

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
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Editor: Adam Versényi
Assistant Editor: Meaghan Jeanne Coogan
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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: Daniel Smith at smit2030@msu.edu or by snail mail:

Daniel Smith,
Department of Theatre,
542 Auditorium Road #113,
Michigan State University,
East Lansing, MI 48825-1120

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the Spring 2026 issue of *The Mercurian*!

The issue opens with Elton Uliana's translation of contemporary Brazilian playwright Andréa Bassit's one-act *The Evicted Soul*. *The Evicted Soul* is an award-winning solo piece depicting a seventy-year-old woman has died, but still lingers in her house, vacillating between memory and confession as she tells the story of the lives lived in this space. Uliana's introduction raises a number of interesting translation issues regarding the nature of spoken Portuguese vs. spoken English, wordplay, humor, and the theatrical translator's relationship to the actor.

Jessica Rainey's translation of Spanish playwright Yolanda García Serrano's *Run!* follows *The Evicted Soul*. Based upon García Serrano's own childhood the play presents the sibling dynamics of a brother in prison for manslaughter and a sister who is a hard-working music teacher as they deal with their mother's death and the inheritance of her house. Rainey's introduction raises a number of translation issues regarding cultural difference around sport and swearing and the translation choices she made for a British audience.

Next comes Jozefina Komporaly's translation of Romanian playwright Alina Nelega's *Traffic Jam*. Structurally akin to the film *Rashomon*, or Brecht's essay "The Street Scene", Nelega's play narrates the events of a traffic jam from the perspectives of six women and a dog. In the process one woman's decision to demand a divorce illuminates points of crisis in all the other characters' lives.

We continue with James Magruder's translation of the seventeenth century French playwright Floren Carton D'Ancourt's *Knight Errant*. An engaging comedy of manners, D'Ancourt's corrupt society has many parallels to contemporary societies on both sides of the Atlantic and, as Magruder suggests in his introduction, would easily find a home in television.

The issue concludes with Sarah Misemer's review of *The Methuen Book of Contemporary Uruguayan Plays*, ed. Sophie Stevens and William Gregory, with translations by Stephen Brown, William Gregory, Catherine Boyle, Rachel Toogood, Kate Eaton, and Sophie Stevens.

Finally, this is my last issue as Editor of *The Mercurian*. Since I founded the journal in 2007 it has been a labor of love for me. I could not have anticipated how much the journal has grown and the number of wonderful theatrical translators who have shared their work and whom I've been privileged to work with over the past nineteen years. I would also be remiss if didn't acknowledge the series of graduate students and staff members who have served as my Assistant Editors and Editorial Assistants over the years, most especially my current Assistant Editor Meaghan Coogan, a newly minted doctorate in Romance Studies, without whom no issue would have appeared and whose assistance was so crucial to the success of Theatrical Translation as Creative Process: A Conference Festival III this past February! With my retirement from UNC-Chapel and PlayMakers Repertory Company in June this seems the appropriate moment to pass the journal along to someone with new ideas and fresh energy. I am delighted that Daniel Smith, whose own translations and book reviews have been published in *The Mercurian* over the years,

will be taking the helm with the Fall 2026 issue. Please welcome him as the new Editor of *The Mercurian*!

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can be found at under the “Archives” tab on our website: <https://the-mercurian.com/>. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques.

—Adam Versényi

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The Evicted Soul

By Andréa Bassitt

Translated from Portuguese by Elton Uliana

Introductory Note

The Evicted Soul (*Alma Despejada*) begins with a fairly simple premise: a seventy-year-old woman has died, but she has not yet left her house. As movers prepare to empty the rooms where she lived her entire life, Teresa lingers between presence and disappearance, watching the domestic world she once inhabited slowly dismantled. From this unusual vantage point, somewhere between memory, confession, and afterlife, she begins to tell the story of the life that unfolded inside those walls.

Written by the Brazilian playwright Andréa Bassitt, the monologue premiered in Brazil in 2019 and quickly became one of the country's most successful solo plays of recent years. Performed by the celebrated actress Irene Ravache, one of the great figures of the Brazilian stage and television, the production ran for extended seasons across the country and received the Bibi Ferreira Prize for Best Original Playtext and Best Actress, Brazil's most prestigious theatre award. Ravache's exceptionally charismatic and perceptive interpretation helped transform the text into a landmark performance piece, widely praised for its delicate balance of humour, intimacy, and emotional precision.

Teresa speaks from a liminal space, no longer among the living, but not entirely gone either. From this suspended perspective she reflects on family, marriage, class mobility, corruption, and the disquieting compromises of everyday life. What might initially appear to be a ghost story soon reveals itself as something more interesting and probing: a tender yet incisive moral excavation of Teresa's life, her family's trajectory, and the social conditions that insidiously shaped them. The "eviction" of the title refers not only to the sale of a house but to the gradual displacement of identity, certainty, and memory.

Bassitt structures the monologue through lyrical fragments of recollection, shifts in tone, wordplay, and sudden changes of register that move effortlessly between light humour and confession. Teresa's voice is conversational, digressive, and often mischievous, yet it also carries the slow accumulation of a life reconsidered after death. The play's humour, sometimes absurd, sometimes caustic, serves both as defence mechanism and subtle instrument of revelation. By the end of the monologue, the reader begins to realise that Teresa's true haunting is not the house itself, but the moral landscape she inhabited without ever fully seeing it.

Although deeply rooted in Brazilian social life – the culture of domestic work, the language of corruption scandals, the rituals of middle-class aspiration – the play resonates far beyond its domestic setting, raising broader questions about responsibility, self-effacement, and deception. Teresa's reflections reveal a silent continuum between the small everyday "shortcuts" people justify without much thought and the larger ethical failures that eventually engulf her family. What begins as a domestic narrative gradually unfolds into a compelling meditation on memory, mortality and moral complicity.

Translator's Commentary

Translating *The Evicted Soul* involved negotiating the delicate balance between preserving the Brazilian social texture of the original and allowing Teresa's voice to move naturally within English theatrical speech. The monologue depends heavily on rhythm, digression, and wordplay; its apparent informality is carefully constructed. Teresa speaks as if thinking aloud, often correcting herself mid-sentence, circling back to earlier ideas, or interrupting her reflections with jokes or linguistic observations.

An earlier English version of the translation leaned more toward a "domesticating" approach, smoothing certain cultural references, clarifying connections that remain implicit in Portuguese, and occasionally expanding short phrases into more explanatory sentences. Revisiting the text during the editorial review process for this publication made clear how easily such adjustments risk altering the tonal fabric of the monologue.

Portuguese, a language much more inflected than English, especially in conversational contexts, often relies on juxtaposition rather than explicit causal explanation, meaning emerges through proximity rather than elaboration. When these compressed structures are expanded in translation, the result can sound more essayistic than spoken. One of the central goals of this revision was therefore to restore the sharper, more elliptical rhythm of Bassitt's phrasing.

The process also prompted a reconsideration of the frequently invoked notion of "speakability" in theatre translation. Translators sometimes assume that actors require language to be simplified, padded, or clarified in order to perform it effectively. In practice, the opposite often proves true. Actors are highly skilled interpreters of rhythm and intention; when the verbal texture of a text is preserved rather than softened, the resulting speech can feel more immediate and theatrically alive. For this reason, the revised translation retains Brazilian references like names, forms of address, and cultural details that earlier drafts occasionally adapted. Terms such as "Dona" remain in place, as do local images that anchor the play in its specific landscape: the taste of a "jaboticaba", the names of Brazilian trees like the "jacaranda" or the "quaresmeira". Rather than smoothing these elements away, the translation allows them to remain as small points of encounter between languages and cultures.

Similarly, vital moments of wordplay were recreated in English wherever possible so that Teresa's fascination with language, her habit of writing words, misspelling them as a child, or turning them into small philosophical reflections, remains central to the performance text.

Humour was another crucial element to preserve, or better still, to reinstate in English. Bassitt frequently places a light form of comedy beside grief or embarrassment, allowing laughter to emerge from uncomfortable recognitions. It became essential for me to maintain that tonal balance required, resisting the temptation to polish Teresa's speech into a register that sound too elevated or elegant. Her voice is thoughtful but not literary; affectionate and reflective but never fully abstract.

Ultimately, translating *The Evicted Soul* meant following the complex, oscillating movement of Teresa's thought rather than imposing a safe, more stable rhetorical order upon it. The monologue unfolds as a series of discoveries, many of which surprise the speaker herself. The task of the

translation was therefore less to explain the text than to accompany it with minimal intervention, allowing Teresa's wandering voice to find its absorbing, often emotional way through another language: unsentimental, wry and tenderly itself.

Andréa Bassitt (born 1966, São José do Rio Preto, São Paulo) is a Brazilian playwright and actress. She graduated from the School of Dramatic Arts at the University of São Paulo (USP). Bassitt gained national recognition through her work in television, notably for her role as Valdete in the series *Sandy & Júnior* and appearances in popular telenovelas such as *Mulheres Apaixonadas*. Her theatre work includes the plays *As Turca* and the children's musical series *Operilda*, which received the APCA (São Paulo Association of Art Critics) Award for Best Children's Musical in 2013 for *Operilda na Orquestra Amazônica*. She is also the author of *Miguel Magno: O Pregador de Peças*. Bassitt's best-known play, the monologue *Alma Despejada (The Evicted Soul)*, written for the renowned actress Irene Ravache, won the Bibi Ferreira Award for Best Original Playtext and Best Actress.

