!

PRODUCER: Things are going to get very bad if we let you carry on like this. I smell a vile stench here. They're a threat to security and public safety. We'll start all over again, whatever the cost. (He claps) Music!

[While the Producer is talking, an old man with sunken features reaches the stage. His shabby appearance makes it clear that he's had a hard life. He walks slowly and unsteadily.]

PRODUCER (losing his nerve): I'm asking for music. Can't you hear?!

[A few isolated scales on the lute.]

SPECTATOR (from the hall): So now we're back to the song and dance routine.

PRODUCER (to the troupe): Get ready. This time we're not going to give way.

[A drum sounds out rhythms. The music is out of time and soft.]

OLD MAN (hesitating and about to go back to his seat): I was thinking it might be time for me to tell you a short story I happen to know. But it looks as though I'm crashing in at an inappropriate moment. Never mind, never mind...

SPECTATOR 3: No, old man, tell us your story.

[The lute-player stops playing.]

PRODUCER: What's got into all of you?

SPECTATOR 4: For the first time everyone has to tell their story.

ABD ABD-GHANI (from the hall): Tell your stories...go on, tell them. They're much more creative than the things our feeble imaginations can come up with...!

PRODUCER: Do you see? If our hands are tied like this, the entire audience will finish up on the stage. Start playing and don't bother about them.

[The Spectators standing on the stage follow the Producer's actions with expressions full of contempt.]

SPECTATOR 5: When tongues start sprouting in our mouths, just see how quickly they all rush to rip them out!

PRODUCER: We're all going to be participants in this civil disobedience if we don't put an end to it. What are you waiting for?

MUSICIAN (calmly): Don't you realize? They don't want our music.

VOICES (from the troupe): Or our dance either.

PRODUCER: You take your instructions from me, not them. They're simply rabble-rousers, no more.

ANOTHER MUSICIAN (calmly): Don't get so worked up. What's the point of music if no one wants to listen to it?

PRODUCER: What's the meaning of this? Are you refusing to do what I ask?

SPECTATOR 4: The musicians and dancers have started to understand. But this Producer doesn't want to.

SPECTATOR: It's not in our best interests for him to understand.

PRODUCER: Answer! Are you refusing to play? (A pause) I suggest you remember that your government employees. I'm the one who gives the instructions around here.

MUSICIAN: He's threatening us.

PRODUCER: I'm deadly serious.

[The musicians whisper the phrase "he's threatening us" among themselves, calmly but suggesting that they are getting angry.]

SPECTATOR: A well-known tactic!

SPECTATOR: What a disgrace!

[The musicians pick up their instruments and leave the stage, one after the other, calmly and with all due ceremony.]

PRODUCER (thunderstruck): Where are you going? Are you defying me? You and your instruments are going to be without a job from now on. You'll regret this for a long time. You'll be really sorry.

VOICES (from the dance troupe): The musicians have left.

So there's no dance.

Let's leave as well.

No, let's stay and see what happens.

What's it got to do with us? Let's stay out of trouble.

[Some of the members of the dance troupe start leaving.]

PRODUCER: You too? Where are you going?

A DANCER: There's nothing left for us to do now that the musicians have left.

PRODUCER: Even the musicians. What does all this mean? Even the musicians. I'm losing my mind!

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Haven't you lost it yet?

SPECTATOR 3: If you want my advice, the best thing for you to do is to follow your troupe and disappear.

PRODUCER: Are you expelling me from my own stage? In a situation like this, how can anyone keep his nerves under control?

OLD MAN: Is this my fault? No, no, it's not necessary. I'll just go back to my seat.

SPECTATOR 2: No, no. Tell your story.

OLD MAN: Actually it's not all that important. It concerns a geography teacher. I was reminded of it when you were talking about geography. But I don't want to interfere if it's not the right time. It's a story about a geography teacher, that's all.

SPECTATOR 2: So what's the story?

OLD MAN: Do you think it's important for me to tell it?

SPECTATOR 3: Why not? For the first time at least, everyone should tell his own story.

`ABD AL-GHANI (from the hall): All the stories are important. What you're saying and doing is terrific!

PRODUCER: What's going on? The hidden aspect of this chaos is really scary.

OLD MAN: I won't hide from you the fact that the whole thing makes me quiver with emotion. It's rare to find anyone interested in geography. History has its leaders and thinkers. But in school programs geography is a secondary option. Everyone avoids it and regards it as a trivial part of the curriculum. A geography teacher has been standing for twenty years in front of a class that couldn't care less. He can go on for hours recounting stories of the problems he's faced and (with a sigh and something akin to a sob) still faces. For twenty years he's been putting his map up on the wall (he takes a big folded piece of paper out of his pocket and opens it up in front of the audience) This is what he does. He spreads the map and says: 'Do you see how wide it all is, and how rich? For the geography teacher, the piece of paper is much more than that; the lines are more than just lines. In that piece of paper he can smell the earth; in those lines which his fingers are touching are borders and human communities. For twenty years he's tried to get other people to appreciate the breadth, to be fully aware of it, and to retain it in their memories just as he does. But, oh dear, in a country that has no respect for geography, how hard it is for any map on a wall to be important and any mere piece of paper to counter the factors that lead to oblivion. That's really sad, as sad as defeat. Even though no one may be listening, the geography teacher can provide proof of what he's saying. The map is torn to shreds, just as the unprotected earth is. (His voice turns gloomy) His map is being torn apart right in front of his students who either laugh or fall asleep. It's started coming apart, one piece from the top (he tears off the north-west part of the map).

SPECTATOR 3 (quietly): The Iskanderun district.

