

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 5, Number 4 (Fall 2015)

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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

Welcome to the Fall 2015 issue of *The Mercurian*. The contents of this issue represent the results of a number of ongoing relationships and collaborations related to theatrical translation that I have engaged in over the past few years. The issue begins with Andy Bragen and Kyoko Yoshida's co-translation of Shu Matsui's *Proud Son*. Commissioned by Joan Robbins, Artistic Director of Ohio Northern University's International Play Festival, the translation has its genesis in the Theatrical Translation as Creative Process: A Conference Festival I co-organized here at the University of North Carolina and Duke University in 2012. Bragen and Yoshida's earlier co-translation of Yukiko Motoya's *Vengeance Can Wait* (previously published in Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 2008) of *The Mercurian*) was given a staged reading there. Robbins and Bragen met in Chapel Hill and began to lay the groundwork for the project at Ohio Northern. Subsequently director Desdemona Chiang, who has directed several times for both our professional company, PlayMakers Repertory Company, and for our Summer Youth Conservatory, was brought on as director. Matsui's *Proud Son* is a playful and absurdist depiction of the Japanese phenomenon of *bikikomori*, in which someone, typically an adolescent male, chooses to isolate himself from the world. The translation itself is preceded by an introduction in which Robbins (as dramaturg), Bragen, Yoshida, and Chiang collectively reflect upon the challenges of cultural transference of theatre, the process of co-translation, and the difficulties encountered in developing the piece with student actors.

The issue continues with Oliver Mayer's *Blood Match*, a refashioning of Federico García Lorca's *Blood Wedding* for the present day. *The Mercurian* readers will be familiar with Mayer's earlier translation/adaptations of Miguel Cervantes' *entremeses Dirty Fraud, The Widowed Pimp, and The Divorce Court Judge* for a contemporary Los Angeles audience, published in the Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall 2010) issue. As Eric Mayer-García discusses in his introduction to *Blood Match*, "El grito de la *seguriya ranchera*: Roots of Lorca's Theatre in Oliver Mayer's *Blood Match*," Mayer does something similar here as he moves Lorca's play across "time, culture, and language" from 1930s Andalusia, Spain to twenty-first century Sinaloa, Mexico.

Next comes Thomas Simpson's translation of Saverio La Ruina's controversial play *Dust*. Simpson was also present at the Theatrical Translation as Creative Process: A Conference Festival in 2012 and his translation of Marco Martinelli's *Noise in the Waters* was published in the Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 2012) issue of *The Mercurian*. Simpson's introduction discusses the challenge of finding an English style of speech that in the source text "presents itself as innocent and candid but is in fact loaded with violence." Simpson also discusses the dual reception the play has received from both Italian and English-speaking audiences. *Dust* was developed in consultation with women who were victims of domestic abuse. When performed at Italian Women's Shelters and anti-violence centers for men who have been perpetrators of violence those audiences have been quite receptive and praised the way that the play depicted "the dynamics at work in violent couple relationships." When performed for more general audiences, however, the play has been condemned for perpetuating and condoning those relationships on stage. Readers here have the opportunity to make their own decisions regarding the play.

The issue concludes with Daniel Jáquez' translation of the contemporary Mexican playwright Alejandro Ricano's *Pork Kidneys to Sootbe Despair*. As Jáquez describes the play it is "A dark comedy. Paris 1940s. Fact and fiction intertwine to tell a story of complicated love, artistic obsession and murder. Gustave, a fan of Joyce's *Ulysses*, is an unsuccessful writer; Marie is undeniably in love with him. Together they stalk Samuel Beckett to protect him and ensure that his masterpiece *Waiting for Godot* is completed." I first encountered this funny and touching play during the Trans (re) lation Convening, a joint event of the Theatre in Translation Network, The Fence, and The Lark at the O'Neill Theatre Center in January 2015 when Jáquez asked me to play Gustave in a staged reading of the translation.

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 6, No. 1 (Spring 2016) will be February 1, 2016.

--Adam Versényi

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Proud Son

By Shu Matsui

Translated by Kyoko Yosida and Andy Bragen

Shu Matsui's *Proud Son*: Collective Reflections about the Production and Translation Process

Introduction...

Joan: The English translation of Shu Matsui's *Proud Son* (*Jiman no Musuko* in Japanese) by co-translators, Andy Bragen and Kyoko Yoshida, was commissioned by Ohio Northern University and produced there in the spring of 2013, under the direction of Desdemona Chiang; I served as both artistic director and production dramaturg. From the earliest stages of play selection and throughout the process, the translators were centrally involved, with the focus of the production placed on the development of the translation. This collection of reflections from dramaturg, director, and co-translators, aims to offer a window into that development, and into the ways in which the processes of translation and production, when linked, can offer reciprocal benefits.

An overview of the production...

Joan: *Proud Son* was produced as part of Ohio Northern University's International Play Festival; now in its eleventh year, the festival has staged world premieres of plays from around the globe; professional international theatre artists have come to Ohio and joined with undergraduate theatre students to produce theatre from sixteen countries, and plays translated from no fewer than seven languages. The primary goals of the festival are twofold: to promote new work for the international stage, and to expand the horizons of the University community by creating an innovative, intercultural theatre experience.

Bragen and Yoshida's English translation of *Proud Son* premiered at ONU in April of 2013; the festival parameters included a fully staged production on an existing festival set which consisted of a two-story, flexible wall unit, made up of paneled modules, some of which opened or moved in various ways (sort of Mondrian, without the color). Much of the translation process occurred over the winter, and we began rehearsals in March with a third draft. Andy and Kyoko spent several days in rehearsal (that experience is detailed elsewhere). The next and final draft of the translation incorporated the results of the rich exchange that had occurred between the translators and the company. Shu Matsui came to Ohio from Tokyo for the performance week, meeting with members of the company, attending classes, and audience talkbacks. Seeing the play performed in English was a completely new experience for him, and he seemed both amazed and excited by the cultural transfer. The Festival culminated with a reception attended by the company, Shu Matsui, and members of the Japanese community.

Some thoughts on play selection...

Joan: Once the choice of Japan as a focus for the festival was made, I relied on co-translators, Andy and Kyoko in selecting a playwright and a play. Kyoko's knowledge of and contacts within the

Japanese contemporary theatre community were crucial.

Kyoko: We wanted to introduce a young playwright, and this choice narrowed candidates down to several playwrights from Tokyo and a few from Kansai (Osaka-Kyoto). I also wanted to pick a play that reflects the playful experimentalism and energy of contemporary small theaters in Japan. I consulted several people before talking to playwrights and their managers--theater fans in Tokyo, my colleague Prof. Hirata (German Theatre) at Keio, playwright Masataka Matsuda, and the Saison Foundation in Tokyo. I considered many writers, including the recipients of the Kishida Prize in the past several years.

Joan: Despite Kyoko's efforts, we faced a number of obstacles in finding a Japanese playwright willing to embrace the translation opportunity we were offering. In retrospect, the principal reasons for this seemed to involve cultural distinctions and distance, and differences in theatrical practices between our two countries. It seemed that the creation of a fully realized English translation of a Japanese play was not a significant attraction, and because we were so far away, there also seemed to be a suspicion on the part of Japanese managers as to our motives. Japanese companies were accustomed to having their work produced in Europe in Japanese, with added super-titles. Thus, the focus was on the original production of the play, not on the transfer into another language and culture. Kyoko was going to have to do some pretty hardcore convincing...

Kyoko: I was quite overwhelmed at how difficult the process of finding a playwright for this translation project turned out to be. There are two reasons: 1) Japanese young playwrights are almost always directors of their own theater troupes, and 2) the recent proliferation of performing arts festivals in Asia and Europe. One major frustration was that I could rarely communicate with playwrights directly. I first had to deal with their international managers and they tended to talk business only; it was very difficult to persuade them of our project's artistic merit. Unlike the small troupes from the 70s, 80s, and 90s, today's young playwrights and troupes have great opportunities to have their work staged in international festivals; the entire troupe can travel to reproduce the exact same production as the original, with added subtitles. As a literary scholar, writer and translator, I am interested in how a text, once translated, changes and travels. This process is more interesting and crucial in theatre, because a text will be staged by different directors and different actors. I had the hardest time explaining to Japanese managers how making English subtitles for international performance is different from translating a play into English. In the end, with help from my colleague Prof. Sato (Film Theory), we resorted to a desperate measure: after glasses of sake with playwright Shu Matsui, we cornered him and talked him into having his play translated into another language. Poor Matsui-san!

About the playwright and the play...

Joan: One of Japan's leading young playwrights, Shu Matsui works as a director, writer, and actor in Tokyo. He first joined the eminent theatre company, Seinendan in 1996 as an actor, and subsequently developed his career as a writer and director, founding his own theatre company, Sample, in 2007. *Proud Son (Jiman no Musuko)* was first created and produced by Sample, and won the prestigious Kishida Drama Award in 2010. Other award-winning plays by Matsui include: *Passage*,

World Premiere, and *Family Portrait*.

Proud Son is about a young man who has chosen to isolate himself from the world, a familiar phenomenon in contemporary Japan known as *bikikomori* (Oxford English Dictionary: “In Japan: abnormal avoidance of social contact: acute social withdrawal; (also) a person, typically an adolescent male, engaging in this; a recluse, a shut-in”). In Matsui’s whimsical but darkly absurdist depiction, Tadashi (the young man) has built an imaginary kingdom out of toys and stuffed animals; his mother, in an ironic twist of the social reality, brags about her son’s accomplishments and travels to visit his kingdom, with the help of a tour guide and accompanied by a brother and sister. The close but twisted bonds between the mother and son and between the brother and sister in the play suggest incest, and while Matsui’s inventive parody possesses absurdist comedy, it also communicates profound familial dysfunction and social isolation.

Many of Matsui’s plays explore relationships between parents and children. In an interview published on the website *Performing Arts Network Japan* in 2011, Matsui describes the images of incestuous sexuality between mother and son in *Proud Son* to be a metaphor for a “repulsive kind of dependency that can neither be called protection or independence” in Japanese society. He goes on in the same interview to characterize his view of the play’s action:

“[...] I wanted to make it a play that involved the parent and child fighting over control of certain spaces in order to stake out their own individual territory. Then, building on that, I wanted to introduce outsiders coming into the parent and child’s space and portray the process of them pushing and pulling each other out of those spaces. [...] In this case “staking out one’s own territory” becomes an act of “expanding the realm of one’s own story.” People try to measure others by their own standards and only see the aspects of others that they are able to measure.”

http://performingarts.jp/E/art_interview/1105/1.html

Both of the central ideas Matsui addresses here – staking out territory and asserting one’s own story – informed the production in important ways. Similar to the original production in Japan, Tadashi created his kingdom in part with a giant piece of white fabric, spread for much of the performance across the acting area. It was manipulated to create different levels and locations, offered concealment, and transformed into objects. It became the physical manifestation of Tadashi’s assertion of his kingdom, and, as the tensions between mother and son rose, the sheet was fought over as a symbol of control. The fabric also possessed a quite wonderful capacity to envelop objects and people, which served Matsui’s thematic notion that in an effort to assert their own stories, there are characters that will try to envelope others, incorporating them into their version of reality, or personal narrative.

In a conversation with company members while in Ohio, Matsui said that he felt that the notion of engaging others in a character’s story, of one person’s fantasy being another person’s nightmare, that this was not entirely clear in our production. In part, this was a function of the various ways in which *Proud Son’s* nonlinear style and structure challenged our student actors. Matsui spoke about one of the unique features of the play being the lack of conventional motivation, and that he had

aimed to create a world with less recognizable probability. Our actors tended to want to find the connections between moments in this play where its author had intentionally left those transitions out, seeking as he said, a different way of getting from one thing or place to the next.

The translation process...

Andy: *Proud Son* marks the third collaboration between Kyoko and myself on a new Japanese play. Along the way we have continued to discover and focus our collaborative process. Kyoko takes an initial pass at the script, translating the text as close to literally as possible. She includes notes, exploring certain moments, and raising many questions. Andy revises this first version, pushing further away from the original, and raising new questions and points of clarification. We pass the document back and forth over a period of months, continuing to clarify and refine. For the final steps, we get together in person and go through the script line by line, reading it out loud, checking it for sound and meaning. The result, we hope, is a translation that is both accurate and alive, a translation that captures the essence of the original play in its new American idiom.

I've been involved with a few processes where I've been able to develop translations while in workshop or rehearsal with actors, both at the Lark Theatre on their US-Mexico Playwrights Exchange, on plays I've translated from the Spanish, and at The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis on other Japanese plays I've co-translated. I always find it quite helpful. It is a chance for more people to engage with the work, a chance for questions to be raised, and ambiguities to be explored. It's a chance to hear what the piece sounds like coming out of actors' mouths. For this particular process, it was also an opportunity for Kyoko and me to be in the same city and country, at the same time, to work in person, as opposed to via email. For a co-translation, this is absolutely essential.

Kyoko: For any co-translation to work, translators have to meet face to face at some point to bounce the sound of the text off of each other. This is especially crucial for poetry and theatre. You cannot just let your translation reverberate in your head. I appreciate how Andy checks and double-checks the sound of our translations. This, I find, is the most crucial part of our process. It is all the better if this is at rehearsal – we can invite the playwright, the director, the dramaturg, and other production staff members and actors into the process. The trained actors have their very specific, professional way of interpreting characters and texts, and watching them analyze the text is always thrilling and teaches me a lot. In the case of *Proud Son*, the student actors posed many questions helpful for us in fine-tuning the characters' voices, especially those of Mother and Tadashi. They also played the role of the firsthand reader of the text, so listening to their comments and reactions, I could see when the translation was a bit off from the original, or when some translational ingenuity was required to fill in the cultural gaps.

Andy: *Proud Son* is written in the plain, contemporary, spoken language of Tokyo, and incorporates many set phrases and clichés. There are a few proverbs used effectively in Japanese that made for a trans-Pacific headache for the translators. A reconstruction of our notes from one such proverb offers an illustration of our process:

Literal Translation

BROTHER: Some say, once you live there, it becomes your metropolis, don't they.

MAN: In some cases, it is the prison for the rest of your life.

Kyoko searched and searched for a substitute proverb in English...

12/3/12: Kyoko's first pass (Tokyo and Yokohama)

BROTHER: Some say, the hermit thinks the sun shines nowhere but in his cell, don't they.

MAN: The hermit might be spending the rest of his life in the prison cell.

Andy sticks with the proverb, but unsure of its point.

12/10/12: Andy's first pass (Lancaster, PA and New York City)

BROTHER: There's a saying about a hermit who thinks the sun shines nowhere but in his cell. Isn't that how it goes?

MAN: The hermit may end up spending the rest of his life in that cell.

(Andy: What are we getting at here?)

Kyoko returns with an explanation.

2/13/13: Notes from Kyoko (Tokyo and Yokohama)

That saying about a hermit: the proverb used here in Japanese is literally, "Once you live there, it is the capital." I picked this English proverb with a hermit because of the play's plot and MAN's response to BROTHER, referring to a prison cell...

Finally, the two brains meet in Ada, Ohio. In rehearsal, hearing the actors read the lines, it became evident that the words were not immediately clear, even to the translators themselves... but this is precisely why we had to travel all this way to sit at one desk.

4/7/13 Kyoko and Andy's collaboration (Ada, Ohio)

BROTHER: Once we move in, it's our castle, like the saying goes, right?

MAN: A man's castle may well become his prison.

The translation process as it influenced the directing and acting...

Desdemona: Having Andy and Kyoko at the table with us was like being one step closer to the playwright. I usually think that directing a play is much like playing a game of Telephone – with each additional collaborator/dramaturg/deviser you bring into the game, you find yourself one step further removed from the original source. But in this case, because of the lack of cultural access I personally had to the piece and my inability to understand the source text, having Kyoko in rehearsal was immensely helpful. In many ways, she became a touchstone for me in my attempts to

understand and navigate Japanese culture. And while, of course, no single person is responsible for representing his/her entire culture, I still found her individual perspectives and opinions very useful.

The issue of equity and authenticity always comes into question when we find ourselves telling stories and experiences that are not our own. As a Chinese American, I only have impressions of what “being Japanese” is like, with the majority of my impressions sourced from American popular culture, the media, and my own self-acknowledged fascination towards the “kawaii” culture of Japan – the cute and infantile (an idea that plays a significant role in *Proud Son*).

I was at first a bit nervous about approaching this play – I was concerned about misappropriation and generating images that could be construed as reductive or offensive. I had the feeling that the cast shared some of my concerns, and we were able to articulate this vis-à-vis the two critical questions that came out of our first read-through:

1. To what extent do we want to consider the body language and physical conventions of Japanese culture, and/or the vocal rhythms of the Japanese language in our production?
2. Are we aiming to create a world that “feels” in some way Japanese, or are we “translating” this story into an entirely American idiom?

What is fascinating is that, as members of the millennial generation, every member of our cast was able to relate deeply to the themes and story of *Proud Son*, regardless of the culture gap between Japan and America. They all had a personal connection to the play, and what it meant to feel oneself separate from reality. They shared stories about parental dependency, friends who were hermits or nerds or social recluses, and talked about how socializing through technology, *Facebook*, and *World of Warcraft* was far safer than engaging with real life.

The translators’ influence on the dramaturgy and cultural understanding of the play...

Joan: Given that the kindred processes of translation and dramaturgy both aim to accomplish cultural interpretation, it's not surprising that on this production, having access to the translators during the rehearsal process was invaluable to the company's understanding of the source culture. A good example would be the character of Tadashi's Mother who is crucial to the play, and around whom revolved a number of issues related to both dramaturgy and translation. Tadashi's mother possesses all of the traditional subservience of a Japanese wife and mother, seeing it as her primary role in life to serve both husband and son. This was not difficult for our cast to understand on a factual level, but to accept this cultural character trait without belittling it from a contemporary, Western position of superiority meant a more nuanced understanding. Kyoko's many cultural examples, including those from her own family, were extremely helpful.

The mother's language at times possessed a youthful, almost childlike quality that we discussed at some length because it seemed to contradict her age and stature. One conclusion we came to is that the childlike language and behavior shared by many of the characters suggested a form of regression or arrested social development. Tadashi's Mother possessed a quirky combination of this youthfulness and a kind of throwback to very traditional, Japanese gender assumptions. One line in

particular that we wrestled with expresses this combination. Tadashi's Mother imagines her son's new kingdom (ironically) to be like Hawaii and so needs a swimsuit, but when the tour guide offers to sell her a bikini she replies:

“No, thanks! Those are for youngsters, but maybe you have something that someone like me could put on, something of that sort. Something like a cover-up chemise would do. A chemise. Wouldn't there be one of those? A chemise.”

The repetition of the word chemise sounded extremely odd to me (in an earlier draft it was bathing costume), in part because the contemporary image it can conjure is of sexy lingerie, which was clearly not the character's intention. In the end, the word worked as an expression of a socially awkward moment (Tadashi's Mother is traveling to her son's kingdom with two much younger people, and is trying to fit in), but also because of what Kyoko said the word suggested from a Japanese perspective: middle-aged women in Japan in the era prior to air-conditioning, wearing shifts they called chemises in the hot summer evenings. Our discussions with the translators in rehearsals which often began like this one did, around the issue of word choice and nuance of expression, invariably opened up to include points of cultural context and characterization, and enriched the production in innumerable ways.

Desdemona: Oh god, the chemise! We must have spent an hour in rehearsal trying to figure out what it was and why the mother would ask for such a thing—everyone in the cast thought it was a piece of lingerie, or a teddy, as opposed to the medieval shift or smock or perhaps a large shirt (in the original French). While those definitions are accurate and still hold up in Japan, they're archaic to us. So, it wasn't the translation from the Japanese that was the problem, but that the word itself changed meaning in our country over the years.

Issues of tone and style...

Andy: We worked with Desdemona to encourage the actors to not be afraid of bigger choices, for example we encouraged the actress playing the Mother to keep exploring the character's' submissive physicality. Also, and this is something that Desdemona had already been working on for a while, we encouraged the actor playing Tadashi to explore choices that were more child-like, and seemingly less pre-determined, less “under control.”

Desdemona: One of the first questions I asked the actors in our rehearsal was: What is the difference between stereotype and archetype?

We embrace the term “archetype” as the idea of something universal, inclusive and an originator of other forms. The term “stereotype” has a negative social connotation that is about overgeneralizing and reducing. One is far more troubling than the other, but both rely on simplification as a point of entry towards an attempt at understanding.

I am not Japanese. The actors aren't Japanese. But, the world of the play and its characters are. How do we adequately and accurately present this? I had to be clear with the cast that this was going to be an American production with an American perspective, but using Japanese source material. There

was a concern around taking on physical forms that mimicked our impressions of what Japanese culture looked like, a concern around performing yellow face. I knew that on some level there would be the possibility of missteps in the arena of representation (both in ideology and execution). It could be potentially problematic as a product, but ultimately useful as a learning experience. And I was willing to accept that as a condition of the process.

We began by addressing the problem head on – if we were afraid of stereotype then let’s start there. What were our perceptions of a “typical” Japanese mother and son? Do they align or misalign with what we see in the play? And how do we explode those stereotypes to create fully realized characters with thought and detail?

Hillary Abbott, who played Tadashi’s Mother, struggled the most with finding her character because she had to work across a cultural gap and a generational gap. We felt that the most effective way for her to navigate the role was to work from an “outside-in” method, using physicality to motivate psychology. We started by establishing physical limitations to her character – she was only allowed to walk taking tiny steps, with her knees touching at all times. She was also required to nod once for every step she took, since her character wears a pedometer strapped to her head. At first, the movement looked mechanical, fake, clunky and perhaps a bit “stereotypical.” But over time, the actor’s subliminal intuition starts to work, and she began to fill that form with impulses, thought, and meaning.

Vocally, I wasn’t interested in employing a dialect or cadence to somehow show “Japanese-ness” in the production. I’ve always found that annoying when I see it in other productions, where, for example, French characters speak English in French accents to indicate that they’re speaking French. It’s a very Anglo-centric perspective, as if we need to have English as a reference point in order to convey other languages. If the characters don’t speak Japanese with an accent, then the English translation doesn’t merit an accent either.

Conclusions...

Joan: We hope that these reflections shed some light on Shu Matsui's play, *Proud Son*, and offer some observations about the development of a translation through the production process that might be useful to other practitioners. Clearly the students at Ohio Northern University benefited tremendously from the talented and sensitive direction provided by Desdemona Chiang, and by the opportunity to engage with the co-translation work of Andy Bragen and Kyoko Yoshida. It was an extremely rewarding, intercultural journey for all involved, and well worth the “desperate measures” and “glasses of sake” to which Kyoko had to resort – we remain forever grateful to her!

-- Joan Robbins, Andy Bragen, Kyoko Yoshida, and Desdemona Chiang

Shu Matsui (Playwright) is a director, writer, and actor. Born in 1972 in Tokyo, Matsui first joined the Seinendan Theatre Company in 1996 as an actor, and subsequently developed his career as a writer and director. Both his first play, *Passage*, and his second, *World Premiere*, won the New Face

Award for Writers from the Japan Playwrights Association. Matsui founded his own company, Sample, in 2007; in 2008, his play *Family Portrait*, written for Sample, was shortlisted for the Kunio Kishida Award. He has directed several European productions of Japanese plays, and Matsui's own plays have been produced in numerous countries.

Andy Bragen's honors include a Workspace Residency and a Process Space Residency with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the Clubbed Thumb Biennial Commission, and a Jerome Fellowship. His play *This is My Office* was produced off-Broadway in the autumn of 2013 by The Play Company. Other plays and translations have been seen and heard at numerous theatres, including PS122, Queens Theatre in the Park, Brown/Trinity Playwrights Rep, and Soho Rep. He has an MFA from Brown University and is a member of New Dramatists. For more information: www.andybragen.com

Kyoko Yoshida was born and raised in Fukuoka, Japan. She received her BA and MA from Kyoto University, and studied creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. From 2001 to 2014, she taught English at Keio University in Tokyo. In 2005, she was an honorary fellow at the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, and in 2006-07, a visiting fellow at the Program for Literary Arts at Brown University. In 2014, she moved to Kyoto to teach American Literature at Ritsumeikan University.

Kyoko has worked extensively as a translator of contemporary experimental Japanese poetry and drama, and as an author of fiction. *Spectacle & Pigsty: Poetry by Kiwao Nomura* (OmniDawn, 2011, co-translated with Forrest Gander) won the 2012 Best Translated Book Award in Poetry in the US and the 2012 Toson Memorial Rekitei Award in Japan. Her first collection of short stories in English, *Disorientalism*, came out in 2014 from Vagabond Press in Sydney.

Desdemona Chiang is a stage director based in Seattle and the San Francisco Bay Area. Co-Founder of Azeotrope. Directing credits: Playmakers Repertory Company, Aurora Theatre Company, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Shotgun Players, Crowded Fire Theatre Company, Impact Theatre, Playwrights Foundation, Golden Thread Productions, Washington Ensemble Theatre, One Minute Play Festival, among others. Alumnus: SDC Sir John Gielgud Directing Fellow, Drama League Directing Fellow, TCG Young Leader of Color, Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab and Directors Lab West. 2012 Gregory Award Recipient for Outstanding Direction. Adjunct Faculty, Cornish College of the Arts. BA: University of California at Berkeley. MFA Directing: University of Washington.

Joan Robbins heads the B.A. program in Theatre at Ohio Northern University where she serves on the theatre faculty and works as both a director and dramaturg. She teaches courses in dramatic literature, theatre history, playwriting, and directing. She is also the co-founder of ONU's International Play Festival, a platform for new work from around the globe. Joan has worked as a dramaturg and as a director in both the academic and professional theatre, and served as Director of Theatre at the University of Scranton from 1991-2000. She holds an MFA and DFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from the Yale School of Drama.

PROUD SON

A play by Shu Matsui

Translation by Kyoko Yoshida and Andy Bragen

Cast:

Tadashi's Mother

Tadashi

Man

Brother (older)

Sister (younger)

Neighbor

Center stage: a chair.

Tadashi's Mother enters and sits in the chair.

After looking around, she drinks water from the glass in her hand and steadies her breath.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

...

Tadashi's Mother drinks some more water.

...Don't blab so much in front of others, that's what my late husband used to tell me. "The way you say things, none of it makes any sense...better you just nod your head." Yesyes, Yesyes – just keep nodding.

Man enters. He eats chunks of fruit - with a pocketknife rather than a fork.

MAN

Yesyes, and?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

And before I knew it, it got to be a habit. Just nodding my head like this...

She nods her head in short, quick motions.

Nodding yesyes to anyone and everyone, yesyes while talking to myself...

Nodding her head

Yesyes to the mirror

Nodding her head

Yesyes, yesyes...

MAN

A one trick pony.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

My husband thought it creepy and he wouldn't go out with me or talk to me. Can you believe it? He's the one who started it. But then one day, he brought home a pedometer, tossed it to me and told me to put it on. A pedometer. What could I do but get a scarf and tie it to my head? And then, guess what... it worked. I've got a purpose... in life.

MAN

I see.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

It was like, "Wow, I nodded seven thousand times today. I'll try for even more tomorrow." A whole new world had opened up. From then on, my husband would check in with me, asking "Hey, how many today?" Though that just was about it for our conversations.

MAN

He sounds like a nice husband.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Yes, I suppose so... come to think of it, I feel bad, rather sorry for him. For having married such a nitwit. He could've found a better fit, I'm sure.

MAN

I highly doubt it.

He pulls a souvenir doll out from his bag.

Think of this as your husband. Do you see any resemblance?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Appraising the doll

No, not really.

MAN

Putting the doll back into the bag

Okay, I see.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

...Yeah, well, but my son, I have an only son, and unlike me, he's really very impressive. Not to brag or anything, but... well, let me tell you...

MAN

And off she goes.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Some say, he's, maybe, greater than that man... you know who... the one born in the manger, who got pelted with stones... you know? He was uhhh... crucified...

MAN

Jesus Christ?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Well, for example, you know... some say...? It's not me saying it, but there is this rumor I hear, or something like it, right?

MAN

Pulling a crucifix out from his bag

A steal. Only 800 yen.

Tadashi's Mother ignores Man's offer. She pulls out a postcard.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Take a look at this.

A postcard from Hawaii is projected onto the wall.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

That's Hawaii. I want to visit Hawaii, I've been saying that for a long long time. He remembered and he sent me this card. Here's what he wrote, "I built a nation. Things are good. Tadashi."

Tadashi's Mother pulls a muumuu and a pair of sunglasses out from her bag and puts them on.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Amazing. He built a nation! I bet it's just like Hawaii. Tadashi's nation. That's his name. Tadashi Furukawa. That's my son's name. Tadashi. To right the wrongs, to fight for justice, this is why Father named him Tadashi.

MAN

I see.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I'm overdue for a visit, the sooner the better, but well, let's see... suitcase, clothes... and... my pickles. What else do I need?

MAN

You'll need to acclimate yourself to the atmosphere there.

The Hawaiian postcard dissolves.

Man pulls a number of goods out of his bag. Many are random tchotchkes like postcards and a small music box.

MAN

Pulling out a small bottle

Here you go: sand from Waikiki Beach...

Pulling out a plastic bottle and a can

Here we have Waikiki seawater, and here, its air.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Nodding

Oh my, oh my... are these things real?

MAN

They're all real. Do you want them?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

May I?

Man pulls a calculator out from his bag and adds figures.

MAN

5000 yen total.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Never mind. No thank you.

MAN

Your loss. So, please wait here. Sit back, relax and enjoy the pleasant trip.

Man exits.

A song is heard, perhaps the sort one would hear chiming from a cheap music box.

A night landscape is projected onto the wall. Mother looks at her postcard and soon falls asleep.

The ideogram 王 (Tadashi) appears on the wall. Below it appears, "The Kingdom of Tadashi."

Tadashi and Sister enter.

Tadashi spreads out a large cloth sheet, covering the entire stage.

The music box-style song transforms itself into telephone hold music.

The sound cuts out.

SISTER

Hello. Thank you for waiting.

TADASHI

...Uh, hello, yeah, um, hey what the heck?... I mean, uh, another ten seconds, and I was gonna hang up.

SISTER

Very sorry, sir.

TADASHI

...And so?

SISTER

The manager is busy at the moment, so we'll need to call you-

TADASHI

Interrupting

Huh? So you're saying no one else is around? Clearly, I'd get nowhere with you...

SISTER

Well, as I said, because flyer distribution is outsourced-

TADASHI

Interrupting

As I've been saying, over and over, just tell them to stop stuffing my mailbox. That's all.

SISTER

Am I correct in assuming that your apartment building has a common trash area?

TADASHI

What the? ...That's not the point. The point is... more junk means more trash. More trash means more carbon dioxide. If we go on like this, what's it all going to come to?

SISTER

Well...

TADASHI

I'll tell you what. Doomsday.

SISTER

I see.

TADASHI

So the question is: what does happiness look like? As I was saying. Are cicadas happy? Or unhappy?

SISTER

Cicadas, you say? ...I'm not sure.

TADASHI

You're not sure. Too bad. So shall we now discuss the happiness of cicadas?

SISTER

Ummm, well, my apologies sir, but in order to express opinions and engage in consultations, you will first need to subscribe to our premiere monthly-

TADASHI

Interrupting

So I have to pay money in order to express my opinions?

SISTER

No, not at all, you can start with a trial subscription. So long as you cancel within two months there will be no charge.

TADASHI

I will not subscribe.

SISTER

But for now, it's complimentary, though-

TADASHI

Interrupting

I'll say it again: transfer me to your superior.

SISTER

You won't consider a trial member-

TADASHI

Interrupting

I don't need a trial membership.

SISTER

But sir, good news, I've just double-checked and if you add up all your customer points, you'll be eligible for another two months of-

TAKASHI

Interrupting

You have no right to add up my customer points!

SISTER

Well no, of course not, not without your permission, um-

TADASHI

Interrupting

Put your boss on, damnit! No trials, no subscription, no points, no nothing!

SISTER

...

TADASHI

Um... hello?

SISTER

There's nothing you need? Nothing at all?

TADASHI

Huh?

SISTER

...What a coincidence. That's the third time I've heard that today... You don't need me?

TADASHI

No, it's not you that I don't need, you know?

SISTER

You're absolutely right about everything. No need for junk mail, no need for trial subscriptions, no need for me...

TADASHI

Now hold on, that's not what I said.

SISTER

But this is my duty. It's my job, as Operator Asanuma, to stand by, to listen to you.

TADASHI

I don't not need you.

SISTER

Please now, there's no need to pretend.

TADASHI

No, really, I mean it.

SISTER

Well then. But you did still yell at me, right? ...So, do you mind if I yell back?

TADASHI

What?

SISTER

It's unfair. Cause, like, here at work, we're always getting yelled at but we never get a chance to respond, so as a result we receive regular counseling. It's hard on the nerves.

TADASHI

That's your company's fault.

SISTER

You're right. ...Agh! Damnit! I've had enough!

TADASHI

Huh? Who are you yelling at?

SISTER

...It's not working! Venting anger isn't calming me down. I'm just getting more upset. Even worse, I'm done for – they're gonna fire me.

TADASHI

Really?

SISTER

Yes. They record everything. ...Oh no, the boss is looking this way. Oh no, here he comes, here he comes. Oh no, agghhh, agghhh!

TADASHI

Hey! ...Do you want to come here?

SISTER

Huh?

TADASHI

Well, I...Well it's no big deal, but I've started this fun place.

SISTER

A fun place?

TADASHI

Yes. Maybe you could come visit, if you have some free time?

High-pitched rock music, possibly from an adjacent apartment, may be heard leaking through the walls.

TADASHI

Looking toward where the music is coming from.

Agh! Damnit!

Tadashi hangs up the phone and exits.

Neighbor enters.

She is dressed in a trashy outfit. She hangs laundry on a clothesline, stretching out some flashy and sexy lingerie, a T-shirt with a skull on it, and a leopard-patterned blouse among other items.

She sings along with the music while hanging her clothes to dry.

Neighbor exits.

Tadashi enters. He stares at the hanging lingerie.

Neighbor enters.

Tadashi exits, flustered.

Neighbor hangs another piece she'd forgotten and exits.

Brother and Sister enter from opposite sides.

BROTHER

Hey. Hot, right?

Brother wheels a rolling suitcase. Sister lugs two shoulder bags.

SISTER

Yeah.

BROTHER

Anyway... I couldn't sleep much last night. Was nervous.

SISTER

I could. I take sleeping pills.

BROTHER

You shouldn't depend on that kind of stuff.

SISTER

It's cause I can't sleep.