Social media:

Facebook: @andrea.bassitt

Instagram: @andreabassitt

Elton Uliana (born 1966, Porto Alegre) is a Brazilian literary critic and translator based in London. He is co-editor of the *Brazilian Translation Club* at University College London, where he also serves as a guest lecturer in Translation Theory. His translations and essays have appeared in publications including *Daughters of Latin America* (HarperCollins), *Art in Translation* (Routledge), *Asymptote*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *West Branch*, *Latin American Literature Today*, and *The Oxford Anthology of Translation*. He is a member of the *Out of the Wings* Theatre Translation Collective at King's College London and, in 2023, served as a reader for the Royal Court Theatre's International Plays in Translation project. Uliana received the 2026 English PEN Presents: Brazil award, a grant supporting his translation of Carla Bessa's Jabuti Prize-winning *Vultures*. He is currently translating a collection of plays by Howard Barker for a Brazilian publisher.

Social media:

Twitter: @elton_uliana

Instagram: @eltonuliana

Facebook: @elton.uliana

The Evicted Soul

By Andréa Bassitt

Translated from Portuguese by Elton Uliana

(TERESA, a woman in her seventies, sits in the living room of her house. Only a few removal boxes, a chair, and an armchair remain. Upstage, the image of her garden.)

They're taking everything away tomorrow. Everything. The armchair, the books, the colour of the walls, even the floor. They're putting down porcelain tiles. They call it *clean*. Clean as in empty... as in almost nothing. A place that's got only the basics is *clean*. Yeah. *Basic* is a good word for *clean* in this case.

(Writes: "BASIC".)

I've always written down words, since I was a kid. When I learned a word I liked, I'd write it all over the walls, just to practise it. Then it turned into a family game. Everyone knew this habit of mine, so they'd find a way to make it very clear which word they wanted. *Jabuticaba!* An order. I'd grab the chalk and run to a wall to write it down. My parents didn't care about the scribbles. The important thing was: their daughter could spell *jabuticaba* at four.

Auntie Lurdes was the generous one. Always easy words: house, cat, ball. Uncle José was brutal. He liked to challenge me just to provoke my father. (*loud*) "Vicissitude." And when he realised I couldn't, he'd wink at me and say to my dad: "See, João? Nothing clever about this girl. Four years old and she still can't spell *vicissitude!* She's illiterate! You're the only one who can't see it, João." I knew he was joking. My father didn't. He was easy to fool. João, the family joker.

Our house was always full. A house is the backdrop of a life: the family, the toys, the smell of food. I spent my whole life in this house.

(Stands and moves downstage.)

Now, I don't live here anymore, but I come by often. If I weren't dead, I'd say I live here. It's normal, the dead take a little while to let go of their houses. My father stayed around here for a while too after he... (*gesture indicating death.*)

Sometimes the children said they saw Grandad around, but I never believed in spirits. Actually, I still don't. I can't quite work out what I am now. A ghost? A wandering soul? Nothing?

The first time I came back was when they cleared out my wardrobe. I spent quite a while here then. After that I'd come on Clarinha's birthday, Eduardo's, at Easter, on Mother's Day... during the World Cup... Oh, the World Cup in Brazil... it was awful! My grandparents were German, but of course I supported Brazil! Nobody expected Brazil to score just one goal, let alone seven from Germany. Roberto suffered more from that match than from my death, I'm sure. Roberto is my husband. Even I, already detached from this world, was upset. My son was so traumatised he never

ate sauerkraut again. And he used to love sauerkraut!

That was the day my grandson almost saw me. Children deal well with subtle things, they're still soft and their spirit comes before reason, their imagination wanders into other planes, wherever the angels are. My grandson wanted water and no one would leave the game to get it. So I knocked over a pan in the kitchen; no one moved. And my wish for someone to bring that boy some water was so strong, so strong, that suddenly he called out: Grandma! He knew I'd drop everything for him. Everything. My grandson... Grandchildren are sweeter than our own children. They trust us when everyone else thinks we're useless. One of the wonders of old age is grandchildren. The others don't exist.

As time passed I came less and less, but I couldn't say a final goodbye to the house. So it said goodbye to me. In the end, it was sold,. And my soul was evicted.

This isn't sad, it's liberating! The house does nothing for me now. And I'm already well into the detachment phase: from money, from cards, entering passwords!!!

How many things I *didn't* need to live! I never thought I'd say this, but a shopping mall, for me now, is just a fair of useless things. Except for bookshops! Yeah, because books aren't consumer goods, they're necessities. Books have souls too, they exist between heaven and earth. Reading lightens the head, makes life weigh less. Borges, the Argentine writer, Jorge Luis Borges, said he imagined paradise as a kind of library. I can't call my library paradise... but maybe an oasis. I love books, the covers, the paper, the smell... Many of mine stayed with family and friends... The ones no one wanted will be donated. It doesn't matter, paper goes, stories stay. Memory doesn't die; memory is the inheritance we leave ourselves. And now, with my eviction, I take only the essentials. My inventory, I invent myself. My share, I divide myself.

(INPERISHABLE)

"Imperishable" is spelled with an *M* for Maria, my daughter! And I'd correct it... *(she adds an M the word imperishable)*.

After we die, memory improves. Did you know that?! The moment you open your eyes on the other side, you remember everything you did here. It's like a final judgment, only there's no court. Neither higher nor lower... Don't think you'll get there and hand your case to the Supreme to sort it out for you. No. There, it's just you and yourself.

But you don't need to be afraid. If you've been good, it'll feel like heaven. Now, if you haven't... you'll have to watch it all over again. It's like a movie: it starts the moment you're born and ends when you die. Some people don't believe it. "I didn't do that!" "I don't remember that!" "They must have mixed up my file. That's not me!" Oh yes, it is. That's you. You'll have to face yourself. That's why many people are afraid of death, afraid of knowing who they are and who they were. Afraid of waking up with a hangover and having someone beside you tell you everything you did the night before. Now, if you don't drink, you don't need to worry about that. If you've never killed, never stolen, never betrayed. If you've never slandered, never dodged tax, never fought with a sibling, never disrespected your father, mother, wife, employee, telemarketing operator...

If you've never felt envy, never gossiped about a friend, never cheered at an enemy's downfall, never lied or looked the other way, never hurt anyone... Then rest assured. You have nothing to fear. Right?

Nail. Swap the "n" to a "j"! Look... jail!

What a difference one letter makes.

The truth is, you take nothing from this life! Thank goodness! If even taking just your soul costs an arm and a leg. I had a friend who died when he received the bill for his wife's funeral. Even in a public cemetery, to be buried in a plain grave, no plaque, just a hole in the ground, you have to pay a fee, the *tax*. Not to mention the wake, the coffin, flowers... Can you imagine if we had to take the whole house with us? I'd definitely be charged excess baggage! I was the type who kept everything. I kept my cousin's wedding invitation, those baptism and first communion cards with saints in them, my children's baby teeth, old clothes, new clothes, tight shoes, expired perfume... For forty-six years I kept a ticket to a Ray Conniff concert! For what? So someone else can throw it away when you die. And all those things we keep thinking we'll give someone but nobody wants them?! I had a pair of trainers so ugly, so ugly not even a homeless person wanted them. They were trendy for a while, big thick soles, curved like a seesaw. They said they helped you lose weight. So I ate like crazy and then went walking in those shoes, thinking they worked like Xenical! (to someone in the audience) Xenical, remember that one? Then you must be dead already! Anyway, what happened? Instead of losing weight, I gained more! And on top of that, the rocking effect triggered my vertigo, I'd get terrible dizzy spells. And the seesaw trainers ended up shoved in the back room. They say if you don't use something for two years, you'll never use it again. Who knows. I kept my aunt's swimsuit from the twenties – Lycra, black and white, with flowers and a little frill on the hip. I kept it because I thought it was beautiful. One day I went to show it to a friend, it disintegrated in my hands. You know when fabric just crumbles? I didn't even have to throw it away. It turned to powder. I just blew. Like they did with my ashes. I blew.

Anthropophagy...

(Walks toward the skull resting on the shelf.)

I've always liked the skull. One day it was there on the shelf, smiling, and Neide, who worked for us, asked: Dona Teresa, when I die, will I look like that? You will, Neide! And so will I! She was shocked. She had never imagined that the lady of the house and the maid might be equal one day. Not even in death! Then she took the skull from my hand and said: "And I'll look like this!" *(Removes all the upper teeth.)* "But I've already told my boys I want to be buried with my Corega!" We laughed and laughed. Humour in pain is wisdom. A sign you've evolved.

Neide worked in our house for more than thirty years – that's a marriage! Three buses to get here, three to go back. She left her children alone so she could look after mine. She had a hard life, but she always kept that skull's smiling humour. I think Neide came into my life to remind me of the purity of human beings.

Many times, after I took off *(Gesture)*, I heard Neide praying for me. Once she was here all day

thinking about me, missing our daily routine; she turned on the radio station I liked – the one she didn't. Quietly, she cried from longing. Her sorrow reached me very gentle, like a breath of affection. A lament is like that, it touches us like light or shadow, depending on how it leaves the person. She used to make coffee after lunch saying it was for me, but she always drank it herself. That day she had to make the coffee just for her, since I couldn't be with her anymore. Couldn't I? Why not? I didn't drink the coffee, but I sat beside her and stayed with her until she finished.

Then she went to dust the bookshelf... and came face to face with the skull! She remembered our conversation. She got scared, looked at the skull and then glanced around the room to see if there was a ghost. (*Points to herself*) "How must Dona Teresa be now? She didn't even turn into a skull... She was toasted. Turned into peanut crumble. I have great sympathy for the skull. Besides always smiling, it makes everyone equal.

Anyway, I take Neide's memory with me and leave the skull here. I've already got my own.

ANOREXIA

For someone who felt fat her whole life, death is wonderful. Such lightness! You don't feel hungry anymore!