OLD MAN (resuming): Bits of the east (he tears off some bits from the east section of the map)

SPECTATORS 3 and 4 (together): The emirates in the Gulf.

OLD MAN (his voice stuttering): A chunk from the middle part, right at the entryway, the core (he tears a piece right out of the middle)

GROUP (together): Palestine.

OLD MAN: The students either scoff or fall asleep. The teacher hasn't wanted to see their fondest hopes hidden. He's told them he was going to hang on to the parts that had been ripped off and keep them in his desk drawer. (he puts the torn bits of paper in his pocket) He's told them we'd have to cooperate one day and try to put things right. But they simply laugh and refuse to listen. A piece of paper--how much is that worth? They don't want to know anything more. The rips on the map increase in number. Just take a look at this piece of paper. It's got holes, it's torn apart, it's in shreds. Today, oh dear, oh dear, you all know that students get less serious as year

follows year. They're more vicious and less interested. Instead of rebuilding the map, new pieces keep being torn away, lots of them, in the mid-south (and he tears another piece off the map).

GROUP: Sinai.

OLD MAN: And the middle West (he tears another piece).

GROUP: The West Bank.

OLD MAN: The mid-North.

GROUP: The Golan Heights.

OLD MAN: It's happening everywhere. The map's turning into a sieve, a body with limbs severed. Ah me! The teacher's hand's starts shaking as he tries to gather up all the pieces, quivering as it does with illness or old age. With a sobbing voice (and he replicates it in his own voice as though he's in tears) he tells them that the torn bits are refugees, lands, and homes...Ah me...he'll tell them even though no-one may be paying attention. Be careful, because the day may come when the small bit where you're sleeping, eating, and keeping your puny relationships going may be torn off as well.

[He dissolves into sobs. There's a period of profound silence now as a sign of the effect he has had.]

SPECTATOR 3 (after a pause, whispering in awe): You're the geography teacher.

OLD MAN (choking as he talks): It doesn't matter, not at all. He's the geography teacher. In a country that has no respect for geography, you can imagine how hard that is.

[He stuffs the piece of paper back in his pocket, then leaves the stage and returns slowly to his seat.]

SPECTATOR: Don't be so sad. Every teacher can bemoan the same kind of accumulated sorrows.¹⁸

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Do you know what he's talking about?

ABU AL-FARAJ: No, by God, I don't. A piece of paper being torn up. We're living in tents; we're hungry and sick. As if that's not enough, people keep blaming us.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: By God, Abu al-faraj, we've lived through a whole lot.

PRODUCER (talking to himself): There's no doubt about that. All the covers are coming off.

SPECTATOR 2 (to Spectator 1): So here's a people's entire geography with no image. A people who can only exist as a mist or dream.

¹⁸ This speech is not included in the Complete Works edition (p. 112).

SPECTATOR 1: Not merely that, a people that doesn't want to interrupt the trance it's in, who have no sense of danger or appreciation of what that means. The earth is sagging beneath our feet, and yet all we can do is wail 'we didn't know, we didn't understand...'

SPECTATOR 7 (from the hall): No, no, excuse me. That's not correct. We all knew the map was torn and the earth was sagging beneath our feet.

SPECTATOR 1: We all knew.

OLD MAN (from the hall): We knew!

PRODUCER (banging his head): Why didn't I notice before? It's all been organized, right down to the smallest detail.

SPECTATOR (approaching the stage): Yes indeed, and at this very moment we're fully aware that the small piece on which we sleep and eat also risks being ripped apart and torn off. (A pause)

PRODUCER (looking astonished): I can see it all clearly now. A carefully planned conspiracy. Firstly `Abd al-ghani's surprise, then these rabble-rousers.

SPECTATOR 7 (continuing as he comes up on to the stage) When the earth quakes, when the danger draws close, then the jungle-animals can smell the scent. Maybe we don't have any image in the mirror, but we still have basic instincts. At least we still have them, and they can help us smell the danger.

SPECTATOR 5: They haven't wanted us to smell it.

SPECTATOR 7: We could even see it.

SPECTATORS 5 and 6: They didn't want us to see it either.

PRODUCER: All these speeches were clearly prepared ahead of time and in full detail.

SPECTATOR 7: We even felt it.

SPECTATORS 5 and 6: They didn't want us to feel it either.

PRODUCER: The dialogue is continuous and the events are organized; there's no doubt about that.

SPECTATOR 7: The danger was there for all to see, just like our mountains, seas, and the clear blue sky.

PRODUCER: By God, `Abd al-ghani al-Sha`ir, what a fantastic job you've done!

SPECTATOR 1: So how have we come to accept it all? Let the question ring out, loud and clear, even if people are deaf. That's the real question, none other. The geography teacher has torn up the map of lands where people live. Soil for roots to be planted, and existence to continue. How can we have accepted such things?

SPECTATOR 2: All of which brings us back to the distribution of problems and responsibilities.

SPECTATOR 1: Of course. This disaster is just too big to allow anyone to shirk the responsibility.

SPECTATOR 7: But we were willing not to accept. We wanted the land not to be ripped up beneath our feet; we wanted our roots not to be torn out and our future not threatened.

SPECTATOR 1: Quite right. These folk (and he points to `Abd al-rahman, his son, and Abu al-faraj) are a token of what we really wanted. Those tents are another sign of our will. The way the country's map has changed is yet a third sign of our will.

PRODUCE: Do you see, gentlemen? It's now as certain as my being here that the thing we thought was mere rustic simplicity is far more than that. What we thought was a mere passing chaotic episode is much more serious than that. It's all been carefully planned in every detail.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Why don't you simply shout it out like Archimedes: Eureka, eureka!