BROTHER

Late nights can be nice.

SISTER

No. They're not.

BROTHER

Okay, right... Can I really come with you?

SISTER

It should be cool – I think. It's not like you have anywhere else to go.

BROTHER

Yeah.

SISTER

What about your job?

BROTHER

Yeah. I quit it. Had a farewell party yesterday. Got a bouquet, see, and they gave me a card.

SISTER

Nice.

Brother passes the bouquet and the card to Sister.

Sister tosses the bouquet away, then rips the card to pieces and throws it away.

BROTHER

Hey!

SISTER

Don't you get it yet? Where things stand? Never look back. Those days are done.

BROTHER

But these are... social obligations.

SISTER

We're cutting those obligations off, now aren't we? It should feel like you're entering a monastery.

BROTHER

Okay, got it. ...What about your job?

SISTER

I'll find one.

BROTHER

Sorry about all this.

SISTER

You should be sorry.

Brother pulls a sketchbook out of his rolling suitcase.

BROTHER

I was cleaning the house yesterday, and look what I found.

SISTER

Wow, it's been so long. I can't believe you still have this.

BROTHER

Well yeah. You had all those stickers you were into. I went ahead and stuck them on these pages and that got you really upset.

SISTER

Cause those stickers were just for me – to look at all by myself.

BROTHER

You said, "I don't want these anymore!" and tossed them away. So I picked them up and held onto it.

SISTER

Is that how it was?

Sister flips through the sketchbook, which has a number of cutout pictures inserted between its pages.

BROTHER

What's that?

SISTER

Showing a drawing to Brother

Princess Sakiko. A manga I made up. See, she's dancing with Antonius.

BROTHER

Cool.

SISTER

Wooww!

Sister flips through the drawings.

BROTHER

I've got some drawings in there too. That drawing of the tire is mine. I used to really like tires.

SISTER

I remember you'd rush out in front of cars and nearly get run over.

BROTHER

That's right.

Flipping through the book, they come across cutout pictures, icons of Mother and Father, drawn by Sister as a child.

SISTER

Wow, it's been so long.

BROTHER

That's Mom... and Dad, too.

SISTER

Holding up the parental icons

We'll decorate their graves with these.

BROTHER

They're still alive.

SISTER

But we must think of them as dead.

BROTHER

That's not possible.

SISTER

Why not? It's not impossible. Why not turn them into memories? There is no more going back.

BROTHER

Can't we?

SISTER

What, are you chickening out?

BROTHER

You know, I can't go number two anywhere but at home.

SISTER

How come?

BROTHER

I'm scared someone might pop out of nowhere and attack me.

SISTER

But that happened way back in grade school.

BROTHER

Water, trash, people and whatnot, all sorts of stuff would fall from above.

SISTER

No, that won't do. You're gonna have to learn to go wherever.

BROTHER

I'll try.

SISTER

If not, just wear diapers.

BROTHER

Yeah, that might be more realistic.

SISTER

Right. From now on, everything's gonna be different. There is no going back.

BROTHER

Good-bye, Mama!

SISTER

Good-bye, Papa.

BROTHER

To Sister

I love you.

SISTER

To Brother

I love you too.

Brother tries to touch Sister.

SISTER

No.

BROTHER

Yeah.

SISTER

Like always. I want you to love me without touching me, like always.

BROTHER

I'll never touch you, never ever.

Brother and Sister arouse each other without touching.

SISTER

Promise me that you'll love me forever. Let me believe. This, here, between you and me, now there's something of true value.

BROTHER

I promise. I won't let anyone come between us. No one else will find their way into our paradise. So we'll be all right.

Man enters holding a closed umbrella up high like a tour guide.

He finger-whistles.

Brother and Sister move apart.

MAN

Thank you for waiting.

BROTHER

Oh, hi. Are you our guide?

MAN

Yes. I'm the guide. Isn't it obvious, from the way I'm dressed?

SISTER

Nice to meet you.

MAN

Nice to meet you too. If I may?

BROTHER

Sure.

MAN

You're traveling rather light. Are you going to be okay like that?

BROTHER

Well... it's not suitable?

MAN

That would depend upon the particular individual. With the caveat that we shall assume zero liability for whatever does or does not happen.

SISTER

To brother

What about these sandals?

BROTHER

To sister

I don't know...

To man

Do you?

MAN

Difficult to say.

Man pulls a pair of sneakers out from his bag.

SISTER

Oh, thank you.

BROTHER

Much obliged.

Sister is about to put the sneakers on.

MAN

10000 yen.

BROTHER

What?

MAN

9500.

SISTER

So these aren't...

MAN

Loaners? No, ma'am. ...Tell you what, I'll cut you a deal and slash the price to... 5000 yen.

BROTHER

Well, in that case...

SISTER

No way! We don't have that kind of money. No, thank you.

The man reacts in an exaggerated manner, falling to his knees.

BROTHER

I'm sorry.

MAN

To be perfectly frank... we are fast approaching the terra incognita of terra incognitas. You must remain on high alert, or else the smallest of incidents may lead to a crisis.

SISTER

But they aren't absolutely necessary, are they?

MAN

That depends on how you look at it. I wouldn't say absolutely, but statistically there is a certain likelihood.

SISTER

Then it should have been put that way in the first place.

MAN

No ma'am. I'd like to stress first of all that I will bear zero liability - none whatsoever. Nor is the nation in a position to bear such responsibility. It's still uninsured.

BROTHER

Once we move in, it's our castle, like the saying goes, right?

MAN

A man's castle may well become his prison.

Tadashi's Mother gets up from the chair and joins Man and the others.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Good morning.

MAN

Good morning. Did you sleep well?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Overnight trains are hard on the elderly.

Brother and Sister stare at Tadashi's Mother, who is dressed in a muumuu, and wearing sunglasses.

BROTHER

And she is?

MAN

Oh right. This is Tadashi's Mother.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Hello. How do you do. I'm Tadashi's Mother.

BROTHER

How do you do.

SISTER

Hi.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Gee, you guys sure are young. Is the Kingdom of Tadashi popular with youngsters too?

Brother and Sister look at each other.

BROTHER

...Uh, yes. It is. Kind of like a retreat.

SISTER

Pointing at Tadashi's Mother

Is she dressed suitably?

MAN

Well, she's proceeding at her own risk, so yes.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I forgot to pack a swimsuit, but I suppose we can find one over there.

SISTER

...yeah, I'm not so sure.

MAN

Would you like to buy one? It is, I should mention, a bikini set.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

No, thanks! Those are for youngsters, but maybe you have something that someone like me could put on, something of that sort. Something like a coverup chemise would do. A chemise. Wouldn't there be one of those? A chemise.

BROTHER

A chemise, you say... I don't know.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Don't you have any sunglasses?

SISTER

Huh?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Pointing at her own

These. You'll need to be careful with the harsh sun over there.

BROTHER

We'll get some when we're there then.

MAN

Those at least I can lend you.

Man takes out three pairs of sunglasses. They each put a pair on.

MAN

Time for the ferryboat to depart.

A gusty wind.

Man, Tadashi's Mother, Brother, and Sister look toward where the wind is coming from.

A light beams in. It gradually turns soft.

A postcard with a picture of a luxury cruise boat is projected onto the screen.

Everyone is having a good time, holding a glass of wine, for example.

Relaxing music flows in.

Tadashi's Mother takes a seat.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

The guide kept pouring me more wine, and there I was tipsy, walking down the deck, and this hunky sailor is holding me tight, saying, "Are you all right, madam?" and I reply, "Yes, this is a dance. I'm doing a dance step. Would you like to dance with me?" and he's blushing bright scarlet, saying, "At your service, madame," so I get mischievous and press my breast against him.

Man, Brother, and Sister lie down to sleep, using their luggage as pillows.

Tadashi's Mother gradually nods off in the seat.

Neighbor enters and stands a while, in a daze.

She hangs her clothes in silence. Among them are clothes for a child, including a superhero costume. She puts her arm in its sleeve and manipulates it like a ventriloquist's dummy. It creates the illusion of a mother and child frolicking.

Neighbor exits.

MAN

We're here.

BROTHER

Waking up

Ughhh.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Drinking water

The sun sure is harsh here.

BROTHER

Gently shaking his sister

Hey, we're here.

The sister does not wake up just yet.

MAN

Pulling out a cell phone.

I'll give a call.

Man walks around with the cell phone, but he can't get service.

BROTHER

Shaking his sister some more

Wake up.

SISTER

No!

Sister shakes off Brother's hand and rolls around, still asleep.

BROTHER

Whatever.

Brother pulls out a portable game device and starts playing.

Tadashi's Mother opens up a parasol.

Tadashi enters. He spies on Sister from a hidden corner.

SISTER

Talking in her sleep, but businesslike

Hello. Thank you for waiting. It's my pleasure, sir. Yes. This is Asanuma on the line. Thank you for your patience.

She keeps repeating this phrase.

Tadashi covers Sister with a sheet of cloth.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

My son, you see, is really quite gentle. He's so gentle, it's hard to know just what to do. I recall how he always used to bring home stray cats.

Man hangs a stuffed cat on the laundry rope and squeezes its body. It meows.

MAN

1000 yen. One double A battery and it meows.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Ignoring Man

Father wouldn't let them in the house, so my son set up a cardboard box under a neighborhood shrub and hid them away there.

Tadashi smooths the sheet over Sister so that the contours of her body may be seen.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Who knows where, but he would find cats run over by cars, kittens with malnutrition, you name it, and he'd bring them all together. He called it "the clinic." Meaning the cardboard box. He'd say, "Mom, I'm going to the clinic today." His bike was "the ambulance," and breadcrumbs and milk were "the medicine." Sooner or later, the cats would meow loud at night and neighbors would find them and have them put down. But then my son would find ever more cats somewhere and keep them hidden away. As if it were his own special mission.

Man puts his cell phone away and picks up his bag.

MAN

Let's go.

BROTHER

Oh hey?

MAN

What?

BROTHER

She's not here.

MAN

In the bathroom maybe?

BROTHER

No, she was sleeping. Right here.

To Tadashi's Mother

Have you seen her?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I don't know.

MAN

I thought I told you two to stick together.

BROTHER

I'm sorry.

Tadashi's Mother, Man, and Brother exit to look for Sister.

Tadashi enters. He looks around. He further spreads the sheet he first spread, expanding his territory.

Once he confirms that no one else is around, he brings in Sister and lays her down on the sheet.

Tadashi sets up small speakers and plays sounds like water trickling down a rivulet, and cicadas.

SISTER

Waking up and looking around

Huh?

TADASHI

Huh?

SISTER

Whaaa? ...Where am I?

TADASHI

Um... This spot is called "Gurgle Brook."

SISTER

...Huh?

TADASHI

Welcome to "Tadashi."

SISTER

Tadashi?

TADASHI

You're Miss Asanuma, right?

SISTER

...Who are you?

TADASHI

I'm Tadashi. Tadashi Furukawa. ... "Are cicadas happy?"

SISTER

...Oh.

TADASHI

Welcome to the Kingdom of "Tadashi."

SISTER

Wait, where are the others?

TADASHI

What others?

SISTER

My brother and the guide, and, and your mother was with us, too.

TADASHI

Hard to say. Perhaps they got held up at the border?

SISTER

Maybe.

TADASHI

I'll go ahead and put in a word.

SISTER

Thank you. So, are you sure it's okay for us to stay here?

TADASHI

Yesyes... I'll work it out. ...

Into his cell phone

Uh, uh, *yea-taru, yea-taru*. ... Yesyes, they really were stuck there. But they'll be okay now.

SISTER

Uh, what was that? You just said... *yea-taru*... right?

TADASHI

You mean the Tadashian language?

SISTER

Yes.

TADASHI

Basically all there is is “yes” and “no.” “*Yea-taru*” means “yes” and “*Nay-falu*” means “no.” Everything else comes from their combination.

SISTER

That’s it?

TADASHI

That’s it. The fewer the better, words, right?

SISTER

I see. But what about something that’s neither “yes” nor “no”?

TADASHI

“*Yeatarunayfalu*.”

SISTER

No, I mean, like “eating.”

TADASHI

Anything will do. You’ll get the hang of it. Gesture – use your hands.

SISTER

Okay, right.

TADASHI

But we don’t use much Tadashian on a regular basis. Primarily, I suppose, at the festivals? That’s where we use it most.

SISTER

The festivals? Oh I love festivals. What sort of festivals?

TADASHI

What sort? The festivals are just festivals. Like when it gets festive, it's a festival... to put it into words... you know...

SISTER

Oh, I'm sorry.

TADASHI

You worry too much about too many things. You should take things as they are, not like anything in particular. Tadashi is a nation of nothing particular.

SISTER

Okay. So do you mind if we settle somewhere around here?

TADASHI

Please, go right ahead.

Sister notices the speakers and the sound effects machine.

SISTER

Excuse me...

Pointing at the speakers

...but what are those?

TADASHI

These...

When Tadashi touches a speaker, it moos.

SISTER

Oh wow.

When Sister touches the sound effects machine, various sounds of the ocean, rain, city bustle, laughter and such come out from the speakers.

SISTER

Ah!... I see... yes.

TADASHI

Please feel free.

SISTER

Thank you.

Sister shoots a grin at Tadashi.

TADASHI

...What's the matter?

SISTER

Nice beard.

TADASHI

Um...ahhh... really?

SISTER

Yes. I love beards.

Sister touches Tadashi's beard.

TADASHI

Well, a beard is just... a beard is...

SISTER

Awesome. It's really beardy.

TADASHI

Uh, is it? ... My beard is beardy... I see, I mean...

SISTER

My father had a beard too.

TADASHI

Indeed... I see, I mean...

SISTER

Kinda sorta cute.

TADASHI

Stiffening

...

Neighbor enters.

NEIGHBOR

You there?

TADASHI

As if talking to himself

What the... ugh!

NEIGHBOR

If you're here, speak up. You've got guests.

Man, Brother, and Tadashi's Mother enter.

MAN

Excooose me. Delivery. Right this way.

BROTHER

There she is!

SISTER

Brother!

Brother and Sister draw close to one another and look into each other's eyes.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Tadashi! Tadashi!

TADASHI

What?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Removing the sunglasses

I'm finally here.

TADASHI

Where have you been?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

We looked everywhere.

Pointing toward Neighbor.

She showed us the way. Make sure you thank her for us, son.

TADASHI

Uh-huh.

To Neighbor

...Thanks.

NEIGHBOR

Yup. Bye then.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Thank you so much.

Pulling a Tupperware container full of pickles from her bag.

Please. Homemade pickles.

TADASHI

Enough already.

NEIGHBOR

Okay. ...Thank you.

Neighbor exits.

Brother and Sister decide on their spot, lifting the sheet to create walls, forming their own room. Within it, they begin to unpack their bags.

MAN

I need a signature here.

TADASHI

Signing

As always, sorry for the trouble.

MAN

Delivered promptly, and safely.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I knew you were good, but I have to say I really am impressed. I've heard this place is extremely fashionable. I wish your father could see it. Really. Let's take a photograph, okay? I want to show my neighbors.

TADASHI

Please stop. You're embarrassing me.

Mother hands a digital camera to Man.

MAN

Ready?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Thank you. They were all amazed when I told them that you'd created your own nation. "So impressive." "So wonderful."

MAN

Smile. There! Say cheese!

Man takes a photograph.

Tadashi's Mother and Tadashi freeze in place like in a photographic image.

MAN

A photo of a mother and a son. That image – it's so ordinary. Mother is smiling; the son looks uncomfortable.

Man covers Tadashi's Mother's eyes to create a black line through the photograph that will obscure her identity.

MAN

The son waves a knife around on a packed commuter train and kills five. It happens in a matter of seconds, and after killing the five, he drops the knife. Why five? "Because my name is Tadashi. Five strokes - the perfect number," he says. Later, the mother climbs a mountain and hangs herself from a tree limb. This is a story.

Man covers the son's eyes in the same manner.

MAN

Or, the mother, worn out from nursing her bedridden son, loses hope for the future, kills him and lies by his side, keeping him company. "Both ideograms, justice and life, are five stroke characters. Therefore, Tadashi is living," the mother says. This is a story.

Man points at both Tadashi's Mother and Tadashi.

MAN

A typical mother and son. They are everywhere. They're not in any way special. I am a conduit. I know these things. These ordinary stories. I deliver them. Things. Words. Those who have lost their

place. Those old folks who wander away, out onto the streets. I deliver them to where they belong. I am a conduit.

Man exits.

Tadashi slowly enters, holding a plate with a single large chunk of tofu on it. Around him, Brother, Sister, and Tadashi's Mother gather. It looks like a solemn ritual.

TADASHI

Now we begin.

Tadashi bows. The others imitate him and bow.

TADASHI

Here commences the ritual wherein you all become subjects of this sovereign nation.

Tadashi passes around the tofu, from which he has already taken a bite. Each takes a small bite off the big piece.

TADASHI

Yea-taru! Yea-taru! Yeeaaaa-taru!

Tadashi signals to the others to follow his example.

ALL

In unison with Tadashi

Yea-taru! Yea-taru! Yeeaaaa-taru!

Tadashi takes another bite of the tofu and passes it around. This time, it's a large, ferocious bite. Each imitates.

SISTER

Feeling something strange in her mouth

Hm?

Sister removes a cicada from her mouth.

TADASHI

You win! You're the winner!

SISTER

Huh?

BROTHER

A cicada?

SISTER

Yeah.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Yesyes. A cicada is an amazing thing. It's a deity.

BROTHER

What do you mean by that?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Back home, cicadas are deities.

To Tadashi

Right?

TADASHI

Yeeaaaa-taru!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

In my hometown, you hide the cicada inside a single piece of inari-sushi.

Starts chanting

Ooga booga booga aahhh, ooga booga booga baahhh... We pass the cicada around from mouth to mouth. The person to whom you pass the cicada will become your keeper.

SISTER

Huh? What do you mean by keeper?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Never mind. There, put it in your mouth.

SISTER

Okay.

Sister places the cicada between her teeth.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Chanting and clapping her hands

Ooga booga booga aahhh, ooga booga booga baahhh...

Tadashi and Brother join the chanting and clap their hands.

Sister, not knowing what to do, approaches Brother.

Tadashi waits right next to Brother, opening his mouth wide.

Brother imitates Tadashi.

Tadashi interferes with Brother, using his hands.

Brother interferes with Tadashi, imitating Tadashi.

Tadashi emits a queer screech.

It sounds like some sort of animal wooing ritual.

Brother cannot bring himself to go this far with the imitation.

Sister, no longer having a choice, transfers the cicada to Tadashi's mouth.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Bingo!

TADASHI

Mumbling with his mouth full

Yeeaaaaa-taru!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Applauding

Yesyes, wonderful!

BROTHER AND SISTER

Imitating Tadashi

Yeeaaaaa-taru!

MAN

From offstage

Excooose me!

Man enters holding a cardboard box.

MAN

I'll just need your signature here, please.

TADASHI

Thank you for your trouble.

He signs as if signing a treaty.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Oh, hello there. Would you like some of my homemade pickles for the road?

MAN

No, thank you.

Tadashi passes the cicada in his mouth to Brother.

BROTHER

Hey, he gave it to me.

To Sister

Want it?

SISTER

No thanks.

BROTHER

Referring to the cicada

Your loss.

Man puts the box down.

MAN

Thank you.

Man exits.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

What have you got there?

TADASHI

Something important.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Oh really? May I open it?

TADASHI

Nay-falu! Nay-falu! The party's over, over!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Hog.

BROTHER

To Tadashi and Tadashi's Mother

Now now.

To all

We should be going.

SISTER

Good-bye.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

See you later.

Brother and Sister return to their spot.

Mother secures a spot for herself and arranges the space with a memorial tablet, a dinner set, knitting tools and other items.

Night comes on, quickly, before anyone knows it. Each prepares for bedtime, making the bed, etc.

Tadashi carries his cardboard box to the corner, and opens it. It's filled with small stuffed animals.

TADASHI

Pulling out the stuffed animals

Welcome... Great to see you, was it cramped in there? ...okay, I see... yesyes, one by one please, one at a time... don't rush... no fighting, no fighting... I hope you can get along well with the old-timers, and the big people too. I hope so, if you please.

From between the folds of the sheet, Tadashi pulls out numerous action figures, and characters of all sorts.

TADASHI

We will create a kingdom where everyone will cooperate and live joyfully and happily ever after, won't we? Won't we?

Loud rock music is heard from the adjacent apartment.

TADASHI

Oh man!

Brother and Sister chat behind the wall made from the sheet. Sister switches on a lamp.

Their silhouettes, through the sheet, are clearly visible to Tadashi.

BROTHER

Can't sleep?

SISTER

No. I've got ringing in my ears. This ringing, like there are people yelling at me.

BROTHER

It's all in your head. Think of it as the sound of waves. There, see?

Brother plays the sound of waves.

Isn't that nice?

SISTER

Yeah. But it's fake.

BROTHER

Well, sure maybe.

SISTER

Well, yeah.

BROTHER

So... what about putting it out of your mind altogether?

SISTER

I wish I could!

BROTHER

So I'll keep repeating your name then. So you can fall asleep.

SISTER

Really? You'll say Sakiko?

BROTHER

No, Sakippe. That's what I've always called you.

SISTER

Good night.

Sister lies down.

BROTHER

Sakippe... Sakippe...

SISTER

...I just had a dream. You and I are traveling together. We arrive at a small island on a boat, and there we live happily ever after, just the two of us.

BROTHER

We fish, we nap...

SISTER

Yeah... Hey, can I call you Antonius?

BROTHER

Yeah, sure.

SISTER

Okay. Antonius! My dear Antonius!

BROTHER

Look.

Pointing at the sheet

There we are.

SISTER

Yes indeed.

BROTHER

We are mirages and those are our true selves, I'm sure of it.

Sister tries to touch Brother.

BROTHER

Don't touch! We made a pact.

SISTER

But aren't we mirages? So it's okay. See? Antonius.

BROTHER

Yeah, Sakippe. It's all a mirage...

The image of the two caressing each other gets projected onto the sheet.

The two say each other's names.

Tadashi shoves his hand inside his pants and rubs hard.

Tadashi's Mother observes Tadashi through a pair of opera glasses.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Tadashi.

TADASHI

Huh?

Tadashi stops what he's doing and turns his back to her.

Tadashi's Mother approaches Tadashi.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Do you need any help?

TADASHI

Pretending to be half-asleep

Help with what? I'm sleeping.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I understand. Mommy understands. Let me help you.

Squeezing her breasts

Wanna suck?

TADASHI

...

Tadashi moves away from Tadashi's Mother.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Don't be shy. You've been so serious-minded, so committed to improving the world, that you haven't had time to get to know girls. Mommy understands.

TADASHI

...Where have you been?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

All over. The guide brought me many places.

TADASHI

Doesn't he already have enough deliveries to make? Anyway, don't go far. It's not safe.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Yesyes, yesyes.

TADASHI

...Do you really?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Huh?

TADASHI

Do you really understand? How much thinking I've been doing for the world, how much for the earth, and for the universe, do you understand how much thinking I do?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Yes, I understand.

TADASHI

Then do something about it.

Mother reaches down toward Tadashi's groin.

TADASHI

Knocking her hand away

Not that! Not from an old hag like you!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

But you used to do this all the time, right?

TADASHI

...I'm not what I was any more.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I understand. Well then, what can I do for you?

TADASHI

A king needs a queen, does he not?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Yeah.

TADASHI

Well then, you could provide a candidate?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

From where?

TADASHI

Beats me.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

How about the young lady next door?

TADASHI

She's no good. She's an idiot. Isn't there someone else?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Really? ...Ummm...

TADASHI

For example, like maybe... that girl.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

She's no good.

TADASHI

Why not?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Because she's got a thing with her brother.

TADASHI

Well, but that's impure! It's not how it's supposed to be, now is it?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I would have to say that the young lady next door is a better choice. She's straightforward.

TADASHI

No way!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Really? But those two have all sorts of problems, don't you think?

TADASHI

Nevertheless they are my subjects. It's my duty as the king to provide instruction for them.

Tadashi leaves his spot and wraps himself with the sheet.

His body is cocooned, like a pupa.

Neighbor enters wearing headphones and carrying a clothesline, and some laundry. She kicks at the sheet and reveals some of the floor.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Oh, hello there.

NEIGHBOR

Referring to the sheet

Hey, watch it. The thing's spilling over.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Sorry. Well, I owe you a thank you.

NEIGHBOR

Huh?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

The sound. You've turned it down.

NEIGHBOR

Oh. Well all you have to do is ask and I'll gladly stop. But he never says a word, that little fuzz-face.

Neighbor stretches out the clothesline and hangs her laundry.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

He's a little shy. Pardon me, but do you mind if I make use of that spot right next to you?

NEIGHBOR

Go right ahead.

Tadashi's Mother, standing next to Neighbor, hangs some daikon radish from the clothesline.

NEIGHBOR

By the way, your pickles the other day were delicious.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Oh yeah? I'll bring you some more right now.

NEIGHBOR

No, no, that's okay. Next time. We're neighbors after all.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Oh, okay.

She looks at the anime towel Neighbor is hanging to dry.

How's your child?

NEIGHBOR

Hmm? ... Fine, thanks.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Glad to hear it. What's his name again?

NEIGHBOR

...Sonny. It's about time you remembered that. Sonny, like the sun. A boy.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

What a nice name.

NEIGHBOR

But he's hypersensitive to the sun, so he doesn't go out much. He's Sonny, but shady. He's taken after me. I don't like the sun, either.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I see.

NEIGHBOR

Calling stage left

Don't get carried away or you'll hurt yourself. That's enough!

To Tadashi's Mother

He never listens to me.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Great to be full of beans.

NEIGHBOR

But only in the shade.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

My son never listens to me either.

NEIGHBOR

Yeah, he's stubborn.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I wish he had someone like you on his side. Someone who could give him a good talking to.

NEIGHBOR

But I do. He's fun to tease.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

No, I mean, well... what about as a wife?

NEIGHBOR

A wife?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Yesyes...

NEIGHBOR

...

TADASHI'S MOTHER

I'll help you with whatever you need, and take care of your child, and you can eat tons of pickles.

NEIGHBOR

No, no, no.

Neighbor exits.

Tadashi's Mother takes out the pedometer and wraps it around her head.

Then she starts nodding her head.

Postcards from different places are projected onto the screen.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Still nodding her head

...Beijing... Moscow, Paris, Rome, Berlin, and then Africa, what's in Africa...? How far will I get today? ...Yesyes, there, that's good. I've done my best. That's enough for today. Yesyes, good job.

Neighbor enters with a significant accumulation of Tupperware.

NEIGHBOR

I thought you might want these containers back. I've had them for a while. Thanks.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Oh my.

NEIGHBOR

Calling offstage

Sonny! Cut that out already!

Neighbor exits.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

...Indeed, indeed, yesyes, I see... Father, I've done my best for today. Thank you for watching over a big nitwit like me.

Sister attempts to enter from behind the "sheet wall." But she cannot move, as her Brother won't let go of her hand.

SISTER

Let me go.

BROTHER

You're going? Are you really going?

SISTER

I am.

BROTHER

You're gonna turn your back on your brother and go?

SISTER

What can I do? I was summoned.

BROTHER

Stay a little longer. I'm about to have a fit.

SISTER

You'll be all right.

BROTHER

No, this is different. This one's bigger than ever.

SISTER

Okay then, I'll wrap you up a little tighter.

BROTHER

Would you?

Sister wraps up Brother's body like a mummy in several layers of the sheet.

Tadashi's Mother stops nodding her head.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Looking at the pedometer

Five thousand. Still more to go. But let's call it a day! ...

Tadashi's Mother returns to her spot, presses her hands together in prayer toward the memorial tablet, and rolls herself up in the sheet, wrapping herself as if she were covering herself with a comforter.

Sister finishes wrapping Brother.

SISTER

Now you'll be okay.

BROTHER

Thank you. I feel better, sort of.

SISTER

See you.

BROTHER

Oh!

SISTER

What?

BROTHER

My face! My face is exposed! This won't do!

SISTER

You'll be all right.

BROTHER

Hey! Don't you remember what we came here for?

SISTER

Yes, I do.

BROTHER

No, you don't.

SISTER

It's because you were tempted to kill someone, isn't that it?

BROTHER

You make me sound like some kind of psycho.

SISTER

Aren't you?

BROTHER

I'm not. Because if someone tries to kill me, then I have no choice but to kill that someone, like it or not.

SISTER

So it's self-defense.

BROTHER

Exactly. But in my case, being afraid that some passerby on the street might attack me, I've kept a knife in hand, in my pocket, and so what they're saying is that it's not necessarily self-defense.

SISTER

Poor Brother.

BROTHER

Yeah. I think I'll be all right here because there are so few people around. But so, anyway, could you stick a picture or something on my face so people can't tell who I am?

SISTER

Yup, sure thing.

Sister pulls out a sketchbook and searches for a drawing.

SISTER

What kind do you want?

BROTHER

Anything will do.

SISTER

How about a flower?

BROTHER

Oh yeah, that'll do.

Sister sticks the drawing of a flower on Brother's face.

Brother now resembles a cloth-wrapped totem pole.

BROTHER

Thank you.

SISTER

I'm going now.

BROTHER

Take care. I love you.

SISTER

I love you too.

Sister exits.

Man enters with a fishing rod.

The sound of rolling waves.

Man takes a stepladder out from beneath the sheet and sits on its top step.

Then he attaches some bait to the tip of the rod and casts it onto the sheet.

The rugged surface of the sheet may look like swelling waves.

MAN

To travel the world is to taste it. There are things I've learned from these tastings. Delicacies are rarely simple. Some may be chewy, while others smell pungent; some may be bitter, spicy, and sweet – all at once. Life has many flavors. Sour, sweet, bitter, pungent – all must be tasted - which indeed gets right to the point. To fully appreciate delicacy requires therefore an accumulation of experience: it is an acquired taste. Without that experience, one is in no position to truly savor.

Man reels in his fishing rod.

MAN

It's big! I've caught the big one!

The hook pulls up and raises the sheet.

The raised sheet takes a human shape. A face biting the hook in her mouth peeks out from the sheet. It's Tadashi's Mother.

MAN

Lo and Behold! A delicacy! I've caught a rare delicacy!

Tadashi's Mother wiggles under the sheet for a while before becoming still.

Man smooths the sheet over Tadashi's Mother so that the contours of her body may be seen.

Man puts the rod away, comes down from the stepladder, and exits with Tadashi's mother.

The sound of waves dissipates.

Tadashi enters, wearing a long beard shaped like a necktie.

He has a radio-controlled miniature helicopter with him.

Sister enters.

TADASHI

Hello. Sorry for calling on such short notice.

SISTER

No worries. Well...

TADASHI

Yes?

SISTER

Your beard, it's awesome.

TADASHI

Fidgeting

Huh? Is it? ...I see... Indeed...

SISTER

It's impressive.

TADASHI

Even more fidgety

Oh really? ...Can't tell, well, for myself, I mean, on my own. Well, shall we go?

SISTER

Where are we going?

TADASHI

Somewhere I've been wanting to show you.

SISTER

Okay.

TADASHI

So, come on board. Careful now.

SISTER

Sure.

Tadashi flies the radio-controlled helicopter.

The rugged surface of the sheet and human shapes wrapped in the sheet resemble the surface of the earth.

Is it a desert here, perhaps?

TADASHI

See, you can see the whole place from here.

SISTER

Yes.

TADASHI

That's the Furukawa River. As you can see, it's run dry. And that's Asanuma Marsh. It's a new place.

SISTER

Did you make it for me?

TADASHI

...

SISTER

That was nice of you.

TADASHI

This nation still relies upon Japan for many things, such as electricity and water. I hope we can work together to make this nation truly self-sufficient so we may live happily ever after.

Tadashi controls the helicopter and leads Sister to a place covered with cloth that looks like a hill.

TADASHI

About this place.

Tadashi flips up the sheet that covers the hill, exposing an area crammed with heaps of stuffed animals and action figures, figures that react to sound, toys that flick and move about.

SISTER

Wow, awesome.

TADASHI

“Friendship Heights” is its name. I've always wanted to bring you here.

SISTER

Thank you so much... I must say, Mr. Tadashi, you are rather adorable.

TADASHI

Adorable? ...Hey, you're teasing me.

SISTER

No, I'm not.

TADASHI

Really? ...So then...

Tadashi grabs a rope and tries to bind Sister.

SISTER

What are you-

Tadashi binds Sister with the rope and presses "pause" on her, as if she were a doll.

SISTER

Stop!

TADASHI

Don't move!

Sister resists, throwing some stuffed animals at Tadashi.

TADASHI

Heeyyy! What the hell are you doing!

SISTER

What about you?

TADASHI

This is a violation!

SISTER

I'm the one getting violated here!

TADASHI

Shut your face! Go away.

SISTER

Oh I will.

Sister exits.

Tadashi remains, dumbfounded. After a while, he rearranges the stuffed animals neatly. Tadashi pulls the animals close to him and goes to sleep, hugging them tight.

TADASHI

Come closer, all of you. You guys are my friends. You won't leave me, will you... I'll never leave you guys...

Tadashi fumbles with some stuffed animals that squeak.

Animals meow, moo, and baa. Tadashi plays them as if he were a conductor of an orchestra.

Neighbor enters.

Tadashi, flustered, hurriedly hides the animals and then hides himself underneath the sheet as well.

NEIGHBOR

Hey! Excuse me! ...Is anyone here? ...Hey!

Neighbor flips up different parts of the sheet, as if she's looking for something.

NEIGHBOR

Hey, have you seen my boy Sonny? ...Hello! Is anyone here?

Neighbor notices Brother standing frozen like a totem pole.

NEIGHBOR

Hey, have you seen my boy Sonny? He's not around.

BROTHER

...

NEIGHBOR

Hey!

Neighbor rips off the drawing pasted on Brother's face.

BROTHER

Whoa!

NEIGHBOR

What the hell are you up to?

BROTHER

Ughhh... nothing special.

NEIGHBOR

Have you seen my boy Sonny around?

BROTHER

...No, I haven't.

NEIGHBOR

Uh, okay.

BROTHER

I'm sorry.

NEIGHBOR

Huh?

BROTHER

Have I done something wrong?

NEIGHBOR

What do you mean?

BROTHER

I passed out for a while.

NEIGHBOR

Have you done something?

BROTHER

No.

NEIGHBOR

You did something. Tell me.

BROTHER

No, I mean, how could I, all wrapped up like this?

NEIGHBOR

You've got to tell me.