Now, vices are harder to get rid of. In fact, let me just warn you: smoking isn't allowed up there.

Well... I'm not exactly waaaay up there. Not waaaay down there either. My "there" is somewhere... in the middle. Between paradise and purgatory. Even in death I ended up somewhere in between.

Next week the new owners arrive. New in both senses: young, and new to the house. A couple. Two men. It could just as well have been two women.

The boys are going to knock the house down! Just imagine: one's an architect, the other's an interior designer.

ARAUCÁRIA, CAMBUCÁ, QUARESMEIRA...

It's been very windy around here these days. All my life, when it rained, I'd go to the window and just watch. It's beautiful to see the rain fall. It clears your head, washes you inside. The other day, sitting in my armchair, I saw lightning strike a huge tree, a jacaranda I'd known for years. That tree was older than me, but you couldn't tell, because the older it got, the stronger it became. Solid, lush! Completely anchored in its roots; unshakable. And then, suddenly, a flash of lightning, and my fortress was on the ground. Just like that, down went the giant Goliath. Nothing is permanent. Nothing.

(TRANSITION)

I wasn't an overly sentimental mother. I was affectionate, but I didn't spoil my children. If they asked for something and we could give it, we did. But if we couldn't, or if it wasn't the right time,

we knew how to say “no”. My daughter doesn’t know how to say no. My son, on the other hand, that’s all he says. How is that possible? They had the same upbringing and they’re completely different. (*pause*) Did they have the same upbringing? Honestly, I don’t know. We change from one child to the next. Each new child finds a different mother.

(*WRITES: SPOUSE – MARRIAGE*)

Roberto and I met when I was twenty-five and he was thirty. Today that’s nothing, But back then, twenty-five, a bit plump, freckled, a schoolteacher and no boyfriend... I was a strong candidate for spinsterhood: “that one’s going to end up an aunt”. Roberto and I fell in love and married at the end of the school year. We spent our honeymoon at the seaside: São Vicente! The town was beautiful, it still is, but it was even more so then, like everything else. Roberto included.

“Do you love your husband?” my neighbour asked me once. I stuffed a piece of cake into my mouth so there’d be no room for words. But afterwards that sentence stayed in my head. “Do you love your husband?” Roberto was an interesting man, charming, energetic, who knew how to do business. In forty years of work he became a very successful businessman. Even after he became wealthy, Roberto never lost his simple manner. He never showed off what he had. He worked a lot, but I can’t say he was absent, busy, yes; but not absent. He was always there at the most important moments. Our relationship was built on trust and I admired him. We were good friends. Time went by quickly, a lot happened us, and before we knew it... The children had grown up and gone abroad to study, so they could have a better future. Brazil. An underdeveloped country. Miserable. When Clarice was little, if she saw someone sleeping rough in the street she couldn’t go to bed at night. She would lie down on the living-room floor... her father or I had to carry her to her room. Nowadays we almost trip over people lying in the street and don’t even notice. We’ve learned to ignore misery.

After our children got married, it was just Roberto and me in this house. Over time Roberto got fatter, more nervous, busier. And drank more. I pretended not to see it. I avoided the problem the same way we avoid a homeless man on the street. Things were going well. Why go looking for trouble? We were simply changing, I told myself. Some things change without us noticing, like a child growing up. Like putting on weight: you only realise when your trousers no longer fit. Better to just let it go.

Hypocrite.

“No, my dear, hypocrite is with a Y!”

Hypocrisy is a beautiful word, I think. Just listen to the sound of it: *hypocrisy*. Isn’t it lovely? It could be a musical term, hypocrisy... melody, symphony. Hypocrite also sounds elegant. It’s classy! Makes you think of hypodermic or hypnotic. Funny how the sound of a word doesn’t match its meaning. Pain is a sweet-sounding word, like “plain”, but not in meaning. Hypocrite.

This fascination with words never took me much beyond my own garden, where I loved to sit and write in the wind. *Sowing*. I always liked writing, but I was far too insecure to try a literary career. Unlike my jacaranda, I never blossomed. I kept teaching children, and I was more the lady of the

house than the lady of my own life. But writing was a spiritual need, which back then was just a metaphor. I'd show my texts to Roberto; he'd fall asleep in the first few paragraphs. And to Dora, my best friend. Dora and I met at school. We studied in a public school, life was simple, everybody knew everybody.

“Carlos loved Dora who loved Pedro”... We used to say that was Dora's song. She was dating a guy called Carlos until one day Dora met who? Pedro! Who was Roberto's brother! And fate decided that, besides being friends, we'd also become sisters-in-law. The four of us dated, got engaged, and married together; I mean on the same day. We were always together. Dora was a journalist, and Pedro was crazy about politics. That's what he wanted to be: a politician. First he was elected building manager. Then he became a bank clerk.

Oh, wait... let me say something: you can't confuse a banker with a bank clerk, you see? Because people do confuse them! Just like lessor and lessee, lots of people confuse those two. The banker is the owner of the bank. The bank clerk works for the bank. In other words, the banker makes money. The bank clerk makes a salary!

Anyway... Pedro, my brother-in-law and Dora's husband, was a bank clerk. So was Carlos! Carlos who loved Dora! Loved, imperfect tense. Gone, perfect tense. Carlos and Pedro worked at the same bank, studied law at the same university, and became very close friends. They had the same dream: to go into politics.

Even though he wanted to be a politician, Pedro was not dishonest. He wasn't! He was upright and fair. He wasn't handsome, but he seemed so because he was so charming. He stood up for whoever needed it, rich or poor: journalists, bricklayers, priests, artists... That sort of thing was not seen kindly in those leaden years, as we called them. A just soul is never welcome in an authoritarian environment. But Pedro thought he could change the world. And maybe he could have. He was a good brother, a good husband, and he was honest. Dora was lucky.

One day, actually, one night, the phone rang. It was Carlos. He could hardly speak, he was screaming. All I could understand was “they killed Pedro.” We were so stunned we ran out just as we were, in pyjamas, nightgowns. It was a car crash, a criminal accident, if you ask us. Pedro had stayed late at the office, working on the case of a missing journalist. He'd been on that case for months and already knew who was responsible. If there were people who loved him, there were also those who hated him, fewer in number, but they did exist. And even if his enemies were few, they were big and voracious. The wolves devoured Pedro. And Dora. She was with him. We both felt orphaned. Roberto lost Pedro, and I lost Dora. Roberto was devastated, he barely spoke, hardly ate.

Carlos helped a lot. He took care of everything and turned the loss of his friend into a mission: to devote himself to politics even more.

We didn't. We started to despise politics. It wasn't worth suffering for it, since it would never suffer for us. Politics is cruel; it kills its own children, it erases the very thing it writes. We never spoke of it again.

(*Hums a tune.*) “As if it were just a children’s circle game... Memory...”

I always thought Eduardo, my son, would become a musician. He loved music, carnival songs, he knew them all! Then he got a guitar and could play all sorts of things by ear. I was sure Eduardo was going to be a musician, at the very least a singer. (*Proud.*) Imagine, my son, a singer?! But his father wouldn’t allow it: “My son, a singer? No way!” He didn’t want the boy mixed up with artists. He was afraid, I understand. He wanted his son to work with him, to look after the business. Look after the business...

With our daughter things were different; she could follow whatever career she wanted. Funny, isn’t it? He never once thought of his daughter working with him.

So Eduardo didn’t become a musician, but he didn’t inherit the business either. He followed a completely different path. It was better that way.

The important thing was that everything was peaceful.
Pardon? Liberté!

When my children no longer needed me, I began to feel a bit useless. But then I thought: I’m going to make the most of my freedom! I went off to do all the things I’d always wanted to do but never had time for. I took French lessons, cooking classes, philosophy... I discovered so many interesting books; reading was no longer forbidden! I read and I ate! That’s when I bought the seesaw shoes!

Going back to studying French gave me a pleasure I hadn’t felt in years. Learning is always good, especially when you think you’re past that stage. I’d studied a little French at school, so reading was easier. Speaking, though... I spoke an invented French. *Je me vá ao toalet... Il toilet!*

I did two years of French and then I decided: I have to see Paris! The hard part was convincing Roberto; business was going very well and he didn’t want to be away from the factory. Since our honeymoon, we’d never travelled alone again, always with the children. Just the two of us? Never!

“Jamais” in French is written like in Portuguese. The only difference is the pronunciation. (*In Portuguese.*) Jamais! (*In French.*) Jamais! Yeah.

Three months trying to convince Roberto and... finally, *enfin! Voilà Paris!*

It was our first trip abroad. The late eighties... The world was opening up for everyone. The Berlin Wall came down, AIDS was on the rise... Technology was spreading... So many new things: CDs, brick-sized mobile phones, computers! Some things were very good, others not so much... In Brazil we had democratic elections, Fernando Collor de Mello was elected president. Ah, and Carlos was elected congressman! (*Long silence. Dodges.*) Where was I? Ah, on my way to Paris!

Arriving in Paris was worth all the hassle of the trip. The city was even more beautiful than I’d imagined. We stayed near the Champs-Élysées. We saw the tower, the bridges, the Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre, Notre Dame, we took boat trips on the Seine, by day and by night! And I spoke French! *Un peu. Merci. Ui! Je suis brésilienne.* Roberto got all delighted to see me speaking

another language. I loved it! Paris really was a dream.

After Paris we started travelling every year. Chile, Uruguay, Argentina... I loved Buenos Aires! And it was so close. I absolutely loved it! Roberto became more open. Open, Roberto! I'd go sightseeing and he'd go to work, visit factories, preferably plastic-packaging factories, his line of business. In fact, it's an excellent market, if there's one thing that's multiplied in life, it's plastic. And plastic surgery.