SPECTATOR 7 (still calm): Refugees, tents, changes in the national map. That's all true enough. Faced with such realities, our eyes would rather be blind. But none of it changes the fact that we were eager not to acknowledge it. We all wanted our map not to be torn to shreds in such a humiliating fashion.

SPECTATOR 2: What value does our will have if we're all featureless images?

SPECTATOR 7 (without pausing): Have you forgotten that day in June? The streets were packed, houses ejected their inhabitants, windows were wide-open, loud-speakers were blaring, and emotions colored our faces. We were all shaking; streets turned into streams of anger, violence, and emotion.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): We embraced each other and wept for sheer enthusiasm. Yes indeed, as I told this man a while ago (pointing at the Producer), we embraced each other and wept out of sheer emotion. We imagined that a prolonged period of humiliation was over, and justice would reign. There would be happiness, and misery would be gone for ever.

SPECTATOR 7: On that June day streets were overflowing with people. Squares were packed. We all assembled without pre-arrangement, everyone responding to a profound call coming from deep in the earth, from fear, from hopes of plenty and generosity. Enthusiasm seared our blood, and emotion reddened our faces. The streets were overflowing. In our midst we had bakers, smiths, porters, and laborers in various trades.

SPECTATOR 3: I saw some itinerant peddlers as well.

[One expression now follows another. The Spectators join in so that the entire scene takes on the form of a demonstration.]

SPECTATOR: And I saw newspaper-vendors, shoe-shines, and beggars.

SPECTATOR 7: Waiters and cafe customers.

SPECTATOR 5: And I saw some poor folk who on most normal days could not find anything to buckle their bellies with...

SPECTATOR 4: Farmers arrived from nearby villages too.

SPECTATOR 6: Students and teachers as well.

WOMAN (from the hall): Women came out on to the streets too. On that June day women opened closed doors and came out on to the streets.

SPECTATOR 7: Everyone, old, young, even children, gathered together on that June day. The streets were overflowing. Enthusiasm seared our blood and emotion reddened our faces. All we heard was the roar of that profound cry.

PRODUCER: Gentlemen, we don't need evidence. The events were continuous and obvious for everyone to see.

SPECTATOR: We all wanted not to accept. We wanted to be responsible.

PRODUCER: This is a total conspiracy, and I'm not ruling out the possibility of foreign involvement.

SPECTATOR 2 (as though talking to himself): What's the value in wanting to be images with no features?

SPECTATOR 7 (going on and realizing what he is saying): The hungry forgot that they were hungry.

[The conversation takes a tangent.]

SPECTATOR 3: The naked forgot that they were naked.

SPECTATOR 4: The dupe forgot that he'd been conned.

SPECTATOR 7; The torture-victim even forget his agony. That June day, streets were overflowing. We all wanted not to accept. We wanted to be responsible.

PRODUCER: This is all `Abd al-ghani the writer's doing, and it is unprecedented. Now people have started raising these issues that contravene security and the supreme public safety of the country. Can there be any room for doubt?!

SPECTATOR 7: We were all part of that clear, terse slogan: what are you asking for?

[A number of Spectators spontaneously come up to the stage and in the hall as well; it's almost instinctive as they form themselves into a unified single voice.]

GROUP: Weapons.

PRODUCER (as though he's waking up, banging his head): But how can this be happening in my theater? I would have rather the theater collapsed on top of me rather than witness what I've seen here.

SPECTATOR 7 (his voice is now a shout): What are you asking for?

GROUP: Weapons.

[The Producer panics. He looks like an imbecile. The demonstration seems to be taking shape almost spontaneously.]

PRODUCER (wandering around the stage, eyes bulging): My theater is never going to be turned into a den of intrigue. Let's stop this at once. (He claps his hands) Where are the lighting people? (He claps again) Where are the lighting people. Turn out the theater lights! Put on the hall lights. This should stop right now, this instant. Hurry up, come on. Our show has uncovered a very dangerous conspiracy, a genuinely dire conspiracy.

[The theater lights go out, creating all sorts of havoc. The hall lights go on. The Spectators on the stage turn into shadows, their movements confused.]

SPECTATOR 2: When our existence really starts and our features become clear, they call it all a conspiracy.

SPECTATOR 4: Then terrorism spreads.

PRODUCER: Leave the stage! Leave the theater!

SPECTATOR (from the hall). Carry on!

SPECTATOR 5: Then they turn out the lights on us.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): Carry on!

Beware of the consequences.

Let's continue what we were saying.

Don't forget they're all among us here.

SPECTATOR 3: At least once, everything needs to be said.

[Some Spectators leave the stage and spread around the hall. `Abd al-rahman, Abu al-faraj, and `Izzat look surprised. They hardly know what they're doing. They move forward a bit and cluster by the edge of the stage, totally non-plussed and baffled by what is happening.]

PRODUCER. Stop the mess, cut the chaos! Get out!

`ABD AL-GHANI (craning his neck from where he's sitting): That's terrific. Don't leave a single word unsaid.

SPECTATORS (from the hall): Carry on!

Let's continue!

We all wanted weapons.

Weapons.

SPECTATOR 7 (his voice dominating the entire place): With our tongues severed we never asked.

SPECTATOR 5: Nor with our blocked ears.

SPECTATOR 4: Nor with our minds cast aside.

SPECTATOR 6: Nor with our bare sufficiency, which we didn't have in any case.

SPECTATOR 7: We were willing not to accept; we wanted to be responsible. On that June day the streets were overflowing. All of us united in that clear, terse slogan: what are you asking for?