BROTHER

I can't... But in any case you better not get near me.

NEIGHBOR

How come?

BROTHER

I'm afraid I might do some harm.

NEIGHBOR

Harm?

BROTHER

Yes.

NEIGHBOR

...What have you done to Sonny?

BROTHER

Nothing, no.

NEIGHBOR

What the hell have you done?

BROTHER

I'll kill you! Here's a knife! See, I've got a knife now. I'll slash through and stab you, right in the heart!

NEIGHBOR

What have you done to Sonny?

BROTHER

Like I've been telling you, I don't know! ...Who the hell is Sonny anyway?

NEIGHBOR

...He's my son. Sonny.

BROTHER

Oh. Would you be so kind as to tell me what he's like?

NEIGHBOR

He's not your average kid.

BROTHER

Meaning?

NEIGHBOR

He molts. The more he molts, the stronger he becomes. He was a human kid before, but he's shed so much old skin that by now he must've evolved into something altogether new.

BROTHER

If he's not human, then what is he?

NEIGHBOR

Don't know. There's no name for it yet. He's shed so much skin, he's evolved too far too fast. He's gotten beyond terms like male or female or human. He's ahead of us all.

BROTHER

You have a child like that?

NEIGHBOR

I did. Not any more.

BROTHER

Oh my god, I wish I could've been around someone like that.

NEIGHBOR

Let it go already. And I'll let go too. I believe he's gone somewhere really far away.

BROTHER

We'll look for him.

NEIGHBOR

I'm past it now.

BROTHER

But wait. What a wonderful son you have! And how lonely he must be. We absolutely must go find him.

NEIGHBOR

Don't worry about Sonny. He's ahead of us all. The problem is

Pointing at herself

...here...

Removing the dry clothes from the clothesline

How much more time can I spend hanging laundry? Well? Seems like it's all I do. Wake up, do the laundry, go to work, come home and do more laundry, and then still more before going to bed... But you know, without Sonny around, I don't have to do so much laundry, now do I? How about that?

BROTHER

Would you like to... adopt me?

NEIGHBOR

Huh? What do you mean?

BROTHER

I meant what I said. What do you say? Would you make me Second Sonny, if you please?

NEIGHBOR

...

BROTHER

I'm afraid I might kill someone if I remain as is.

NEIGHBOR

But you haven't killed anyone yet, have you?

BROTHER

No.

NEIGHBOR

So it's okay.

BROTHER

But I'm not sure anymore. I'm afraid I might have done something without knowing it. So I'm shedding my old clothes.

As if making a confession of his love

...Will you... will you launder my new clothes?

NEIGHBOR

...

Slowly caressing Brother's face

Sonny, where have you been?

BROTHER

Uh, yes.

NEIGHBOR

Ready?

Neighbor spins Brother.

Brother emerges from the sheet like an insect out of a cocoon.

Neighbor and Brother exit.

Man, Tadashi's Mother and Tadashi enter.

MAN

...Well, it certainly is rather unexpected, like a kind of accident, right?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Hm? Uh-huh.

MAN

To Tadashi's Mother

Look. There's something.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Hmm?

MAN

Hold on.

Man removes an eyelash from Tadashi's Mother's cheek.

MAN

Looks tasty.

He eats the eyelash.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

No!

MAN

Chuckling

...Go ahead and tell him.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Me? No, it's too embarrassing!

TADASHI

...

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Okay, then. Well, he and I are going to get married, more or less.

MAN

More or less?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Sorry, sorry. That's not what I meant!

MAN

I'm a little hurt.

TADASHI

...

TADASHI'S MOTHER

What I'm trying to say is that I've decided to take this opportunity to finally let go of my son.

Referring to Man

To have and to hold...

TADASHI

To Man

...Please don't take her seriously. She's getting totally senile...

MAN

Tadashi, my dear son, Tadashi.

TADASHI

I'm no son of yours!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Stop it!

TADASHI

...

To Tadashi's Mother.

You haven't forgotten about finding a queen for me, have you?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Of course not. But I haven't come across anyone nice.

TADASHI

...

TADASHI'S MOTHER

You've been looking around for Miss Right yourself, haven't you?

TADASHI

To man

...Don't make her start thinking that she's special. As for you, she'd take any guy with a pulse.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

He hasn't been able to let go of me.

MAN

Tadashi. This is for you. You like this kind of stuff, don't you?

Man pulls a stuffed animal out of his backpack and throws it toward Tadashi.

TADASHI

...

MAN

If you don't like it, just throw it away.

TADASHI

You know what they called me in school? "The son of the whiteface whore." *Into the love shack of the whiteface whore / someone new every day / teachers and dads – the head of the PTA / from the janitor to the principal / fellow travelers all – brothers in arms* —That's what they would chant right in front of me.

Tadashi's Mother drags the sheet and turns it over. Man helps her.

TADASHI

Stop! This is my kingdom!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

...Ha! It's a Tinkertoy kingdom. I could squash it any time.

MAN

As if drawing in a fishing net

It's huge, so huge! ...

Looking at Tadashi

Oh no, it's one of those. Another lousy cut of fish. Too dry for grilling, too thick for stew, half-rancid - tastes like sand, tastes like shit!

Tadashi gets snapped away from the sheet.

Man and Tadashi's Mother move away, open the parasol, open their basket and sit down. As if they've come to a picnic.

Sister enters with a cell phone.

SISTER

Hello. Helloooo.

Listless, Tadashi picks up his phone and puts it to his ear.

TADASHI

Hello.

SISTER

It's me.

TADASHI

Weren't you leaving?

SISTER

I've decided not to. Nowhere else to go... Is it a good time to talk?

TADASHI

No, not really.

SISTER

Oh well. I'll tell you anyway. I've been thinking about it, and I believe I'd like to go out with you.

TADASHI

Huh?

SISTER

You're not into it?

TADASHI

Huh? Well yeah, but is it okay with you?

SISTER

Yes, it is.

TADASHI

You're okay with the prospect of becoming a queen?

SISTER

... Yes.

TADASHI

For sure? Really?

SISTER

Yes.

TADASHI

Really really?

SISTER

Yes...

Sister starts sobbing.

TADASHI

Why? Why are you crying?

SISTER

My brother's gone.

TADASHI

Really? Where to?

SISTER

I don't know. He said he's getting adopted by the lady next door. He's going to take the place of her son.

TADASHI

What? That dragon next door has no son.

SISTER

Huh? But...

TADASHI

I've never seen one.

SISTER

Well... There was a note. It said, "Do not search for me. I shall return once I've shed my old skin."

TADASHI

I see. So if he's coming back sometime...

SISTER

But what shall I do till then? We've been one, the two of us together. We were going to live in the shadows, picking each other's scabs and licking the wounds.

TADASHI

If only I could be your pillar...

SISTER

You can't. But... yes, I'll be with you.

TADASHI

I don't want you to force yourself...

SISTER

But, yes, I will force myself. You will marry me, and I will serve you like a slave.

TADASHI

I won't treat you like that.

SISTER

I know you will. And that's okay. Showered with curses, and treated like a doll, I'll have no choice but to become numb, and paralyzed.

TADASHI

What the hell do you think I am?

SISTER

Oops? Did I make you mad?

TADASHI

Stop playing!

SISTER

Yes. I will date you, and fuel your fire. I will never, ever open my heart. Because my heart belongs to my Brother, and my Brother alone.

TADASHI

Then I can't be with you.

SISTER

Yes, you can. Because we are very much alike.

TADASHI

In what way?

SISTER

We cannot accept reality.

TADASHI

I'm different than you.

SISTER

You're no different. So, why, for goodness sake, shouldn't we live together pretending to accept reality?

TADASHI

...

SISTER

We'll delude ourselves. Some things last longer, thanks to delusion. I'm thinking of finding the intention to get ready to begin to prepare myself to make every effort to like you. You should do the same.

TADASHI

...

SISTER

Good night!

Sister exits.

Tadashi throws away his phone. Then he hugs his stuffed animals and heads to "Friendship Heights."

TADASHI

Fondling an animal that makes sounds

...

Tadashi plays some heroic music.

TADASHI

Okay, everyone, keep calm and listen up. This nation is on the precipice of a fateful crisis... We face powerful threats from the outside and aggressive maneuvers by insurgents, not to mention tensions with the neighboring country. We need to make the first move to overcome this crisis. Do you have any good ideas? ...

He picks up a stuffed animal.

What about you? ...

He picks up an action figure.

Or you? ...Even the smallest idea is welcome... Why don't you say something?

Tadashi peels off his clothes.

Let me ask you one question. Do you see the emperor's new clothes? ...Let me ask it once again. Do you see the emperor's new clothes? ...Answer me! ...Don't you see the emperor's new clothes?

Tadashi interrogates the stuffed animals, picking them up one by one.

You beasts, you're making a fool of me! Go to hell! Get lost!

Tadashi stomps on the stuffed animals, tearing off their heads and limbs.

Man enters holding the suitcase Brother used to have.

Tadashi's Mother also enters.

MAN

Excooose me! Delivery. Oh, hello.

TADASHI

Whooooaaaa!

Tadashi wraps himself in the sheet.

MAN

Miss Asanuma.

SISTER

Yes.

MAN

It's for you. I need your signature here.

Sister signs the paper and receives the suitcase.

Thank you.

Sister opens Brother's suitcase. Inside she finds the clothes he had worn and a knife.

SISTER

Brother.

Sister holds Brother's clothes tightly and puts them on.

MAN

...

To Tadashi's Mother

Now, shall we go?

Tadashi's Mother stands up, showing off her rear end, wrapped in the sheet like a bride in a wedding dress.

TADASHI

Mom.

Tadashi gropes for the back of the sheet and slips himself inside Tadashi's Mother's dress.

MAN

A murder-suicide of a mother and a son. By day, the mother worked in a supermarket, standing behind the register. By night, the red light district, standing on the corner. She would never let her son near liquor or the betting table or women. Purity, honesty and beauty—that was her parental philosophy. This is a story. A story someone told about someone else.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

...Oh... yes... good boy. That's a good boy. Never ever doubt.

Rubbing her lower abdomen

This has been your kingdom from the beginning.

Man exits.

Sister wallows about tightly hugging herself while dressed in her Brother's clothes.

Tadashi emerges from the sheet between his mother's legs. Out pops his head.

TADASHI

Phew! ...Help! I'm suffocating!

SISTER

Oh hey. What are you doing?

TADASHI

I'm getting sucked in!

SISTER

Will you be with me?

TADASHI

Huh? Hold on, this is not the moment.

SISTER

Will you marry me?

Tightly hugging herself while dressed in her Brother's clothes

I'm this close to losing it.

TADASHI

...Okay. We'll get married. We'll have a national ceremony for our wedding...

He faints.

SISTER

Thank you!

Sister flips up the sheet that is wrapped around Tadashi's

Mother, as if it were a fancy dress, and drags out Tadashi.

Tadashi's Mother turns around. Her face is painted white.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Tadashi! Father's dead! What shall we do?

TADASHI

As if he were talking in his sleep

Mom! Mom!

SISTER

Are you all right?

TADASHI

...Thanks. Did you just say my name?

SISTER

Uh-uh.

TADASHI

Oh, I see.

SISTER

Tadashi.

TADASHI

Oh. I haven't asked your name yet, have I?

SISTER

Sakiko. A child in bloom.

TADASHI

A good name.

SISTER

So is Tadashi.

TADASHI

Thanks.

Tadashi plays some music.

SISTER

Pulling a tiara out of her pocket and putting it on her head

Princess Sakiko. On her way to an unhappy marriage. All she has are the sweet memories of her days with Antonius...

The wedding begins.

Tadashi's Mother is acting senile.

Tadashi and Sister turn to each other.

TADASHI

Will you pledge your everlasting love?

SISTER

...Yes.

Tadashi urges Sister to say the same.

SISTER

Will you pledge your everlasting love?

TADASHI

Yes... Now, I may kiss the bride...

Tadashi places his hands on Sister's neck and slowly strangles her. Sister, struggling, cannot get free.

SISTER

Ugh!

TADASHI

...Now you're just like the rest of them.

SISTER

...No, I'm not!

TADASHI

...You'll be all right.

Tadashi's Mother suddenly wedges herself between the two.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Father! Father!

TADASHI

Loosening his grip

Huh?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Who's that woman?

TADASHI

I'm not Father. I'm Tadashi!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Tadashi? ...

Nodding

Oh, I see... So, Tadashi.

TADASHI

To his Mother

What?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

He's gone.

TADASHI

Huh?

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Father's gone.

TADASHI

...

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Reading a note.

"I'm setting out on a journey. All I have are the sweet memories of my days with you." ...What's this?

TADASHI

Who knows. Dad's dead - you know that!

Tadashi's Mother starts to walk away.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

He didn't seem like that kind of person.

TADASHI

Where are you going? Don't go too far. Be careful!

TADASHI'S MOTHER

But we've talked about the things we're gonna do together...

Neighbor and Brother enter.

NEIGHBOR

Sonny! Come this way!

BROTHER

Yeeesss!

Brother and Neighbor lift the sheet from below.

Brother sets up the stepladder, steps on it, and climbs the ladder holding the sheet high above him.

Right between Tadashi and Sister, the sheet heaves up and the two tumble down the slope of the sheet.

Sister pulls a knife out of her Brother's nearby suitcase and hides it on her person.

BROTHER

How's this?

NEIGHBOR

Higher. Go higher!

Brother climbs further up the stepladder.

BROTHER

Or here?

NEIGHBOR

Yeah, okay. This'll be our new home. How do you feel?

Neighbor stretches the clothesline from the stepladder and hangs the laundry.

BROTHER

I couldn't be better. Now I'm neither a man nor a human being. That's right, I'm the keeper. Sakippe, do you know where your brother is? Right below you. Underground. Sonny doesn't get along with the sun, so here we are. We'll live here for years and years, decades, no, for centuries, and some day, I'll shed this skin and fly out into the sky. Until that day, your Brother remains a pillar to support the earth you stand on. I'll remain here thinking of you.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

Wearing the sunglasses and the pedometer, observing the uneven lumps of the sheet

There, that's Diamond Head, that's Waikiki Beach... we have a good view here...

TADASHI

To Sister

Hey, where are you?

SISTER

To Tadashi

I'm here. You kissed me all wrong... Now it's my turn.

TADASHI

It's the kiss for forever.

SISTER

Holding up the knife

Yes, the battle begins... for forever...

Tadashi and Sister, each from either side climbs step by step up the hill covered with the sheet.

A music box chimes in and everyone's movements turn mechanical.

Man enters.

MAN

Please take a look. This display is said to represent the origin of this land.

TADASHI'S MOTHER

...

Moving like a machine

Where am I right now?

MAN

...Everywhere.

Man exits.

Everyone on stage remains in their places and repeats movements like those of mechanical dolls.

Gradually their movements become confused, their bodies crooked and their footing unsure, but they do not cease their movements. Until they crumble to dust.

Black out.

The End

Blood Match

By Oliver Mayer

Adaptation of Federico García Lorca's *Bodas de sangre*

El grito de la *seguriya ranchera*: Roots of Lorca's Theatre in Oliver Mayer's *Blood Match*

Oliver Mayer's *Blood Match* (2015) is not a translation, but rather a new work of dramatic verse and prose inspired by Federico García Lorca's *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) (1933). Even so, it should still bear great interest for *The Mercurian* and its readership, as Mayer accomplishes the formidable and protean task of refashioning across time, culture, and language key elements of Lorca's theatrical masterpiece—a world governed by ravenous supernatural forces, a secret wish for revenge, a sense of impending doom, an obsessive passion that can only be harbored on the run, and an all-consuming destruction that boils over from beneath the surface. The inspiration provided by Lorca's *Bodas de sangre* in Mayer's writing is two-fold. First through Mayer's creativity, dramatic motifs and archetypal characters from *Bodas de sangre* provide a poetic framework to address onstage the corruption, shadow economy and violence resulting from Sinaloa becoming the center of the global drug trade. Second, Oliver Mayer takes a lesson from Lorca in crafting a theatrical world from the culture grounded beneath the landscape of Sinaloa, Mexico.

The exchange of meaning that takes place between Lorca's Andalucía and Mayer's Sinaloa is built upon the striking resonance between the two worlds. As Mayer pointed out in an interview, the central connection between Lorca's characters and his own is the precarious conditions of life on the margins, of living outside the precepts of the law or at the limits of convention. The characters embrace this marginality as it seals their doomed fate. Working from this kernel of synchronicity, Oliver Mayer transforms the characters, symbolism, and motifs of *Bodas de sangre* to speak to a world of opium farmers living under the shadow of the cartel. The family feud is fueled by a competition for the cartel's money, and the wedding itself becomes a business transaction to unite two lucrative opium farms. When the Bridegroom hunts the Bride and Leonardo in the countryside near the end of the play, he carries out the hunt under the watch of a cartel man. As Mayer points out, "The Groom is unknowingly doing the dirty work yet again for the conglomerate, thinking that he is satisfying his blood lust and honor when he is actually doing business for the cartel."¹ Although the play is a radical departure from *Bodas de sangre*, Lorca's play ghosts the characters of *Blood Match* at every turn. And this haunting mourns for what, at the expense of poetry, the archetypes are missing, or rather, cannot retain in this world—an irresistible call to transcend self and return to their structural roots. For example, the lovers boil over with hatred and self-obsession and this corrupted passion is dramatized in their final scene in the poppy fields. Throughout the play, the repeated image of poppies glowing in the dark evokes the space of the opium fields. The poppies are receptacles for the moonlight and the doom that it beckons. Sharing a moment of ecstasy in the fields, Leonardo and the Bride shoot heroin, giving a whole new meaning to Lorca's metaphor of "*clavos de luna*," which join the lovers to one another and their dark fate. In this case, their secret and

¹ Oliver Mayer, interview by author, 30 July 2015.

irresistible desire is an addiction to escapism and self-destruction. Perhaps, this is the best one can hope for in world poisoned by drugs and blood money pumping in and out of U.S. and global markets that corrupt Sinaloa and riddle Northern Mexico with violence.

Drawing upon the borderlands and the popular culture of greater Mexico with postmodern flare, Oliver Mayer casts La Santa Muerte and José Malverde as the supernatural mediators of a theatrical world where we encounter singer Gloria Trevi, boxer Julio César Chávez, and children's TV Personality el Chapulín Colorado. In the first scene, the shrewd Mother of the Bridegroom, "dressed very telenovela," prays before her alter of La Santa Muerte asking that she finally be granted revenge against the Felix family. The figure of La Santa Muerte comes to life and answers her devotee, saying "Te bendigo" (I bless you), an utterance that sets the wheels of tragic fate in motion. In Mayer's postmodern borderlands, the *punkera* Bride is introduced with the thumping beat of Gloria Trevi's hit "Pelo Suelto," the leitmotif that melodramatically underscores her moments of amorousness, distress, and rage. As a pop culture derived archetype, Trevi embellishes the Bride's destructive impulses with a youthful rebellion familiar to contemporary audiences. José Malverde, the bandit folk saint and patron of *narcotraficantes*, looms over the poppies in the countryside at night. Malverde is much like the Moon in *Bodas de sangre*, a personified symbol that not only forebodes death, but also summons it forth. Although a human altar of suppliants implore Malverde to hide them from their pursuers, he shines upon the fugitive lovers with his blue light and binds them with the Bridegroom in blood.

Brought to the stage in the February 2015 USC School of Dramatic Arts production directed by David Bridel, *Blood Match's* dense poetic universe of images, motifs, and characters was made manifest by designer Takeshi Kata and the brilliant ensemble cast. Masterfully interpreting La Santa Muerte disguised as the Beggar Woman, actor Amaka Izuchi's performance grotesquely embodied another kind of borderlands, the one between the worlds of the living and the dead. With jagged movement through the shadowy moonlight of Leigh Allen's lighting design, the Beggar Woman sung the Bride's rebellious anthem, "Pelo Suelto," while laughing through her teeth at the naiveté of its spirited sentiment. This moment wed beauty with horror, icon with stereotype, trauma with laughter, devotion with betrayal, and poetry with a scream. The production brought to light that *Blood Match* is a score comprised of all these notes. Its music intones the corruption and violence plaguing Northern Mexico with a resilient *grito*, and in much the same way that the *Santos* treat the three young lovers, *Blood Match* consumes its audience, as it draws us in and ignites fire in our veins.

Eric Mayer-García
Louisiana State University

Oliver Mayer is the author of nearly 30 plays, from the ground-breaking *Blade to the Heat* to his most recent play *The Sinner From Toledo*, inspired by a Chekhov short story. An award-winning associate professor with tenure at the University of Southern California's School of Dramatic Arts, Oliver also writes opera libretti, cabaret, screenplays, children's books and poetry.

Eric Mayer-García is a PhD candidate in the LSU Department of Theatre. His dissertation research focuses on the Cuban avant-garde theatre in Havana, Miami, and New York and its intersection with U.S. Latina/o theatre. He has published and presented original research on nineteenth-century Cuban costumbristas in New Orleans, teatro vernáculo in early twentieth-century Ybor City, popular theatre collective Teatro Escambray, as well as the theatre of Maria Irene Fornes, Virgilio Piñera, Reinaldo Arenas, and Caridad Svich.

Federico García Lorca is one of the world's greatest modern poets and playwrights. In the 1920s Lorca studied at La Residencia de Estudiantes where he wrote his first play, *El maleficio de la mariposa*, which experimented with Symbolism. While studying in Madrid, he became friends with Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. The three formed part of the Catalán Surrealist Group that identified with Tristan Tzara and Andre Bretón's movement. Lorca authored several popular farces through the 1920s. His *Romancero Gitano* (1928) quickly garnered him international notoriety as a poet. In 1930 he traveled to Harlem, where he became fast friends with Langston Hughes, and Havana, where Lydia Cabrera took him to see Ñanigo performances, and, who years later introduced him to Margarita Xirgu in Madrid. After returning to Spain, Lorca received funding from the newly founded Second Republic of Spain in 1931 to form a theatre company called La Barraca that toured through Andalucía and Southern Spain. Lorca directed and acted in the plays of Calderón de la Barca and Lope de Vega for rural audiences. When touring through Southern Spain, García Lorca began to write *Bodas de Sangre*. After he directed the premiere of the play in Madrid in 1933, Lorca saw Margarita Xirgu perform the title role in a production of Seneca's *Medea*, directed by Cipriano Rivas. The production gave Lorca a new clarity of how to bring tragedy together with duende. Xirgu and Rivas became Lorca's collaborators for the third production of *Bodas de Sangre* in 1935, as well as the premieres of *Yerma* (1934) and *Doña Rosita la soltera* (1935). The second production of *Bodas de Sangre* staged by Lola Membrives in Buenos Aires in 1933 created tremors in Latin America's avant-garde that are still felt today. García Lorca's assassination in 1936 at the hands of a fascist uprising was truly one of the great tragedies of the modern theatre. The Franco regime instituted a complete ban on his works until 1953. Despite attempts to silence his work in Spain, García Lorca's theatre became just as influential in the Americas as Brecht's, and has fueled the work of contemporary U.S. Latina/o playwrights, including María Irene Fornés, Nilo Cruz, Caridad Svich, and Oliver Mayer.

BLOOD MATCH

ACT ONE

As AUDIENCE enters, the Company greets them.

Mexican WEDDING MUSIC plays, cheesy and fun, as they try to get AUDIENCE MEMBERS to dance with them, and to teach them the basic steps (*cumbia? quebradita?*). It's hardly about great dancing; it is about the sacred rite of marriage. In its seemingly innocent way, it creates a web of family.

DARKNESS EXCEPT FOR MOONLIGHT

SINALOA countryside, mountains in the near distance. Rolling fields of POPPIES, which glow in the dark.

Then the sound of a CROWN VICTORIA running hard on an unpaved road. HIGH BEAMS bounce until it comes to a labored stop. A SINGLE LIGHT reveals a heretofore dark window. From her bedroom the BRIDE TO BE stares out at the unseen DRIVER. Sound of a MAN breathing hard. A long, full stare, until the Crown Vic tears away, high beams bouncing against the walls.

A moment, then Bride turns off the light. Silence.

Below her, the MAID appears in the arms of the FATHER, and older man with gleaming white hair. He envelops her.

MAID

Viejo! Did you see?

FATHER

No, Vieja.

MAID

Did you hear?

FATHER

Ya no importa más. Bésame...

As he continues kissing and embracing her, MAID stares out, then up at the now-dark window as she genuflects.

SCENE 1

MUSIC as darkness turns to DAWN. The Poppies stop glowing and assume an ORANGE color.

A ROOM PAINTED YELLOW.

MOTHER in black, prays to an ALTAR with candles, talismans and photos of a family. A single statue of LA SANTA MUERTE – a cross between The Grim Reaper and The Virgin Mary. When she finishes praying, she looks out at the poppies.

MOTHER

(Disgusted)

Que barbaridad!

Her son the BRIDEGROOM enters. He wears western gear of good quality, the picture of the young *Patron*.

BRIDEGROOM

(Sees the poppies)

Chido.

They kiss.

BRIDEGROOM (CONT'D)

Gotta go.

MOTHER

Adónde?

BRIDEGROOM

The fields. Harvest time.

He puts on his cowboy hat at a rakish slant. He feels for his belt and knife sheath, now empty.

BRIDEGROOM (CONT'D)

'Ama.

MOTHER

M'hijo?

BRIDEGROOM

Give me the knife.

MOTHER

The what?

BRIDEGROOM

I have to score the bulbs. Give me the knife, '*Ama!*

MOTHER

Knives, knives... I curse all sharp things.

She opens a box in which she has hoarded a collection of knives and other weaponry.

BRIDEGROOM

I was wondering where all these went.

He finds the knife.

MOTHER

All things that can cut into the body of a man, a man whose beauty flowers from his mouth, who goes out to his *agave* – or his poppies – because they are his legacy.

BRIDEGROOM

(Angering)

Leave off, I'm asking nicely...

MOTHER

But he'll never come back. And if he does return it's only to place a rosary in his cold fist and coins on his eyes – and salt to keep the body from swelling.

BRIDEGROOM

Ya basta.

MOTHER

First, your father who smelled of marigold, who I only got to sleep beside for a measly three years. Then your brother bleeding out in the street. How is something small as a blade able to finish a man who is a bull?

BRIDEGROOM

Can we please finish this?

MOTHER

Can anyone bring your father or brother back to me?

BRIDEGROOM

Are you asking me to kill them?

MOTHER

No... It's just I don't like you carrying that knife. It's just that... I wish you didn't have to go to the fields.

BRIDEGROOM

(Laughing)

We'll both go!

MOTHER

I'd like it a lot better if you were a woman. You wouldn't be going to the *arroyo* now. We'd embroider for the little ones to come, just us girls.

BRIDEGROOM

"Us Girls?"

(Laughing)

And what if I do take you to the poppy fields with me?

MOTHER

What use is an old woman in the poppy fields? Would you lie with me in the tall grass?

BRIDEGROOM

Ay mi carcancha! You crazy old clunker you!

MOTHER

That's what your father did. He took me under the *agave* – before the marijuana and the heroin – he took me under the blue *agave*. We made you that way. That is good lineage, your bloodline! Your grandfather? *Mucho pegue*. Charisma with women! He left *mocosos* on every street corner in Culiacan. That's the way I like it. Men are men. The rest are the fag-ends.

The leavings. The waste.

BRIDEGROOM

And me, '*Ama?*

MOTHER

What about you?

BRIDEGROOM

I'm a man now. I want to get married.

(Off her silence)

Does it seem wrong to you?

MOTHER

No.

BRIDEGROOM

Then what?

MOTHER

She's a good girl – I'm right, aren't I? She makes her own *tamales* and sews her own *reboso*, and still in spite of everything when her name is said I feel as if they've thrown a rock in my face.

BRIDEGROOM

Tonterias!

MOTHER

Más que tonterias. You will leave me. The only thing I have left is you, I don't want you to go.

BRIDEGROOM

But *'Ama!* You'll come with us.

MOTHER

No. I will not leave your father and brother alone. I must go to tend to them every morning. If I were to leave then very easily one of the Felix family may die, and then that family of murderers might bury their own beside ours. And that ain't gonna happen! *Nunca en un millyon de años! Por encima de mi cadaver!*

BRIDEGROOM

Here we go again.

Pause as he looks out the window and she at the altar.

MOTHER

How long have you been seeing each other?

BRIDEGROOM

Long enough for me to bring these fields to harvest. Long enough.

MOTHER

Three years.

(Beat)

She had another man, *un galán*, am I right?

BRIDEGROOM

Where'd you hear that?

(Beat)

I don't know. I don't think so.

Girls have to watch out.

MOTHER

I didn't watch out. I didn't look at all. I looked at your father, and when they killed him I stared at the wall in front of me. One and done, that's married life. *Y qué?*

BRIDEGROOM

I picked a good one, *'Ama*.

MOTHER

If you say so. Still, I just wish I knew more about her mother.

BRIDEGROOM

Her mother? Who cares?

MOTHER

You're right! What does it matter about the mother. *No importa*.
When shall we make the arrangements?

BRIDEGROOM

(Happily)

How about Sunday?

MOTHER

I'll bring her the turquoise pendant because it goes back generations.
And you should buy her –

Mother tosses him a *Victoria's Secret* mailer.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Something from here.

BRIDEGROOM

'*Ama!* You're making me all *chapateado!*

MOTHER

Don't blush. You think I don't know about young people? And for yourself two suits, Western cut. And a new hat.

BRIDEGROOM

Chido!

MOTHER

Mi rey. You're the only thing I have left in this world.

BRIDEGROOM

I just know that you are going to love my bride to be.

MOTHER

I love her already.

(About to kiss him, stops)

Anda, you're getting too big for kisses from me. Get some from your woman.

(Qualifies it)

When you're married.

Delighted, Bridegroom exits into sunlight.

BRIDEGROOM

Me voy.

MOTHER

Dig down deep, my Son. It's your first harvest as *Patrón*, our family's first harvest. Now the cartels will come to us. Not the Felix and their bad luck. So work hard today and show no fear.

BRIDEGROOM

That's the way it's done.

MOTHER

(Blesses him)

Te bendigo. Vaya con dios.

The Bridegroom exits. Mother stays seated with her back to the door. A NEIGHBOR appears at the door, hair in curlers.

NEIGHBOR

How's it going?

MOTHER

Ya ves. What you see is what you get.

NEIGHBOR

I went for some medicine and thought I'd stop by.

Offers a spliff. They will pass it back and forth.

NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

We never see each other, you and I, we live so far apart.

MOTHER

I haven't been to the end of the street in twenty years.

NEIGHBOR

Así es la vida. Two days ago they brought in my neighbor's son, all torn up – the cartel.

MOTHER

Rafael?

NEIGHBOR

Kidnappings, beheadings, no one is safe anymore.

(Prays at the altar)

Your dead and mine are lucky to be sleeping in their graves.

MOTHER

Shut up.

NEIGHBOR

(Sadly)

And your son? The living one?

MOTHER

Out there.

NEIGHBOR

(Stares out)

Poppies! He'll make a ton of cash. You can go to the Culiacan Galleria and buy all the best stuff now.

MOTHER

We had some good luck.

NEIGHBOR

And now he can get married.

Mother retrieves a bottle of mescal and two earthen cups.

MOTHER

Oye! Comadre, entre nosotros.

NEIGHBOR

(Hoping for something confidential)

Tell me.

Mother pours two shots.

MOTHER

Do you know this girl that my son is going with?

NEIGHBOR

Top shelf!

MOTHER

Yeah, sure, but...

NEIGHBOR

But no one really knows her, if you know what I mean. She lives alone with her father in the big house, way out there in the flat lands.

(Downs her shot)

But she's good, so they say.

MOTHER

And her mother?

Neighbor pours herself another shot.

NEIGHBOR

A real knockout. Her face glowed, her eyes sparkled – like a saint. But I never liked her very much at all. *No me cae bien*. She didn't love her husband.

MOTHER

Chismosa! How could you even know this about a person?

NEIGHBOR

But it's the truth. Look, no one knows for sure if she played around on him. There's no *bochinche* that I can gossip about. She kept her nose way up in the air, *que cabrona*.

MOTHER

(Grim)

Just like the daughter!

NEIGHBOR

A la chingada. Hey, you asked me.

Mother gives her back the mescal. She pours a third shot.

MOTHER

I wish that none of us knew either of them, the dead mother or the living bride to be. They're like cactus underfoot that you don't see until you've stepped on the spines – until they've broken the skin.

NEIGHBOR

You're right to ask around. Your son? He's worth more than gold.

MOTHER

My son is worth *mas que colibri*. That's why I have to watch out for him. I hear the girl had another man – *un galán* – some time ago.

NEIGHBOR

(Finishes the spliff)

Not so long ago. The *novio* was crazy about her. He ended up marrying one of her cousins two years ago. On the rebound!

MOTHER

Who was this *novio*?

NEIGHBOR

Leonardo.

MOTHER

Which Leonardo?

NEIGHBOR

From the Familia Felix.

MOTHER

(Rising, fists raised)

De los Felix?

NEIGHBOR

Hold on, Woman, don't pin your vengeance on Leonardo! He didn't kill your old man! He was a snot-nosed kid when the shit went down. He shares a name with the cartel – that's it! He's no *matón*!

MOTHER

All I have to hear is the name of Felix and nothing else matters.

(Between teeth)

Felix fills my mouth with dung. And I have to spit

(Spits)

I have to spit

(Spits)

Or else I'll kill them all.

NEIGHBOR

Calm your *culo* down. Don't wreck your son's chance at happiness!

MOTHER

I have to tell him –

NEIGHBOR

Don't say anything! You're an old *chismosa*. Me too. You and I have to learn to zip our traps.

MOTHER

I won't say another word.

NEIGHBOR

Not a single one.

MOTHER

(Serene)

The things we know.

NEIGHBOR

(Downs final shot)

That's enough for one day. Soon everyone will be coming back from the fields and they'll be *hangry*!

MOTHER/NEIGHBOR

Hungry and angry. *Hijos de la chingada!*

Laughing, they stand together at the door, both lit.

MOTHER

Whew it's hot, have you ever seen the like of it?

NEIGHBOR

They're roasting out there, they'll come back black as Africans.

(A bug)

I like 'em dark! Bye Woman.

MOTHER

Adios.

Neighbor leaves. Mother at the altar, genuflects to the statue of La Santa Muerte, prays.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Santísima Muerte, te pido un gran favor con todo mi corazón:

Since you are the powerful owner of the dark mansion of life and Empress of darkness, grant me what was promised to me. *Venganza.*

As she continues to pray, SANTA MUERTE comes to life, blesses Mother.