Back in Brazil our life kept getting better. Roberto managed to set up his own factory and we started being called *nouveau riche*. Some people got offended at being called "new rich". Not me! Much better to be newly rich than newly poor! One of the young men who are going to live here once said the entrance to the house looked very *nouveau riche*. I didn't understand, but I couldn't exactly ask, could I? He thought the little fountain I put by the steps was tacky. I liked the sound it made.

Another word that became fashionable when they talked about people like us was "emerging". And people thought it was tacky to be "emerging". Tacky to rise in life? Why? It would be wonderful if everyone could rise too, but the injustice of the world wasn't our fault. Was it? We weren't stealing. On the contrary, we were doing our part: paying taxes, creating jobs, fostering the economy. Another fashionable word back then: "fostering". Roberto was very upright, he helped people, he was like Pedro. Neide used to say, "Seu Roberto is an angel!" He helped a lot of people. (*Changes tone.*) So why should I feel guilty for being newly rich, right? He helped a lot of people. A lot of people.

Franchising

The children got married and we reached that moment when my husband got fatter, more irritable... and I pretended not to see it. Soon the first grandchild arrived and brought a breath of fresh air into our lives. I helped my daughter-in-law with whatever she needed; I was exhausted, but my life felt full.

When my granddaughter was born, I was enchanted with having a little girl! But I didn't want to look after her, no.

By then I was a senior citizen. Fifty-percent discount on everything. Priority in queues. A lot of activities... gym, water aerobics, lambada! Can you imagine me giving up my freedom at this stage to look after a baby?! Just when I was in my "golden years"?

"This *golden years* thing is only for rich people, Dona Teresa, because for poor people... the older you get, the worse it gets!"

You know who said that, don't you?

WRITES MARKETING...

Another word that came into fashion was *marketeer*.

WRITES OVERNIGHT

(TRANSITION)

One night like any other, Roberto came home for dinner... but that night he didn't eat. He was anxious, trembling. He said he needed to talk to me. He asked me to stop everything. Of course I stopped right away. He looked straight at me, afraid. "Calm down, Roberto!" I thought he was going to tell me he had a lover, or a child out of wedlock... "Speak! Did something happen to the children?" He gripped my hands tightly and poured everything out in one long vomit of words, his eyes fixed on me. The news was harsh, but the determination he showed in telling me, and the trust he placed in me, strange as it sounds, gave me the clarity I needed to take the blow.

I listened to everything. When he finished, he was destroyed. I poured him a glass of water and one for myself. With a sigh, he pushed the glass away, laid his head on his arms, and cried. I had only ever seen my husband cry when his brother died. He cried and cried... He spilled all his anguish onto our table. I didn't try to hold it back; I let it run over the edges, soak the floor, spread through the house. I stayed dry as a stone.

He wanted my help, wanted me to speak for him. Men do that a lot, when they don't have the courage to say something, they send the woman...

(CUT)

Doctor, my name is Teresa So-and-so, I'm the wife of Roberto Such-and-such, owner of such-and-such a company. I've come to report my husband for involvement in corruption and money laundering.

He was receiving incentives from public bodies, passing funds on to people connected to the government, political parties, election campaigns, all of that.

MODUS OPERANDI

The *modus operandi* doesn't matter, the result is the same, and no end justifies those means, does it, Doctor?

Here are some of the accounting records, contacts, contracts, his passport. The only thing left to hand over is him. He'll be doing that shortly himself, with a lawyer.

I only came first because he was scared and asked me to turn him in. And it's better to help someone turn themselves in than to help them run away, isn't it? So I came to make this outsourced confession. Sorry for my joke. I learned from a friend how to find humour in pain. It helps.

I left there and wandered around aimlessly for a while. When I got home, Roberto wasn't there, he'd already gone to the police station. I turned on the radio. Suddenly I heard Roberto's name in the news. "My God, it's started!" I didn't even hear the story properly. I turned it all off, went to my corner and stayed still, motionless, like a boa after swallowing an ox. I waited for the digestion. I waited for Roberto to come back, but he didn't; he'd been arrested.

The next day, I went to visit him. When I saw him there, in jail, in those prison clothes, with that enormous shame pushing his head down, I thought of the children, of us... I felt angry, and very sorry for him. But the pity passed quickly. Mine did. His...not so much.

There are things you never imagine will happen to you, until they do. The father of my children, my companion... Why? For money? Power?

The corrupt always have a just cause. Did Roberto also have a “just cause” to justify the hell our lives had become?

Delight. Delete. Denounce.

Roberto’s “just cause” had a name: Carlos. At the start of his career, Carlos came to Roberto asking for help with his campaigns. After he was elected, he kept needing help to stay in power. Roberto felt a huge gratitude to him, and almost a brotherly bond. Pedro’s death had left the same scar on both of them; in relationships like that, the complicity grows so strong it can even justify a change in principles, if necessary.

Carlos was the head of a scheme that moved millions. Roberto benefited from it in public bids and was hired as a speaker and legal adviser for amounts far greater than the services he actually provided. When he provided them. In other words, they were laundering money. Interesting word: laundering. It can refer to both cleanliness... and filth.

“Teresa, transfers aren’t stealing! And the factory is a pioneer in its field!”

It was also a pioneer in forming a criminal gang. Forming a criminal gang. Carlos loved Dora who loved Pedro who loved... What would Pedro think of all this? If I run into him somewhere there, I’ll ask. His brother and his friend involved in corruption?

Friend... Friendship... That’s a word I like very much, for the sound and for the meaning. Friendship is something very particular, because friendship isn’t just one feeling, it’s many. How often we overlook a friend’s faults but not those of a brother, a husband, our children... No, forgive me, with our children we do overlook them. (*Reflects*). Yes, friendship has a bit of motherhood in it. Maybe Pedro would forgive his friend. His brother... maybe not.

Our children dealt with it in their own ways, as always. Clarice was pregnant, and even suffering a lot, she stayed by my side the whole time. She’s the one who ended up taking care of the business, and did it with a lot of dignity. Eduardo had been living abroad for years and there he stayed; he didn’t come to see his father, he was too angry. I thought it was for the best. One less person to feel ashamed.

They tore our lives apart. The press, the people... The police came into the house, turned everything upside down, took computers, papers, Roberto’s personal things, it was a huge stressful. But I’ll tell you, some things I was even glad they took, piles of Roberto’s old paperwork. One day I almost slipped the seesaw shoes into one of the police boxes.

If staying indoors was bad, going out was even worse. People hated us, attacked us on social media, hurled insults: “family of thieves!” One day, at my grandson’s school, a child asked the teacher if she was still allowed to be his friend. The little friends disappeared, and the big friends too.

We were isolated like monkeys with yellow fever.

Shame. Shame. Shame...The more you say that word, the uglier it becomes. Shame. Shame. Shame. Shame...Even Neide was ashamed to say she worked for us.

BRIBE. “Done Teresa, bribe means corruption, right?” Yes. “Oh, I thought it meant a present... ‘I’ll give you a little bribe!’” And she wasn’t wrong!

I like the word bribe, the sound of it, it’s funny. Bribe is another word that made it into the top-ten list, but the term “bribe” doesn’t appear in the Brazilian Penal Code, because it’s considered slang. Slang... See how even the word itself is a kind of “deviation” in the language, a joke.

“But he can’t have meant any harm, Dona Teresa. Everybody makes mistakes. Forgive him!”

My God... so much misery, so much violence, so much disrespect, disregard, disgrace...So much disillusion. So many dis-words, and I never suspected a thing.

I never asked about Roberto’s financial life, and he never talked to me about it. I didn’t worry about those things. He paid for everything and I assumed the money the money came from our work. Yes, because what I earned as a teacher, I also gave to him. We were a couple! I never saw any tax return, any contract, nothing, I just signed. I had no reason to be suspect anything! Our life, despite everything, was normal. I never got a diamond necklace, or a house by the lake. All I had was my little fountain.

But human beings are unpredictable. You can’t really say anyone is totally immune to a slip-up, can you? To a failure, some moment of opportunism. What’s our daily dose of corruption? Jumping the queue, getting a job through connections, grabbing a fake sick note, forging a signature, passing penalty points from one driver’s licence to another... “With or without receipt?” Giving a little “help” to a campaign, under the table... What’s the harm? Everyone does it! If you don’t, you fall behind! Dignity becomes a nuisance. Better to dodge it.

Spending a lifetime dodging reality, that was my greatest act of corruption.

“Family of thieves”...But isn’t that exactly what we were?

Ah, speaking of family, when you die, there’s none of that business of relatives coming to greet you. At least not in my case, no one came. Not my father, not my mother, not my grandmother; I’m an orphaned corpse. Maybe because they’re too ashamed to admit they’re related to me?

(Back to Roberto) When Roberto was released to serve his sentence at home, we were all locked up together. I didn’t recognise my husband anymore; something between us had broken forever. Many times I wanted to leave, eventually even that passed. All that remained was emptiness.

Nothing. Neutral gear.

None of us died because of all this. Not even me.

(LOOKS DOWN AT THE FLOOR)

I'm not sure porcelain tiles will work here. People think Brazil is always hot, but that's not true. It gets really cold in winter, the house turns into an icebox! With porcelain tiles it'll become an igloo! Igloo was the name of a motel on the road to my grandfather's house. Behind the Igloo there was a fortune teller everyone used to visit. I went there once too. She told me I would die on a day of great joy. I never trusted fortune tellers, but this one was good. I died during Carnival. From dengue. Of course it would have been more exotic if I'd been bitten by a snake, like Cleopatra supposedly was, but the end of my coil came from a tropical mosquito: *Aedes aegypti*, which has nothing to do with Egypt, the name comes from Greek. Very classy.