GROUP: Weapons.

PRODUCER: Stop. You're going to pay a high price for this. Stop!

SPECTATOR 7: What are you asking for?

GROUP: Weapons.

PRODUCER: Not here, you're not. Go to some other theater, any other theater.

[The Spectators continue with their play, totally ignoring his shouts.]

SPECTATOR 7: The bakers wanted to stuff their bread with bombs and feed it to the invaders.

SPECTATOR 3: The smiths wanted to melt their metals and turn them into nails under the enemy's feet.

WOMAN (from the hall): Women wanted to use their jewelry to make bullets and bombs.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): We wanted to water the earth with the invaders' blood.

WOMAN (from the hall): Women wanted to put on helmets rather than make-up.

ANOTHER WOMAN (from the hall): And to carry guns and ammunition rather than nice pocket-books.

SPECTATOR 7: The man under torture forgot his agony. The streets were overflowing with people. Thousands of people who didn't want to be violated, who didn't want yet more poverty and humiliation. A terse, simple slogan: What are you asking for?

GROUP: Weapons.

PRODUCER: I seek refuge with God! How can I have allowed you to lead me on like this...?

SPECTATOR 7: All the men were singing the song:

Hey boy, exhausted woman's son,

Leave your mother and get a gun,

*The gun's much better than your mother,
When times are tough, it solves your bother.*

SPECTATOR 4: That was our war.

SPECTATOR 3: Against swindlers and thieves.

SPECTATOR 4: That was our war.

SPECTATOR 5: Against those who protect the thieves.

SPECTATOR 4: That was our war.

SPECTATOR 6: Against daily hunger, misery, and death.

SPECTATOR 4: That was our war.

SPECTATOR 5: And every one of us wanted to carry a rifle without wearing a green uniform, different from soldiers.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN and `IZZAT (in shocked unison): Ah...that man.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): We all wanted to be him.

SPECTATOR 7: The streets were overflowing with people on that June day. Our slogan hasn't changed: what are you asking for?

GROUP: Weapons.

SPECTATOR 7: The streets led us to them, and they greeted us with frowning faces.

SPECTATOR 5: As long as I live, I'll never forget their threatening looks.

SPECTATOR 7: From balconies and through loud-speakers they told us that they admired our spirit, but we were helping the enemies of the people and conspirators against the regime.

SPECTATOR 6: They told us war had nothing to do with us.

SPECTATOR 5: They told us to be careful we didn't fall prey to agitators and informers.

SPECTATOR 7: They spoke to us from their balconies and through loud-speakers, with frowns on their faces...

SPECTATOR 5: And threatening expressions in their eyes.

SPECTATOR 7: Go back to your homes, they said, and follow the heroic deeds of our armies on your radios. In a few seconds our mass of people that had spontaneously gathered in the streets completely dissipated.

SPECTATOR 3: And our collective will collapsed.

SPECTATOR 2 (his voice sad and his tone mechanical): When you're just featureless faces, what do you expect?!

SPECTATOR 7: We all went back to our quarters, our homes, to cafes, tea, and the sound of radios blaring.

SPECTATOR 4: And we followed the accounts of our heroic armed forces.¹⁹

SPECTATOR: All of them with no exceptions.²⁰

SPECTATOR (from the hall): If wars are long-distance races, we've certainly won all the championships without exception.²¹

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Some of the runners managed to forget their own feet in the shoes they left scattered behind them.

SPECTATOR 3: They were cleverer than the enemy. They abandoned their weapons and ammunition, then scurried away as fast as they could.

SPECTATOR 5: Before they threw their weapons away, they used up all the remaining ammunition by firing at rocks and tree-roots.

[Like an echo, `Abd al-rahman, Abu al-faraj, and `Izzat start repeating the section in which they're talking about soldiers, as though, in some fleeting fashion, they're recalling some old impressions.]

ABU AL-FARAJ: We encountered a lot of soldiers in the burning streets.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (in a low voice): They looked distraught and exhausted, the sweat pouring from their clothes.

YOUNG MAN: Even so we shouldn't forget the people who resisted and actually sacrificed their own lives.²²

SPECTATOR 7: We all wanted to resist along with them and sacrifice our own lives too.

[From the front rows a young man wearing civilian clothes stands up. He's yells at them angrily.]

YOUNG MAN: Shut up! May you all lose your heads! I've kept my nerves in check longer than my military honor as an army officer will allow. What are these lies you're telling? What phony rumors are you spreading?

ABU AL-FARAJ: Just like us, they don't know what's happening.²³

¹⁹ The phrase "of our heroic armed forces" only occurs in the *Mawaqif* text. The Complete Works text only has "heroisms."

²⁰ This speech is found only in the Complete Works version of the text.

²¹ This speech and the following three are only found in the *Mawaqif* version of the text.

²² This speech only occurs in the Complete Works edition. In the *Mawaqif* text, his introduction is part of the stage-direction that follows.

`IZZAT: That's right. Just like us, they don't know what's happening.

OFFICER: How dare you? This is an insult to our heroic army.²⁴

VERSION 1

PRODUCER: Just a small part of the conspiracy.

OFFICER: What do you people know about the heroism of our courageous soldiers? One day the epic story of what our soldiers did during the war will be written down. Just look here (and he points to his left cheek) Where do you think I got this wound?

SPECTATOR: Wound!

What wound?

It's no deeper than you get at the barbers!

Or a scratch from long finger-nails.