SANTA MUERTE

Te bendigo.

SCENE 2

A ROOM PAINTED ROSE. Lots of flowers and copper household items. A tablecloth over a large table. Morning. Leonardo's MOTHER IN LAW with an INFANT in her arms. She rocks the baby. The WIFE texts, looks out the window, going stir crazy. The TV is on. To the tune of an *El Chapulín Colorado* children's sing-along ditty on screen, Mother in Law sings:

MOTHER IN LAW

(Quotes the TV ditty)

MÁS ÁGIL QUE UNA TORTUGA

MÁS FUERTE QUE UN RATÓN

MÁS NOBLE QUE UNA LECHUGA

MI ESCUDO ES UN CORAZÓN!

EL CHAPULÍN COLORADO!

The baby cries. Mother in Law sings softer.

MOTHER IN LAW (CONT'D)

TARZANES Y KALIMARES

LE RINDEN ADMIRACIÓN

BATMANES Y SUPERMANES

LE VAN A PEDIR PERDON –

Wife MUTES the TV.

WIFE

Enough. Please.

MOTHER IN LAW

The baby loves it!

With a look, Wife takes the baby (who happens to be dressed in a *Chapulín Colorado* tee shirt) from Mother in Law.

MOTHER IN LAW (CONT'D)

You loved it when you were a baby.

WIFE

I didn't know any better.

Rocking him in her arms, she sings from "*El Unicornio Azul*":

WIFE (CONT'D)

MI UNICORNIO AZUL

AYER SE ME PERDIÓ

NO SÉ SI SE ME FUE

NO SÉ SI EXTRAVIO

Y YO NO TENGO MÁS

QUE UN UNICORNIO AZUL

Sound of the Crown Vic arriving. Wife readies herself.

MOTHER IN LAW

Why that song?

WIFE

Because he is my blue unicorn.

MOTHER IN LAW

Hopeless romantic.

WIFE

I must have gotten that from Father because I didn't get it from you.

Mother in Law exits with Baby, singing the "*Chapulín Colorado*" song under her breath.

LEONARDO enters, handsome but unkempt, sleepless.

LEONARDO

El chavalillo?

WIFE

Just got him to sleep.

LEONARDO

Bad boy. Cried all day yesterday.

WIFE

Es mi unicornio azul today.

And you? Did you take the car in?

LEONARDO

Just got back from the shop. I put new tires on it two months ago, and they're already shot to hell. *Chinos cabrones*, don't even know how to make a decent tire anymore! It's these Culiacan roads, nothing but potholes and sharp rocks.

WIFE

Or that you always drive off-road?

LEONARDO

I almost never go off-road.

WIFE

The migrant workers told me they saw you driving the Crown Vic way out on the edge of the plains, where they harvest marijuana.

LEONARDO

No one harvests marijuana anymore. It's all heroin now. Poppies everywhere.

(Beat)

Who told you?

WIFE

I don't know their names.

(Beat)

Eras tú?

LEONARDO

There's nothing for me out there in the dry-beds. Just train tracks. Nothing but Guatemalans hopping trains heading North.

WIFE

That's what I said. But the car is beat to shit, the paint job pockmarked from gravel and stones, and the tires are worn down.

LEONARDO

What do you know about cars?

WIFE

Nothing, but my mother does.

LEONARDO

She's an expert on everything.

WIFE

(Changes tone)

Want some water?

LEONARDO

Una fría bien fría.

WIFE

Why didn't you come home to eat last night? I texted you a million times.

LEONARDO

I was with the cartel. You can't disrespect them with phone calls.

WIFE

Will they pay a good price this year?

LEONARDO

There is no negotiating with them. They pay what they pay.

(Under his breath)

If they pay at all.

WIFE

I saw a new dress that you'll like, *Ann Taylor*, and I'm sick of the baby's *Chapulín Colorado* onesie.

LEONARDO

Come on. I want to see him sleep.

Mother in Law enters.

MOTHER IN LAW

Who's driving that car like it's a dump truck? The engine's overheating! It's leaking oil! It's on its last legs! Who would do something like that?

LEONARDO

(Sour)

I would.

MOTHER IN LAW

Oh well then! It's your car, Son in Law; total it if you want to.

WIFE

(Timidly)

He was with the cartel.

MOTHER IN LAW

Set it aflame for all I care. They'll pay nothing for that shit harvest of ours.

WIFE

(To LEONARDO)

Tecate?

(To MOTHER IN LAW)

Did you hear my cousin is getting engaged?

LEONARDO

(Coughs)

When?

WIFE

Tomorrow. The wedding will happen within the month. I'd imagine that we'll be asked to attend.

LEONARDO

I wouldn't know.

MOTHER IN LAW

I hear the Bridegroom's mother is not very happy about the match.

LEONARDO

The old *bruja* may just be right. The girl is not to be trusted.

WIFE

I don't like you saying bad things about my cousin; she's good.

MOTHER IN LAW

He ought to know.

Uncomfortable silence.

LEONARDO

I gave her up. I dropped her. Three years ago *hijo de la chingada!*

(To WIFE, who weeps)

What are you going to do now, cry? Quit it, or I swear I'll...

(Pulls her hands from her face)

Come on. Let's go see the kid.

They exit, embracing.

A Sales Girl appears in department store uniform.

SALES GIRL

The circus is in town! Did you see?

MOTHER IN LAW

The real circus is Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey! These are just *Maroma* – itinerant *Yaqui Indios* – doing *carpa* for the farmworkers. Pure vaudeville.

SALES GIRL

It's going to be fun!

MOTHER IN LAW

Ay pelada! What are you bothering us for? Why aren't you back at the store?

SALES GIRL

The Bridegroom came to *Forever Pink* and bought up all the best stuff we got!

MOTHER IN LAW

He came alone?

SALES GIRL

His mom came with too. Very nose in the air. Dressed very *telenovela!*

MOTHER IN LAW

They have money – now.

SALES GIRL

They bought *lingerie!* Lace underwear. Babydolls, bustle-backs and satin slips. And a pair of stockings that women dream about.

(Points to her ankle)

Look, a little bird here

(Her calf)

A flying fish here

(Her thigh)

And up here, a rose – very pink!

MOTHER IN LAW

Shut your mouth!

SALES GIRL

With thorns, may I add. The whole thing in silk! Ed Hardy.

MOTHER IN LAW

Takes money to make money. Two families are merging their wealth.
This is business, not love.

Leonardo and Wife enter with the Baby.

WIFE

You look excited.

SALES GIRL

I came to tell you about all the stuff they bought at the store!

LEONARDO

We don't give a damn! *Pa'fuera.*

WIFE

Leonardo! Leave her be.

MOTHER IN LAW

You don't have to get so mad.

SALES GIRL

I'm sorry!

(Leaves weeping)

I thought you'd want to know!

(Stops at the door, to WIFE)

The circus is here.

Sales Girl exits weeping. The baby cries.

MOTHER IN LAW

Why be so evil to the girl? She did nothing to you.

LEONARDO

I hate the circus.

Pause. Distant sound of the Circus Tent being lifted. Leonardo goes to the door.

LEONARDO (CONT'D)

Me voy.

WIFE

Don't leave me like this, —!

(Takes his hand)

LEONARDO

Take your hand off me.

WIFE

No, I need you to look at me and tell me what's on your mind.

LEONARDO

Déjame.

MOTHER IN LAW

Where do you think you're going?

LEONARDO

(Bitterly)

Can you please shut up?

Leonardo exits. The Baby cries.

MOTHER IN LAW

(Takes the INFANT)

Not you, *M'Hijo!* Scream all you want. We'll take you to the circus!

Wife remains standing, frozen. Turns slowly as if dreaming.

WIFE

MI UNICORNIO Y YO

HICIMOS AMISTAD

UN POCO CON AMOR
UN POCO CON VERDAD.
CON SU CUERNO DE ANIL
PESCABA UNA CANCIÓN
MI UNICORNIO Y YO
SABERLA COMPARTIR
ERA SU VOCACIÓN.

Mother in Law gives the baby to the Wife. The TV continues to show *El Chapulín Colorado*, muted.

SCENE 3

The Big House where the Bride to Be lives. A large CROSS made up of large pink flowers. Mexican mirrors catch the light. Under glass, a CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE BELT sits in a place of honor. Hanging from a peg is a worn pair of BOXING GLOVES.

MAID

Pasen...!

Friendly, full of false humility, the Maid invites in the Bridegroom and his Mother. The Mother wears black, hair back, very severe. The Bridegroom wears a Western cut suit and a new hat – also a good watch chain. He carries presents.

MAID (CONT'D)

Make yourself comfortable. *Nuestra casa es su casa.*

Mother pulls out used ladies underwear – Maid's – from between the sofa cushions. Maid grabs it.

MAID (CONT'D)

(Blushing)

They're coming.

Maid leaves. Mother and Bridegroom remain. Bridegroom examines the gloves, the belt.

MOTHER

Did you bring the watch?

BRIDEGROOM

Yes.

He brings it out of his pocket and opens it for her.

MOTHER

That was your grandfather's. Everyone knew the gleam of that watch in the sun. Before the cartels. When Pancho Villa was the boss around here.

(Warming up)

Your *abuelo*? Looked a lot like Pancho Villa. Who knows? Maybe he was one of Villa's *mocosos*.

BRIDEGROOM

'*Amá!*

MOTHER

That's your blood. Be proud.

BRIDEGROOM

I am.

(Inspecting the room)

Her father must have been champion.

MOTHER

I guess. Now he just does what the drug lord tells him.

(Fidgets)

We don't have all day. Why do they have to live so far away?

BRIDEGROOM

But they have really good land.

MOTHER

Sure it's good, but there's nothing else out here! Hours and hours and hardly a house or a tree anywhere!

BRIDEGROOM

It didn't take that long. And that's the way the Old Man likes it. More space for his poppies. Did you see? They glow like they're on the moon!

MOTHER

Your father preferred good old-fashioned *marijuana*. He would have covered these hills with hemp.

BRIDEGROOM

I don't know, Mom...

MOTHER

He had a green thumb. The three years we were married, he planted Colombian, Mexican Sativa, Purple Kush, Afghan Skunk, Thai and some Maui Wauai – but it died.

BRIDEGROOM

She must be dressing up for us.

Enter the FATHER of the Bride. He has an old beaten face and his hair is full and shiny white. The Bridegroom shakes his hand in silence. The Mother kisses it in deference.

FATHER

Long drive?

MOTHER

Forever.

FATHER

You took the long way. Quicker to go off-road.

MOTHER

I'm too old to go off-road. That's for lovers and other crazy people.

BRIDEGROOM

She gets carsick.

Awkward pause.

FATHER

Good harvest.

BRIDEGROOM

Excellent.

FATHER

When I was young, not even hemp would grow on this land. I had to beat it with my hands and cry on the plants in order to get something worthwhile to grow.

MOTHER

But look at your poppies now. Don't whine about it. I haven't come to ask for a piece of the action.

FATHER

You have the best *amapola* this side of Afghanistan. I just wish that your land and my land... you understand?... weren't so far apart. Me, I like everything together. That's what's stuck in my craw. If only we could buy out the Felix family, then it would all be ours! But they won't sell it to me for all the gold in Medellín.

BRIDEGROOM

I heard that their crops failed, that their harvest was a bust.

FATHER

Exactamente! If only we could demolish everything that separates us and start over, your mountain poppies and mine on the flatlands – now that gets this old heart pumping!

MOTHER

(Tasty)

That excites you? Why?

FATHER

Because what's mine is my daughter's. And what's yours is your son's. That's why. To see it all together, in a row, all our combined wealth and power. That's a thing of beauty.

MOTHER

What excites me is to see the Felix Family on its knees. Before I die, I would like to see their fields razed and their house bulldozed.

FATHER

We just might, Baby, we just might. If I had sons I would have bought land right up to the sea. Even the crap land, the salt flats, *los*

secanos, because with hard work you can make anything grow. And because it's such a sleepy part of Mexico, you can do what you want – mostly.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Most nights I sleep like a baby.

(To MAID)

Don't' I?

MOTHER

You know why I'm here.

FATHER

I do. Seems like a good deal to me. As long as the youngsters can agree.

MOTHER

My boy is willing.

FATHER

My daughter is able.

MOTHER

My son? He's gorgeous, a catch. Plus he's never been with a woman.

(BRIDEGROOM groans)

His character is spotless, clean as a sun-dried altar cloth.

FATHER

And mine? *Qué te puedo decir?* She's up before dawn to feed the men *chilaquiles* – very tasty. Never complains. You'll find her soft and smooth to the touch. She's good with her hands, and she can cut through a rope with her teeth.

MOTHER

(Impressed)

Dios bendiga su casa!

FATHER

Que Dios la bendiga!

Father signals the Maid who arrives with champagne and various goodies. Father pops it to Bridegroom's applause.

MOTHER

When should the wedding take place?

BRIDEGROOM

Soon. Next Thursday?

FATHER

Her birthday. She'll be twenty-two.

MOTHER

Twenty-two! That would have been the age of my other son – had he not been murdered by the Felix.

Bridegroom ties to silence her with cake and champagne.

FATHER

Best not to think about such things. Not today.

MOTHER

I think about it every minute. Put your hand on my chest. Feel.

FATHER

Thursday, then.

(To BRIDEGROOM)

That's the way you want it?

BRIDEGROOM

That's the way I want it.

FATHER

(To MOTHER)

You and I will drive with the bride and groom. We'll take the BMW. It can't go off-road, so we'll go the long way; don't want you to get carsick. The rest of the wedding party can come by land or by sea!

BRIDEGROOM

Or by air!

MOTHER

Agreed.

The Maid prompts the Father.

FATHER

Oh yes! Tell my daughter she can come in now.

(To MOTHER)

If you like her as much as I do, then we can really celebrate.

A small upstairs bedroom space; the BRIDE's BEDROOM. Posters of Gloria Trevi. BRIDE TO BE sits with earphones on; she has a slightly Madonna-like attitude. Maid takes the buds from her ears and we hear Gloria Trevi's "*Pelo Suelto*" before she shuts it off.

MAID

It's time.

Maid takes her hand, smooths her hair, returns downstairs with the Bride to Be, who keeps her eyes lowered and her hands at her side. Mother looks her over.

MOTHER

Come close. Are you happy?

BRIDE TO BE

Yes Ma'am.

FATHER

Then don't look so serious. When the dust settles she's going to be your mother.

BRIDE TO BE

What I have to give I want to give.

MOTHER

Naturally.

(Holds her by the chin)

Mírame.

FATHER

She looks just like my wife.

(Starts to cry)

Ignalita!

MOTHER

You are beautiful to look at, that's for sure. You know what marriage is, don't you, Little One?

BRIDE TO BE

I do.

MOTHER

One husband, a bunch of *mocosos* running around, and a stone wall between you and everything else.

Bridegroom takes Bride to Be's hand.

BRIDEGROOM

Are we forgetting anything?

MOTHER

Just that you all live long lives. That's it. Live long lives.

BRIDE TO BE

I will abide.

MOTHER

(Remembering)

Here! Some presents.

Bride to Be opens the Victoria's Secret first.

FATHER

Eso es!

MOTHER

I chose that one.

BRIDEGROOM

Do you like it?

BRIDE TO BE

Thank you.

FATHER

Let's drink to them!

MOTHER

Liquor never touches my lips.

BRIDEGROOM

It touches mine!

Father pours Bridegroom a glass. But before he can drink:

MOTHER

My son doesn't drink.

FATHER

Mejor!

Father drinks it. Awkward pause as everyone stands.

BRIDEGROOM

(To FATHER)

Were you a boxer?

FATHER

I was.

BRIDEGROOM

And that's your championship belt?

FATHER

Oh no. That was a gift. Do you know Julio Cesar Chavez?

BRIDEGROOM

Of course.

FATHER

He had a problem, and I fixed it. One day he came all the way out here to give this to me personally.

BRIDEGROOM

Wow. Julio César Chavez.

FATHER

JC Superstar.

(Confidential)

If you ever have a problem, come to me, my Son.

Mother clears her throat as if to go.

BRIDEGROOM

(To BRIDE)

I'll return tomorrow.

BRIDE TO BE

When?

BRIDEGROOM

At five?

BRIDE TO BE

Yo te espero.

For the first time, Bridegroom is able to get close to her.

BRIDEGROOM

(Quietly)

Don't believe everything my mother says about me.

For the first time, she smiles. It lights up the room.

BRIDEGROOM (CONT'D)

Leaving your side makes me feel like I have no purpose in life. It hurts my heart, I don't want to breathe.

BRIDE TO BE

Breathe. When we are married, you won't feel that way ever again.

He moves to kiss her.

MOTHER

(Clears throat)

Time to go. The Sun waits on no man.

(To FATHER)

All good?

FATHER

All good.

MOTHER

(To MAID)

Adios, mujer. Cúdate.

MAID

Vayan ustedes con Dios!

Mother kisses the Bride.

MOTHER

Adios, Hija.

FATHER

Let me walk you both to the car.

Mother, Father and Bridegroom leave.

MAID

Omigod Let's open your presents!

BRIDE TO BE

Let go.

MAID

Oh come off it Sourpuss, show me!

BRIDE TO BE

I don't want to.

MAID

At least the undies. I bet he bought you butt floss!

BRIDE TO BE

Ea que no!

MAID

Cógelo con take it easy! You act as if you don't want to marry the guy.

BRIDE TO BE

(In rage and despair)

No más!

MAID

What's going on in that little head of yours? Open up your presents.

Maid grabs a box. Bride grabs her wrists.

BRIDE TO BE

I said let go.

MAID

OW! *Coño su madre!* You're strong as a man!

BRIDE TO BE

I wish to God I were.

MAID

A man? Much safer to be a woman.

BRIDE TO BE

(Calms herself)

He's a good man. Handsome. Hard-working. And he's devoted to me.

MAID

Then you've slept together?

BRIDE TO BE

No seas tan pendeja!

MAID

Then he is a virgin!

BRIDE TO BE

No, I am!

Light change as the sun falls and evening sets in.

MAID

Did you hear a car last night?

BRIDE TO BE

When?

MAID

Before dawn.

BRIDE TO BE

Must have been one of Father's truckers driving to Los Mochis.

MAID

This was no trucker.

BRIDE TO BE

You saw the driver?

MAID

I did. He drove right up to your window. *Me molestó mucho.*

BRIDE TO BE

Don't be shocked. It must have been my *fiancé*. He comes by sometimes to see me when everyone is asleep. It was him. It must have been.

MAID

No.

BRIDE TO BE

Who did you see? Who did you see?

Maid looks around to make sure no one is listening.

MAID

Leonardo.

BRIDE TO BE

Liar! Why would he come here?

MAID

I don't know, but he was here.

BRIDE TO BE

Just shut up! Don't say another word or your tongue will rot.

Outside, the sound of the Crown Vic approaching.

MAID

Mira, asómate, Baby! Look out there and tell me – is he your lover?

BRIDE TO BE

Yes. He is.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

Front patio of the Bride's house. The Bride enters, full of nervous energy, half-in half-out of her wedding dress (which has a decidedly punky flair). Maid follows dressed as before.

MAID

Let me finish combing your hair out here. *Ay*, stop moving!

BRIDE TO BE

It's so hot! I'm melting.

MAID

In Sinaloa, you don't even get a break from the heat before dawn.

Bride looks at herself in one of the Mexican mirrors, as the Maid finally is able to comb her hair.

BRIDE TO BE

My mother came from a place with many trees. Lots of rain.

MAID

(Meaning the opposite)

Probably why she was so happy here.

BRIDE TO BE

She suffocated in this house. Burned to ashes. We'll all be burned to ashes. The walls are on fire.

MAID

Sounds like you're having a hot flash. I know about those.

BRIDE

OUCH! Don't comb so hard.

MAID

Doing hair is like training a dog: you have to make it sit, then you have to make it stay. It has to fall over your forehead.

BRIDE TO BE

You mean my five-head? I'm so ugly.

MAID

You're beautiful.

She kisses Bride on the mouth.

BRIDE TO BE

Comb.

MAID

It's the heat. You are so blessed. You're about to hold a real man in your arms, to kiss his lips and feel his weight on top of you when he—

BRIDE TO BE

When he what? Shush.

MAID

And then when you wake up in the night and feel him beside you and his breath caresses your, you know what, and then you caress his!

BRIDE TO BE

(Fiercely)

Be quiet!

MAID

Pero, niña! What else is a wedding for? It's the marriage bed, sparkling with the sweat of a man and a woman *nocturnando!*

BRIDE TO BE

Don't talk about it!

MAID

What? You two *cogiendo como locos?* But it's so much fun!

BRIDE TO BE

Or so much bitterness.

MAID

We should put flowers in your hair. Orange blossoms. Your *fiancé* brought them for your *garland*. And one between your breasts.

(Models it)

Aquí.

(Her crotch)

Or here.

BRIDE TO BE

Give them over.

Holding the flower, she looks at herself in the mirror.

MAID

What is it?

BRIDE TO BE

Just leave me.

MAID

Now's not the time for cold feet.

Come on. Give me the flower.

The Bride throws it to the floor.

MAID (CONT'D)

Niña!

(Genuflects)

Is it that you don't want to get married? Or is it that you don't want to get married to him? *Dígame.*

BRIDE TO BE

Dark clouds. Everybody gets them.

Maid puts the flower in her hair.

MAID

It's a good union between two families. There's been enough violence over the years. This solves any problems your father might have down the road. Plus your fiancé's really cute.

(Getting emotional)

I know you don't want to hear this, but when this thing started between your father and me –

A loud KNOCKING.

BRIDE TO BE

I told you! The first guests must be here. Open the door for them!

Bride runs inside. Maid opens the front gate.

MAID

Ti? Really?

LEONARDO

Good morning to you too.

MAID

Hardly. You're the first guest here

(Checks watch)

By a lot!

LEONARDO

(Shows his invitation)

They invited me.

MAID

For some reason.

LEONARDO

So I'm here.

MAID

They invited your wife too.

LEONARDO

She took the bus with the others.

MAID

And you went off-road. Of course.

(Looks out)

You'll destroy that car.

LEONARDO

When it dies, then it's dead.

MAID

Everyone is still asleep.

LEONARDO

And the Bride?

MAID

I'm supposed to be dressing her right now.

LEONARDO

(Bitter)

Ah the Bride on her wedding day. Glowing with happiness. Like a Virgin.

MAID

How's the child?

LEONARDO

What child?

MAID

Your child.

LEONARDO

Oh.

MAID

Is he coming too?

LEONARDO

No. Did the Bridegroom bring lemon blossoms to wear on her breast?

The Bride enters, with the flower at her breast.

BRIDE TO BE

Orange.

MAID

Don't come out here like that!

BRIDE TO BE

Who cares? What bad can happen?

(To LEONARDO)

What do you care about flowers? Do you have something to give me?

LEONARDO

(Gets close to her)

You know me. You know what I can give. So tell me. What did I ever mean to you? Think back. I'm not rich like your new boyfriend. My poppies didn't produce. That's the prick that really wounds my heart.

BRIDE TO BE

Then why come?

LEONARDO

To witness the marriage bond.

BRIDE TO BE

Just as I witnessed yours.

LEONARDO

And now you marry him? They can kill me, but damned if anyone will spit on me. All his gleaming poppy fields, he should have placed a poppy between your tits.

BRIDE TO BE

Cúal es tu pinche pedo?

LEONARDO

I don't want to speak on this anymore, because once I get started, the mountains themselves would hear my *llanto*.

BRIDE TO BE

Mine would be louder.

MAID

(Uneasily)

Guys! Stop bringing up the past.

BRIDE TO BE

Why am I even speaking to you at all? Get out. You can wait for your wife outside the gate.

LEONARDO

I thought night and day about whose fault it was – yours or mine? And every time I had it figured out, a new fault would come to mind to gobble up everything else that came before. In the end? There's more than enough blame for both of us.

BRIDE TO BE

A man with a cowboy hat and a fast car can do a lot of damage to a lonely girl in a desert like this. But I have my pride. That's why I'm getting married. I will shut myself up with my husband behind heavy doors and walls and I will find a way to love him above all things.

LEONARDO

(Comes closer)

Your pride won't work on me.

BRIDE TO BE

Don't get close!

LEONARDO

What good did my pride do me, keeping myself from you and leaving you awake night after night? It only made the fire burn more. You think that time cures all and that walls can shut out the fire. It's not true. There's nowhere to hide. It's in you.

BRIDE TO BE

(Trembling)

I feel like I drank a bottle of mescal by myself and fell asleep in a bed of poppies. I'm drowning in a thicket of flowers but I don't save myself, I just keep sleeping.

MAID

You have to go right now!

LEONARDO

This is the last time I'll ever speak to her. Don't be afraid.

(To BRIDE)

I can have no peace unless I tell you what's in my heart. My crops have failed. All my luck is gone.

(No response)

I had a wedding. Now it's your turn. Let's see how lucky you are.

MAID

Luckier than you!

MUSIC and VOICES from offstage.

VOICES

DESPIERTE LA NOVIA

LA MAÑANA DE LA BODA

BRIDE TO BE

It's time to wake up!

Bride runs into the house.

MAID

The guests are arriving. Don't try to get close to her.

LEONARDO

No worries. I'm done with her.

Leonardo exits.

The Bridegroom appears at the front gate with the Circus Players, who serenade her *mariachi* style at the Bridegroom's bidding. WEDDING MUSIC plays as the COMPANY dances:

CIRCUS SINGER

DESPIERTE LA NOVIA

LA MAÑANA DE LA BODA

RUEDE LA RONDA

Y EN CADA BALCÓN

UNA CORONA

CIRCUS VOICES

DESPIERTE LA NOVIA

MAID

(Covering for her)

Wake up, Bride to Be!

ELDERLY CLOWN

QUE DESPIERTE

CON EL RAMO VERDE

DEL AMOR FLORIDO
QUE DESPIERTE
POR EL TROCO Y LA RAMA
DE LOS LAURELES

CIRCUS SINGER

QUE DESPIERTE
CON EL LARGO PELO
CAMISA DE NIEVE
BOTAS DE CHAROL Y PLATA
Y JAZMINES EN LA FRENTE

BRIDEGROOM

Wake up, my Bride! The Sun is rising!

ELDERLY CLOWN

Ay Galán! Take off your cowboy hat and stay awhile!

CIRCUS SINGER

DESPIERTE LA NOVIA
QUE POR LOS CAMPOS VIENE
RONDANDO LA BODA
CON BANDEJAS DE DALIAS
Y PANES DE GLORIA

CIRCUS VOICES

DESPIERTE LA NOVIA

Maid sees the flower garland on the floor, picks it up.

MAID

With all these orange blossoms the Bride can't sleep a wink!

Bridegroom enters the patio with an armful of orange blossom.

BRIDEGROOM

Beneath the orange blossom, the Bridegroom offers you his heart!

(Mexican grito)

CIRCUS VOICES

DESPIERTA, PALOMA!

EL ALBA DESPEJA

CAMPANAS DE SOMBRA

LA NOVIA

LA BLANCA NOVIA

HOY DONCELLA

MAÑANA SENORA

ELDERLY CLOWN

Come out, *Morenita*, in your Victoria's Secret made of silk!

BRIDEGROOM

Wake up, my Bride, and let the morning dew bless you.

MAID

UN ÁRBOL QUIERO BORDARLE

LLENO DE CINTAS GRANATES

Y EN CADA CINTA UN AMOR

CON VIVAS ALREDEDOR

CIRCUS VOICES

DESPIERTE LA NOVIA

ELDERLY CLOWN

LA MAÑANA DE LA BODA

Mother appears at the gate.

CIRCUS SINGER

LA MAÑANA DE LA BODA

QUE GALANA VAS A ESTAR
PARECES FLOR DE LOS MONTES
LA MUJER DE UN CAPITAN

Father appears from inside the house.

FATHER

LA MUJER DE UN CAPITAN
SE LLEVA EL NOVIO
YA VIENE CON SUS BUEYES
POR EL TESORO!

MAID

(Excited)

She's coming! She's coming!

ELDERLY CLOWN

The wedding rises like a bull!

The Bride appears. She wears a Madonna-like style made famous in Mexico by Gloria Trevi in the 1990s. MUSIC ends, The Guests and Circus Performers cheer her. The Bridegroom gives her flowers.

BRIDE TO BE

Why did you wear those boots?

BRIDEGROOM

They're Yves Saint Laurent! I splurged.

BRIDE TO BE

Mariachis?

BRIDEGROOM

Circus *mariachis*. Next time they'll play Gloria Trevi style.

BRIDE TO BE

(Smiling)

Next time? You're crazy.

Bridegroom steals a kiss.

The WIFE appears with Leonardo. Kisses her cousin.

WIFE

Salud! Amor! Pesetas!

LEONARDO

Y tiempo para gastarlos.

Leonardo kisses her as a cousin. Shakes Bridegroom's hand.

BRIDEGROOM

Glad you both came.

WIFE

(To BRIDE)

Very Gloria Trevi!

BRIDE TO BE

Pelo Suelto!

For a moment they both sing like pre-teen Trevi fans:

WIFE

A MI ME GUSTA

ANDAR DE PELO SUELTO

ME GUSTA TODO

LO QUE SEA MISTERIO

BRIDE TO BE

ME GUSTA IR

SIEMPRE EN CONTRA DE VIENTO

SI DICEN BLANCO

Y LES DIGO NEGRO

As the cousins laugh, Mother eyes Leonardo.

MOTHER

(To FATHER)

Why the hell are they here?

FATHER

They are family. Today we forgive.

MOTHER

I can forget, but never forgive.

Leonardo and Bride make eye contact.

BRIDEGROOM

(To BRIDE)

I'm happy that you're wearing your flowers. You're the single best decision I've made in my life.

BRIDE TO BE

Let's go get married, this instant.

BRIDEGROOM

You're in a hurry!

BRIDE TO BE

Yes, I can't wait to be your woman and get away from everyone but you.

BRIDEGROOM

That's what I want too.

BRIDE TO BE

No one else's eyes but yours, if you hold me tight enough.

He embraces her. Lifts her in the air.

BRIDEGROOM

I have strong arms. Count on this embrace for the next forty years... at least!

BRIDE TO BE

Forever!

Cheers and *gritos* from the Guests.

FATHER

Time to go! Got to get to church on time! Everybody find their cars.
The sun's already ahead of us!

MOTHER

Everyone be careful! The last thing we need is any bad luck!

The Guests exit. Bridegroom pays the Elderly Clown cash.

BRIDEGROOM

Gracias por todo.

ELDERLY CLOWN

Por nada, *Patrón.*

CIRCUS VOICES

Que vivan los novios!

Maid weeps as she kisses Bride.

MAID

Our little girl, you leave this house our star!

Father kisses Bride, then hugs the Maid.

FATHER

My little girl leaving this house to go get married!

CIRCUS SINGER

YA SALES DE TU CASA

PARA LA IGLESIA!

The Circus Performers exit making music and singing.

BRIDEGROOM

She's pure as flowers tossed upon the sand.

He takes her hand and leads her off. Father and Maid follow close behind. Mother lags, aware of Leonardo. Finally she exits too, leaving Leonardo and Wife alone in the patio.

WIFE

Come on, let's go.

LEONARDO

Where?

WIFE

To church of course. I need to ride with you, the bus was full.

LEONARDO

I don't want to go anymore.

WIFE

Well I'm not going to church alone.

Que no puedo más! I can't stand it anymore, Leo.

LEONARDO

Me neither.

WIFE

Why are you looking at me like that? With knives in your eyes!

LEONARDO

Don't get excited. Let's go.

WIFE

We're finished. But I have a child.

(Touches belly)

And another on the way. The same thing happened to my mother when my father left us. But I'm not her.

Don't you remember our wedding day? I thought that I could fit the entire countryside inside me, my heart was so full!

LEONARDO

Let's go.

WIFE

Together!

LEONARDO

Fine. Yes. Sure.

(Hotly)

Move!

They exit. The Elderly Clown appears, having seen it all. He kneels at the altar. He prays to Santa Muerte, and to JESUS MALVERDE, patron saint of the drug trade.

ELDERLY CLOWN

AL SALIR DE TU CASA

PARA LA IGLESIA

ACUÉRDATE QUE SALES

COMO UNA ESTRELLA

(His song turns to the Santa Muerte prayer)

Muerte querida: yo te pido con todas las fuerzas de mi corazón, que así como dios te formo inmortal, y poderosa dueña y reina de las tinieblas del mas alla, que con ese gran poder que tienes sobre todos los mortales, Bring a peaceful end to this day.

MUSIC, traditional *ranchera* style, muted.

The Bride and Bridegroom are joined in matrimony. Flowers everywhere – wreaths, bouquets – and lit votive candles. As part of the wedding ritual, the Bridegroom gives the Bride *trece monedas de oro* (13 gold coins) blessed by THE PRIEST. These symbolize his wealth and trust in her. After the vows, The Priest puts *El Lazo*, a white-ribboned lasso in the shape of a Figure Eight, around each of their necks – the symbol of the unbreakable bond of marriage. Bride is stoic throughout, while the Bridegroom turns smiles and cries.

SCENE 2

The patio of the Bride's home. An intonation of grey whites and cold blues, with plated large prickly pears and mangos. The Maid arranges glasses and trays for the wedding party.

MAID

(Shouts)

Spread the tablecloths!

(Sings to herself the Gloria Trevi song)

A MI ME GUSTA
ANDAR DE PELO SUELTO
AUNQUE ME VEAN
SIEMPRE CON ENREDOS
ME GUSTA TODO
LO QUE SEA SINCERO
YO SOY REAL
Y NO TENGO REVERSO

(Shouts)

Bring the *tequila!*

(Dances as she sings)

Y VOY Y VOY Y VOY Y VOY

Father enters with Mother.

MOTHER

Por fin! You drive too fast. I'm carsick.

FATHER

(Sweetly ignoring her)

We're the first ones back?

MAID

Nope. Leonardo and his wife got here a while back, he must have gone off-road like a *puma*. The wife looked half dead from fear.

FATHER

That young man looks for misfortune. He has bad blood.

MOTHER

What other blood can he have? It began with his great-grandfather, who started the killings with his bad blood and passed it on to his gang of sons for generations. Men with smiling faces and knives.

FATHER

Let's not talk about it!

MAID

How can she not?

MOTHER

It hurts me like a clot in my veins. I look at Leonardo's face and all I see is that hand that murdered what was mine.

FATHER

Today is not the day for those kinds of memories.

MOTHER

Today even more so. Because today I am left alone in my own house.

FATHER

But not for long!