I wasn't that old when I got sick, I was seventy. I could have died a bit later, from chikungunya or yellow fever! But you can't choose, when your time comes, you die. To die, all you have to do is ...be alive. My mother had a neighbour who choked to death on a kibbeh, Dona Zubaida. They called her Zica. What bad luck! Well... at least it wasn't Zika!

And apparently death-by-mobile-phone has gone way up too. Whether it's in the "robbery", "selfie" or "WhatsApp" category, all three are dangerous.

But without the slightest glamour, fate decided my death would be determined by a very Latin-American factor. It wasn't hunger or misery, so I can't complain. I received excellent care, comfort, and very little suffering. Life said goodbye to me gently. And my death brought Roberto and the children closer together. Together they cried the tears of the just and the unjust. Death relativises everything. In time they'll find their way again. That's what life is for, to help us make things right.

Around seven o'clock on a Carnival Monday, I made my transition. To the sound of *A Voz do Brasil*. If I had died a little earlier I might have caught the *Ave Maria*. But my soul is truly Brazilian. That's now proven. I said goodbye to this world to the sound of *O Guarani*.

They'll take everything away tomorrow. And I, with my bags packed, say goodbye to this world. Since I can't do anything more to change it, all that's left for me is to rest in peace. (*Puts the skull away.*) From this house I take my leave without bitterness or sadness. They can take everything. It doesn't matter. All I take with me is my soul. It was evicted, but after wandering for so long, it finally has somewhere to drop dead..

(Note: "A Voz do Brasil" was the long-running Brazilian government radio broadcast during the dictatorship whose theme music is the overture to *O Guarani* by Carlos Gomes.)

Run!

By Yolanda García Serrano

Translated from Spanish by Jessica Rainey

Run! (¡Corre!) is a two-person play centred on a series of prison visits between a brother, behind bars, and his sister, a music teacher. There are occasional one-sided dialogues with other unseen characters—a social worker, a coach, Emma’s husband—but the play is predominantly a succession of tense exchanges between the two siblings, probing why they have such divergent life paths when they come from the same troubled background.

It is an intimate and deeply personal play, arising from the childhood experiences and sibling dynamics of the playwright, Yolanda García Serrano. Despite the intensity, and the sparse and restricted setting, there are moments of physicality and humour. García Serrano is better known for her comedic theatre and film work, and she uses these tools to break the tension and provide relief for both the characters and the audience.

The English translation was first commissioned by London’s Cervantes Theatre, which employs a three-stage translation process: an initial working draft for the production team, a second ‘rehearsal-ready’ draft used for a Rapid Production (a performance with staging, music, lighting, costumes, but actors can keep the script in hand), and a final revision following this production. The play was performed for two nights in October 2019—the first night in Spanish, the second in English¹—and followed each night by a panel discussion with the playwright, director, actors, and myself as translator.

One of the first questions relative to the draft translation was, why had I maintained the setting in Spain? Knowing that the playwright was from Madrid, active in theatre and film there, and that the narrative was rooted in her own experiences, I initially felt that this was a Spanish play, being translated for a Spanish company, possibly for Spanish actors. However, sitting in the theatre in central London, watching two Black British actors perform with London accents, it quickly became apparent that this was a play with universal themes, readily adaptable to numerous locations. The play is not actually heavy with cultural references, but allusions to bullfighting hold a clear association; the English actor playing the brother specifically mentioned these felt jarring to perform, taking the actors out of their location.

One of the main changes following these discussions was to broaden out the possible setting. The bullfighting references became boxing—a sport with similarly distinctive moves that chimes with the structure of the play as “like boxing rounds.”² Names were also adapted. Again, the play is not heavy with names, and Emma is popular in English-speaking countries anyway, but Kiko was changed to Danny, Esteban to Evan. The apartment became a house, Mallorca became the airport, and numerous other tweaks to the details. Note that pound (sterling) is used in this version, but the currency can be adapted if need be.

¹ Directed by Jessica Lazar and performed by Candela Gómez and Jaime Menendez in Spanish, and Leila Ashgar-Ali and Keith Porter in English.

² Oristrell, Joaquín (2017), Teatro Galileo: <https://www.gruposmedia.com/wpdf/corre-smedia-dossier.pdf>

An aspect that I was particularly keen to observe in these productions was the response (both actor and audience) to the level of swearing in the play. In Spain, swearwords relating to body parts and bodily functions are frequent and not necessarily taboo—it is not uncommon to hear them in the workplace or among children. The UK is a little more puritan in this respect, and the theatre clearly intensifies the impact; I was half-expecting a warning to be used before the show: *this performance contains strong language*.

In the first panel discussion, I had mentioned my concerns and observed that the level of swearing seemed entirely natural and not overly marked in the Spanish performance. So the question came up the following evening, did I think there was too much swearing for a British audience? I remember seeing a mother in the audience, sitting beside her pre-teen daughter, nodding vigorously. But what I realised watching the performance was not that there was ‘too much’—the swearing is an important part of the characterisation in numerous scenes—rather that it was often occurring in the wrong place. Where the insults or anger were strong in Spanish, it sometimes needed to be toned down in English; conversely, where the words were more neutral in Spanish, it seemed to need something punchier in English. This enabled me to be freer in my final draft, not necessarily removing but moving swearwords to where the emphasis felt natural. I did moderate some of the expressions for Emma, and tended towards religious profanities (*for God’s sake*), so that when she really needed to swear it had more force. For Danny, it is entirely possible (I haven’t counted) that I gave him more; I wanted a clearer distinction between the register of the two characters in the final version. Linked to these choices, and based on a comment from the actors, I also introduced jibes that were more likely to be used in childhood. The actors felt that they were reverting into a sibling dynamic during the play and so *stop talking shit* became *don’t be stupid*; *total bitch* became *stupid cow*.

One phrase I found particularly problematic was the repetition of *puta madre*. This literally means *whore mother* and has clear significance in the context of a play about the aftershocks of an abusive mother. However, in Spanish, it is often used as an expression of celebration, or to describe something as brilliant. This caused problems in the translation. There is a sense of Kiko/Danny using the term both to spite and in spite of his mother – he will succeed or overcome the odds despite his upbringing. An obvious option in the context of the play was *son of a bitch*, but this doesn’t hold the same celebratory connotations in English. I played around with this phrase repeatedly, trying blasphemy (*holy mother of Christ*) as well as more muted but malleable expressions (*nice one*). In the end, I decided *son of a bitch* was the best choice, placing my trust in the actors and directors to deliver the line in the various situations as they believe appropriate. And this is perhaps the wonder of swearwords in plays, and of this play in particular: the location and context in which it is performed will change the way it resonates.

The Spanish play won the National Prize for Dramatic Literature from the Ministry of Culture in 2018 for its dramatic force and emotional depth, for characters portraying the “eternal struggle between people and their environment”, and for bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary dramatic forms.³

³ Centro de Documentación de las Artes Escénicas y de la Música (2018): <https://www.teatro.es/quiosco/yolanda-garcia-serrano-premio-nacional-de-literatura-dramatica/pdf>

Yolanda García Serrano is a Spanish writer and director for the theatre, cinema and television. She has won numerous awards, including the 2018 National Prize for Dramatic Literature for *¡Corre!*, the 2013 Lope de Vega Award for *Shakespeare nunca estuvo aquí*, the 2007 Chivas Telón Award for *Dónde pongo la cabeza* and the 1998 Puerto de Santa María Comedy Award for *Qué asco de amor*. She has also won two Goya Awards: Best Original Screenplay in 1994 for *Todos los hombres sois iguales* and Best Adapted Screenplay in 2026 for *La Cena*. In 2011, she was the first Spanish woman to direct and premiere her own play in New York with *Good sex. Good day. Lo que ellos ignoran de ella*.

Jessica Rainey is a British translator of French and Spanish with a particular focus on plays and poetry. Recent translations have been published by Words Without Borders and New England Review. She is also an associate translator with the Stephen Spender Trust, running creative translation workshops in schools, and an associate lecturer at Newcastle University. She is currently researching engagement in language learning through creative translation, with doctoral funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Run!

By Yolanda García Serrano

Translated from Spanish by Jessica Rainey

CHARACTERS:

EMMA: Danny's elder sister, a music teacher and long-term sufferer; her brother has made her life a misery.

DANNY: 33 years old and has spent half his life in prison; it seems he will never change, or will he?

1. MEN'S PRISON, ROOM WITH PARTITION SCREEN

OFF: Footsteps can be heard that increase in speed until they're running. More than running, they're flying. The rhythm of this race is like a musical score.

EMMA enters the room slowly. A glass screen splits the space in two, separating her from the other side. There are two stools, one on each side of the glass. The sound of running mixes with the sound of a police siren. OFF: The screech of brakes.

Then, a heavy iron door closing. The sound of bolts. More bolts.

With each sound, Emma seems to be getting a shock. She puts her hands over her eyes, breathes heavily. She is trying to control her growing anxiety, while waiting impatiently for the person she has agreed to visit.

Emma, standing, compulsively touches her skirt. She sits, stands, sits again. She takes her hair out of its clip, then puts it in again, tighter. She opens her bag, checks for the things she put in there at home, closes her bag. She stands up again.

A door on the other side of the glass opens and DANNY appears, looking in a sorry state. He exchanges a look with Emma, and his eyes narrow to a slit. Then he walks towards the glass that separates them and sits down.

Emma takes her seat again. She is on the verge of tears, but controls herself and faces Danny with an expression of both anger and pain.

He moves his hand towards the glass. She jerks back.