OFFICER (angrily): May the devil wound all of you in hell! Who says such a thing? A scratch from long finger-nails! War has left its mark on my face, and you call it a barber's cut? If the shrapnel had gone any deeper (and he touches his cheek in an instinctive gesture), I'd be one of the martyrs whom the country is mourning. A pox on you all! What do you know about our soldiers' heroic deeds? One of our men brought down ten planes all by himself.

SPECTATOR (expressing amazement with all due sarcasm): No kidding!

SPECTATORS (in the same tone): No kidding!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Some of them told stories that were just like a pack of lies. Good heavens, one of them even swore...

OFFICER (interrupting and carrying on): Our action on Tel al-Raml, didn't you hear about it? Five soldiers and a corporal managed to stop a whole brigade of tanks and destroyed most of their machinery. The enemy thought at least half the entire army was involved. They had to call in their air force. You can just imagine how ashamed they felt when they discovered that it was just five soldiers and a corporal.

SPECTATOR 7 (in the same sarcastic tone): No kidding!

SPECTATORS (in the same tone): No kidding!

OFFICER: The head of operations carried his own rifle and fought just like any other soldier.

²³ The Complete Works text has "understand" instead of "knowing."

²⁴ From this point on, the two versions of the text are completely different for a few pages. Two versions are now provided in translation: Version 1 is that of *Mawaqif* (pp. 63-5; Version 2 (considerably shorter) that of the Complete Works, pp..120-21.

SPECTATOR 7; No kidding!

‘IZZAT: The soldiers we saw were so depressed, they were weeping.

SPECTATORS: No kidding!

ABU AL-FARAJ: He's right, they were weeping like women.

PRODUCER: So here's yet another segment of this treason and conspiracy.

[Meanwhile, Muhammad Abu Ghazala has entered. He's wearing a long, grey kaftan, its hem covered in dirt. His face is broad and pock-marked (or rather his face-mask is). His tone of voice is loud and imperious.]

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA: True enough. At last I've found my role.

[Everyone turns toward him.. The Producer is frothing at the mouth, his expression helpless.]

PRODUCER: Muhammad Abu Ghazala! Why are you wearing that face-mask? What's that you're wearing? What's your plan?

OFFICER: Listen to me. Do you doubt my word. Don't you believe me?

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA: You've always despised me and given me the least important roles. But now...rub your eyes carefully and take a look. I am history...

PRODUCER: In this elaborate conspiracy, that's the way actors behave.

SPECTATORS (sarcastically): History?

History?

What...history?

OFFICER: So now we have a clown! How dare you interrupt me?

MUIHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA (his voice taking on a fearsomely august tone): I spoke too quickly and made a mistake. I'm not history, just its messenger. I've come with some news...

PRODUCER: Just swallow that ringing tone of yours and get out of here at once. Haven't we had enough farce for one night?

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA: You're not going to rob me of my one key role in life.

OFFICER: Listen to me. I'll bring the roof down on your heads. I'll burn you all alive.

SPECTATOR (from the hall, laughing): But where's the history?

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA: In a land where events are taken more seriously.

SPECTATOR (from the hall): Did you hear that? In a land where events are taken more seriously.

ANOTHER SPECTATOR (from the hall): He's bringing us news from history.

PRODUCER: I told you to swallow that tongue of yours and go back to the wings. Can't you find a more appropriate time to make use of your powerful voice?

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA: Today that powerful voice of mine carries a message. It's not some secondary role in one of your plays.

SPECTATOR 6 (smiling): Let history tell us its news.

SPECTATORS (blending the comic with the serious): Yes indeed, start talking, but don't use any big words.

History. Isn't that a big word itself?

What's history got to tell us?

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA: Steady on! Steady on! I'm going to let you hear every bit of news I'm bringing.

PRODUCER: I'm telling you to leave immediately.

[He pushes Muhammad Abu Ghazala, but he resists. The two men fight.]

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA. I'm going to respond. You're not going to deprive me of my role here.

SPECTATORS: Let him be.

They're brawling.

Let him be!

I seek refuge in God from Satan the accursed!

Let him be!

Just let them scrap right in front of us!

VERSION 2:

PRODUCER (heading over to `Abd al-rahman, Abu al-Faraj, and `Izzat and shoving them off the stage): You're all tools and fingers of this conspiracy. Get out of here!

YOUNG MAN (continuing in his loud voice): Some people really understood what was happening. Hugging the ground with their weapons, dozens of them hundreds, were buried in the sand as they fought.

SPECTATOR 7: They were alone; they resisted and died along.

YOUNG MAN: But they left the door open for hope. I'm aware that the dark cloud of defeat is thick, and yet it shouldn't blind our eyes. There are some bright spots, windows open to light and hope. The events that happened in various places were sterling examples of heroism, things that can't ever be forgotten.

SPECTATOR 7: A few beams of light scattered here and there which soon vanished because they were isolated. They resisted and died alone. We wanted to join them, but they addressed us with frowning faces.

SPECTATOR 5: And threatening looks.

SPECTATOR 7: War's none of your business.

PRODUCER (heading over to the group): Enough, enough! Get out of my theater, all of you!

SPECTATOR 3: Our will was crushed.

`IZZAT: The soldiers we saw were so depressed, they were weeping.

ABU AL-FARAJ: He's right, they were weeping like women.

PRODUCER: You people, I'm going to crush your skulls, by God!

[They stare blankly at him.]

`IZZAT: They were defeated but had no idea why.

PRODUCER: Take your foul conspiracy and get out of here!

`IZZAT: Like us, they had no idea of what was happening.

[The Producer starts kicking them. He keeps on punching and kicking them.]

PRODUCER: For heaven's sake, scram!

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Now they're kicking us, Abu al-faraj!

ABU AL-FARAJ: Yes, they're hitting us.