(Touches MAID's belly)

A baby can't be far.

MOTHER

That's my wish: grandchildren.

Father pours them all tequila.

FATHER

In this hard land you need more than hired hands, you need *los tuyos*, your own sons. You always have to battle with the land against the blight, the weeds, the rocks that seem to grow from God knows where. Only your own kind can conquer the land and seed the fields. It takes a lot of sons.

MOTHER

And at least one daughter!

FATHER

(Cheerfully)

Boys and girls.

MOTHER

My son will get her pregnant in no time. We have good seed. His father and I would have had many sons.

FATHER

I wish it could all happen in one day. *Abracadabra!* Then right away they'd have two or three grown men. Oh I'd put them to work right away!

MOTHER

It takes so long. When I saw my eldest son dying, I bathed my hands in his blood, I dipped my tongue in the gore. Because it was my blood. You don't know what that's like.

FATHER

(Tenderly)

Sometimes you have to learn to look the other way.

MOTHER

I should have taken the bloody dirt from the street and placed it in a vessel as a sacred relic.

(Pours tequila out)

"For the homies who couldn't be here" – that's what he would have said. *Ay que chingón era!*

FATHER

No worries. My daughter is broad and your son is *fuerte, como esto!*

He holds up his arm like an erection. Maid laughs.

MOTHER

I'll drink to that.

FATHER

(To the HELP)

Where are the *carnitas*?

MAID

Everything is prepared.

(Touches his face)

It will be a beautiful party.

FATHER

Have them bring some *nopalitos* and some *tortillas de harina* – burnt the way I like it.

Maid exits as Leonardo and Wife approach.

WIFE

Blessings upon them, and you!

MOTHER

(Cold)

Gracias.

LEONARDO

Will there be a party?

FATHER

Just a little one. You young people don't know how to amuse yourselves!

MOTHER

No one wants to stay too late and have to come home in the dark. Night is when the knives come out.

MAID

(Returning)

Here they come!

Bridegroom and Bride enter embracing one another.

BRIDEGROOM

(Pointing out people)

There are my cousins from Tamaulipas! I'd never met them before today.

MOTHER

All my people from Puebla came.

BRIDEGROOM

And there? Are they...?

The party comes to a halt as CARTEL 1 and 2 enter.

FATHER

Our friends from the cartel. Paying their respects. They don't come to just anyone's wedding, *m'bijo!*

BRIDEGROOM

Everyone is afraid of them.

FATHER

No reason for you to be. You are safe now. You're one of us.

As Father and Bridegroom walk towards the CARTEL GROUP.

MOTHER

(To BRIDE)

What's wrong?

BRIDE

Nothing's wrong.

MOTHER

Today's blessings weigh heavy.

MUSIC. Guests begin to dance.

BRIDE

Like a stone.

MOTHER

It shouldn't be like that. You should feel light as a bird.

BRIDE

Are you staying here tonight?

MOTHER

No. I'm going home, alone.

BRIDE

Stay with us!

FATHER

People are dancing! I brought out my old records from back when we were their age. We knew how to have fun! Come on, *Vieja*, let's dance in the old style!

(Dancing and singing)

PERO ME VAS A RECORDAR

A RECORDAR A RECORDAR

He tries to get Mother to dance. When she won't, he dances with Maid until he pulls a back muscle.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Oy yoy yoy!

She helps him off the dance floor.

MOTHER

Mexican men aren't supposed to dance like that.

FATHER

I'll just watch.

(Kisses MAID)

How wonderful to see the change in this house!

She helps him off.

MOTHER

I'm going.

She exits alone. Bridegroom gets Bride to dance with him.

BRIDEGROOM

Did you like the flowers?

BRIDE

Yes.

BRIDEGROOM

I've been thinking, *mi amor*. We'll build our own house, just yours and mine. Out there where the fields meet the *agave* and the train tracks cut through the land like a scar. Just you and me, –

Leonardo stands and exits suddenly.

BRIDE

I'm going to change into something more comfortable.

Bride exits as Wife approaches Bridegroom.

WIFE

I wish you love with my cousin!

BRIDEGROOM

I already have it!

WIFE

I overheard. Just you two living way out here and raising a family, without having to go to town and all that *locura*. I wish my husband and I lived this far away!

BRIDEGROOM

Bueno! Come join us! The land is cheap out here, great for raising children. My father-in-law and I have plans, good ones...

WIFE

Our crops failed again and Leonardo already owes the cartel for last year. The way things are going...

BRIDEGROOM

Leonardo is a hard working man.

WIFE

He's not like you.

Maid appears with food.

MAID

I'm going to wrap up some sweet *tamales* for your mother, I know she likes them a lot.

BRIDEGROOM

Give her a dozen!

MAID

Half that. We girls have to watch our weight!

BRIDEGROOM

Today is a "cheat" day! No diets.

(Looks around)

Where is my mother?

WIFE

(Calling out)

Leonardo?

(To MAID)

Have you seen him?

MAID

Wasn't looking.

BRIDEGROOM

He probably went inside. There's a fight on cable. A kid from Los Mochis fighting for the title against a Puerto Rican. *Que viva Mexico! Que viva Sinaloa!*

WIFE

I'll go check.

MAID

(Tearing up)

Everything's so beautiful!

BRIDEGROOM

You're not dancing?

MAID

No one asked me.

BRIDEGROOM

What about my father-in-law?

MAID

He doesn't count.

BRIDEGROOM

These young bucks don't know any better. You cougars move better than the young ones!

MAID

How would you know, Young Man?

Maid dances a bit.

BRIDEGROOM

I know what I see!

MAID

Estoy en buena forma, pero la forma es redonda!

BRIDEGROOM

In all the right places.

MAID

Keep flirting, I like it. My mother attended the wedding of your parents. What a man, your *papa!* She said it seemed like your *mama* was marrying a mountain.

BRIDEGROOM

I'm not that tall.

MAID

But you have the same sparkle in the eyes.

BRIDEGROOM

Only when I'm looking at my bride.

MAID

Where is our little *estrella?*

BRIDEGROOM

Changing clothes I think.

MAID

Ah! Listen up, Young Buck. After midnight, since you two will be awake, I left out some *carnitas* and a bottle of good Napa champagne to wash it down. I hid it in the back of the refrigerator. Just in case you get hungry, after.

BRIDEGROOM

(Pats his belly)

I try not to eat late at night.

MAID

Maybe she'll be hungry.

Maid winks as she exits.

The CARTEL GUYS approach. They are a little drunk, but essentially friendly. Cartel #1 is Latino. Cartel #2 is African American and clearly from the North.

CARTEL #1

Cuate! Felicitaciones! No hay bronca!

BRIDEGROOM

Thank you for coming. You honor me.

CARTEL #2

This is only the beginning Bruh. The cartel is very happy with your harvest.

CARTEL #1

Brother, you sure did marry a pretty one. I gotta get me one of those. Come have a drink with us.

BRIDEGROOM

(Hesitates)

I'm waiting for the bride.

CARTEL #2

You can have her all night.

CARTEL #1

Morning too. That's my favorite.

CARTEL #2

Your new father opened up the good brandy.

BRIDEGROOM

Is the fight still on?

CARTEL #1

That *Boriqua* knocked him in the first round! *Que buey!*

CARTEL #2

Messican got bum rushed!

CARTEL #1

Your father took it hard.

(Mimes drinking)

If you know what I mean.

CARTEL #2

Let's have that drink, *Compadre*. See if we can catch up with him! And we can talk about next year's harvest and other investments.

BRIDEGROOM

Pos andale, mis Compadres!

The three enter the house together, laughing.

In the BRIDE's BEDROOM, the Young Salesgirl enters with the Bride, now in a change of clothes, but still in a dark mood.

SALES GIRL

I can't believe you're giving me your Gloria Trevi CDs!

BRIDE

I can't believe you want them.

SALES GIRL

I know all her songs. I heard you singing with your cousin.

BRIDE

(Gives GIRL a package)

Here, take this too.

Sales Girl opens it, finds the Victoria's Secret undies.

SALES GIRL

You can't!

BRIDE

Why can't I?

SALES GIRL

But it's for tonight!

BRIDE

He won't notice. Those things stay on for only a minute anyways.

Sales Girl gives it back.

SALES GIRL

I can't.

BRIDE

Fine! I don't give a damn.

SALES GIRL

Sorry.

BRIDE

No. Forgive me.

SALES GIRL

De que? I'm just so glad that you are spending time with me on such an important night in your life. I stand at the counter at the Forever Pink in the Culiacan Galleria and I dream about the man I'll marry. He'll be handsome and successful and he'll love me –

BRIDE

You really want to get married?

SALES GIRL

(Shyly)

Yes.

BRIDE

Why?

SALES GIRL

(Blushing)

Well...

Bridegroom appears, a little tipsy, comes up and embraces Bride from behind. Bride is startled.

BRIDE

(Alarmed)

Quita!

(Sees him)

Oh, it's just you. I didn't know.

BRIDEGROOM

Who else could it be? Your father or me, and he'd embrace you in a different way.

(Embraces her)

This is how I do it.

BRIDE

Let go.

BRIDEGROOM

Why?

BRIDE

Because... people. They'll talk.

BRIDEGROOM

Y qué? We tied the knot in front of them all. We're supposed to embrace, and... all that stuff.

BRIDE

Later.

Wife enters.

WIFE

I'm sorry to interrupt, –

BRIDEGROOM

Tell me.

WIFE

Did my husband pass by here?

BRIDE

No.

WIFE

It's just that I haven't found him or the car anywhere.

BRIDEGROOM

Maybe he went for a drive.

Wife walks on, uneasy.

MAID

What is it, *Estrella*?

BRIDE

I feel like I got punched in the head.

MAID

You have to be strong to be a bride, especially here.

(To BRIDEGROOM)

Well, *M'hijo*, you're the only one around that can cure her, since she is officially yours now.

A CRASH offstage, followed by laughter from the CARTEL GUYS.

MAID (CONT'D)

God, what is your father up to now?

SALES GIRL

They broke the glass to get a look at the championship belt.

MAID

Animales con ropa!

Maid runs off in the direction of the crash. For the first time, Bride smiles. Bridegroom kisses Bride.

BRIDEGROOM

We have to dance the wedding dance.

BRIDE

No, let me lie down for a moment.

BRIDEGROOM

I'll join you.

BRIDE

No! Not with all these people here.

BRIDEGROOM

Whatever you say. But no excuses later tonight!

BRIDE

I'll be better by then.

BRIDEGROOM

Promise?

Mother enters as Bride exits.

MOTHER

M'hijo!

BRIDEGROOM

Where have you been?

MOTHER

Your father in law made me watch the fight with him. I hate the fights!

(Beat)

So. Are you happy?

BRIDEGROOM

I am.

MOTHER

Y tu mujer?

BRIDEGROOM

She's gone to bed – just for a moment. Bad day for brides I guess.

MOTHER

Bad day? It's the only good day. A wedding day is just like coming into an inheritance.

The Maid gives her a doggy bag of *tamales*. Exits into house.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

When you get married you clear the land, you plant new trees. Hemp!

Mother takes the *tamales* and starts off.

BRIDEGROOM

You're going home?

MOTHER

I have to.

BRIDEGROOM

All alone?

MOTHER

Not alone. My head is full of men and their struggles.

BRIDEGROOM

(Holds her hand)

No more struggles anymore.

Maid reenters quickly. Exits again, now running.

MOTHER

Life is struggle.

BRIDEGROOM

Before you go... tell me what to do to be a good husband.

MOTHER

Be affectionate. But if she acts conceited or surly, don't let it stand. Then kiss her softly. Let her know that you're the man even if she's the boss.

(Blesses him)

Dios te bendiga.

WEDDING DANCE MUSIC and dancing begin.

FATHER

My daughter?

BRIDEGROOM

Inside.

FATHER

She's not here.

BRIDEGROOM

No?

FATHER

Maybe she went to the carpark.

BRIDEGROOM

She's not there.

MOTHER

No?

FATHER

Where would a bride go on her wedding night?

Maid enters, running. Bridegroom continues searching.

MAID

Where's our little girl?

MOTHER

Can't find her.

FATHER

Maybe she's dancing.

MAID

She's not dancing.

FATHER

Go look!

MAID

I already have, *Viejo!*

WEDDING MUSIC and DANCING stop.

BRIDEGROOM

(Returns)

Nothing. She's not here.

MOTHER

(Accusingly)

Qué es esto? Where did your daughter go?

Wife enters, bottle in hand.

WIFE

They ran off! Together. Your wife and my husband. In the Crown Vic. I saw them in each other's arms. All the air left my body. I'm dry.

FATHER

My daughter wouldn't do that. Not like her mother did to me. This can't be true.

MOTHER

Of course it's true.

(To BRIDEGROOM)

Antes que te cases, mira lo que haces!

(To FATHER)

And you? This is your evil seed. A bad mother, a fool for a father with a maid for a mistress? No wonder. But it's too late now. She's become part of our family!

BRIDEGROOM

(To FATHER)

You said I could come to you if I ever needed anything. Well I'm coming to you now. What shall I do? *Señor*, tell me. *Papa!* Please.

Father cannot speak from crying. Bridegroom gives up.

BRIDEGROOM (CONT'D)

Where's the keys?

(To FATHER)

The BMW keys, now!

MOTHER

Go after them!

He has to fish them out of Father's pants pocket.

BRIDEGROOM

We'll bring them back.

CARTEL #1

Cabrones won't get far. I never trusted Leonardo. *Se cree muy muy.*

CARTEL #2

We will fuck her up.

BRIDEGROOM

Not the Bride. Leave her to me.

CARTEL #2

You're the boss.

(To UNSEEN VATOS)

Pos orale, Vatos Locos!

CARTEL #1

A buevo! Sin piedad.

Bridegroom exits with them, picking up weapons along the way.

MOTHER

A sacred rite – and she defiled it. They spat on everything we hold dear! *Simvergüenzas!*

Mother gathers all remaining guests.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Everyone, spread out – go off-road if you have the nerve. We are going to help my son find his wife.

Two groups form.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Every road, every field, every cave. It's come again – the hour of blood. You go with your people towards Los Mochis, and I'll go with mine to the sea. Go. Go!

Father leads his group and she leads hers. Maid is left crying alone.

END ACT THREE

ACT THREE

In the semi-dark, The COMPANY bangs hands and feet to the rhythm of "*Pelo Suelto*." But instead of the normal pop song, this version stays angry, elemental, and the SINGER seems to scream the song as if it were *flamenco puro*.

The actor playing MOON and the actress playing BEGGAR WOMAN remove any previous garments and get into their costumes in front of us. They also get into their make-up, masks, wigs, all in rhythm to the song.

Meanwhile, members of the company take turns mussing their hair in front of us, full of punk attitude and rage.

The MOON wears the mask of JESUS MALVERDE: white, impenetrable.

BEGGAR WOMAN is the Bride of a nightmare future: hair tangled, clothes torn, mind gone. Either lip-syncs or SINGS:

BEGGAR WOMAN

VOY A TRAER
EL PELO SUELTO
VOY A SER
SIEMPRE COMO QUIERO
AUNQUE ME TACHEN
DE INDECENTE
AUNQUE HABLE MAL
DE MI LA GENTE
VOY A TRAER
EL PELO SUELTO

Then the HIGH BEAMS of the Crown Vic as it passes at high speed. A moment later, sound of it LABORING and SLOWING.

SCENE 1

Deep in the Sinaloa countryside. Train tracks like a scar.

As the COMPANY witnesses, Bridegroom enters with a heavily armed but strangely reticent Cartel #1. Beggar Woman conceals herself beneath her ratty hair and shawl. Bridegroom looks for clues along the trail.

BRIDEGROOM

This way. *Apúrate!*

CARTEL #1

(Petulant)

We're never going to get them, *Cuate*. *Me vale tres kilos de verga*. They're halfway to Culiacan by now.

BRIDEGROOM

No. I heard an engine overheating. Their car must have broken down.

CARTEL #1

Could be someone else's car.

BRIDEGROOM

Putá madre! There is only one car in the whole world for me. I thought you cartel guys were supposed to be tough! Just follow me and don't talk.

CARTEL #1

I'm wearing the wrong shoes –

BRIDEGROOM

Shut up about your shoes! I know we're going to find them here.

Bridegroom raises his forearm like an erection.

BRIDEGROOM (CONT'D)

Do you see? This is not my arm anymore. It belongs to my brother and my father and all my family dead before their time. This arm is stronger than Julio Cesar Chavez. It belongs to my people. Let's do this quickly, because I'm starting to feel their teeth biting into me–

Beggar Woman moans as if in pain.

BEGGAR WOMAN

Ay yi.

They look around, not seeing her.

CARTEL #1

You hear that?

BRIDEGROOM

Go that way and then circle back.

CARTEL #1

What, you a hunter or something?

BRIDEGROOM

Or something. This is the greatest hunt that can ever be.

Cartel #1 exits. Bridegroom trips on Beggar Woman, revealed now as DEATH with the face of Santa Muerte. Still, Bridegroom sees something of the Bride in her.

BRIDEGROOM (CONT'D)

Mi vida?

Beggar Woman speaks with the voice of a younger person, sexy.

BEGGAR WOMAN

Tu vida.

She tries to kiss him. He pushes her away.

BRIDEGROOM

What the hell?

(Gets abhold of himself)

I thought you were someone else.

BEGGAR WOMAN

Maybe I am. I'm lost without you.

BRIDEGROOM

Which way are you going?

BEGGAR WOMAN

Where the train takes me.

Bridegroom looks around, sees the train tracks.

BRIDEGROOM

Where are you coming from?

BEGGAR WOMAN

Where the train comes from.

BRIDEGROOM

You're one of them.

BEGGAR WOMAN

One of whom?

BRIDEGROOM

Where is home, really? Guatemala?

BEGGAR WOMAN

(Touches his heart)

Home is here.

BRIDEGROOM

(Moving away)

Did you see a man and woman come here? They can't have gotten far.

Bridegroom checks his watch. Beggar Woman perks up.

BEGGAR WOMAN

Beautiful watch for a beautiful man. *Que chamaco más lindo.*

She uncovers herself, revealing a youthful comely shape.

BRIDEGROOM

Look. I don't have time.

BEGGAR WOMAN

What broad shoulders!

(Caresses him)

Lie down awhile with me and give your feet a rest. *Que pollo eres!*

BRIDEGROOM

Gallo, you mean!

(Shakes her)

Have they come by here, or not?

BEGGAR WOMAN

Don't you hear them?

BRIDEGROOM

No.

BEGGAR WOMAN

Listen for their hearts beating out of their chests.

BRIDEGROOM

I only hear my own.

BEGGAR WOMAN

Then wait for the moon. It shows all.

Bridegroom exits rapidly. Beggar Woman returns to her crouch. From within her shawl she pulls the WATCH, having stolen it.

BEGGAR WOMAN (CONT'D)

Just after two in the morning.

(In an ancient voice)

Death is all around us.

Beggar Woman once again hides, blending in, invisible.

The MOON with the mask of MALVERDE emerges between clouds.

MALVERDE

You may not escape. Who hides beneath the poppies of my valley?
Let me in.

The COMPANY rises as moonlight shines down on them. Their faces glow as if they were poppies. They form a human altar in front of him.

COMPANY A

Flores para ti Malverde! A ti que te gustan las flores, –

COMPANY B

Flowers for you, Malverde! We know how much you love them in your chapel, poppies of all colors, gifts from all the people you have helped and saved.

COMPANY A

Y que tú recibes con la humildad con que siempre tratastes a la gente y con la bondad que adornó tu corazón.

COMPANY B

Wrap me in the aroma of your flowers and overwhelm me in the colors of the poppies...

COMPANY A

Para que me confunda con el bosque y con el cerro, para que los que me persiguen no me atrapen.

COMPANY B

So that I can be camouflaged in tree and hillside, so that my pursuers cannot find me.

COMPANY

Amen!

MALVERDE

No one hides from me.

COMPANY A

¡No podrán escaparse!

COMPANY B

Yo haré lucir al caballo una fiebre de diamante.

Malverde casts moonlight across the space.

MALVERDE

Shine bright with the fever of a diamond light.

Leonardo and Bride enter, hunted.

LEONARDO

Quiet!

The Moon puts up a hand and his light is obscured by clouds.

BRIDE

Let me go back alone. I can find my way from here. Leave while you can.

LEONARDO

Demonios! Quiet, *jueputa!*

BRIDE

With your teeth, your hands, any way you can, pull the *lazo* from my neck. Or else just cut me here

(Her neck)

The way you'd kill a rattlesnake in the sand!

LEONARDO

If they find us, they'll rape you and kill you. And they'll break every bone in my body. I'll die slowly. There's no other way than forward. Together.

BRIDE

There is no forward. And there is no together.

LEONARDO

Who kissed whom? Who took my hand and led me out into the poppy fields? Who put her neck to my lips? Who's been beckoning me all these months, waiting up for me all night, and whose hands –?

BRIDE

These hands! They're yours. Now get out of here! Maybe I want you to live. And maybe I want to die.

LEONARDO

You don't get to choose. I got in the car and it drove itself to your door. I don't feel guilty at all. Blame it on the earth and the smell of your breasts.

BRIDE

I follow you like a poppy flower to the knife. I'll get what I deserve.

BIRD SOUNDS from the company.

LEONARDO

Do you hear? The morning birds are awakening from the trees.

(Takes her hand)

Let's go to that dark place where other people don't matter, where their poison no longer works on us.

Embracing her, he takes her to a spot and lies with her. He has heroin. She watches him inject himself.

BRIDE

Where I can sleep at your feet and guard your dreams

(They remove their clothes)

Naked, watching over your fields as if I were your dog, and I am, and your beauty burns me.

He injects her.

LEONARDO

Fire breeds fire. Let it burn us both together. Come!

BRIDE

Where?

LEONARDO

Where no one can find us. Where I can look at you.

The Moon drops his hand and his light shines on them.

BRIDE

I'll fly my dirty wedding sheets in the air like a flag. *Como una puta.*

LEONARDO

I have no shame. So come. The moon fastens me to your thighs.

They come together.

The Company bangs hands and feet to the rhythm of "Pelo Suelto." No words, just the drum beat.

BRIDE

Do you hear?

LEONARDO

People are coming.

BRIDE

Run! This is where I should die. Let the poppies mourn the wasted bride.

LEONARDO

They're already here.

BRIDE

Go!

LEONARDO

We go together. You hear me? Together.

Bride hesitates.

BRIDE

Como quieras!

LEONARDO

The only way they'll tear us apart is if I'm dead.

BRIDE

(Holds him)

They'll have to kill me.

The Moon emerges fully from the poppies. Intense blue light. Bridegroom enters, knife in hand. Despite his promise, Leonardo lets go of Bride to face Bridegroom, knife in hand.

Company makes BIRD SOUNDS.

Beggar Woman opens her cloak like a great bird with outspread wings. The stolen watch glints in the moonlight. She holds Bride back. Without words, the men embrace, digging knives into each other. They hold each other like lovers, refusing to cry out.

Silence.

SCENE 2

A WHITE ROOM. Outside the Mother's house. Not a single shadow anywhere. Wife and Mother in Law enter in anguish.

WIFE

I have to go out there.

MOTHER IN LAW

The door must remain closed. We'll nail the windows shut. Cover your face. Your sons belong to you, nothing else matters. Put a cross of ash where Leonardo once laid his head on the bed.

Beggar Woman appears, humming "*Pelo Suelto*." Mother in Law goes inside, but Wife lingers.

BEGGAR WOMAN

(Puts out her hand)

Un pedazo de pan? A little love?

Wife gives her money.

WIFE

Did you see what happened?

BEGGAR WOMAN

They'll be here soon.

(Tasting it)

Dead. Torn flowers for eyes, teeth fistfuls of frozen snow. They fell dead on top of each other, with the Bride wearing their blood on her dress and in her hair, the *puta*.

(Checks the watch)

Time of Death: between two and three, before dawn.

Bereft, Wife turns to leave. Beggar Woman sings as she goes.

BEGGAR WOMAN (CONT'D)

VOY A TRAER

EL PELO SUELTO

VOY A VER SIEMPRE

COMO SOY

Sound of BABY's CRIES from within. Mother enters.

MOTHER

Quiet!

WIFE

I can't.

MOTHER

I said quiet. My son should have answered me. But my son is just an armful of dead flowers. Just the sound of birds behind the mountains...

(Furious)

I will not have weeping in this house. Your tears come only from your eyes. But mine will come from the soles of my feet, from the roots of my people. And they will be fiercer than any blood.

WIFE

Don't stay here.

MOTHER

I live here. It's peaceful here. Everyone is dead. At midnight I will sleep without fears of knives.

(Fiercely)

Take your hands from your face. The terrible days are still to come.

WIFE

Have pity on yourself. I beg you.

The Bride enters, her gown torn and stained.

WIFE (CONT'D)

DIABLA!!! Where are you going?

BRIDE

Here.

MOTHER

(To WIFE)

Who is it?

WIFE

Don't you recognize her?

MOTHER

I can't recognize her or I'll sink my teeth into her neck!

(To BRIDE)

Concha tu madre!

She rises as if to strike the Bride but stops.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(To WIFE)

You see her? There she is crying and standing in front of me and I –
I'm calm, not even clawing out her eyes. I don't even know myself.
Can it be that I never loved my son?

She strikes Bride, who falls. Wife tries to separate them.

WIFE

Por Dios!

BRIDE

Let her!

(To MOTHER)

Don't waste time with your hands, do it with sharp things, a sickle,
shovels, knives, until you break my bones. Do it! But you have to
know that I am clean, I am unstained.

First quiet, then laughter. From Wife and Mother. Wife pulls the shawl from Bride, revealing a
bloodstain at her crotch.

WIFE

You crazy bitch.

BRIDE

I may be crazy, but I can be buried with the knowledge that no man
has seen the whiteness of my breasts!

MOTHER

We don't care.

WIFE

What does it matter anymore?

BRIDE

Because I have nothing!

MOTHER

Not even honor.

(Spits)

Bride assumes the position of someone about to be executed.

BRIDE

Have your revenge! But don't dishonor me!

They laugh mirthlessly at her.

BRIDE (CONT'D)

I do have honor!

WIFE

Live alone with your honor then.

Mother rises to go. Wife rises to follow.

BRIDE

At least let me weep with you.

MOTHER

Weep all you want – alone.

Mother does not exit. Wife falters.

WIFE

Y AUNQUE TUVIERA DOS

YO SÓLO QUIERO AQUEL

CUALQUIER INFORMACIÓN LA PAGARÉ

MI UNICORNIO AZUL –

CIRCUS SINGER

They're bringing them now.

The Company carries on the body of Bridegroom, with POPPIES placed at his chest. Behind him they drag Leonardo's broken body. Mother sits with the body of Bridegroom.

MOTHER

With a knife, just a little knife on a fated day between two and three *en la madrugada*, two men killed each other over love.

Bride sits with Leonardo's body, which has been defiled.

Wife displaces Bride, sits beside her dead husband.

WIFE

It enters so *fria bien fria* through astonished flesh, and stops here –

(Her heart)

BRIDE

Aquí –

(Her crotch)

BABY SCREAMS stop.

WIFE

SE FUE

MOTHER

Where we tremble *como locos* tangled in the dark root of a scream.

BRIDE

(SCREAMS)

END OF PLAY.

Dust

By Saverio La Ruina

Translated by Thomas Haskell Simpson

In 1992, actor and playwright Saverio La Ruina established the theater company *Scena Verticale* in his hometown of Castrovillari, a provincial metropolis of 20,000 in the hills bordering the southern Italian states of Calabria and Basilicata, far outside the regular circuit of theater. In the years since, he and his company have won virtually every important theatrical prize in Italy, including prestigious UBU Prizes both for acting and playwriting. With his collaborator Dario De Luca, his company has also established the annual festival, *Primavera dei Teatri*, which has had great success bringing national attention to theater produced outside Italy's recognized cultural centers.

La Ruina is most known for three theatrical monologues he has written in Calabrian dialect and performed throughout Italy, in two of which—*Dissonorata* (Dishonored) and *La Borto* (The Abortion)—he speaks in the character of a village woman of his region who has been victimized by the brutal male honor codes that have held and continue to hold sway in numerous parts of rural Italy.

The present play, *Polvere* (here translated as *Dust*), first performed in 2015, represents a striking departure in at least two ways from what spectators have come to expect from La Ruina. In place of a solo monologue, this play is a dialogue between two characters. The speech and modes of thought of this urban couple (with the male role performed by La Ruina) has lost any trace whatsoever of dialect. Instead they communicate in the deodorized speech typical of contemporary mediatized, educated, suburbanized Italy (which, in its reduced, involute vocabulary, can also be considered a dialect, but that's another matter). Despite speech that appears plain to the point of being pallid, democratic and (so-to-speak) free-market, the predominant sensation we have from the play's first moments is of language used as a vehicle of menace, of domination, an instrument for the creeping invasion of a demented psyche into a vulnerable one. The most immediate point of comparison for English-speaking readers would obviously be Pinter, and more recently perhaps, a contemporary master of the ambiguous pause, Annie Baker, though Baker's hesitations and silences are certainly more comic. Although a stinging social critic, Baker generally has affection for her character's foibles and flaws. In La Ruina the situation is more visceral and more disturbing, and we can say that he puts greater demands on his audience.

The challenges of this translation are deceptive, precisely because of La Ruina's exploration of a style of speech that presents itself as innocent and candid but is in fact loaded with violence. A particular challenge for the translator is to find effective and sensitive American equivalents for those incredibly common, seemingly neutral, terribly banal expressions apparently devoid of denotative meaning, which are sometimes called "discourse markers." These terms, signifiers without a fixed signified, serve as shifting signals between interlocutors in a dialogue, and although they have no tangible meaning, they are quite culturally specific. In Italian, for example, there is the word *ma*, which means "but," but there is also *Mab...*, a sort of iteration of "but" that expresses lack of

enthusiasm about or assent with regard to what has just been said or asked. In this kind of language, the vocal sounds themselves—for example, labial b and m, the dental d, and aspirated vowel sounds—seem more important than the fluid, contingent meanings of the words spoken. Even more than their equivalents in English do, the Italian words *sì* (yes) and *no* (no) quite often, when used rhetorically or to gain time while formulating a response, may express their opposites (I make this assertion while recognizing that no means no). Because American rhetorical tactics are different from Italian ones, it can feel unsatisfying and not quite right to translate Italian *sì* into English yes.

Here are a few examples of discourse markers from only a few pages of the translation (which may indirectly serve to explain the play's allusive title, referring to something omnipresent but invisible, oppressive but ungraspable): “Uhm..., But..., Look, I'm sorry, Come on, No, Yes, Well, Anyway, Really, Eh?, eh..., Gosh, Hm..., All Right, Now now, (*Nods*), Yes but, OK, Wow, Nooo, (*Silence*), You think?” Especially in rendering an intimate relationship, each of these ambiguous, rather vapid exhalations can betray more truth and convey more dramatic power than whole paragraphs of verbiage.

More urgent to discuss here, however, is the reaction of anger and at times outright hostility this play has aroused in some spectators and readers. *Dust* was partly developed in consultation with, and has often been performed for, people at Women's Shelters, refuges for women who have fallen victim to violent relationships, and also at anti-violence centers for men who have been perpetrators of violence. La Ruina has written to me that in post-play discussions these audiences “always express great satisfaction for how the play reflects in precise, surprising, surgical ways the dynamics at work in violent couple relationships.” In a review for the online journal *Doppiozero*, critic Maddalena Giovanelli enumerates the symptoms portrayed with surgical precision in *Dust*: “the programmed deconstruction of the personality of the other through continuous debasing, diminishing, molding; the demand that the other abandon everything to the relationship; the demand even to nullify the past; the wish to dominate every aspect of the life of the other; the obsession with knowing every instant; the phobia about being lied to.”

Despite these responses from the people most directly connected to the problem the play confronts, other spectators have reacted, La Ruina tells me, with “hostility toward the play, as though it was itself hostile and violent, confusing what raises the issue with the issue itself.” These viewers' complaint center on two aspects: First, the maddening passivity, almost to the point of complicity, of the woman toward her own victimization (In one performance, in the middle of an intense moment, an exasperated spectator yelled out, “*Sparagli!*”—*Shoot him!*). The second complaint condemns the play's arc, or seeming lack thereof; that is, its structure of slow, unrelenting escalation of cruelty (with one brief exception), which some have claimed robs the play of breath, of dramatic variety.

I have discovered the same reaction of hostility among readers to whom I have sent drafts of this translation, including one who angrily called the play “an exercise in hostility,” and a text message that simply read, “I am the wrong person to evaluate this play. I just don't cope well with this sort of thing. Sorry.” Discussion over. Still more troubling are the non-reactions of those to whom I've sent

the draft, who promise to send their thoughts and comments, but then never do despite repeated requests, as though the whole matter were so distasteful that it were better to pretend it didn't exist.

Toward readers who prefer silence to dialogue, the thought comes that they should probably avoid a play called *Othello*, which deals with a similar dynamic far more excruciatingly and violently, and they might do well to stay away from Greek tragedy altogether. As for *Dust*, I can only cite the words of the playwright himself: "I have to resign myself that the destiny of this play is in the divisions it creates (weird for me because the last 3 monologues I've done create almost total empathy). I don't bother with whether the play is ugly or beautiful. Maybe the most important thing is what happens around it."

Thomas Haskell Simpson

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Saverio La Ruina is an Italian actor, playwright and theater director. In 1992 he founded the theatrical cooperative *Scena Verticale* in his hometown of Castrovillari in the southern region of Calabria, far outside the national centers of culture. As an actor, La Ruina has won Italy's most prestigious new theater award, the *Premio Ubu*, for his two stage monologues in Calabrian dialect, *Dissonorata* and *La Borto*, in which he performs in the character of a woman victimized by the crushing patriarchal honor codes that still hold sway in many parts of rural Italy. In 1999 he and his company established an annual performance festival, *Primavera dei Teatri*, which brings to light plays and playwrights who originate from outside the regular theatrical circuit, and puts them in contact with audiences often excluded from contemporary performance. For more information, see: <http://www.scenaverticale.it/>.

Thomas Simpson is Associate Professor of Instruction in Italian at Northwestern University. In *The Mercurian*, he has published a translation of Marco Martinelli's "Rumore di acque" which has been performed in New York, New Jersey, Chicago, and Milwaukee. His translations of plays by Edoardo de Filippo have been performed in New York, New Haven, Pittsburgh, and Seattle. He is also translator of Marco Paolini's *The Story of Vajont*, Marco Baliani's *Body of State* (co-translator), *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte* by Antonio Fava, and Valentina Valentini's *Theatres, Worlds, Bodies* (ths907@northwestern.edu).