DANNY: Hey, I don't bite.

EMMA: Just in case.

DANNY: I didn't think it'd be you.

He suddenly realises he hates being there, hates having her there in front of him. He feels sick to his stomach with shame.

DANNY: But here you are.

EMMA: Do you get many visitors?

DANNY: Nope, none. Who told you I was here, your mother?

Emma doesn't say either way. In that instant, what she most regrets is having given up smoking.

EMMA: It's so far away this place. It took me almost two hours to get here.

DANNY: That's why I never go out.

Emma looks at him waiting for the end of what seems to be a joke.

DANNY: Wouldn't wanna be late back to my cell.

EMMA: I'd forgotten what a joker you are.

DANNY: Don't you have a car?

EMMA: Yes, but I don't like driving on main roads.

Danny laughs.

EMMA: What?

DANNY: For fuck's sake, Emma, where else you gonna drive – on the pavement?

EMMA: In the city, idiot. City driving and highway driving are not the same thing.

DANNY: Ohhh right. Did you have an accident?

EMMA: One, but I wasn't driving.

DANNY: And I've driven my whole life with no licence and nothing's ever happened to me.

EMMA: Yeah, right. Looks like nothing's ever happened to you.

DANNY: And how's your mother?

Silence.

DANNY: I wrote her a letter but she didn't write back.

EMMA: I picked it up.

DANNY: How come?

EMMA: Your mother died six months ago.

*Danny suddenly head-butts the glass separating him from his sister.
Emma jumps back.*

DANNY: I knew it, fuck, I knew it! Know why? The cold. Do you remember how I never got cold? Well, I had to ask for a blanket. Been sleeping with a blanket the past few months because every time I got into bed, I'd start shivering.

EMMA: I would've told you but I didn't know where you were.

DANNY: What did she die of?

EMMA: Shame and sorrow, I guess.

DANNY: Don't fuck with me, Emma! You didn't come here just to shit on me, did you?

EMMA: She had a heart attack.

DANNY: Well, they're not nice, but I'd sign up, eh? One strike and you're out.

EMMA: You haven't changed.

DANNY: No shit. Neither have you. And here you are to prove it.

EMMA: Do you really think the best thing I've got to do is come and see my brother in jail?

DANNY: Better if you hadn't come.

EMMA: Better if you'd disappeared off the face of the earth.

DANNY: Yeah. Better for you if it was me that was dead, eh?

EMMA: I didn't say that.

DANNY: Yeah, I'm alive, sorry. With a bit of luck I won't be around much longer.

Emma realises that she may have gone too far.

EMMA: Why? Are you sick?

DANNY: Screwed, but not sick. Sadly for you.

EMMA: It's always the same with you, we end up arguing and I didn't come here for that. I came to talk about your mother's house. We've both inherited, so the best thing we can do is sell and split the money.

Danny looks surprised.

DANNY: Your mother left the house to both of us? Me too?

EMMA: Fifty-fifty. But it wasn't her; it's the law.

DANNY: Ah... And how much is it worth?

EMMA: That's all that interests you?

DANNY: Yep.

EMMA: It doesn't bother you that your mother died?

DANNY: Of course it bothers me, but I can't do shit about it now, can I? Anyway, she was always sick. If it wasn't one thing, it was something else.

EMMA: She was always worried about her kids. Especially you.

DANNY: What would you know!

EMMA: You're the one who doesn't know, you were never around to find out.

DANNY: Right, you were always the smart one.

EMMA: I'm going.

DANNY: You have no idea.

EMMA: Oh and you do.

DANNY: About my own life, yes. And that everything's going to change now. Now that I'm in the money.

Emma would have slapped him if it weren't for the glass between them.

EMMA: Yeah, and look at you. A lot of good that money's gonna be in here.

DANNY: I'm not gonna be locked up my whole life.

EMMA: Only till you get out and then they'll get you for something else.

DANNY: I've been unlucky.

EMMA: Oh, of course, poor you. Your luck is to blame. You haven't done a thing.

DANNY: I'm not a psychopath. Just chosen a different path to you, that's all. And now I'm gonna have some money.

EMMA: I'll give the papers to a lawyer; he'll open an account for you and transfer half the amount of the sale. Goodbye.

Emma stands up. Danny too, but to try to stop her leaving so soon.

DANNY: Don't go yet! We haven't seen each other in over three years and this lasts three minutes!

EMMA: And why haven't we seen each other in three years? Who disappeared as usual? Do you think it's normal to not let your mother know where you are for three years? I don't give a shit, but she would wait for the post every day, she wouldn't go out in case you called, she'd scan the

newspapers looking for your name... Then suddenly you send a letter as if nothing's happened. Why? What the hell did you do? What did you get yourself into this time?

DANNY: I'm your only brother, okay?

EMMA: I can't take any more of your bullshit, Danny. As soon as we have the papers, you can sign them and disappear again, I won't look for you.

DANNY: Being inside is bullshit.

EMMA: You should've thought of that before. I've left some photos, in case you want a keepsake.

DANNY: Can I write to you?

But Emma doesn't respond, she's already walked away. Danny would smash the glass with his head if he could.

DANNY: I forgot what a stupid cow you are!

2. EMMA'S FLAT

Emma switches on the living room light. She suddenly feels she might faint. Pale, she puts her hand on her chest.

EMMA: I can't breathe... I can't breathe properly... My hands have seized up.

Emma shows her hand to the other person, her husband, who we can't see. Her fingers look like claws.

EMMA: Danny's alive, and in prison. I saw him this afternoon. I thought I could handle it, but now I'm back here I don't think I can.

No, he didn't tell me what he'd done this time.

I couldn't just write and tell him our mother was dead, could I?

I should've asked him how much time he's got left in there.

Threaten me, no, it's just his way of standing up for himself, he's never laid a finger on me.

I won't go back to see him. I'll leave the house in the hands of a lawyer.

What I will do is send him some clothes. He looked a mess. His trainers were falling apart...

He's always had bad eyesight, ever since we were kids, but he never wanted to wear glasses.

I feel sorry for him!

It's his house too, he can do what he wants with it. In fact, he can have the whole house, for all I care, even though he doesn't deserve it.

3. PRISON CELL

Danny is talking to his social worker, though we can't see her.

DANNY: Yeah, my record's a good read, but there are worse. Hey, you're looking good today. Nah, love, not rough, but today you're looking better than usual. Alright, boss, whatever you say.

Course I regret it, for fuck's sake. I just don't know how to say it.

I want you to give me a chance.

I dislocated his arm 'cos he was being a twat, but the punishment has done me good. Given me a bit of time to think.

No, I don't wanna come back in here. For the first time in my life, things are gonna get better.

Everyone gets lucky at some point, even the ones who are really cursed. Me too. I'm gonna have some money when I get out of here, so things are looking up.

Tell me what I have to do to get out of here as soon as possible. I know I've got to serve my sentence, but if I wanted to get time off for good behaviour... I can't stay here doing fuck all, it does my head in. I get stressed out then I end up screwing up.

What about a unit change? Could you put in a good word?

I already told you I've changed!

How can I prove it?

Oh, everyone says take part in activities, workshops and all that crap! Sorry, sorry...

That's all great, but I don't know how to do any of that stuff.

Okay, tell me I'll be moved and I'll give you my word that this time... I swear.

I'm better than this. I've just had bad luck.

4. PRIVATE PRISON VISITING ROOM

The room is set up for prisoners to meet their families. One table and two chairs barely provide any comfort.

Emma waits for her brother and tries not to be nervous.

Danny enters the room with a smile on his face; he's happy to see her. He leaves a packet of crisps on the table.

DANNY: You said you weren't gonna come back. But I'm happy you're here.

His hair is looking slightly neater this time. He's clearly tried to smarten himself up.

EMMA: We've had an offer on the house already. I thought it was going to take a while but...

DANNY: Wow. Not even a hug...

Danny moves to give her a hug. Emma lets him. They sit down. For a split second it seems like they might hold hands, but no.

EMMA: They're offering us three hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Minus repairs and legal fees, we have around three hundred thousand to split between us.

DANNY: Keep your voice down.

EMMA: What?

DANNY: You can't trust anyone round here. If they find out I've got cash, I'll likely turn up dead tomorrow.

Emma looks around her.

EMMA: Right.

DANNY: *(In a low voice)* Did you say three hundred grand?

EMMA: Yes. A hundred and fifty thousand each.

DANNY: Quite a sum.

EMMA: A lawyer will bring the papers here so you can sign and we can sell.

DANNY: You just wait till I get out of here.

EMMA: Let's see how long it lasts you. It sounds a lot, but it's not endless.

DANNY: What do you think I'm gonna do, blow it all in two days? I don't need a lot to live...

food, fags, you know...

EMMA: Drugs...

DANNY: I don't do that shit anymore.

EMMA: Flash cars...

DANNY: Yeah, you got me there. But I'm gonna count to three before opening my wallet.

EMMA: I hope so.

DANNY: I will, you wait and see.

EMMA: I really hope so, I've always wanted a normal brother and a sister-in-law and some nieces and nephews...

DANNY: I'm never gonna be that normal. Jesus, I'd go mental.

EMMA: Well, nothing new there then.

DANNY: Alright, but first you have to do me a favour.

EMMA: Here we go.

DANNY: Just a small favour. Really tiny. No skin off your back at all. I'm really really behaving myself. You can ask them.

EMMA: How much time have you got left?

DANNY: Too much. But it would be a bit less if you help me.

EMMA: How?

DANNY: Well, if you can convince them you're not as bad as you seem, they move you from Unit One to Unit Two.

EMMA: What's the difference?