SPECTATOR 2 (followed by a number of other Spectators): Leave them alone!

SPECTATOR 5: They're hitting them!

[Total chaos on the stage.²⁵ A man in the front row wearing an official uniform gets up. He looks both angry and self-assured. He gives a signal to the men guarding the doors, and they all distribute themselves like sentries around the hall. The men use rapid drills, creating military formations that completely encircle the interior of the hall. They get out revolvers and aim them

²⁵ The two versions come together again at this point. This particular phrase occurs only in the Complete Works edition.

at the audience, especially the people who have been involved in the conversation. Everything that now follows is jumbled and confused.]

OFFICIAL (moving toward the audience): Everybody stop! All this has got to stop. (coming on to the stage. The producer cringes before him and does his level best to act submissive) Do you think that all public order has come to an end and the entire country has descended into chaos?

SPECTATOR (in whispers): Excellency.

His august presence, the president.

The president!

Revolvers!

OFFICIAL: Geography, history, and phony rumors. Everything painted in false colors.

PRODUCER: Lights...lights!

[A beam of light falls on the Official, and the hall lights dim.]

OFFICIAL: We told ourselves we'd let you carry on so we could see where it all landed up. But what've we've uncovered here is a conspiracy, the dimensions of which we don't know yet.

PRODUCER: That's right, Mr. President. There's no doubt about it. A full-scale conspiracy from A to Z.

SPECTATORS (in a whisper): We warned them about the consequences.

Did they forget where we're living?

The tongue can get up to all sorts of mischief!

OFFICIAL: Where is this quack author?

[Two men rush over to the row where `Abd al-ghani al-Sha`ir is sitting.]

PRODUCER: Yes, he's the place where the rot starts. In fact, he's the rot itself.

TWO MEN: Here he is, Sir.

OFFICIAL: Arrest him! Arrest everyone who's participated in this foul conspiracy.

PRODUCER: Aha! At long last...!

{He claps enthusiastically. The arrest of `Abd al-Ghani and the rest of the spectators who have taken part causes a hue and cry in the hall.]

`ABD AL-GHANI: Don't push me. I can walk by myself.

SPECTATOR 2: Just what we expected to happen.

OFFICIAL: Never in my entire life have I seen such subversive rabble-rousers!

SPECTATOR: I didn't take part in any of it; I swear by all the prophets...

`ABD AL-RAHMAN: Now they're going to put us in prison, Abu al-faraj.

ABU AL-FARAJ: That's all that's left!

`IZZAT: Where have we been up till now? Moving from one prison to another?

ABU AL-FARAJ: I only said one single thing. May God cut my tongue out if I said more than one thing.

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (shaking his head): Well, my son, we seen a whole lot, haven't we?

SPECTATOR 6: The words led us on, like a mirage...

SPECTATOR 3: But words have to burst into speech at least once.

SPECTATOR: You're making a mistake, that's for sure. You must think I'm someone else. I swear you're making a mistake.

[`Abd al-ghani is close to the Official. They collect all the arrested men to one side of the stage.]

OFFICIAL (turning toward `Abd al-ghani and addressing him arrogantly): Ah, the genius author! Couldn't you find an outlet for your talent other than conspiracy? (`Abd al-ghani stares contemptuously at him) Didn't you take the circumstances our great country is going through into consideration?

`ABD AL-GHANI: That may well be the only thing I took into consideration.

OFFICIAL: So how did you let yourself get so fooled?

`ABD AL-GHANI (to the audience): Let myself be fooled? I confess. About an hour ago, the reason was far from clear; there was a vague feeling of disgust directed at my words, at my producer's genius, at the lie that gradually spread like a patch of oil on water. But now...I know, I know, as clearly as the nose on my face in the mirror...so that what has happened can happen. Now I know the reason...

OFFICIAL: So that what has happened can happen? We'll find out what lies behind what has happened. We've plenty of time to cross-examine you and your putrid group. We'll see what your nasty conspiracy is hiding!

MAN: (pointing the mouth of his revolver at his chest): Shut your mouth and say nothing.

PRODUCER (gritting his teeth): Terrific. One of my own actors is part of the conspiracy. So, Abu Ghazala, we'll find out how to settle our account with you!

SPECTATOR: I said one thing, that's all.

MUHAMMAD ABU GHAZALA: Do you really have the nerve to threaten the envoys of history?

OFFICIAL (moving toward the audience and adopting a traditional oratorical posture): Imperialism and its clients fondly imagine that our ability to stand fast has been weakened by events and the wind blows fair for them to demolish the firmly planted structure of our nation. They sow dissention in the ranks of our stolid citizen believers, with the aim of creating general chaos. Their fondest dream is for the crisis to erupt from the outset, but what they have not realized is that the masses of our people, with its loyal and reliable leadership, are fully capable of frustrating their plans, scoffing at their fanciful ideas, and treading them underfoot like the lowliest of insects.

SPECTATOR 2 (to SPECTATOR 1): I wonder whether or not we were responsible.

SPECTATOR 1: We're responsible for our responsibility for the defeat.

MEN (waving their revolvers): Shut up!

Shut your stinking mouths!

Cut out the chatter and listen.

OFFICIAL: This splendid soirée with its enormous significance is a sure confirmation of the fact that these conspirators are still at work; the enemies of the people are intensifying their trickery as day follows day. You've watched them emerge from under their rocks in broad daylight; you've seen them stretching their evil tongues and spreading their poison like snakes, without fear or restraint. (The Producer claps, followed by a number of Spectators) Imperialism and its clients are heretical enemies of the people, by God; they imagine that it's now possible to take over your public order, something that is marked by thousands of years of struggle and generations of victims and fighters.