Dust

(Dialogue between man and woman)

By Saverio La Ruina

Translated by Thomas Haskell Simpson, 2015

BEGINNING

As they enter, SHE is singing to herself Cole Porter's C'est Magnifique

SHE: Nice party, no?

HE: Uhm...

SHE: My friends, did you like them?

HE: Uhm...

SHE: Did you have fun?

HE: Listen, if you don't mind, do you think you could find a hotel for me?

SHE: Why?

HE: Would you mind calling a hotel, please, so I don't sleep at your house?

SHE: What do you mean? Come on, get in the car.

HE: No, I'm not getting in.

SHE: But... did I do something...

HE: Look, I'm sorry, I'm just tired, I want to go to sleep. Would you mind?

SHE: But why not at my place? You slept there last night...

HE: Last night.

SHE: What's changed now?

HE: I have to explain?

SHE: I don't understand, we had such a nice evening, you seemed happy... What's the matter?

HE: You're so dry.

SHE: Dry, what do you mean? You mean too bony, skinny, what...?

HE: No no, you're a dry woman, of feeling.

SHE: Why, did I disappoint you? If I did something wrong, I'm sorry, I don't...

HE: Are you going to call a hotel or not?

SHE: What did I do to you?

HE: What did you do...

SHE: No, I really don't know...

HE: Ah, you don't know?

SHE: No, I don't know, you have to tell me.

HE: Did you feel fulfilled?

SHE: About what?

HE: I felt like I'd shown up with Brigitte Bardot... Everyone greeting you, hugging you. Did you see yourself?

SHE: It was a party at my friends' house, we all know each other...

HE: (*Upset*) So I entered the house of these people and you presented me like I was some friend.

SHE: But...

HE: But you never touched me, a little gesture, anything...

SHE: Besides the fact that I never had time because you disappeared at a certain point.

HE: Do you think it worked?

SHE: Worked?

HE: To make you understand.

SHE: But I don't know you, I thought maybe he's gone outside to talk to someone, take a walk, have a smoke...

HE: You never came over to hug me and most of all you never made it clear we were together.

SHE: Look, in a little place like this if I come to a party with someone out of nowhere they see in two seconds there's something between us. It's not like I go around with men, like it's nothing. Anyway, look, I assure you, if tomorrow you ask my friends if I'm with someone, they understood perfectly.

HE: So why didn't you say my boyfriend?

SHE: Because you just slept at my house the night before, I didn't even know it was like that for you. I thought he'll think I'm an idiot if I say my boyfriend. Like maybe for you it's I'm here now, gone tomorrow, it's nothing.

HE: Because that's how it is for you, right?

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: That's what you think, then?

SHE: No, that's not how it is for me. But my boyfriend... seemed a little too much. If I knew it mattered to you I would have specified that we're seeing each other, that we have a relationship, I don't know... Anyway, I'm sorry...

HE: That's a relief.

SHE: Maybe I didn't pay you enough attention...

HE: I'd say.

SHE: So I'm sorry then. Anyway I explained why.

HE: Anyway, there was a positive note tonight.

SHE: What?

HE: Your eyes.

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: Can I ask you a question?

SHE: Sure.

HE: But, no, maybe it's better not to.

SHE: Why?

HE: Come on, maybe you don't feel like answering.

SHE: No, I feel like it.

HE: Yes, but maybe you think this guy why's he sticking his nose in my...

SHE: No, I'm not thinking anything, actually I'm curious, tell me.

HE: You touch yourself.

SHE: I touch myself?

HE: Yes, the whole night you were touching your hands, how come?

SHE: Well, I don't know, maybe because my hands are always cold, so I warm them up, I don't know...

HE: And your throat. You were always touching your throat too.

SHE: Well, because I always need to cover my neck, even in the summer, so if I don't have something on I touch it.

HE: But you touch yourself continuously.

SHE: What do you mean, I touch myself?

HE: You touch yourself, you're always there touching yourself.

SHE: But when, in which moment?

HE: When you listen to the others.

SHE: Well maybe it relaxes me. It's just like when someone touches their beard, no? I touch my neck, my hair...

HE: Anyway, we won't talk about it if you don't want to.

SHE: No, that's not it; I want to understand. Why, what do you think about the fact that I touch myself?

HE: That it can either be sheer distraction or a way of communicating something.

SHE: I'd say it's more distraction. Actually for me it's a sign I'm listening, it shows I'm concentrating on listening.

HE: Yes, but if you have a tight little t-shirt with a low neckline and you touch your throat that way, a man watching you, it's not like he thinks you're concentrating.

SHE: Why, what should he think?

HE: Maybe he thinks you have a pretty uninhibited rapport with your body. Or worse, it's a way of winking, no?

SHE: Well, that seems... No, it's just a habit. Some people chew their nails for example. Maybe for me it's also a way of reassuring myself.

HE: Why, were you embarrassed?

SHE: No, not with them.

HE: But I was.

SHE: You?

HE: Yes, me.

SHE: Why?

HE: I was wondering what they thought of me.

SHE: Really?

HE: Yes, I was really embarrassed.

SHE: Oh come on...

HE: Yes, very, another reason why I left.

SHE: I didn't get that at all.

HE: No, eh? Should I show you how you do?

SHE: (*Nodding*) Hm...

HE: You're not aware, but when they're talking to you, you touch yourself (*he caresses his neck in a very sensual way*) like that, and so if you touch yourself that way...

SHE: But I don't think... Do I really do that?

HE: Yes, you do that.

SHE: Gosh I'm sorry, I mean, what you're showing me is not nice.

HE: Look, I know maybe you do it distractedly, but you have to be more attentive to the signals you send. Be aware of it. If you want to send them, send them, but if you don't want to send them, don't send them.

SHE: I definitely didn't want to send them.

HE: But if you go like (*as before*) this.

SHE: Hm... Actually, If I think about it... I do that a lot. I just didn't think it could... become...

HE: If I'm telling you as a man, trust me.

SHE: No no, I trust you, I trust you.

HE: Trust me.

SHE: Yeah, if I did like that.

HE: All right...

SHE: All in all... a disaster.

HE: Now now, come on, let's not exaggerate, the important thing is to understand why.

SHE: Anyway, I'm sorry I embarrassed you.

HE: All right, you didn't do it on purpose, you said so, no?

SHE: No, absolutely not. Anyway, I'm sorry.

HE: (*Sweetly, smiling*) We're together, no?

SHE: (*Nods*)

HE: The next time though, let them know right away who you're with.

SHE: (*Nods*)

HE: That is, it needs to be very clear that you're with me.

SHE: (*Nods*)

HE: But you have to be the one to say so, especially when I come to a place that's yours, no?

SHE: (*Nods*)

HE: You have to present me.

SHE: (*Nods, slightly bewildered*)

Blackout

SOME TIME LATER 1

HE: Sit down

SHE: Why, what do we have to...

HE: Sit down.

They sit.

HE: Come on, let's tell each other everything, I want to know everything about you, your past, who there was before me...

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: Come on, I'm interested.

SHE: No, come on, you start.

HE: First I want to know about you.

SHE: No, you first, then me.

HE: All right then. I don't know if I should tell you...

SHE: You said we have to tell each other everything, no?

HE: Yes, but I noticed that you're a very cautious person about certain thing...

SHE: Like what?

HE: Well, we still haven't made love yet, no?

SHE: Yes, I need some time.

HE: No, it's fine, but... that's never happened to me before. I've always been with women... who really want it.

SHE: Well, I'm really everything but that.

HE: Yes, I understand that doesn't work with you.

SHE: I'm not saying it doesn't work, just not in those terms...

HE: Yes yes, but I want to learn your ways. I just wanted to tell you how I am. That's all. Actually, I want to tell you about something that really affected me.

SHE: What?

HE: As a photographer, you know?

SHE: Yes.

HE: I told you about the photo essay I did about Indian women...

SHE: Yes.

HE: ...that came out a while ago in 'Espresso'... Though in my opinion they didn't choose the best pictures.

SHE: Why?

HE: Well because they were looking for ones they could connect to social issues, which are fine, you need to, but I would have chosen the ones that showed more their way of being.

SHE: And how is that?

HE: That is their way of being doesn't come through in their external beauty, which is definitely notable, but in the internal kind that comes through in their behavior, their composure, in their little movements, never a gesture out of place. Like authentic modesty.

SHE: OK, these things you're telling me seem very positive.

HE: They don't have, in other words, that female craving you find everywhere in the West to please always and no matter what.

SHE: OK, but not all women, though.

HE: Almost. Anyway for me the Indian woman is beauty. You know what happened to my father two years ago?

SHE: What happened to him?

HE: He got lost. Or rather we thought he'd gotten lost. In truth he was trying to get back to our old house in the country. But it was too far by the paved road so he cut across the fields. He fell down a ravine and couldn't get up again.

SHE: How long was he stuck there?

HE: Eighteen hours, including a whole night, in winter. He was eighty-four years old.

SHE: Wow, did he survive?

HE: I looked for him in the churches, in the bars, at the hospital, even under bridges, but I couldn't get the picture of my mother out of my head, back home, waiting. I asked myself what my father would have done if he was standing in the same place I was. I looked over toward our old country house and start cutting across to it. I get to a ledge, I hear a voice far off, it seems like a dream, I go down... and I find him there stretched out, face down in the dirt. I help him get up and ask him, dad, are you okay? And he answered: pretty good.

SHE: Nooo...

HE: YES. Eighty-four years old, after a night in the cold with his face in the dirt, he answered me: pretty good.

SHE: Incredible.

HE: And you know why he was saved?

SHE: Why?

HE: Because that saint of a woman, my mother, would dress him in long winter underwear, wool underwear, heavy wool underwear with an elastic band, then his pants, his shirt, a sweater, an overcoat, scarf, hat and gloves. If he hadn't been dressed that way he would have frozen to death. That's what love is. Love conquers even death.

SHE: Thank you, that's a beautiful story.

HE: Now tell me about you.

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: Come on, I'm curious...

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: Start with the most important thing...

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: Or the most beautiful...

SHE: Uhm...

HE: So?

SHE: This thing happened at night, in Rome, shortly after my father died, I mean, I was very upset.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: I was staying at a girlfriend's apartment. We hadn't seen each other for a while so we stayed up late talking. She knew I was really close to my father, she asked me how I felt when he died, what had changed in my life. Then she told me all about problems she was having at work, with her boyfriend, you know, all that sort of thing. At a certain point it was very late, she had to get up early for work, so she went to bed. By myself I couldn't stop thinking about my father, I couldn't sleep, I was crying. In those days I was having panic attacks...

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: In other words I couldn't lie there in bed. Since you couldn't smoke in the building, I go down to the street to have a smoke. And I'm walking back and forth in front of the door. It was August. It was like three in the morning.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: I don't know if you know that area. She lives on the corner of Via Mottolese and Via Amadei.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: Right down there on the corner there's a newsstand.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: Anyway I was smoking and walking, from the door of the building to the newsstand, newsstand to door. A guy grabs me when I'm trying to get back in the building and drags me into an alley...

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: Yeah, he dragged me into an alley... and that's where it happened.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: So, when I was living through this thing I didn't... I didn't cry for help, I didn't scream, not right away anyway, I just froze.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: All right, so, just kill me. Like the time I crashed my car into a snow bank. I said all right, I'm dying, it's all over, do your worst. I was, like, anesthetized.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: Then, I remember, a motorbike went by with no muffler, you know?, and for me it was like they'd slapped me and I screamed and so the guy ran away.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: But by then the worst had already happened.

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: *(Smiling bitterly)* All this just to let you know it's pretty fragile in here, I mean, with me it's not like you take me to bed and start doing somersaults.

HE: I will learn... from you.

Blackout

SOME TIME LATER 2

HE: Who did this painting?

SHE: A girlfriend of mine from when we were little did it.

HE: And what's her name?

SHE: Claudia.

HE: Claudia... Is it signed?

SHE: Yes.

He goes close to the picture.

HE: Hm, Claudia. You like it, this painting?

SHE: I don't know if it's a fine painting. I don't know if Claudia is a good painter, but she gave it to me for my birthday. It's been with me always in all the different places I've lived. I don't mind it, it's pretty. I mean, I think it's pretty.

HE: But have you seen the woman in the center of the painting?

SHE: Yes, I've seen her.

HE: And how is she?

SHE: Eh... it's a beautiful figure, beautiful body, tapered, I like it...

HE: And these women at her feet?

SHE: Well... They're women but stylized, they seem a little bit like fish, like animals... I never thought they were women, they seem like flowers...

HE: Uhm...

SHE: What is it?

HE: But don't you see what a mean face this woman has?

SHE: Well, no, actually I never noticed it.

HE: Sit down.

SHE: (*Undecided*)

HE: Sit down.

They both sit down in front of the painting.

HE: Look. However you look at it, she is in a seductive pose. With all these women, one spread over the other, around her feet. It's a woman who is affirming her sensual power, no?

SHE: You think?

HE: Well, there she is, naked...

SHE: Yes, but refined, delicate...

HE: But naked, in the middle of a red painting, with this really mean face, this hair that looks like Medusa, and all these very sensual women, like a bunch of nymphs, laid at her feet.

SHE: You think so?

HE: Mmm... I don't get it. I find it morose, erotic I'd say.

SHE: But... I never looked at it like that.

He gets up and continues as though giving a lesson.

HE: Look at the eyes. Anyway she has these long eyes...

SHE: But I don't... It's not me, I don't think... She made it, she gave it to me, but it's not me.

HE: But it's you. She gave it to you because this is you. You like it?

SHE: Well, if it's me it doesn't correspond much, that is, with this eye this way, mean like you say. If you see mine mean, sensual...

HE: (*As though making a positive remark*) A little bit.

SHE: But it doesn't seem to me...

HE: Why do you pluck your eyebrows?

SHE: Eh?

HE: The hairs of your eyebrows.

SHE: But I don't pluck them very much. There are only three or four here... They're ugly.

HE: You think?

SHE: Yes, really, they're ugly, because there are only three or four... scattered. So I pull them out.

HE: Yes, but this way doesn't look good on you.

SHE: But I don't do it any particular way. I only pull out these three or four that sprout up here...

HE: Yes, but like that you give a very aggressive look to your eyebrows.

SHE: You know I never thought about it... Aggressive, you say?

HE: Very aggressive... But, do you look at yourself?

SHE: It's not like I look at myself very much.

HE: I'll show you.

He goes to get a mirror and holds it out to her.

HE: Because anyway you see it's a look that gives the eye a very aggressive expression.

SHE: You think? Well... I didn't think...

HE: But it is. Look at yourself.

SHE: I shouldn't have done it?

HE: No. Because you're sweet, with this little girl face and these eyebrows change your expression, they make your expression more seductive, I don't know if that's clear.

SHE: Yes, but even if I don't pluck them the look doesn't change. My father's were like that too.

HE: Are you sure?

SHE: *(Looking at herself in the mirror)* Well... maybe my eye is a little aggressive...

HE: Trust me.

SHE: So no more plucking?

HE: For now, no more plucking.

HE: *(Looking at the painting)* And about this painting? What do we do with it?

SHE: Uh...

HE: You want to keep this painting?

SHE: Well... I've had it for so many years... at least fifteen years. It doesn't bother me, I mean.

HE: Yes, but it represents an erotic aspect of you that I don't like.

SHE: But it's just a picture...

HE: Yes, but the day you throw away or burn this painting will be a very important day, it will mean you've grown up.

SHE: Because it disturbs you if...

HE: It disturbs me a lot.

Blackout.

SOME TIME LATER 3

Lights up. The painting is gone.

HE: Did you move the chair?

SHE: Ah, yes... yes, I moved the chair the other day.

HE: And why did you move the chair?

SHE: Well, I moved it because...

HE: Would you please look at me?

SHE: No, it's just I'm making the tea...

HE: The tea's not important.

She turns.

SHE: I moved it because...

He places a chair in front of his own.

HE: Can you sit down and tell me here?

She sits.

SHE: Here I am. So, I was telling you...

HE: Something's missing.

SHE: And... what's missing?

HE: You didn't say love.

SHE: Ah, yes, sure, love, sorry, I'm sorry.

HE: Very good. So, let's repeat: why did you move the chair?

SHE: Love, I was telling you that I moved it because...

HE: But are you annoyed by what I'm asking you?

SHE: No, love, I'm not annoyed, it's that I was making the tea and so...

HE: No, I'm saying, it's not that you got irritated because...

SHE: No, not at all, I'm explaining to you. Maybe I can't remember, but I'll try.

HE: Well of course, try, think about it. Does it come to mind?

SHE: Love, I think I bumped into it the other day before going to work because I was in a rush and...

HE: But do you think you bumped it or did you bump it?

SHE: Well, I believe I bumped into it. Yes, if I moved the chair, I bumped into it.

HE: And why did you bump into it? It's been there a while, no? I've never bumped into this chair since I've been coming here. Why did you bump into the chair?

SHE: Well you know, I can't remember...

HE: So think about it.

Pause

SHE: But maybe because I was sleepy, you know going to work, maybe I was late.

HE: You were late? And why were you late?

SHE: I can't remember now exactly whether I was actually late, but...

HE: Eh no, because you're never late, so you'd remember if you were late that morning.

SHE: Yes, maybe I was late, maybe the alarm didn't go off.

HE: And therefore: you were late because the alarm didn't go off, you were rushing, you bumped into the chair and moved the chair. Hm, I understand. And how come the alarm didn't go off? The alarm always goes off.

SHE: Eh, well I don't know, maybe the battery was dead.

HE: And so you go to sleep risking that the alarm might not go off?

SHE: Yes, that happened once. But now that I think about it, I'm sorry, I'm not so sure at all that it didn't go off that morning.

HE: Hm, so think about it; go ahead.

Pause

SHE: You know, I can't remember if the alarm went off or didn't go off that morning?

HE: Hm... But anyway, this chair, how long's it been since you moved it?

SHE: Eh, exactly, I'm trying to reconstruct it exactly, love, I'm sorry.

HE: So think about it.

Pause

SHE: Well, I don't know... Love, when was the last time you came here?

HE: The last time I came here it was there. So you moved it in the last two or three days?

SHE: So yes then, I must have moved it in the last two or three days. If you can remember it...

HE: Therefore in the last two or three days you were late to work?

SHE: No, but in fact, love, it doesn't seem to me... But now, it could be that the cleaning lady... Maybe Silvana, who comes to clean?

HE: So then you got to work late or rather Silvana... When did Silvana come to clean?

SHE: Eh, Silvana comes Thursday, so then... Today is Sunday, maybe Thursday Silvana came and moved the chair.

HE: But how many years has Silvana been coming to clean?

SHE: Eh... must be three years by now she's been coming.

HE: And she moves objects?

SHE: I don't know... it depends... Books for example she never moves... However, maybe, you know, sweeping...

HE: So therefore you weren't late getting to work?

SHE: No, love, I don't believe so.

HE: And so why did you say the alarm didn't go off? Before you said that the alarm didn't go off.

SHE: But I'm not really very sure at all, sorry. I thought, I was trying to think.

HE: But you're sure then that you weren't late for work?

SHE: Yes, I believe so... I don't know, love, I'm sorry. Let's call Silvana. That is, I don't know... What should I do? Should we call Silvana? Do we want to ask if she moved the chair?

HE: There's no need to call Silvana. Were you late to work or weren't you late for work?

SHE: But it doesn't seem to me that in the last three days... No, I don't believe...

HE: But have you ever had alarm problems with your cell phone?

SHE: I don't know, love, but I can remember, one morning, recently, that I was running a little. But I don't know if it was Thursday or the week before and if I moved the chair that day.

HE: And so, in other words, you didn't hear the alarm.

SHE: No, it actually didn't ring, it's not that I didn't hear it.

HE: And so therefore you have an alarm problem.

SHE: Yes, maybe so... So then... that is, I set two alarms, I don't know how...

HE: Eh, you should start setting three alarms. For sure, not remembering whether, I mean... No? Love, why not think a little bit seriously about it?

SHE: I can definitely think about it, love, I'm sorry, but... I swear... I don't know, I'm sorry... I didn't... But the chair doesn't go there, should I put it where it was before? Because... that is, if it disturbs you, I don't...

HE: It doesn't disturb me. That is, are you aware how important it is to be present to yourself when someone does things?

SHE: Yes, love, I'm sorry, you're right.

HE: But was it bothering you, the seat there?

SHE: No, it's always been there. It's because I bumped into it a moment... But for me, let's put it where you want, I mean... if you don't like it.

HE: No no, it can stay. Do we want to move something else in the house?

SHE: No, but it's not like I want to move furniture.

HE: But that's not it. It's that you cannot answer no, nothing, I moved it because I can't remember. To nothing can one answer saying I can't remember, the cleaning lady, me, you, the cat... No. If you have the craving to move the chair you have to justify your motive to me. We sit down, we talk about it and we understand what this desire of yours to move the chair derives from.

SHE: But after all it doesn't seem so important to me.

HE: You believe it's not important. But the chair is not the chair. The chair is everything, the chair is the glass, the tree, the neighbor's beard. Today it's the chair, but tomorrow it's a person, a man and I need to understand whether you are a trustworthy woman.

SHE: I'll be more careful, believe me.

HE: Why? Would you tell me everything you think?

SHE: Yes, of course, obviously... What do you want to know, love, ask me.

HE: Can I ask you anything at all?

SHE: Yes.

HE: And I can put my hands everywhere and everything is in its place?

SHE: Sure, you're at home with me.

HE: Can I turn on your computer, can I look at your mail...

SHE: Sure, of course...

HE: Are you sure?

SHE: Sure.

HE: *(With a bit of a boyish smile)* All right, I believe you.

He plays around like a little boy making funny poses

HE: Look how I believe you.

SHE: *(She laughs)*

HE: Do I believe you like this?

SHE: *(She laughs)*

HE: And like this?

SHE: *(She laughs)*

HE: Look, like this I believe you for sure.

SHE: *(She laughs)*

HE: But in your opinion will the others believe me this way?

SHE: *(She laughs)*

HE: Maybe more like this.

SHE: *(She laughs)*

Blackout

SOME TIME LATER 4

He sees her smoking on the balcony.

HE: Ah.

SHE: No, sorry, it's that I can't quit all at once. A little at a time...

HE: Did I say something? I didn't say anything.

SHE: It's the first of the day, the first and last.

HE: No, seeing as how last night we said we were going to quit smoking...

SHE: You're right, I'm sorry, but I just couldn't make it.

HE: Then on the sly...

SHE: No, but I would've told you, sorry.

HE: Hm... Sure, so you go hide for a cigarette...

SHE: But...

HE: You're not a trustworthy woman.

SHE: I'll toss it right now.

HE: (*Taking the cigarette*) Don't you worry about it, I'll take care of it, you sit down.

SHE: (*Hesitates*)

HE: Sit down.

She sits.

HE: Listen... You remember three days ago when I called and you had just left school?

SHE: Yes.

HE: Then if you remember I called again to find out whether you'd made it home, no?

SHE: Yes.

HE: And you were still on the way. Remember?

SHE: Yes.

HE: Because you'd run into your friend, you said, no?

SHE: Ah, yes, Marco. But not so much my friend as a friend of my brother's.

HE: Do you mind if we go over again what we said on the phone?

SHE: No, love, you ask and I answer.

HE: You met and greeted one another, no?

SHE: Sure.

HE: How?

SHE: Ah... how? Hi, hi...

HE: Where were you?

SHE: I was walking.

HE: And him?

SHE: But I already told you, he was in the coffee shop down below here.

HE: How'd you have your hair?

SHE: Tied up.

HE: And how were you dressed?

SHE: With the orange dress.

HE: With the orange dress? So you wanted to be noticed?

SHE: No, love, what do you mean? It's big on me, and kind of ugly.

HE: Yes, but orange.

SHE: Yes, but a faded orange, almost brown. Should I get it and show you?

HE: There's no need to get it, I know it.

SHE: No one notices it...

HE: So you say, no one notices it. In fact though, Marco noticed you.

SHE: Actually, love, it was just by chance because he was coming out of the café and I was walking by.

HE: And the fact that he came out right when you were walking by doesn't tell you something?

SHE: No no, it was clear that...

HE: All right, did you shake hands or kiss?

SHE: No, we kissed each other on the cheek, you know, ciao ciao...

HE: But holding hands or not?

SHE: Holding hands.

HE: So you kissed and held hands.

SHE: Yes, kissed and held hands.

HE: How?

SHE: What do you mean, how?

HE: (*Rising*) Do you mind showing me exactly how you greeted him? Get up.

SHE: (*Undecided*)

HE: Get up.

She gets up. They repeat the greeting.

HE: So you took each other's hands and you kissed... Like this?

SHE: Yes, exactly.

HE: But did he hold your hand for long or a little?

SHE: Well I don't know... whatever is normal when two people greet...

HE: A quick greeting?

SHE: Yes, a quick greeting.

HE: And when you saw him, what did you think?

SHE: What did I think... Hm... Gosh, Marco, how long's it been...

HE: But did you think that you wanted to greet him?

SHE: Well I don't know, if I thought... that is, the time it takes to think and he was already there in front of me and we greeted one another, I didn't think I'm going to greet him or I'm not going to greet him.

HE: And were you happy to see him?

SHE: Uhm...

HE: In your opinion, were you happy to see him?

SHE: Well, normally happy, that is... Um... curious I hadn't seen him for so long, so what are you up to, or not up to, what have you been doing, where have you been?

HE: And him, to see you?

SHE: Well, yes, he seemed... normally, like two people who meet one another.

HE: And after you greeted one another, what did you say to one another, that you'd be in touch?

SHE: But I don't even have Marco's number...

HE: So you didn't say we'll see each other soon.

SHE: No. Ciao, have a great day, ciao.

HE: And while you went back home after seeing Marco, did you think about having seen Marco?

SHE: No, that is no, I didn't think about him, why should I think about Marco? No.

HE: So the whole day long you didn't think about him anymore?

SHE: No.

He takes out the cigarette he had taken from her, goes out to the balcony and lights it.

Blackout.

SOME TIME LATER 5

She is alone, cell phone rings, they talk.

SHE: Hi, love, how are you?

HE: Uhm...

SHE: Love, is something wrong?

HE: No, it's that...

SHE: Don't you feel well?

HE: *(Silence)*

SHE: Tell me, love, what is it?

HE: I'd like to ask you something...

SHE: What?

HE: Something you talked to me about a while ago. Can I?

SHE: Yes, of course.

HE: But... do you mind if we talk about it again?

SHE: No, love, I don't know what it is but go ahead and ask me.

HE: Do you remember the time you talked to me about that thing that happened to you in Rome?

Pause

SHE: Yess...

HE: Does it bother you if we talk about it again?

SHE: You want to talk about it?

HE: Yes.

SHE: Love, if you want to talk about it we'll talk about it.

HE: But you don't want to?

SHE: No no, if you want to talk about it we'll talk about it.

HE: Can you tell me exactly what happened?

SHE: But love, I already told you that.

HE: Can you repeat it again for me, please?

SHE: From... where?

HE: From when you went down to smoke.

SHE: All right. I told you I was at my girlfriend's house, that I couldn't get to sleep and I went down to the street to smoke...

HE: Unh huh...

SHE: And I'm walking back and forth in front of the street door, door newsstand, newsstand door...

HE: And then?

SHE: Then, when I was about to go back in...

HE: When you were about to go back in?

SHE: This guy grabbed me and dragged me into an alley.

HE: But before he grabbed you, did you look at him? How did you look at him?

SHE: No, I didn't look at him at all.

HE: No?

SHE: No, I didn't even notice he was there.

HE: All right, but what did you have on?

SHE: Eh well, it was summer, I had a dress on...

HE: And sure, a dress, the guy pulled up your dress like that and... Why didn't you cover yourself when you went out?

SHE: But love, it was August.

HE: But you think you're a normal person at three in the morning goes down and smokes in the street?

SHE: I don't know, love...

HE: What were you expecting?

SHE: Love, I wasn't expecting anything, otherwise I wouldn't have gone down.

HE: All right and after?

SHE: After when?

HE: After he took you into the alley.

Pause

SHE: That's when it happened.

HE: But he... did he come in?

Pause

SHE: Yes, love, yes.

HE: But... did he finish, not finish?

SHE: I told you, a motorbike with no muffler went by, the noise woke me up and I screamed. And he ran away.

HE: So then... he didn't finish?

SHE: No.

HE: But you, why didn't you scream, before?

SHE: I already told you, love, I was like anaesthetized.

HE: Or maybe you liked it?

SHE: *(Silence)*

HE: But can you explain to me why you didn't scream?

SHE: *(Silence)*

HE: And in the morning when you saw your girlfriend what did you say to each other?

SHE: She asked me what had happened...

HE: And why'd she ask you if she didn't know anything?

SHE: Because she saw the shape I was in...

HE: And you?

SHE: I told her I'd fallen down the stairs.

HE: For fuck's sake, but why didn't you tell her what had happened?

SHE: I don't know, I already told you, all I know is that as soon as I told her I fell down the stairs it became true for me too.

HE: How is that possible, for fuck's sake?

SHE: Because I repressed it. Probably because I couldn't tell myself... I couldn't bring myself to tell myself... It was too much. I was mourning my father, I was having overwhelming panic attacks, there was too much going on in that moment.

HE: Yes, but why didn't you scream before, why didn't you scream in the very first moments?

SHE: *(Silence)*

HE: Can you tell me why?

SHE: *(Silence)*

HE: For fuck's sake, but if you go out at three in the morning to smoke and walk the streets of Rome with a short dress on, what do you think will happen? They're going to bring you a bouquet of flowers? Let's tell it like it is, when it comes down to it you deserved it... and when it really comes down to it, you were also asking for it.

SHE: *(Weeping)* Love, you tell me what to say and I'll say it, what to think and I'll think it, what to do and I'll do it.

HE: Are you crying? All right, I'll get off. I'll call back when you're done.

SHE: But do you want us to talk to someone, should we get help from someone?

HE: No, you and me are enough.

He abruptly ends the call.

Blackout.

ANOTHER TIME 6

He and She are embracing.

HE: Come on, come here.

SHE: No, I can't do it.

HE: Come on, you can't be afraid of a horse.

SHE: No, no...

HE: Come on, feed him, he won't do anything.

SHE: I'm afraid...

HE: Don't be afraid, come on, I'm here.

SHE: I can't do it.

HE: Don't pull your hand away, be calm.

SHE: But I'm afraid he's going to bite me.

HE: No, he's not going to bite you, look, he's afraid too.

SHE: Okay, but don't let go of my hand.

HE: Be calm, I'll keep my hand under yours.

SHE: Oh God, here he comes here he comes...

HE: Stay calm, stay calm.

SHE: Is he here, is he here?

HE: Feel the tickle?

SHE: *(Silence)*

HE: He already ate.

SHE: Are you teasing me?

HE: Look, look how brave you were.

SHE: Oh God I can't believe it. Love, I did it, I did it.

HE: See how you did it?

SHE: Thank you, love, I can't believe it.

HE: You're such a little girl.

Blackout

SOME TIME LATER 7

SHE, off, is singing to herself

HE: Love, would you mind making me some tea, please?

SHE: Sure, love, just a moment and I'm there.

HE: Would you mind making me some tea now?

SHE: Yes, yes, love, I'm getting dressed, just a moment, I'm just drying off...

HE: All right, I don't want it anymore.

SHE: No, I'm all done. You always say I have to dry myself really well or I'll have cold feet, this is bad for me, that is bad for me. Fuck, this thing is stuck... *(Arriving in a rush)* What do you mean you don't want it anymore?

HE: Did you hear what you just said?

SHE: Why?

HE: First of all the language. Can we do a little cleanup? So: fuck, cunt, no.

SHE: You're right, I'm sorry.

HE: And then the volume. Why the screeching?

SHE: I'm sorry, love, I thought you couldn't hear me. There are two rooms between us.

HE: And I had to call you twice.

SHE: But the second time I was already here.

HE: And the tone? Can we talk about the tone?

SHE: What tone?

HE: "Just a moment, I'm getting dressed". You know what I would have done? I would have come naked and made you tea.

SHE: No, love, I said I have to finish drying myself, in a moment I'm there. Anyway, I'll make the tea now.

HE: I don't want it.

SHE: What do you mean you don't want it?

HE: I don't want it anymore. In fact, you know what I'll do? I'll go have tea downstairs.

SHE: No, what do you mean downstairs, I'll make it, we'll have it here at home.

HE: No, I'll go out for it.

SHE: Shall we both go? Shall we go have some tea together?

HE: No, I'll go by myself.

SHE: What do you mean by yourself?

HE: It just seems like today you really don't want to have tea with me.

SHE: What? We have tea together every afternoon. Come on, let's make it here, it only takes a second, which one do you want? The green? The white? I know, let's make the special one you brought from India.

HE: Yes, since you and I are never going to go to India together.

SHE: What? You told me you would take me.

HE: But in your opinion I can go to India with someone who answers "I can't, just a moment, I'm getting dressed"? I can't take you there.

SHE: Why not?

HE: Because you don't love me.

SHE: Love, what does tea have to do with love?

HE: It's not the tea. It's the love. As always, it's feelings we're talking about.

SHE: What do you mean feelings?

HE: Because feelings are the base of everything. Anyway how many men have you said I love to before me?

SHE: But I already told you, love, two. They were very long relationships...

HE: Forget about what you did. Did I ask you what you did? You said: two. You know how many women I said it to before you? Zero. Therefore I love you. You don't love me.

SHE: What do you mean I don't love you?

HE: Shall we play the three card game?

SHE: What's that mean?

HE: You have said I love you to three people me included. One, two, three. One of the three is true. Which is the true one?

SHE: But all three are true. The first I was seventeen...

HE: Always this first love of yours when you were seventeen that you wish for everyone, that you'd wish for your daughter since it was so delicate, so romantic... So what was so special about this phenomenon?

SHE: He cared for me.

HE: (*Struck*) Ah, right, he cared for you. So I imagine how many times you told him I love you.

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: (*Thinking it over*) How many times did you tell him I love you?

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: Answer?

SHE: Um, three, four.

HE: Ah, not one time like you said. You see? You always give different answers. Every time we talk you always give different answers. You see that you're not credible?

SHE: But sometimes I get confused, it was so many years ago...

HE: You're not confused, you're untrustworthy. You see why we always have to repeat the same things? You force me.

SHE: Yes, so now we have to talk again about when I was seventeen?