DANNY: Everything. They give you points for good behaviour and you can do activities and stuff. There's a guy who was a coach. They got him for some doping shit... Anyway, he wants to set up a kind of Prison Olympics. You remember how good I was at running?

EMMA: Yeah. Specially away from the police.

DANNY: Yeah, well, I'm not gonna argue with that right now. The thing is, if you write a letter

to my social worker, saying I've changed, she might let me do a time trial.

EMMA: Why can't you just do one?

DANNY: Because I have to change unit. Could you ask them to give me another chance? And tell them I'm not a bad person...

EMMA: Aren't you?

DANNY: Hell no! Being locked up doesn't mean shit. There are worse people outside than in here. Tell the social worker you're my sister and that I'm telling the truth when I say I want to change my ways.

EMMA: And how do I know that?

DANNY: Because I'm telling you!

EMMA: Right. And those marks?

Emma indicates some scars that can be seen on her brother's wrists.

DANNY: From a previous life. Things got a bit tough. But I'm doing good now. Will you write?

EMMA: How many times have I stuck up for you, Danny?

DANNY: Oh great! What have I done to you now? It's just a letter!

EMMA: And how many times have you let me down?

DANNY: I told you I'm trying to change!

EMMA: The first time you tried to change, you burgled my house.

DANNY: And I regret it. I never said I was sorry, okay, I'll say it now, I'm sorry.

EMMA: What about when I guaranteed your loan, and ended up shelling out for your motorbike, which you then smashed up in a robbery... Shall I go on?

DANNY: I know the list off by heart.

EMMA: So you understand why I might be upset?

DANNY: If you just help me one more time, I'll prove to you I'm going legit. I need to change unit. I really can't stand the idea of another eighteen months in here.

EMMA: So what do I write? My brother is amazing. Though you and I had better pray he

doesn't suddenly snap.

DANNY: You're such a cow!

EMMA: On the bus on the way here I was saying to myself: treat him as though he's never done anything wrong.

DANNY: If I let you down, you can tell me where to go. I'll even let you hit me. Hit me now if you want. In advance.

EMMA: Don't be stupid.

DANNY: Hit me. If that'll help... for everything I've done over the years.

He's starting to make Emma laugh. Danny locks on to it. He knows this is the key that opens all the doors.

EMMA: Oh stop it!

DANNY: Go on, you're going to write me the most beautiful letter in the world, aren't you?

EMMA: And what if I say no?

DANNY: Then I'll swallow my tongue and die right here in front of you, like one of my cellmates did to me.

EMMA: Don't be an idiot.

DANNY: I swear I'll swallow it.

EMMA: I'm going.

Emma stands up. So Danny pretends to swallow his tongue. He rolls his eyes back and makes guttural sounds that make his sister laugh.

EMMA: Stop being such an idiot!

But Danny keeps going.

EMMA: Stop it!

Danny doesn't listen. He's going red.

EMMA: I'm going to call the guard.

As Danny doesn't stop, Emma really starts to get scared.

EMMA: Danny, enough!

She can't take it anymore: she grabs her brother and tries to force her fingers into his mouth.

EMMA: Don't do this! Please don't do this to me! Get your tongue out, Danny! Get it out!

Danny returns to normal and laughs.

DANNY: You believed me! You believed me! Look at your face!

Emma is pushing him violently and hitting him in the chest.

EMMA: You bastard!

DANNY: It was a joke! Jesus, sorry.

EMMA: You're a little shit!

DANNY: I got them to take me to the sickroom doing that once. You've gotta get inventive around here.

Danny winks at her.

Emma sits down and puts her hand on her chest.

EMMA: My heart's beating so fast. I've got to go.

DANNY: That's because you're worried about losing your brother. Admit it. Can you advance me some of my share? I asked for some glasses, but since we don't get much chance to see long-distance in here, they've only given me reading glasses...

5. EMMA'S FLAT

Emma puts down her bag, sits down, tries to compose herself. She sorts out her hair, smooths down her skirt, crosses her arms. She talks to her husband.

EMMA: Yes, I went back to see my brother. I was going to tell you, I swear.

Emma sighs heavily.

EMMA: He's much better. You wouldn't recognise him.

I have to see him, but only till we sell the house. After that, he'll be out of my life for good.

I hope. No, I'm sure. Yes, I'm sure.

What do you mean? Why would we move away?

But it's not necessary to get a transfer. And anyway, you were the one who didn't want to move...

We're running away from my brother? Is that it?

He's not a disease!

6. PRISON GYM

Danny is in the gym in Unit Two. He's wearing, for the first time, a tracksuit given to him by his sister with the logo of the school where she works; it's a bit too big for him. He's talking to the coach.

DANNY: Hey, I'm Danny. I've just been transferred from Unit One.

I hear you're looking for athletes. I run. I run a hundred in twelve seconds.

A hundred metres is twice round the gym. Go on, time me.

Danny breathes in and waits for the signal.

A clap is heard.

Danny runs off.

5. EMMA'S FLAT – CONTINUED

EMMA: Don't make me choose, do not make me choose. That's not fair.

Yes, he's torn me apart my whole life.

It's not that he likes it; he can't help it!

But he tries, eh? He does try.

What do you want, that I rip him into pieces and throw him in the bin?

My brother is not a project gone wrong.

You can't just delete siblings!

6. PRISON GYM – CONTINUED

Danny is knackered. He's panting with his hands on his knees.

DANNY: Do I smoke? Yeah.

Danny takes a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket, ready to smoke. But chucks it away and starts hitting his chest.

DANNY: But not anymore. From now on, I'm officially an ex-smoker.

Lungs of steel.

Put me to the test. Let me show you, coach.

I need some training. But I have two weeks to get fit. Under twelve seconds, for sure.

5. EMMA'S FLAT – CONTINUED

EMMA: It's me that suffers, me.

How many times have you come to the prison with me? How many times have I asked you to? Not once!

Twelve years since we met, Evan, twelve years. And how many years has he been inside? More than outside.

And if you haven't come with me it's because I haven't wanted you to. *I* haven't wanted you to. Because he's *my* brother.

6. PRISON GYM – CONTINUED

Danny is in training. He's doing press-ups in the gym.

DANNY: Legs of steel, stomach of steel, legs of steel, stomach of steel. Jesus, and arms of steel.

5. EMMA'S FLAT – CONTINUED

EMMA: I'm not having a go at you. This is *my* problem. And I sort out *my* problems the way I know or the way I can or the way I sodding want to.

6. PRISON GYM – CONTINUED

Danny is doing weight training.

DANNY: Check me out, coach! Check me out lifting these bitches.

What weight am I at? Tell me, eh, come on...

Alright, alright, I'll shut up...

5. EMMA'S FLAT – CONTINUED

EMMA: Sorry... I'm sorry.

You don't deserve this.

No, it was me, I got myself in a state, you don't need to bring him into this.

I'm sorry, okay. I'm going to run a bath.

6. PRISON GYM – CONTINUED

Danny, sweating, exhausted, out of breath, is smoking a cigarette in secret.

7. PRIVATE PRISON VISITING ROOM

Emma is waiting for her brother in the visiting room. Danny enters with beers. He offers one to Emma.

DANNY: They're alcohol-free.

EMMA: I should hope so too.

DANNY: I do want to change, you know, but they block everything in here. Online access restricted, calls only at certain times, back in your cell when they say...

EMMA: You can't go to your cell when you want?

DANNY: Only if you're sick. You've got to follow a strict routine, head count twice a day... They literally clock every move you make...

EMMA: It's prison, not a hotel.

DANNY: But 8.30 in your cell? It's a bit extreme, don't you think? In summer, we get till 10 p.m. And I need to train if I want to get fit. Thanks for the letter, by the way.

EMMA: Why did you want me to come here?

DANNY: For that.

EMMA: For what?

DANNY: To say thanks. Or can I not even thank my own sister? Hey, I like to acknowledge it when someone does me a favour.

EMMA: You could have just called me. You made me come all the way here...

DANNY: It's better face-to-face though, eh? Though if you're going to get all arsey I won't ask again.

EMMA: I'm not being arsey.

DANNY: You are, Emma. You're getting all uptight because you don't really want to see me or spend time with me.

Emma stays silent because she knows Danny has a point. They are both silent for a moment, except for the sound of Danny tapping his feet on the floor, as though he can't keep them still. Emma breaks the silence.

EMMA: How's the new unit?

DANNY: Great. So far so good.

Danny crosses his fingers.

DANNY: Prison is a complete waste of time though. Look at me. My whole life in and out and what happens? No one will give me a job 'cos of my record. So what choice have I got? Fuck it all off and go back to what I was doing.

EMMA: And what were you doing most recently?

DANNY: Getting a life. But a real life, which is really fuckin' hard.

EMMA: Do you think the rest of us aren't working hard, living a real life?

DANNY: You guys living in the Matrix don't understand a thing.

EMMA: You never wanted to work.

DANNY: Yes I did. I was working as night security in a hotel at the airport. I got a meal and the only thing I had to do was open the door for late arrivals. But one day I lost it a bit and they chucked me out. I worked eight months without a single complaint. Fucking Spanish tourists!

Danny has got more agitated than he'd have liked.

EMMA: There are people who've been to prison who manage to turn their lives around.

DANNY: Yeah, in films. More bullshit. I hate films.

EMMA: But you love boxing. I hate boxing.

DANNY: Boxing is like life. The bad guy wins. The tough guy. The one who hits hardest. Most of the time anyway.

Do you remember when we were kids? You'd always do as you were told and I'd always answer back. That's why I always got a beating.

EMMA: You were a pain.

DANNY: And your mother was a bitch.

EMMA: Mum?