[The Producer claps, and so do some Spectators. A whistle can be heard as well.]

`ABD AL-RAHMAN (whispering): Good heavens. He's talking like the radio!

ABU AL-FARAJ: Yes, by God, it's just like the radio!

MAN: May your tongues be cut out!

ANOTHER MAN: Don't say a single word!

OFFICIAL: Imperialism and its clients imagine that our ability to stand firm has been weakened by events. They kid themselves that, from now on, we will never be able to resist their strategy, the aim of which is to humiliate us and put an end to the popular flood whose waves are now smashing all across our territory. But the masses who have been able to thwart the enemy's plans and stay in full control of the situation are always fully capable of exposing conspiracies and scoffing at the imperialists' delusions and of uncovering their operatives inside our society, agents who have sold themselves dirt cheap.

[The Producer claps, followed by a number of spectators. As the desultory applause continues, it is interrupted by an increasing number of whistles.]

OFFICIAL: The spectacular victories that our heroic people has won under the command of its trailblazing leadership that believes in God, His prophet, and the will of the revolution have all aroused the fury of the imperialists. That is why they have intensified their assaults on our citadels. Hardly have they given up on one failed plot before their sick minds come up with a fresh one. Imperialism never gives up, however many failures it may suffer. However our steadfast regime, with its devotion and mighty achievements, never gives up, and will continue to impose one defeat after another on imperialism. It will continue to expose its plots, strike down its agents, and destroy its bases, wherever they may be.

[The Producer and a number of spectators applaud, while another whistle is also heard.]

OFFICIAL: You members of the steadfast masses, I give you the example of this soirée that provides clear, fresh evidence that enemies are infiltrating among us, wearing a variety of different masks. We must stay alert and not let our guard drop for an instant. Every citizen is a guard, so beware of conspirators and traitors! Expose people who spread malicious rumors and continue to serve as eyes, missing nothing and never sleeping. Our progress will never be stopped, however many the problems we have to face. As our sacred forward march proceeds, it will not be affected by colonies of bats, people moving around in the dark. So, you masses, forward we go, forward! Continue to serve as eyes, missing nothing and never sleeping. Our progress will never be stopped, however many the fluttering bats and the problems we have to face. 'Say: Get to work, and God will see your work, as so will his Prophet and the believers.' [Qur'an 9, v. 105] So then, forward, ye masses, forward, forward...!

[Applause and whistling from all over the theater.]

MEN (waving their revolvers): You can all leave now.

Make sure you don't cause any chaos.

Leave calmly.

OFFICIAL: Take them so we can see what they're hiding.

SPECTATOR 3 (in a powerful tone of voice, looking toward the hall): Tonight we were improvising. But perhaps tomorrow you can move beyond that.

MAN (hitting him): That's enough poison!

ANOTHER MAN. We'll soon find out if it was improvised or not...

SPECTATOR (one of those standing around): I only said one thing. I swear by my children, no more than one thing.

MEN: Move!

ANOTHER MAN: Ahead of us.

[They take the arrested men out through the wings.]

MEN: Leave quickly.

ANOTHER MAN: What are you waiting for. Get out of here fast.

[In the alcoves and on the stairs.]

SPECTATOR: What an evening!

SPECTATOR: Let's admit they had courage.

SPECTATOR: Yes, and look what's happened to them!

SPECTATOR: But let's admit nevertheless that they had courage. We did nothing to protect them.

SPECTATOR: What's that to do with us. Walls have ears, you know.

SPECTATOR: What they said was true nevertheless.

SPECTATOR: I was sure the ending was going to be sad.

SPECTATOR: We've never seen an evening like it!

SPECTATOR: God curse the theater and its problems!

SPECTATOR: I told you I didn't want to come. Do you see now what's happened?!

WOMAN: How scared you are. At least, you weren't arrested.

SPECTATOR: You would want me to be one of them!

WOMAN: You could never do that.

THE END

Book Review

New Plays from Spain: Eight Works by Seven Playwrights. Edited by Frank Hentschker. New York: Martin E. Segal Publications, 2013; pp. 366.

As Íñigo Ramirez de Haro states in the Forward of *New Plays from Spain: Eight Works by Seven Playwrights*, one of the most bewildering phenomena beleaguering Spanish culture today is the meager presence of post-Francoist playwrights on the non-Spanish speaking theatergoers' minds or their respective stages. This uncanny development is particularly disconcerting in the light of Spain's brilliant five hundred year legacy in theater that has seen the likes of Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina, José Zorrilla and García Lorca whose visionary minds have penned some of Western theater's most universally applauded plays with such unforgettable characters as Don Juan, El Cid, Segismundo and Bernarda Alba. Today's reality cannot be attributed to a scarcity of living, actively-engaged playwrights nor of stage-worthy plays. In fact, these last four decades have witnessed the genre flourish even further by becoming ever more diversified and inclusive as it welcomes more women and regional dramatists to its rapidly expanding stylistic and linguistic repertoire. Contrary to Ramirez de Haro's statement that this is the "first attempt to do justice to contemporary Spanish playwriting", it is important to clarify that Hispanists in the United States have published several bilingual drama anthologies¹, translations in American theater journals, and an annual series since 1992 of English translations in *Estreno Contemporary Spanish Plays*. In spite of these efforts, the visibility and accessibility of English translations in the English-speaking world continues to be sparse. The question remains, what is obstructing the exportation of Spain's contemporary theater outside of its national and/or linguistic borders? Perhaps the title and the strategy behind the 2012-2013 staged reading series in New York, *Give us a damn stage!*, provide us with a possible answer to this enigma. It is not so much a shortage of English translations of Spanish plays rather a matter of access to venues open to take the leap from page to stage. This present collection of English translations is the product of a concerted effort by collaborators from both sides of the Atlantic