HE: Yes, we'll talk fifty times about when you were seventeen if necessary. In fact, you know what we'll do? We'll make some nice tea, even the Indian since you like it so much, and we'll repeat it all from the top.

SHE: All from the top?

HE: Yes, all from the top. Sit down.

SHE: (*With a slightly cross tone*) No, please, enough.

HE: What did you say?

SHE: No, I mean...

HE: No no, repeat what you said?

SHE: I said...

HE: With the same tone as before. Repeat... Repeat... Repeat!

SHE: (*as before*) I said enough.

He slaps her.

Blackout

SOME TIME LATER 8

HE: Who is Ivan?

SHE: Eh?

HE: Didn't you hear?

SHE: Who?

HE: Ivan. Eye-Vee-A-Enn.

SHE: Ivan what?

HE: You heard me.

SHE: I don't know any Ivan.

HE: Are you sure?

SHE: Yes, love.

HE: You're telling me you don't know any Ivan.

SHE: No.

HE: Think hard.

SHE: There's no need, I already answered.

HE: Is that your last answer?

SHE: Yes.

HE: So you don't know him.

SHE: I don't know who you're talking about.

HE: You don't know Ivan Donato.

SHE: No.

HE: So no Ivan Donato exists?

SHE: Someone with that name may exist, but I don't know him.

HE: Strange, though, he was at your father's funeral.

SHE: But, just like lots of other people.

HE: Yes, but you arrived in a car with him.

SHE: Well I don't think so, and anyway I was so upset I don't even remember how I got there.

HE: But for me it's all completely clear. I'll tell you how you got there.

SHE: What are you trying to say?

HE: That you know Ivan Donato very well. Out with it, love, tell me.

SHE: But why shouldn't I tell you? I don't know who he is.

HE: Love, tell me the truth, nothing will happen.

SHE: But I already told you.

HE: (*Marking the words*) So you told me that you don't know any Ivan Donato.

SHE: (*She nods no with her head*)

HE: All right, I believe you.

Pause

HE: You're a liar.

SHE: What do you mean a liar?

HE: I'll give you another chance.

SHE: For what?

HE: Who is Ivan Donato?

SHE: But I don't know him.

HE: Come on, tell me.

SHE: I already told you everything.

HE: But why are you hiding it?

SHE: But hiding what? Who are you talking about?

HE: About who was behind you the whole time.

SHE: Where?

HE: At home, at church, at the cemetery.

SHE: But, love, there were so many people, relatives, friends, neighbors...

HE: And you don't remember him?

SHE: I don't remember anyone in particular.

HE: No? But everyone remembers him.

SHE: Everyone who?

HE: Everyone, everyone.

SHE: And who told you these things?

HE: It's not important who told me.

SHE: No, love, on the contrary it is important.

HE: You know what the only important thing is?

SHE: What?

HE: That you should have told me.

SHE: But I always tell you everything.

HE: You're a liar.

SHE: What do you mean a liar?

HE: You're a liar because you know him. You want some help?

SHE: (*Silence*)

HE: Does a gray Peugeot mean anything to you?

SHE: But there are billions of gray Peugeots.

HE: Cabrio, with a yellow interior?

SHE: *(Silence)*

HE: You want to think about it?

SHE: *(Silence)*

HE: Come on, love, take some time. Think about it.

Pause

HE: You're a liar and a whore.

SHE: What?

HE: You're a whore and a liar.

SHE: Why?

HE: Because yesterday standing in front of me was a person who saw you.

SHE: But, who?

HE: Someone from your town.

SHE: From my town?

HE: Small world, eh? Yesterday I did a photo essay on a person from your town.

SHE: And so?

HE: When I asked him if he knew you he said ah, yes, Ivan Donato's ex.

SHE: I'm not his ex, we were never together.

HE: Ahhh, so you know him.

SHE: I didn't tell you because there was nothing to tell. He was just a friend.

HE: If he was just a friend why did you lie to me?

SHE: Because I didn't do anything, we were never together.

HE: Liar, liar and whore.

SHE: But I swear, we were never together.

HE: So why not say so? Because you still see him?

SHE: Because it never came up.

HE: But today it did, however.

SHE: Yes, I know love, I'm sorry.

HE: You see you're a liar.

SHE: But I was afraid you'd think who knows what.

HE: What? That you still see each other? That you still fuck? The truth. Because that's not how it is?

SHE: Nooo.

HE: All right, you don't fuck him now, but you fucked him before. Everyone knows.

SHE: But you never talk to me like this, why are you talking to me like this?

HE: Because that's how you talk to people like you.

SHE: Like me how?

HE: Whores, whores and liars.

SHE: But you know everything about me.

HE: Apparently not. Why not tell me?

SHE: Because we spend hours talking about me, about my past, and then we start over again, you ask, I answer, hours and hours, always the same things, always the same, always the same...

With a sudden movement, he grabs her nipples and twists them.

HE: Yes, always the same lies, because you're all the same, whores and liars. You're like all the others. But I realized that already at that first party at your friends'. Brigitte Bardot. I already understood when I was sixteen. With that one who said she loved only me, that she kissed only me, that she walked holding hands only with me. Then my friends asked me, who do you think you're going with? You still haven't noticed? But you know all of us here in town have done her? You understand? Already at sixteen. Whore and liar at sixteen. It's in your DNA. Young and old. Like the one in the art gallery who pulled down the gates and got down like a sheep. For me. Her husband at home with the children and we're screwing like pigs. You understand the lady in the art gallery? I gave her what she wanted. 'Cause you women, just put something between your legs and you lose your bearings. Always ready. Like dogs. Or the student at my photography exhibit who leaves her fiancé at home with an excuse, "I've got a headache", and comes back alone. I made that headache go away. And then she says, fuck me here, in your set, and piss on me. And that's what I did. I fucked her and pissed on her while I came. It was the greatest feeling in my life.

As he speaks, she begins trembling, the shaking gets stronger and stronger, becoming convulsions. He changes expression, looks at her in shock, like a scared child.

HE: I beg you don't do that, I beg you don't do that, don't do that, don't do that... it's nothing, it's nothing... it's passing, it's passing now... ssshhhh, ssshhhh, enough, enough, enough... it's over, it's over... it's gone, you see how it's gone? Do you feel me, do you feel me hugging you? 'Cause now we'll hug and it'll all go away. You taught me that. You taught me how to hug? I didn't know how.

You taught me how to make love. I didn't know how to make love. I told you right away, remember? I said, I'll learn from you. And now we make love and it all goes away. It's always like that. We make love and it all goes away.

Blackout

EPILOGUE

She receives a phone call. The dialogue takes place on the phone.

HE: So are you going to tell me what you did with this guy?

SHE: But, who?

HE: You know perfectly well, Ivan Donato.

SHE: Nooo, not again.

HE: Why, did you think we were done? Look, the discussion has only started.

SHE: But it's seven in the morning. We talked about it until three. I didn't sleep. I have to go to work...

HE: Yes, but you didn't tell me the whole truth.

SHE: But I told you everything, what else do we have to talk about? Do you want for us to talk about it with him? Shall I have you speak with him?

HE: There's no need for him, you and me are enough. We two will talk about it now when you come up.

Pause

SHE: I don't think I'll come up.

HE: What? You're not coming up?

SHE: We don't need to see each other right now. I need...

HE: You need what?

SHE: A little time.

HE: What. Hold on, I don't understand. You need a little time?

SHE: Yes, I don't feel like it... right now.

HE: Ah, you don't feel like it? So I'll come down to the car and you tell me to my face you don't feel like it.

SHE: I'm sorry, just give me a little time.

HE: You have to tell me to my face, you understand? But anyway... who am I talking to? Look at yourself in the mirror, go look at yourself in the mirror, go, go. Look at those wrinkles. Those creases around your eyes say who you are.

SHE: My wrinkles. There's my blood in my wrinkles. But who are you, when it comes down to it who are you to judge my whole life? Okay, so I'm a shit woman, I have wrinkles you want me? This is me.

HE: Ah, now you talk back to me too? You have to tell me in person. You and I shut ourselves in the house and you have to tell me in person that I have to take you as you are because you're fine that way. But where are you headed with this load, this weight? Look what you've done, look at what's happened to you. We'll shut ourselves up inside and take up the discussion again, because you have to explain to me...

SHE: But what do I have to explain to you? Again?

HE: Because you think I've forgotten that thing in Rome?

SHE: Nooo, but what else do I have to say, I've already told you everything.

HE: You think I've forgotten that thing when you went out at three in the night to smoke in the street? You think your explanation convinced me?

She gets up, leaves the cell phone on the chair, walks away, then stops, turns and looks at the phone.

HE: Eh? You think you convinced me? Why don't you answer? You see the difference between me and you? Whatever you ask I've told you. What are you doing, crying? Are you crying? All right, I'll get off, I'll call you when you're done. Are you done? Hey, will you deign to answer me? Oh, here we are now she doesn't answer, now our provincial Brigitte Bardot doesn't deign to answer. Eh, what is it? Lose your temper? Do you feel sick? Poor little thing. Come on, answer. Anyway you know how it is, no? I come down, we make love and it all goes away. That's how it always goes, no? Hey. Anyway you know how it is, no? Eh? We make love and it all goes away...

She stands still, looking at the telephone.

Blackout.

Pork Kidneys to Soothe Despair

By Alejandro Ricaño

Translated by Daniel Jáquez

Alejandro Ricaño Rodríguez, born in Xalapa, Veracruz, México in 1983, is a prolific writer, garnering a lot of well deserved attention and recognition in Mexico and around the world. I first encountered his work while reading play submissions for the Lark Play Development Center's US/Mexico Playwright Exchange program in 2011. For me, it was an immediate stand out amongst all applicants -- and we had a very powerful group that year.

Ricaño belongs to the generation of writers – not only in Mexico but in all of Latin America – considered to be the cohort that brought the *word* back to the center of the drama on the stage. These are theatre makers who write, direct and act in their own creations. They are very aware of theatre that is truthful and reflects the same preoccupation with social justice and meaning that the great writers of the sixties and seventies had. They have, however, also adopted the aesthetics, techniques and physicality of other theatrical forms prevalent in the last three decades in Latin America. These productions tended to be director/producer-driven like dance theatre, image theatre, visual theatre and performance art. This new writing is muscular and inventive and generates theatre with authorship transferred back to the playwright, to the words.

Pork Kidneys to Soothe Despair is one of Ricaño's earliest works, from a period during which he focused on the great literary figures that influenced him, that he admired. He wrote fictional stories embedded with actual facts about them, and placed his characters and his own life concerns in the middle of these imagined histories, either searching for fame or for young, torturous love or forgiveness.

The first of his plays to be produced professionally and published was *Un torso, mierda y el secreto del carnicero* (*A Torso, Shit and the Butcher's Secret*). It is a work inspired by Alfred Jarry's life and success. Jarry, who was famous for being famous at such a young age, intrigued the 19-year-old Ricaño. The play was a critical success.

Samuel Beckett was another inspiration for Ricaño. Elements of Beckett's life were used to create *Pork Kidneys to Soothe Despair* (or, *Riñon de cerdo para el desconsuelo*). The blurb I used to describe the play in my workshop was the following, "A dark comedy. Paris 1940s. Fact and fiction intertwine to tell a story of complicated love, artistic obsession and murder. Gustave, a fan of Joyce's *Ulysses*, is an unsuccessful writer; Marie is undeniably in love with him. Together they stalk Beckett to protect him and ensure his masterpiece is completed."

History and fiction are so perfectly entwined in the play that it is difficult to know where one ends and the other begins. It is a thoughtful examination on the failure and frustration of the unsuccessful artist and the difficult amorous relationships he encounters.

This play, which I found to be a very moving love story, is, according to Ricaño, an apology letter to his then girlfriend for having subjected her to life with a brooding, struggling writer. Fortunately for him, this lasted only a couple of years. (Nothing compared with the *decades* of struggle a lot us theatre artists endure.)

I loved the play upon reading it. The language and the many plot turns, the intense and poignant moments all made me eager to dive into that world. The play spoke to my sensibilities as a stage director and a theatre maker. I saw the potential for high theatricality and beauty. Every time I think about Gustave and Marie's predicaments, I am reminded of how fortunate I am as an artist, and I count my blessings. There is, however, something delicious about tortured, dysfunctional relationships on stage that attracts me. *Siempre hay un roto para un descosido*, which means *there is always someone tattered for someone unraveled*, that's Gustave and Marie. I also wanted to showcase the dramaturgy from my country and point out that contemporary Mexican playwriting went far beyond the traditional; it is exciting, moving, piercing.

Working on this text was a joy and quite a challenge. The dialog is brisk, but the structure was a bit perplexing at first: narration, dialog within narration, dialog, flash backs, etc. Also, quotidian language is interwoven with certain words and idioms intended to create grammatically awkward, albeit correct, sentences, and, of course, the occasional invented word. In Spanish, this provides the listener with a sensation of time and place and gives a weight to the words that is integral to the characters themselves. So, the challenge was to make sure I preserved the character's voice and the tone of the piece without sounding as if I'd made poor translation choices or had used language that would bring attention to itself instead of to the character's actions.

Enjoy *Pork Kidneys to Soothe Despair!*

Alejandro Ricaño (Xalapa, Veracruz, México, 1983) has a degree in Theatre from the *Universidad Veracruzana*, where he is currently a professor of playwriting. He is a candidate to receive his Masters Degree in Mexican Literature at the University's Center for Linguistic-Literature Research. He was a finalist in 2005 and 2008 for the National Playwriting Prize: Gerardo Mancebo del Castillo for his plays *Un torso, mierda y el secreto del carnicero*, and *Riñón de cerdo para el desconsuelo*, respectively. In 2009, his play *Timboctou* received honorable mention from INBA's National Playwriting Prize. In 2008, he received National Playwriting Prize: Emilio Carballido for his play *Más pequeños que el Guggenheim*. He won, in 2009, the National Playwriting Prize: Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda for his play *Fractales*. In 2011, his play *El amor de las luciérnagas* was awarded INBA's National Playwriting Prize. He was awarded grants from the Fund for Arts and Culture of the State of Veracruz (2005, 2008); from FONCA's Young Creators program (2006, 2009); from the Antonio Gala Foundation in Spain (2007); from the Lark Play Development Center in New York (2011); and currently, from Mexico's National Council on Science and Technology. His work has been seen in several festivals across Mexico as well as in Spain, Hungary, Belgium, New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Peru and Buenos Aires. He is the Artistic Director of the theater company *Los Guggenheim*. Contact: AlejandroRicano@hotmail.com

Daniel Jáquez (www.danieljaquez.com) is a NY based freelance director and translator, an Associate Artist at The Miracle Theatre in Portland, Oregon an advisor to Teatro Vlda in Springfield, MA as well as an Advisory Board member for The Lark's US/Mexico Word Exchange. From 2003 to 2006 he was Director-Producer of INTAR Theatre's NewWorks Lab and he is the co-founder of Calpulli Mexican Dance Theatre in Queens, NY and from 2003 to 2011 was its Artistic Director and choreographer.

His recent translations into English include plays by award winning Mexican playwrights David Olguín, Alejandro Ricano and Luis Ayhllón. He has served as panelist and/or committee member for the Latina/o Theatre Commons, NEA, TCG, New Dramatists, NYSCA, CUNY, etc. His teaching experience includes: Adjunct Professor at Manhattanville College, Teaching Fellow at Harvard University, Guest Artist/Teacher at Columbia University and Sarah Lawrence College and many community workshops in dance and theatre.

In 2000 he earned an MFA in Directing from the American Repertory Theater/Moscow Art Theater Institute at Harvard University. He is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, of The Latina/o Theatre Commons Steering Committee, of Lincoln Center Theater Director's Lab and of NoPassport: a Pan-American theatre coalition.

Daniel grew up in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and studied Actuarial Science at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, received a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from the University of Texas and was a member of the Society of Actuaries. Contact: Daniel@danieljaquez.com

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PORK KIDNEYS TO SOOTHE DESPAIR

By Alejandro Ricaño

Translated by Daniel Jáquez

Characters

GUSTAVE

MARIE

I

Paris, 1953

MARIE: His arm hung down from the cot to the floor above a small pool of dry bile. He had cut off his hand. Above the bile, swayed a bandaged stump.

GUSTAVE: The fucking Irishman, Marie... Is he well?

MARIE: Heavy-heartedly he put his face between the cell bars and repeated in a weak voice...

GUSTAVE: I'm asking you if he is well.

(Silence.)

MARIE: The play is opening, Gustave.

II

Paris, 1939. Third floor of an apartment building in Montmartre. Gustave and Marie stare at a small tree in the middle of the living room.

MARIE: It's a pitiful-looking tree.

GUSTAVE: At present. With time, Marie, it will turn into a willow with branches sturdy enough to hang us from.

MARIE: You bought a tree to hang us from?

GUSTAVE: You never know. *(Pause.)* Get pork kidneys for breakfast.

MARIE: Pork kidneys?

GUSTAVE: A loaf of bread and tea. It will be our way of celebrating Ulysses.

MARIE: Is he coming?

GUSTAVE: He?

MARIE: Ulysses.

GUSTAVE: Good God, Marie!

MARIE: I just want to know if he's coming.

GUSTAVE: Get your ass straight to the butcher!

MARIE: I was kidding, you think I'm stupid?

GUSTAVE: Yes.

MARIE: You believe that I'm stupid.

GUSTAVE: With all my heart.

MARIE: But I do know who Ulysses is.

GUSTAVE: Stupid nonetheless.

MARIE: Let's embrace.

GUSTAVE: Why?

MARIE: To commemorate Ulysses.

(They embrace.)

MARIE: Shall we kiss?

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie!

MARIE: *(Apologetically.)* I thought it fitting. *(Silence.)* I was thinking, Gustave; if you try, you could love me.

GUSTAVE: If I tried.

MARIE: Do you love me?

GUSTAVE: No.

MARIE: Not even a little?

GUSTAVE: On occasion I feel pity for you.

MARIE: That's something.

GUSTAVE: It's pity!

MARIE: And if I were cross-eyed?

GUSTAVE: Don't say that!

MARIE: Cross-eyed!

GUSTAVE: Marie!

MARIE: Sorry. (*Silence.*) I saw her with someone.

GUSTAVE: I know.

MARIE: An Irishman.

GUSTAVE: A common Irishman! Did they seem happy?

MARIE: She did.

GUSTAVE: She was pretending! And he?

MARIE: He appeared indifferent.

GUSTAVE: He was pretending.

MARIE: They were at the University. Not that I was there by chance...

GUSTAVE: I know.

MARIE: I wanted to ask if you could still...

GUSTAVE: It was not necessary...

MARIE: Because your poems were...

GUSTAVE: Shit. Yes! I entered the contest.

MARIE: Weren't you against it?

GUSTAVE: Absolutely.

MARIE: Because "contests are for weak writers..."

GUSTAVE: ... One cannot fall so low.

MARIE: And?

GUSTAVE: And?

MARIE: And?

GUSTAVE: And?!

MARIE: ... and?

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Did he submit?

MARIE: The Irishman?

GUSTAVE: You said he was there.

MARIE: Adding his poems to the stack.

GUSTAVE: A useless endeavor. What did you do?

MARIE: I followed them.

GUSTAVE: Discretely?

MARIE: Rather blatantly, I'd say. They went into the Joyce's house.

GUSTAVE: Where no one could see them?! You did nothing?

MARIE: Nothing, like what?

GUSTAVE: Make a fuss, you good-for-nothing. Anything, to stop it!

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: Soiled by the Irish pig! We are fucked, Marie.

MARIE: Absolutely fucked, he kept repeating all day. But the following morning we learned that the Irishman...

GUSTAVE: ... rejected her, Marie.

MARIE: And that her brain had shriveled up, her wits were gone and she was stiff as a board.

GUSTAVE: Catatonic, Marie!

MARIE: She's so melodramatic.

GUSTAVE: They promised her off.

MARIE: How inconsiderate. While she was...catatonic?

GUSTAVE: Before.

MARIE: They forced the Irishman?

GUSTAVE: The brother-in-law of somebody's brother-in-law.

MARIE: How much did they pay him?

GUSTAVE: He did it freely, Marie, until Lúcia lost her sanity. Then he broke off the engagement.

MARIE: He would've stuck around for a couple of francs.

GUSTAVE: It's Samuel's fault. Fucking, petulant Irishman!

MARIE: You said you noticed something strange in her gaze...

GUSTAVE: Fucking Protestant!

MARIE: ... in addition to being cross-eyed,...

GUSTAVE: I am going to slit his throat, Marie!

MARIE: ... something to worry about.

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Prepare the pork kidney.

MARIE: Pork kidney?

GUSTAVE: It was our way of commemorating, now it will be our way of grieving.

MARIE: I am not grieving anything.

GUSTAVE: When the butter begins to sizzle...

MARIE: I'm not grieving anything!

GUSTAVE: Fine, then prepare it and watch me enjoy it!

MARIE: Heartless piece of...

GUSTAVE: ... shit? Change the frosting at least, Marie. Repetition makes it meaningless.

MARIE: I'm leaving, Gustave!

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: Fine.

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: Fine.

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Far away?

MARIE: To my room.

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: Fine.

III

GUSTAVE: I can't sleep, Marie, the coughing fits don't let me.

MARIE: Did you take the codeine?

GUSTAVE: It ran out.

MARIE: I'll go get some more.

GUSTAVE: It's ridiculous, Marie. All this... business. You love me, I love Lúcia, Lúcia loves the common Irishman and the common Irishman has his heart up his ass. We should learn to love what we have. You, for example, Marie, are my consolation-prize whore. Do you like the title?

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: It is better than contempt. Show some gratitude.

MARIE: Did you drink what was left in the bottle?

GUSTAVE: I want you to leave.

MARIE: Where to?

GUSTAVE: I don't care.

(Pause.)

MARIE: Fine.

GUSTAVE: I am not going to allow you to continue living here at my expense.

MARIE: It's fine.

GUSTAVE: Fine.

(Pause. She gets ready to leave.)

GUSTAVE: Marie!

MARIE: What?

GUSTAVE: Are you not going to beg?

MARIE: What for?

GUSTAVE: For my permission to stay.

MARIE: You want me to beg?

GUSTAVE: Don't ask me that! It has to come from within you.

(Silence.)

MARIE: Gustave?

GUSTAVE: Yes, Marie.

MARIE: Can I stay?

GUSTAVE: Try a little harder.

MARIE: Please, allow me to stay.

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie!

MARIE: I beg you, Gustave, I'll be miserable without you. Allow me to stay!

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: No. Get out!

MARIE: Heartless piece of shit.

GUSTAVE: Ungrateful whore!

MARIE: I'm leaving.

GUSTAVE: No.

MARIE: Do you want me to stay?

GUSTAVE: Under no circumstance!

MARIE: Do you want me to leave?!

GUSTAVE: No!

MARIE: No?

GUSTAVE: Yes!

MARIE: Yes?

GUSTAVE: No! Yes! It's all the same! Shit, fuck, shit! You are hideous; you evil careless instigator, you shouldn't have gotten my hopes up...! *(Loses his breath, kneels down covering his face. Cries. She does not understand. She kneels in front of him and embraces him.)* I didn't win, Marie.

(Silence.)

MARIE: It's all right.

GUSTAVE: No, it's not all right. I worked hard on those poems.

MARIE: Maybe it wasn't fair.

GUSTAVE: It was.

MARIE: You know the winner?

GUSTAVE: Unfortunately.

MARIE: Do I know him?

GUSTAVE: Think, Marie, for a change.

MARIE: Him?!

GUSTAVE: That rusty nail ensconced between my shoulder blades.

(Silence.)

MARIE: Your play will have much better luck.

GUSTAVE: It requires some polishing.

MARIE: A title.

GUSTAVE: The beginning is lax, the characters weak and I still have no ending.

MARIE: Details.

GUSTAVE: And it needs a title, yes.

MARIE: That's more than what the Irishman can accomplish.

GUSTAVE: Do you think the Irishman...

MARIE: ...writes plays?

GUSTAVE: Yes.

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: And if he...

MARIE: Unthinkable.

GUSTAVE: But...

MARIE: I don't think that...

GUSTAVE: Let me finish!

MARIE: Go on.

GUSTAVE: What was I saying?

MARIE: Nothing in particular.

GUSTAVE: The Irishman!

MARIE: If he wrote plays.

GUSTAVE: With his ass.

MARIE: Must be painful.

GUSTAVE: I mean he writes badly. The Irishman is a solitary man, solitary men don't write plays, they write poems. The theater requires the capacity to... dialog.

MARIE: How about monologues?

GUSTAVE: Monologues are not theater!

MARIE: So you think that...

GUSTAVE: The barbarian bard is incapable of writing a scene!

MARIE: He cannot screw with us when it comes to that!

GUSTAVE: You're right, Marie, there's no reason to give up.

MARIE: Not in the least.

GUSTAVE: Hand to pen!

MARIE: Feet to street!

(He writes. She prepares to leave.)

GUSTAVE: Wait.

MARIE: What?

GUSTAVE: Say something.

MARIE: Something like what?

GUSTAVE: Anything. Something spontaneous.

MARIE: Fine. *(She thinks.)*

(Long silence.)

GUSTAVE: Whatever comes to mind!

MARIE: Nothing comes to mind.

GUSTAVE: Anything.

MARIE: I'm drawing a blank!

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie!

MARIE: Give me some direction!

GUSTAVE: The door, you useless piece of trash!

(Pause.)

MARIE: I am stupid, Gustave, not the ideal muse.

GUSTAVE: Muse?

MARIE: I would not inspire a pig to defecate.

GUSTAVE: Not even if its sphincter were torn! For heavens sake, Marie, what made you think you were my muse?

MARIE: I'm not?

GUSTAVE: The door, you filth!

MARIE: Then I'm her?

GUSTAVE: The woman in my...?

MARIE: Yes.

GUSTAVE: No.

MARIE: There are many similarities, now that I think about it.

GUSTAVE: You identified with a character, it happens all the time.

MARIE: And her name is Marie.

GUSTAVE: I borrowed your name. It's temporary.

MARIE: I suspect I'm her.

GUSTAVE: I said no!

MARIE: How exciting to be a character.

GUSTAVE: Exciting?

MARIE: It exceeds the title of muse.

GUSTAVE: Go away, Marie.

MARIE: You were the one who stopped me.

GUSTAVE: Indefinitely. Take your belongings.

MARIE: What belongings?

GUSTAVE: Well, fling your ass onto the street, at once!

MARIE: You need me...

GUSTAVE: Not even as the starting point. Leave.

MARIE: Do you want me to beg?

GUSTAVE: Out!

MARIE: I can beg if that's what you want.

GUSTAVE: One!

MARIE: Look how I beg: please, please, please!

GUSTAVE: Three!

IV

A bridge. Dusk.

GUSTAVE: You are incorrigible, Marie! I simply cannot abide you, you push me to insult you; you are ungrateful; a misbehaved cretin whore, and... I am prepared, if you promise to make amends, to accept... your apology.

MARIE: You cannot write?!

GUSTAVE: Volumes, but it tortures me thinking of you being destitute on the street.

MARIE: A wealthy family took me in.

GUSTAVE: On top of it, you lie to protect me. My devoted Marie.

MARIE: I live better now.

GUSTAVE: Don't say another word, I'll rescue you from that dishonorable life!

MARIE: I said I'm fine where I am!

GUSTAVE: I implore you, come back to me!

(Silence.)

MARIE: You've not written a thing.

GUSTAVE: Not one word.

MARIE: I'm her, right?

GUSTAVE: Doesn't it excite you?

MARIE: It used to.

GUSTAVE: Well, let's rekindle that excitement.

MARIE: But then I thought, if the character is stupid, it's because Gustave thinks I'm stupid too.

GUSTAVE: I can lie, if that's what you want.

MARIE: It's about our lives, Gustave. All the world will know. And the image you paint of me is truly...

GUSTAVE: Precise?

MARIE: Despicable.

GUSTAVE: And if I change your character's name?

MARIE: You'd do that for me?

GUSTAVE: I swear.

MARIE: And maybe, also, she could be...

GUSTAVE: Less stupid?

MARIE: A bit lovely.

GUSTAVE: I will give it my best.

(Pause.)

MARIE: Beg me a little.

GUSTAVE: Say that again.

MARIE: Implore me to come back.

GUSTAVE: Did your brain shrivel up?

MARIE: Do you want me to come back, or not?

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: Fine.

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Marie?

MARIE: Gustave?

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: ...

(Silence.)

GUSTAVE: I don't feel it.

MARIE: You don't feel it?

GUSTAVE: I don't feel it.

(Silence. They think.)

MARIE: Repeat after me.

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: Agreed?

GUSTAVE: I repeat after you.

(Pause.)

MARIE: *Gustave...*

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: Repeat *Gustave*.

GUSTAVE: Oh, sorry.

MARIE: *Gustave...*

GUSTAVE: *Gustave...*

MARIE: *Is an insensitive son of a bitch.*

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: *(Insisting.) Is an insensitive son of a bitch...*

GUSTAVE: *Is an insensitive son of a bitch...*

MARIE: *And regrets having treated Marie badly...*

GUSTAVE: *and regrets having treated Marie badly...*

MARIE: *The admirable...*

GUSTAVE: Yes, that.

MARIE: Let's kiss.

GUSTAVE: ... *(He doesn't let her kiss him.)*

MARIE: *(Apologetically.)* I thought it fitting. *(Pause.)* Shall we go?

GUSTAVE: Let's go.

V

GUSTAVE: Well, Marie, I will play myself.

MARIE: You?

GUSTAVE: Who else?

MARIE: A professional actor.

GUSTAVE: And I should find a director as well, right?

MARIE: Yes.

GUSTAVE: Under no circumstances! We, the French write, direct and interpret ourselves.

MARIE: What about that gas company employee?

GUSTAVE: Precisely, that's all he was, a gas company employee. Take the script. You will play *Marie*.

MARIE: You said you would change the name.

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie!

MARIE: You promised.

GUSTAVE: It's a matter of rhythm. Listen (*Looks for an example in the script.*) Listen... (*Reads.*) “*You're an ungrateful whorish pig, Marie!*”

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: Ah?

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: It's as clear as day!

MARIE: What?

GUSTAVE: You couldn't simply say “*You're an ungrateful whorish pig...*”

(Silence.)

MARIE: What?

GUSTAVE: I'm searching for a name.

(Silence.)

MARIE: So?

GUSTAVE: (*With great effort.*) You're an ungrateful whorish pig... Felicia! You're an ungrateful whorish pig (*Scornful.*) Felicia! (*Pause.*) You see? Your name is brief. Two syllables, unstressed the first, stressed the last.

MARIE: They will know it's about me.

GUSTAVE: Nobody will even suspect it.

VI

GUSTAVE: You could have disguised it a little!

MARIE: You gave me the note to be myself. Besides, the name...

GUSTAVE: It's a common name! All the world is named Marie! What made them assume it was about you?

MARIE: The last name?

GUSTAVE: So, what if it was about you?

MARIE: They thought it humiliating.

GUSTAVE: Humiliating? It was an homage!

MARIE: My character was an idiot!

GUSTAVE: I must capture reality. (*Pause.*) It's all Samuel's fault, Marie.

MARIE: Samuel's?

GUSTAVE: And his poems! (*Pause.*) I stole a copy of his poems.

MARIE: Well, we'll give it back.

GUSTAVE: You don't understand.

MARIE: I'll take the blame. I'll say I forced you to take it.

GUSTAVE: The comparison, Marie! It tortures me. I cannot write more than a word without feeling insufficient. I write a little, I revise it, then I take his poems from the drawer to compare, and it's always insufficient.

MARIE: We will lock the drawer.

GUSTAVE: I should have killed him, Marie.

MARIE: A double lock will be best. Kill him?

GUSTAVE: Lúcia went mad because of him and he's driving me insane as well!

MARIE: Kill him?

GUSTAVE: With the indifference with which one kills a rat!

VII

GUSTAVE: Here, you will slide this telegram through the mail slot in his door; it says his father died.

MARIE: His father died?

GUSTAVE: It's a fake telegram, of course.

MARIE: We shouldn't mess around with those things; it's bad luck.

GUSTAVE: Don't be superstitious, Marie. It's the only way he'll leave the house.

MARIE: How will you get in?

GUSTAVE: I'll force the door open.

MARIE: You are too weak, you'll break your bones.

GUSTAVE: Fine, I'll wait in the hallway! When he leaves I will thrust a piece of cardboard in the door before he closes it. He will be so distraught; he will not notice my presence.

MARIE: And when he finds out the news is false?

GUSTAVE: He will come back to his house. And I will be there, waiting behind the door. And when he comes in...

MARIE: He would stab him in the back. But, coincidentally, Samuel's father had died that morning. So he never went back.

GUSTAVE: I waited for him behind the door for hours, holding the knife over my shoulders. Until I fell asleep.

MARIE: He called home from the train station a few minutes before they would have delivered the real telegram. And his mother simply reflected on the efficiency of the Irish General Post Office.

GUSTAVE: I was awakened by the real telegram hitting me on the head. (*Silence.*) How does a common Irishman live? Cautiously, I walked the narrow hallway that led to his bedroom. In a corner was an arching lamp upon a desk. (*Silence.*) I wish I'd never crossed that hallway.

MARIE: Drenched in the morning breeze, he returned home. Stood by the door. Then got on his knees and wept. Come in, you're freezing.

VIII

Inside of a tub, pale and trembling, Gustave embraces his knees. Close to him, sitting on a stool, Marie pours water on his hair with a saucer.

MARIE: Your clothes were clean.

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: You didn't have the knife with you.

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: It's important, Gustave. Do you remember where you left it?

(He cries. She kisses his forehead.)

MARIE: It's all-right my dear. It's all-right.

(She wets a sponge and scrubs his back.)

GUSTAVE: Beautiful.

MARIE: Beautiful?

GUSTAVE: *Godot.*

MARIE: Was someone else there?

GUSTAVE: Only *Godot.*

MARIE: And Samuel?

GUSTAVE: He never came back.

MARIE: So you didn't kill him?

GUSTAVE: I couldn't. I would have never forgiven myself.

MARIE: And *Godot*?

GUSTAVE: There, alone, lit by the only lighted lamp in the room. *(Pause.)* Left behind on purpose, Marie. He knew that would save him.

MARIE: A... prostitute?

GUSTAVE: A play, Marie. The fucking Irishman also writes plays. He wanted me to know. He left a draft on the table so I could find it. To fuck with my peace of mind forever. *(Silence.)* And surely I killed his father.

IX

MARIE: After his father's funeral, Samuel went into hiding for a couple of days in London before returning to Paris. Around that time Gustave left the apartment with a typewriter under his arm.

GUSTAVE: I needed to have *Godot* with me. I went back to his apartment to transcribe it. I could now read it every single night and sleep in peace. And I could memorize it in the event it got lost.

X

MARIE: What's it about?

GUSTAVE: Well, there are...two men. Waiting for someone who never arrives.

(Silence.)

MARIE: That's all?

GUSTAVE: Well, yes, but they're under a weeping willow, see?

MARIE: A weeping willow?

GUSTAVE: Very desolate, leafless.

MARIE: Waiting for someone?

GUSTAVE: Who never arrives.

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: You'd have to read it, Marie! It's so... (*He leans on his hands.*) So... (*He can't find the right word.*) Wouldn't it torment you to suspect that you were waiting for someone that may not arrive?

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: No?

MARIE: Well, I would stop waiting for them.

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie, exercise your mind a little!

MARIE: Who waits for someone who will not come? You have to be stupid.

GUSTAVE: It's a metaphor, Marie! A metaphor of... of... all this! Understand? In the end, if you think a little, life is but waiting.

MARIE: For what?

GUSTAVE: Death, Marie. What else. It's always a matter of... Shit! Shit!

MARIE: He grabbed his coat and walked out saying: Shit, Shit. Where are you going, I shouted from the window, but he was already halfway down the street, saying...

GUSTAVE: Shit, Shit! The title was unfinished. I went back to his bedroom to make the necessary adjustments.

MARIE: *Waiting for Godot?*

GUSTAVE: *Godot* was not enough.

MARIE: He'll notice the change.

GUSTAVE: He'll find it satisfying and will stop searching for an explanation. Besides, I emulated his handwriting to a T.

(Silence.)

MARIE: He came back this morning.

GUSTAVE: From London?

MARIE: Perhaps right after you left his apartment.

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Fine. *(Pause.)* Fine. Nothing to be done, just one more denizen of Paris. We shouldn't give it much importance.

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: I'm going to sleep.

MARIE: It's the middle of the day.

GUSTAVE: Well, I'm sleepy in the middle of the day!

MARIE: He didn't leave his room until midnight, and only then to repeat that it truly wasn't important that Samuel had come back. Then locked himself up again. *(Pause.)* Never would we have imagined what would happen at daybreak.

XI

MARIE: Gustave! *(Pause.)* Wake up, Gustave!

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: They tried to kill him.

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: They stabbed him on a pier on the Seine.

GUSTAVE: Is he dead?

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: Where is he?

MARIE: Nearby, in the hospital with the red flowerpots.

GUSTAVE: Who did it?

MARIE: A drifter.

GUSTAVE: Did they arrest him?

MARIE: I believe so.

GUSTAVE: Believe so?

MARIE: Get dressed, you must go see him.

GUSTAVE: I should've been paying attention, Marie. I should've predicted something like this would happen.

MARIE: You couldn't have known.

GUSTAVE: It's my fault, Marie.

MARIE: It is not.

GUSTAVE: I should have protected him.

MARIE: It wasn't your responsibility.

GUSTAVE: Shit, shit, shit!

(He slaps his face. She stops him.)

MARIE: Hurry up.

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: Offer him your assistance.

GUSTAVE: Yes.

MARIE: But soon after he left, looking out the window, I saw him coming back. He was dragging a bouquet of flowers.

GUSTAVE: Fucking Irish.

MARIE: How is he?

GUSTAVE: He has a punctured lung.

MARIE: Did he accept your help?

GUSTAVE: Mr. Joyce had taken charge. *(Pause.)* And there was somebody else there. A woman.

MARIE: A nurse?

GUSTAVE: Suzanne. He called her Suzanne, with a certain... fondness.

MARIE: Maybe she's only a relative.

GUSTAVE: Maybe.

XII

GUSTAVE: It seems to me they have spent too much time together.

MARIE: She's attractive.

GUSTAVE: You think so?

MARIE: Yes.

GUSTAVE: Perhaps she is, a little, but Lúcia, even with... well, her eyes are... Don't make me say it!

MARIE: We moved to the fourth floor of a building near Samuel's home. Suzanne had now moved in with him. We could see them over a pair of rooftops.

GUSTAVE: Did he cough?

MARIE: I don't know.

GUSTAVE: It's his lung, Marie. It didn't heal completely. I think he should go back to the hospital.

MARIE: Really?

GUSTAVE: He coughed again! What do I do, Marie?

MARIE: You?

GUSTAVE: That woman does nothing but play the piano. *(Pause.)* What is he doing?

(He takes his hat from the stand and goes to exit.)

MARIE: Where are you going?

GUSTAVE: He went out. *(Exits.)*

MARIE: He started following him everywhere. Soon after, we moved into their building, the apartment above. When they were not there, Gustave would take the opportunity to drill small holes through their ceiling.

GUSTAVE: *(Lying down with one ear on the floor.)* Two sneezes more than yesterday! It's that damn dusty piano, Marie. I'll go down and clean it tonight.

MARIE: He kept count of his sneezes. The number of trips to the bathroom. The number of...

GUSTAVE: Insatiable whore! Does she want to kill him? Had I not oiled the bed, Marie, I wouldn't need to press my ear to the floor to hear them.

MARIE: Until one morning when the newspapers carried a report that should have worried us more than Samuel's well being.

XIII

MARIE: I am worried, Gustave.

GUSTAVE: About Sam?

MARIE: Look.

(She hands him a newspaper.)

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: The Germans invaded Poland.

GUSTAVE: What does that have to do with Sam?

MARIE: There will be another war, Gustave. I just know it.

GUSTAVE: What are you talking about?

MARIE: The British will declare war, and then we'll have to do the same.

GUSTAVE: For heaven's sake, Marie, stop predicting tragedies! It's just an inconsequential fact. There will be no war.

MARIE: You promise?

GUSTAVE: On your mother's grave. How many sneezes this time?

MARIE: None.

GUSTAVE: Fine. Let's eat. (*Pause.*) A war! You are grim, Marie.

XIV

GUSTAVE: You read it somewhere!

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: Liar! How could you have predicted there would be war?

MARIE: Intuition.

GUSTAVE: A feeling! Pshaw.

MARIE: What are we going to do?

GUSTAVE: Stay here. I have a medical waiver because of my myopia. The army will not enlist me.

MARIE: And me?

GUSTAVE: I don't know, wait for your "intuition." (*Pause.*) Samuel left for Ireland, at least I won't have to worry about him.

MARIE: But a General who was doing who-knows-what in London, called for all French citizens to join the Resistance and continue fighting. Samuel must have heard him.

GUSTAVE: He's not even French, Marie! Why the devil did he come back?

MARIE: "War has a meaning and a purpose, and all French citizens..."

GUSTAVE: You memorized the speech?

MARIE: Part of it. I thought I would impress you.

GUSTAVE: Yes, Marie, an uplifting speech.

MARIE: Isn't it?

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: Samuel's faction was betrayed. He and Suzanne managed to sneak out of their apartment only a few hours before the Gestapo arrived. That evening, we found them lying on a park bench. Gustave pretended not to see them.

XV

MARIE: Gustave?

GUSTAVE: Yes?

MARIE: Was it them?

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Them?

MARIE: Samuel and Suzanne. In the park.

GUSTAVE: I don't think so.

(Silence.)

MARIE: It's just that I do believe it was them. I'm sure.

GUSTAVE: Really?

MARIE: We should help them.

GUSTAVE: What do you suggest?

MARIE: I don't know.

(They think.)

GUSTAVE: Fine, give me your coat.

MARIE: What?

GUSTAVE: I'm giving them your coat.

MARIE: No!

GUSTAVE: Then they'll freeze to death!

MARIE: I was thinking of something else.

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: Invite them to sleep here.

GUSTAVE: They don't even know us.

MARIE: It would be the perfect occasion for them to meet us.

GUSTAVE: I'd rather give them your coat.

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: Your damn coat!

MARIE: I said no!

GUSTAVE: So heartless!

MARIE: He cooked pork kidney and toasted some bread. With my coat under his arm and a basket of food, he headed to the park at midnight.

GUSTAVE: I felt embarrassed for them. Samuel and Suzanne sleeping on a bench, like two homeless drifters. *(Pause.)* It would have been heartless not to take them home. *(Pause.)* But then a miracle occurred. A tear rolled down his cheek and clung to his chin. The filthy Irishman was crying, crammed on a park bench with his woman lying on his lap. *(Pause.)* I put Marie's coat on over mine, and sat down to consider his suffering as I enjoyed the kidney right in front of them. When finished, I licked my fingers. *(Pause.)* I had forgiven him, after all.

XVI

MARIE: Gustave returned in a rush that morning. You're sweating!

GUSTAVE: Like a damn pig!

MARIE: You're wearing both coats?!

GUSTAVE: They went to the train station, Marie. They're leaving.

MARIE: Where to?

GUSTAVE: I don't know. Heading south. I must go with them.

MARIE: *(Not satisfied.)* Must?

GUSTAVE: Think, Marie. Without my company they'd be completely unprotected.

MARIE: They'll work it out on their own.

GUSTAVE: Pack my bag. Quickly.

MARIE: Don't you know what day tomorrow is?

GUSTAVE: Wednesday. No Thursday!

MARIE: My birthday!

GUSTAVE: Good God, Marie, can you stop thinking about yourself for once!

MARIE: I never think about myself! It's always about you, Samuel, or anybody else. My only concern should be you. And... It's fine, it doesn't matter (*Pause.*) I'm going to pack your suitcase.

(*Pause.*)

GUSTAVE: Leave it!

MARIE: (*Excited, hopeful.*) You're staying?

GUSTAVE: I will pack my bag myself. You do enough already.

MARIE: Go to hell!

XVII

GUSTAVE: I dragged the suitcase all the way to the station and took the train heading to Bordeaux.

MARIE: I went into the street to follow Gustave, but the fleeing crowds dragged me in another direction. Among the crowd I recognized the Joyces, burdened with suitcases and one catatonic Lúcia, as if she were just another bag. I decided to follow them thinking they would go in the same direction...

GUSTAVE: Upon arrival in Bordeaux, Samuel and Suzanne headed east with another group of French refugees.

MARIE: In Zurich I learned I had strayed a little. They deported me to Ireland, where someone had heard that Samuel was in a small town east of Bordeaux working on a farm with Suzanne.

GUSTAVE: Marie showed up one morning amid the wheat fields, on a mule led by a child.

MARIE: We stayed in a small cabin near the farm that gave sanctuary to Samuel and Suzanne.

XVIII

GUSTAVE: So, you were in Ireland?

MARIE: Yes.

GUSTAVE: They remain neutral?

MARIE: Up to now.

GUSTAVE: Does anybody read *Ulysses* in Dublin?

MARIE: Jews.

GUSTAVE: And the intellectuals?

MARIE: They are interested in a young Czech.

GUSTAVE: A Czech?

MARIE: Kafka. I believe.

GUSTAVE: I have never heard of him.

MARIE: Wrote something about a cockroach.

GUSTAVE: About a...! Well.

(Pause.)

MARIE: Gustave?

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: Mr. Joyce died.

GUSTAVE: In Zurich?

MARIE: He had peritonitis. I'm sorry.

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Find some pork kidneys.

MARIE: I brought some from Ireland. They're on the table.

GUSTAVE: Good. Prepare some tea and bread, well-toasted ple/*(ase.)*

MARIE: They're next to the kidney.

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: I'm going to sleep.

MARIE: Yes. *(Pause.)* Yes.

XIX

MARIE: Devouring pork kidney, well-toasted bread and plenty of tea, we commemorated *Ulysses* on the 16th of June those three years we stayed in Rousillon, hidden from war. At night, Gustave would sneak into Samuel's barn and borrow the play to make small corrections...

GUSTAVE: Bashful or... annoying?

MARIE: Annoying.

GUSTAVE *(Making the correction.):* Bash...ful.

MARIE: Then small corrections turned into radical changes.

GUSTAVE: I am incorporating a character, Marie, a boy. He'll be a kind of messenger.

MARIE: He rewrote the text every night during those three years. He'd secretly take it, then return it before dawn. *(Pause.)* One night, I remember, I saw him put his name on it. He placed it on the

table and stared at it for hours. Then, just before sunrise, he erased his name and changed it back to Samuel's.

XX

MARIE: Is it a radio?

GUSTAVE: It was in the barn.

MARIE: Does it work?

GUSTAVE: It worked moments ago. The Germans are losing hold.

(Pause.)

MARIE: Gustave?

GUSTAVE: Yes?

MARIE: When will all this end?

GUSTAVE: The war?

MARIE: Us and Samuel. When are we going to stop following him?

GUSTAVE: When we finish writing the play.

MARIE: It's not finished?

GUSTAVE: Needs polishing.

MARIE: But...

GUSTAVE: Tshhh! *(Succeeds in tuning the radio.)*

MARIE: What?

GUSTAVE: Good news, I hope.

LOCUTOR: "...the Allied forces took part in the largest amphibious invasion to date. Close to 152 thousand men crossed the English Channel on board of more than 25 hundred vessels towards the beaches of Normandy which were taken by assault. With this we accomplished that..." *(The radio loses signal.)*

GUSTAVE: What, what? *(Hits radio.)* Accomplished what? *(Shakes it over his head.)* Move away, Marie, you're causing interference!

XXI

MARIE: Then, one morning, just like that, the war ended.

GUSTAVE: The Germans couldn't stand the snow. We can go back to Paris.

MARIE: Snow? What does that have to do with anything?

GUSTAVE: Samuel and Suzanne are on their way to the train station.

MARIE: Snow?

GUSTAVE: I saw them go out an hour ago.

MARIE: I've never heard of snow ending a war.

XXII

GUSTAVE: The return to Paris was bleak.

MARIE: The Allied forces had occupied the streets of Paris.

GUSTAVE: We walked under the Arc de Triomphe next to a group of German soldiers.

MARIE: They were forced to walk with their arms in the air.

GUSTAVE: You don't have to raise your arms, Marie!

MARIE: I feel sorry for them!

GUSTAVE: Traitors were tied to posts and executed in public.

MARIE: The women were simply forced to shave their heads and walk in their underwear.

GUSTAVE: What are you doing, Marie?

MARIE: I spit at the traitors!

GUSTAVE: Good God, Marie, that woman has cancer!

MARIE: French flags waved everywhere.

GUSTAVE: And there were many soldiers from the United States riding their tanks through the streets of Paris.

MARIE: It didn't matter who had liberated us. It was a day of celebration, after all.

XXIII

Gustave and Marie's apartment, right above Samuel and Suzanne's.

GUSTAVE: Marie! He's in danger!

MARIE: Who?

GUSTAVE: Who else? An American soldier wants to assassinate him.

MARIE: The Americans are gone.

GUSTAVE: Precisely. There is no other reason for him to be here. Germans were expelled, traitors were executed, The Resistance dissolved. I have not seen any other soldiers.

MARIE: He might be on vacation.

GUSTAVE: No, Marie, he's here to kill him.

MARIE: Why would he want to kill him?

GUSTAVE: I don't know, literary envy, their playwrights are hopeless.

MARIE: It's absurd, Gustave.

GUSTAVE: I don't trust him, Marie.

MARIE: He would spend all day at the window keeping an eye on Samuel's apartment.

GUSTAVE: It's him!

MARIE: Who?

GUSTAVE: The American, in the street.

MARIE: Where?

GUSTAVE: Right in front, see him?

(Pause.)

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: He's next to that nurse, Marie!

MARIE: The one with the flowers?

GUSTAVE: Bastard.

MARIE: He's handsome.

GUSTAVE: They send the attractive ones to avoid suspicion.

MARIE: You see? He's leaving.

GUSTAVE: Clearly waiting for a more favorable occasion.

XXIV

MARIE: We took the bed out of the bedroom and placed it next to the window to keep an eye on Samuel's apartment. If Gustave managed to fall asleep, he would immediately wake up cursing the American. Finally, after the sixth night, he decided to put an end to the matter.

GUSTAVE: His undone bowtie fluttered over his shoulder. From a deserted bridge at early dawn, the American gazed distractedly at the Seine.

MARIE: He silently stood up and remained standing at the window. Then, he grabbed his hat and left. After a while, I went down to wait for him at the front door of the building.

GUSTAVE: I crossed the bridge, like an ordinary passer-by. Slowly. Imperceptible. When I got by his side, I turned to him. Violently.

MARIE: I could make him out through the fog at the end of the alley. He was running, gripping one hand to his chest.

GUSTAVE: I buried the knife in his back exactly where his lungs should be, thinking this would be enough. Alas, it wasn't.

MARIE: He stood in front of the door for a while without saying a thing. Come in, I said, you are soaking wet.

GUSTAVE: He fell in the river and swam to the edge, bleeding. I had to jump off the bridge and swim to him.

MARIE: I heated some water for a bath.

GUSTAVE: I covered his mouth pushing until his head was buried in mud.

MARIE: His shirt was soaking, covered in sludge. Sleeves mangled.

GUSTAVE: Marie was waiting at the door of the building.

MARIE: He shivered in the tub as I washed the splattered blood out of his hair.

GUSTAVE: I had to do it, Marie.

MARIE: I know.

GUSTAVE: Samuel was in danger.

MARIE: What happened to your hand?

GUSTAVE: The American took a bite out of it.

XXV

MARIE: Gustave!

GUSTAVE: Shit! What?

MARIE: He was the nurse's lover!

GUSTAVE: Samuel?

MARIE: The American. He didn't want to kill Samuel, he was the nurse's lover, that's why he was still here.

GUSTAVE: You are making assumptions.

MARIE: Her husband dismembered her.

GUSTAVE: There was a husband?

MARIE: The butcher. He cut her up, then hung her torso next to the carcasses and started to scream from the entrance "whore meat for sale."

GUSTAVE: Did he sell any?

MARIE: For heaven's sake! We all felt sorry for him. When the police arrived, he embraced the torso and started crying like a child. It took an hour to pull him off.

GUSTAVE: Fine. Well, he was the nurse's lover and wanted to kill Samuel. One thing does not preclude the other.

XXVI

GUSTAVE: I have not been able to sleep in days, Marie.

MARIE: It's the coughing fits.

GUSTAVE: It's my hand. I think it's rotting.

MARIE: Your hand is fine.

GUSTAVE: What do you know of rotting hands!

MARIE: Look at it yourself.

GUSTAVE: It's rotting from within! It's because of the American.

MARIE: There's nothing wrong!

GUSTAVE: It's God, Marie. God does not like the French. He abhors us. The Americans are now his favorite. It's obviously a form of punishment, Marie. *(Pause.)* I can't stop seeing the torso of that nurse twirling in the butcher's shop. *(Pause.)* And the butcher... You said he cried like a child? I cannot stand it, Marie. I will end up rotting completely if I don't confess.

MARIE: I'll go get a priest.

GUSTAVE: No, Marie. I want to turn myself in.

MARIE: A priest will do.

GUSTAVE: I want my punishment.

XXVII

MARIE: We crossed Paris in the haze of dawn to the police station. Gustave showed them his hand as evidence of his crime, but there was nothing wrong with his hand. No one understood a thing.

GUSTAVE: It's a conspiracy to torture me, Marie!

MARIE: They'll make room in a prison cell for you.

GUSTAVE: They should hang me this instant!

MARIE: He underwent a number of interrogations. But Gustave would only talk about how the French had been betrayed by God.

GUSTAVE: The nurse is dead, the butcher lost his mind and they think I manipulate you to say what I want. Nobody can corroborate the crime, Marie.

MARIE: Did you tell them where you hid the body?

GUSTAVE: Somebody must have moved it. They said there was nothing.

MARIE: Maybe he wasn't dead.

GUSTAVE: They are transferring me to a mental institution, Marie.

MARIE: Then, a woman's pig in Rouen found the body at the edge of the river. The American had drifted all the way from Paris. The woman, thinking it was a German soldier, allowed the pig to have his fill.

GUSTAVE: God bless that pig, Marie!

MARIE: God?

GUSTAVE: We've made our peace.

MARIE: How did they find out it was the American?

GUSTAVE: The pig didn't like the United States' insignia.

MARIE: The court meets the middle of next month, Gustave, perhaps there is room to hear your case.

GUSTAVE: Which lasts two days.

MARIE: The jury returns with a verdict.

GUSTAVE: Only one reporter.

MARIE: From the Rouen local newspaper.

GUSTAVE: Just a boy.

MARIE: Do you have a verdict? Asks the judge of the foreman.

GUSTAVE: Yes, your honor. Answering as he stands.

MARIE: Guilty on the charge of the murder of...

GUSTAVE: Arthur Miller? Like the playwright? I killed Miller's namesake?

MARIE: Do you have the sentence?

GUSTAVE: Yes.

MARIE: Do you pardon him?

GUSTAVE: Death Penalty, your honor.

MARIE: Shit!

GUSTAVE: A death sentence for murdering a soldier with the name of a playwright. Climb the gallows, fall through the trapdoor and squirm until the very last breath.

MARIE: "The death penalty," he repeats to be perfectly clear.

GUSTAVE: I warned you, Marie; the fucking American playwrights had something to do with this, one way or another!

MARIE: Are you shaking?

GUSTAVE: Am I?

MARIE: No. It's only your hand. It's trembling.

GUSTAVE: It's the damn rot, it's crept up the forearm.

MARIE: Your hand...

GUSTAVE: Don't say it! You incredulous tramp.

MARIE: They transferred him to death row. At daybreak they notified me that Gustave had attempted to cut off his hand.

XXVIII

A cell.

GUSTAVE: It's more painful than you think, Marie.

MARIE: I know.

GUSTAVE: I lost courage. I should have done it in one precise cut.

(Silence.)

MARIE: They are producing the play, Gustave.

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: *Waiting for Godot.* They are producing it.

GUSTAVE: It's not finished.

MARIE: No?

GUSTAVE: I told you it needed polishing!

MARIE: Yes?

GUSTAVE: You have to delay the production, Marie.

MARIE: Me?

GUSTAVE: I need to fix the text.

MARIE: You?

GUSTAVE: No, your mother, with a pencil strapped to her ass! Go into his apartment and bring the script. We have a key at home.

MARIE: That same night I went into Samuel's apartment. The following morning I came back with the script.

GUSTAVE: Let's see...

MARIE: He re-read it three or four times, a pencil in his mouth...which he never used. *(Pause.)* There were no more corrections to be made. *(Pause.)* He sighed with disappointment. He then took the pencil and put it in the shirt pocket over his heart.

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: He finished it?

GUSTAVE: It looks that way. *(Silence.)* Well, Marie, we have to turn our attention toward the production.

MARIE: The production? A production didn't exist. Seeing him in the corner of the cell, his hand half mutilated; I didn't know any other way to cheer him up. And now I didn't know how to keep the lie alive. I was hoping for a miracle.

GUSTAVE: On Friday, Marie came back with details of the production.

MARIE: They found a theatre!

GUSTAVE: Which one?

MARIE: The Babylon.

GUSTAVE: The Babylon? The Babylon!?

MARIE: *(Fearful.)* ...Yes.

GUSTAVE: Fine. Fine. The Babylon is good.

MARIE: And they have a director.

GUSTAVE: Do you know the name?

MARIE: Roger...

GUSTAVE: Blin? (*She nods.*) Could have been worse.

MARIE: Blin found the play in his mailbox. When he called Samuel wanting to direct it, Samuel sent him another copy. Blin never understood why he received two manuscripts; he didn't care to find out. (*Pause.*) I thought nudging the miracle along was not a bad idea after all.

XXIX

GUSTAVE: Do they have a cast?

MARIE: Yes.

GUSTAVE: And?

MARIE: I wrote down their names. (*Pulls out a wrinkled piece of paper. Unwrinkles it. Reads.*) Pierre Latour, Lucien Rai...

GUSTAVE: I want to know who they're playing!

MARIE: ... (*Looks at the paper. Flips it over.*) Lucien... will play *Estragon*, and *Vladimir* will be played by... Pierre Latour.

GUSTAVE: Lucien, *Estragon*? Latour would be better as *Estragon*!

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: Go on.

MARIE: *Lucky*... Jean Martin. And *Pozzo*... (*Searches.*) I didn't write it down? (*Looks on the front.*) Oh, here it is. *Pozzo* will be played by Roger Blin.

GUSTAVE: Blin!?

MARIE: (*Double checks.*) Blin, yes.

GUSTAVE: It can't be.

MARIE: Is he bad?

GUSTAVE: He's a stutterer!

MARIE: It can't be.

GUSTAVE: I'm telling you, he stutters.

MARIE: I saw him rehearsing with the other actors.

GUSTAVE: At a distance. You saw him rehearsing at a distance, but you didn't hear him. We're fucked, Marie.

MARIE: I will make an actor accidentally appear at a rehearsal.

GUSTAVE: I don't trust the kind of actor you might find.

(Silence.)

MARIE: I'm scared.

GUSTAVE- You?

MARIE: I've been reading. The fall breaks your neck and it takes up to ten minutes to die.

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie!

MARIE: That's why I brought you this.

GUSTAVE: A teaspoon?

MARIE: The handle is sharpened. It will be less painful if you slit your throat.

GUSTAVE: You want me to kill myself!?

MARIE: Very gently.

GUSTAVE: Traitoress!

MARIE: You won't feel a thing.

GUSTAVE: Fine. Here. You do it.

MARIE: Me?

GUSTAVE: Don't hesitate.

(Pause. She tries to cut his throat.)

GUSTAVE: Murderess!

MARIE: You asked me to cut your throat.

GUSTAVE: To illuminate that it isn't easy.

MARIE: It is.

GUSTAVE: Put that away.

MARIE: I don't want them to hang you.

(Silence.)

GUSTAVE: Are you crying?

MARIE: I'm sorry.

(She dries the tears.)

GUSTAVE: Forget about it now.

(Pause.)

MARIE: I have to go.

GUSTAVE: Yes.

MARIE: Gustave?

GUSTAVE: Yes, Marie.

MARIE: Should I... leave the teaspoon?

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Yes, Marie, leave the teaspoon.

XXX

MARIE: I got Latour to play *Estragon*. Blin stopped stuttering while he was acting, it was a miracle. Gustave would write short notes for the actors that I would accidentally drop on the stage so they could find them. Then one day, opening night was set. That same afternoon I went to visit Gustave and was informed that the execution date was also set.

GUSTAVE: I couldn't avoid it, Marie. I needed to end the putridness...

MARIE: He was lying down. His arm hung down from the cot to the floor above a small pool of dry bile. He had cut off his hand. Above the bile, swayed a bandaged stump.

GUSTAVE: The fucking Irishman, Marie... Is he well?

MARIE: Heavy-heartedly he put his face between the cell bars and repeated in a weak voice...

GUSTAVE: I 'm asking you if he is well.

(Silence.)

MARIE: The play is opening, Gustave. They have a date.

GUSTAVE: When?

(Pause.)

MARIE: At the end of the month.

GUSTAVE: Fine. Fine. *(Pause.)* I'm a mess, Marie. My liver must be rotting. God wants to kill me before I climb the gallows.

MARIE: There will be no gallows, Gustave.

GUSTAVE: And where do they think they'll hang me from?

MARIE: They asked me to convince you; it won't be the noose, but the guillotine that will break your neck.

GUSTAVE: The noose?

MARIE: The guillotine. A blade to decapitate...

GUSTAVE: I know what a noose is, Marie! It's just that I wasn't informed of the change of plans.

MARIE: It has always been the guillotine. But they say you refuse to listen.

GUSTAVE: They never said it was to be the noose.

MARIE: The guillotine.

GUSTAVE: That's what I said, the noose!

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: ...

(Silence.)

GUSTAVE: They will cut off my head?

MARIE: In one swoop.

GUSTAVE: I always thought I'd die hanging. Sam would have preferred it that way.

MARIE: Sam?

GUSTAVE: You don't remember?

MARIE: Sam?

GUSTAVE: The willow.

MARIE: Sam has a willow?

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Did you read the play, Marie?

MARIE: From beginning to end.

GUSTAVE: What did you think of Godot?

MARIE: Very well drawn.

GUSTAVE: Godot never arrives!

MARIE: It was two people waiting; why would I read it!

(Silence.)

GUSTAVE: I'm scared.

MARIE: Me too. *(Silence.)* Gustave.

GUSTAVE: Yes?

MARIE: They set your date.

GUSTAVE: As well?

MARIE: Yes, Gustave.

GUSTAVE: When?

(Pause.)

MARIE: At the end of this month.

GUSTAVE: Same as *Godot*.

MARIE: Almost.

GUSTAVE: What... almost? When?

(Pause.)

MARIE: One day before.

GUSTAVE: One day?

MARIE: I'm sorry.

GUSTAVE: One day, Marie!

MARIE: I couldn't do anything. I tried everything, but I couldn't do anything.

GUSTAVE: Of course you couldn't do anything. *(Silence.)* I will never know if it was worth it, Marie. All this... sacrifice. I'll never know if it was worth it.

MARIE: I'll come the day of... *(Pause.)* I'll tell you how the dress rehearsal went.

GUSTAVE: What for?

MARIE: I thought that...

GUSTAVE: Go, Marie. Out! LEAVE!

XXXI

MARIE: And that is how we got here. Tomorrow is the opening of *Godot*. Today they decapitate Gustave. *(Pause.)* This afternoon I visited our willow and recalled the morning that Gustave asked me to cook pork kidney for breakfast. Gustave thinks it's stupid, but tonight, I'll dress up and go visit him.

MARIE: I could not see the dress rehearsal. They found out I didn't work at the theatre.

GUSTAVE: I told you it didn't make any sense. The dress rehearsal means nothing.

(Pause.)

MARIE: They told me you tried to cut off your arm.

GUSTAVE: And they took away my teaspoon.

(Silence.)

MARIE: I read the play, Gustave.

GUSTAVE: Finally.

MARIE: I think I realized something: They are waiting.

GUSTAVE: You are quite observant, Marie.

MARIE: Together, Gustave.

GUSTAVE: You never cease to amaze me.

MARIE: And they couldn't do it, one without the other. That's why *Gogo* tells *Didi*...

(She doesn't remember. Silence.)

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: I wrote it down on a piece of paper because I knew I was going to forget. *(Takes out a crumpled paper, smooths it out against her thigh. Reads.)* It says... *(Pause.)* I can't read my own writing... It was something nice, I'm sure. *(Tries one more time. Desists.)* What I'm trying to say is that they depend on each other, Gustave, that's why, when they think of hanging themselves from the willow to kill time, *Didi* says to *Gogo* that he doesn't want to hang himself after him, because being heavier, he will end up breaking the branch.

GUSTAVE: So?

MARIE: He would be alone, Gustave! *(Silence.)* That's what's going to happen to me. What is going to happen to me, without you? What am I going to do today, after you die? I will wake up every day and sit on the corner of the bed not knowing what to do.

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie! Not tomorrow. Tomorrow you must be strong.

MARIE: I can't!

GUSTAVE: You have to go to the opening of *Godot*.

MARIE: I am going to hang myself from the willow.

GUSTAVE: Devour pork kidney.

MARIE: What for?

GUSTAVE: To commemorate, to grieve, it doesn't matter! Let it fill your throat and impede the tears from coming. We did not sacrifice ourselves for you to bungle it up with your weeping.

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: Make an effort not to appear so unattractive and go to the theatre. Don't take anybody's seat, stay standing in the back of the house.

MARIE: Yes.

GUSTAVE: Laugh when the play calls for it, so the audience will follow. If people don't understand the ending, start to applaud. Not immediately, give them a breath.

MARIE: Fine.

GUSTAVE: Shit, Marie! You're already crying?

MARIE: No.

GUSTAVE: You are crying!

MARIE: I am not crying!

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Find Samuel at the end of the performance. Try not to overwhelm him. Just tell him a little about us. Not of what we did for him, you shouldn't make him uncomfortable on his night.

MARIE: It is also our night.

GUSTAVE: Someone has to make a sacrifice, Marie. The least gifted ones. And it's alright.

MARIE: And if he asks for you?

GUSTAVE: He won't ask for me.

MARIE: I know, but if he asks?

GUSTAVE: Apologize for me. Say I could not make it.

MARIE: Why?

GUSTAVE: You know why!

MARIE: Yes, but if he wants to know why?

GUSTAVE: Tell him... Anything! Shit, Marie, can't you make up an excuse?! You are stupid, stupid and detestable! Tell him... *(Pause.)* Make an effort! Just say... Tell him that... *(Silence.)* I don't know what you can say.

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: It's only a play, Marie. Nobody will know we sacrificed ourselves for it.

MARIE: We will.

GUSTAVE: It doesn't even belong to us.

MARIE: Secretly.

GUSTAVE: It is over, Marie. I want you to leave.

(Silence.)

MARIE: Do you love me?

GUSTAVE: No.

MARIE: Insult me.

GUSTAVE: Why?

MARIE: I want to feel something.

GUSTAVE: I have run out of insults, Marie.

MARIE: Insult me!

GUSTAVE: I don't want to.

MARIE: I'm going.

GUSTAVE: Fine.

MARIE: Do you want me to stay?

GUSTAVE: No.

MARIE: You don't want me to stay?

GUSTAVE: No.

MARIE: Ask me to beg you to stay.

GUSTAVE: I don't want you to stay, Marie.

(Pause.)

MARIE: Fine, let's go.

GUSTAVE: What?

MARIE: Let's go.

GUSTAVE: Damn you, don't bother me!

MARIE: We go down the stairs...

GUSTAVE: Shut up!

MARIE: ... and we go out on the street!

GUSTAVE: Enough!

MARIE: Then we walk to the theatre.

GUSTAVE: I beg you...

MARIE: The fucking Irishman is there. He's smiling. Do you see him? The fucking Irishman is smiling. We walk up to him. We tap his shoulder, he turns and we introduce ourselves. Such a pleasure, fucking Irishman, my name is Marie and he is Gustave. We are going to die for you.

GUSTAVE: You are not going to die.

MARIE: ...

GUSTAVE: ...

MARIE: You don't have to thank us for anything. We just wanted you to know.

GUSTAVE: I do want him to thank me.

MARIE: We've changed our mind. We want you to thank us, pig.

(They laugh. Silence.)

GUSTAVE: Can you stay a while?

MARIE: Do you want me to?

GUSTAVE: Don't ask me, it has to come from within you.

MARIE: Gustave?

GUSTAVE: Yes?

MARIE: I want to stay a while.

GUSTAVE: That's fine.

(Silence.)

MARIE: What do we do now?

GUSTAVE: Wait.

(Silence.)

MARIE: Godot will come.

(Pause.)

GUSTAVE: Godot will come.