¹ There are several excellent publications of English translations of Spanish plays. Here is just a sampling: *Plays of the New Democratic Spain (1975-1990)*. Ed. Patricia O'Connor. New York: University Press of America, 1992; *Modern Spanish Stage: 4 Plays*. Ed. Marion Holt. New York: Hill and Wang, 1970; *Antonio Buero Vallejo: Three Plays*. Ed. Marion Holt. San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1985; *One-Act Spanish Plays by Women about Women*. Ed. Patricia O'Connor. Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 1998; *One-Act Spanish Plays by Women about Women in the Early Years of the 21st Century*. Ed. Patricia O'Connor. Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 2006.

Ocean (Fundación Autor and SGAE in Spain, and the Cervantes Institute as well as the Martin E. Segal Theater Center of CUNY in New York) to overcome linguistic barriers and expose English-speaking directors, theater goers, readers and academia to the delightful diversity and top-notch quality of Spain's theater in the twenty-first century.

New Plays from Spain: Eight Works by Seven Playwrights is one of several steps in the process of marketing Spain's current theater to an American audience. As mentioned above, the *Give us a damn stage!* event began in the Fall of 2012 with the staged reading in Spanish of the selected eight plays at the Repertorio Español. The following May, staged readings of the same plays were presented in English at the Martin E. Segal Theater. At the end of this two-day marathon, there was an open Q&A with all of the collaborators including the dramatists, translators, directors and actors. I was fortunate enough to be present at all the events and I can attest to the overwhelmingly positive audience response to these dramatic works. It was truly amazing! The May event was quickly followed by the publication and presentation of this collection. Although it is unquestionably admirable to have gathered, organized, edited and published such a large number of plays in one collection so swiftly, there are several omissions and inconsistencies that should be noted and perhaps avoided if there is to be a promised future series of these anthologies. Please allow me to specify.

Omissions

If the intended readership of this volume is an English-speaking audience unfamiliar with Spain's current playwrights or theater, then it would make sense to provide a brief introduction of the chosen dramatists highlighting the diversity of styles, regions, and languages (several of these plays were translated not from Spanish but from Catalán). The seven authors also represent several generations of actively-engaged dramatists contributing to the current theater scene in Spain. There is no such orientation for the readers. There is no mention made of the fact that this representative group reflects playwrights at different stages of their careers that includes neophytes as well as time-honored authors like Ernesto Caballero. In addition, the original titles of the plays in Spanish or Catalán as well as the year in which they were written are omitted. For those interested in knowing these details, it will be necessary to go to the copyright page.

Inconsistencies

Surely the most striking inconsistency may be found in the decision to present three of the eight plays in the original Spanish side by side with the English translation, and the

remaining five solely in English. This seems a bit odd for anthologies of this nature usually choose to do one or the other. Another significant inconsistency lies in the quality of the translations themselves. The translations include variations of English from both England (*Paquita* translated by Patricia Rodríguez Méndez) as well as the United States, and their quality ranges from superb and stage-ready (*Promised Land* translated by Marion Holt) to others that still are in need of revisions. This might be due to the fact that several translations were done by the authors themselves who are less proficient in the second language.

The Plays

It is important to point out that my reservations are directed more toward the format of the book. There is no doubt as to the excellence of the selection of representative plays and dramatists included in the anthology. *New Plays from Spain: Eight Works by Seven Playwrights* contains a treasure trove of theatrical delights offering something for every theater lover's preference. Among them one will find: a riveting monologue by an obsessive actress ensnared in her role as a murder on and off the stage (*Paquita* by Ernesto Caballero and translated by Patricia Rodríguez Méndez); a collage of provocative sketches that tiptoe through the minefield of fear, disillusionment, and socio-economic blunders that have marked the last fifty years of Spanish history (*On the Moon* by Alfredo Sanzol and translated by Simon Breden); the ubiquitous presence of technology in daily life and its questionable impact on relationships and society (*Smartphones* written and translated by Emilio Williams); a whimsical peek at three modern day couples (ranging in age in their 20's, 40's and 60's) each faced with the breakup of a romantic relationship that somehow got lost in the emotional labyrinth of pride, fear and miscommunication (*Happily Ever After* written and translated by Cristina Colmena); the existential dilemma of workers trapped in the economic recession and forced to adapt to the absurd demands of the times (*Typing* written and translated by Cristina Colmena); a stage adaptation of an historical event based on a Spanish ship's rescue of 51 African castaways at sea, and the moral dilemmas and political complexities arising out of the unstoppable wave of massive numbers of human migration (*Numbers* by Mar Gómez Glez and translated by William Gregory); a politically-charged futuristic drama that hones in not only on the dire impact of climate change on developing nations but also on the ethical and economic responsibilities of first world nations (*Promised Land* by Guillem Clúa and translated by Marion Holt); and, finally, an imaginary encounter between the iconic Picasso and other exiled socialist compatriots in

France after Spain's Civil War (1936-39) that underscores the continued struggle of these unsung patriots to hold on to a fading identity, to refuse to go along with outside pressures to conform and forget, and to resist the temptation to renounce their political ideals (*Picasso and His Barber* by Borja Ortíz de Gondra and translated by Nancy Festinger). Altogether, *New Plays from Spain: Eight Works by Seven Playwrights* is a living testament to the continuing powerful and influential legacy of today's theater in Spain.

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