DANNY: She locked me in the store cupboard for a whole day once for calling her stupid. I hadn't taken communion yet, so I couldn't have been very old. D'you remember?

EMMA: No.

DANNY: Luckily there was food and Fanta in the cupboard so it wasn't as bad as all that. The worst bit was coming out and being blinded by the light.

EMMA: But it was your father who beat you.

DANNY: No, it wasn't. It was her. She'd find the wooden spatula, grab hold of me and whack me with it. Do you remember when I broke my arm?

EMMA: Which time? From what I remember, you broke it at least three times.

DANNY: When I fell down the stairs.

EMMA: Yes.

DANNY: Well, I didn't fall.

EMMA: What do you mean? I picked you up off the floor.

DANNY: Your mother pushed me.

EMMA: Liar.

DANNY: I was jumping on the bed with my shoes on, she grabbed me by the arm and threw me down the stairs.

EMMA: It was an accident, surely.

DANNY: Yeah, an accident. That's why she came rushing down the stairs half an hour later. But then again she threw a knife at your head!

EMMA: She was stressed out and I was winding her up. It was the only time it happened.

DANNY: But she threw a knife at you. Normal mums yell at you, or smack you; they don't throw knives at their kids...

EMMA: You're talking about someone I don't know.

DANNY: Half the scars I have are from her.

Danny is left hanging for a moment. Emma doesn't know whether or not to believe what she's hearing.

EMMA: Didn't you tell anyone?

DANNY: Who? Your father...? The teachers more interested in kicking me out of school...? You...?

EMMA: Someone who could've helped you, Danny. I didn't see any of what you're telling me.

DANNY: Well, there you go.

EMMA: So what you're actually telling me is it's her fault you're...

DANNY: No, no, don't give her the credit. I've lived my life the way I wanted. What's happened to me has been all my own doing.

EMMA: You say that as though you're proud of it.

DANNY: My life's been pretty good, Sis. I've got up when I wanted, with no one hassling me; I've had money to burn... But all good things come to an end.

EMMA: Yep.

DANNY: *(Suddenly jubilant)* So I'm training hard and... you haven't noticed something...

EMMA: What?

DANNY: I quit smoking. I've gone seven hours without a single cigarette. And look, no cravings, nothing. You know, you'd be really pretty if you wore more make-up.

EMMA: Charming.

DANNY: D'you know the first thing I'm gonna do with the cash when I get out of here?

EMMA: Something stupid.

DANNY: Come on. I'm gonna go to Brazil. I've been dreaming of Brazil since I saw some photos... gorgeous girls half naked... don't get mad.

EMMA: You don't think you should try to spend as little as possible?

DANNY: And when I get back from Brazil I'm gonna start a business.

EMMA: What sort of business?

DANNY: I don't know yet, but I'll be the boss. Can you imagine your brother, the boss?

EMMA: No.

DANNY: And I'll get some business cards. Mr Daniel Trafford. Managing Director. Cool, eh?

EMMA: Managing Director of what?

DANNY: I just need an office. A decent car. A telephone. And I'm ready to go.

EMMA: But an office for what?

DANNY: Sales. International sales.

EMMA: And what are you going to sell?

DANNY: Whatever. I've got the gift of the gab.

EMMA: Well, you'll need to get organised, think with your head...

DANNY: I've lived on the street, Sis. I've been attacked on a bench in the middle of the night; I've had my head split open twice. What I mean is, I know how to fend for myself. And now with some cash, it's gonna be even easier to do that.

Don't you worry about me. Everything's gonna be alright. Guess how many press-ups I can do?

Emma shakes her head.

DANNY: Two hundred and fifty. You gotta be fit to run. Count them.

And before Emma can say anything, Danny is down on the floor doing press-ups.

EMMA: I believe you.

DANNY: Count them!

Emma scrapes her chair back and gets up.

EMMA: Bye, Danny.

DANNY: What?

EMMA: I have to be somewhere; I'm going to be late.

Emma starts to leave. Danny keeps doing press-ups.

DANNY: Look! One hand!

As Emma goes through the door, she bursts into tears.

8. EMMA'S FLAT

Emma is finding it hard to breathe. She's crying. She opens the bag beside her, gets out a packet of cigarettes, puts one in her mouth.

The front door can be heard opening. Emma turns around, quickly wipes away the tears.

EMMA: The first time he broke his arm, I thought he'd fallen. But it turns out it was my mother who pushed him. Danny told me. I didn't want to believe him, but then I remembered, that night I had to force her to take him to hospital. His arm was badly swollen and my mother was just smoking calmly. He broke his arm before dinner and it was gone midnight before he had a cast on.

When he cut it at the abattoir the same thing happened more or less. I found him with his hand wrapped in two tea towels. There was blood everywhere, all over the floor. I asked him why his boss hadn't taken him to hospital. He doesn't know, he said. If he sees I've trashed the machine, I'm gonna get it in the neck. And your mother? I asked. Sh! Shut up! If she finds out she won't just chuck me out, she'll break my fucking neck. Pass me the mop so I can clean up this mess. In the end, I had to take him myself. The cut went down to the bone. And the idiot didn't say a thing as they stitched him up. My mother didn't even ask when she saw his hand bandaged up to his elbow. She just lit one cigarette after another. The only thing she asked was who'd made a mess of the kitchen floor.

I hadn't realised what was happening up till now...

9. THE GYM

Danny is in the gym, skipping. Training hard.

Then he puts down the rope and goes back to his cell.

10. PRISON CELL

Danny continues training in the cell of his new unit. His new cellmate doesn't seem to like so much activity around him. Danny is talking to him.

DANNY: I'm almost on target. Fourteen seconds.

I'm not old, motherfucker. I've got more willpower than you and all the bastards in here put together.

When I get an idea in my head... it's in my head and it's not coming out.

And I really wanna get them to cut my sentence.

Jesus, I'm already on edge, don't make it worse!

It's tomorrow. I gotta hit the target tomorrow.

Danny approaches his part of the wall; it has a photo of his sister and posters of Brazilian women in bikinis.

DANNY: I'm not gonna stop running till I get out of here, man.

He touches the images as he mentions his dreams.

DANNY: There's a plane, Rio de Janeiro, three hot Brazilian women, another plane, a house, the fancy office I'm gonna have, the flash car I'm gonna buy; I wanna get a nice evening dress for my sister...

11. PRIVATE PRISON VISITING ROOM

Emma is waiting for her brother to arrive. She looks in her bag, gets out a sweet, takes off the wrapper, puts it in her mouth. She doesn't know where to put the wrapper, so she puts it in her pocket.

Danny enters the room with his head down. This time there is no sign of joy on his face. Emma waits for him as usual in the room.

EMMA: Are you okay?

DANNY: What does it look like?

EMMA: You're not okay.

DANNY: Then you know already.

EMMA: Did they do something to you?

DANNY: I did it all myself.

EMMA: What happened?

DANNY: Like I said: me. Well no, not me, my bad luck. I got a bit cocky 'cos everything was going so well, but, you know, I've never had any luck, and I'm never gonna have any.

EMMA: Luck doesn't exist.

DANNY: Yeah? So how come some people are born rolling in shit but come out smelling of roses, and others just smell of shit?

EMMA: And I suppose you belong to the second group...

DANNY: Well, you tell me! In this entire shithole, I'm the one who runs the most but they wouldn't let me do the time trial.

EMMA: Why not?

DANNY: I just told you, my bad luck.

EMMA: It's not bad luck, people make bad choices, that's all.

DANNY: Oh really? Let's think back. Nine years old. The day of my First Communion. I fall over... well, I don't fall over, I slip on the church steps, which had just been washed down, and get filthy marks all over my outfit.

EMMA: And what were you doing?

DANNY: Running.

EMMA: See!

DANNY: I was a kid and I was bored.

EMMA: You just had to wait it out, Danny, like everyone else!

DANNY: Stealing my first motorbike. Okay, it's wrong, but loads of people steal and nothing ever happens to them. I come off it on the first turn and the exhaust slams into my leg. You can still see the scar.

EMMA: Your fault.

DANNY: First arrest. Sixteen years old and they lock me up with eleven blokes for forty-eight

hours. Two whole days before they realise I'm underage! And why? 'Cos I'd lost my ID the day before... my bad luck.

EMMA: Okay, that was bad luck, but every now and then something bad happens to everyone.

DANNY: What's ever happened to you? Even when your mother throws a knife at you, it misses by a millimetre. It would've sliced me right across my ugly mug.

EMMA: What never happened doesn't count!

DANNY: You've got a nice life. You met a great guy, got married, you have an amazing house, I'm pretty sure you earn a decent amount between you... And no kids. You've got it completely sorted.

EMMA: Well, has it occurred to you why I don't have kids? I like children, I teach them; I'm financially stable...

DANNY: I guess because you're smart and know this world is a pile of shit.

EMMA: I don't have kids because I'm scared I'll be a bad mother.

DANNY: Come on, you can't fool me. You don't have kids 'cos you're scared they'll end up like me.

EMMA: That too.

DANNY: How come you ended up so different to the rest of us anyway?

EMMA: Don't know, maybe I'm not that different. Maybe I hide behind a mask too.

DANNY: You've always been different. You were different from the moment you could hold a spoon. You played mother to your mother.

EMMA: I don't really remember being little. At home, when you were all having a laugh, I wasn't. But do I say I'm unlucky? No, I keep going, and keep reminding myself that what I've got is much better than what a lot of people have.

DANNY: Your good luck was running away from our family.

EMMA: You can't run away from family, Danny. Even if you don't see them, they're here, inside you.

DANNY: Do you remember I told you I was attacked on a bench one night? So, I was attacked. And when I kicked the bastard who was laying into me with a bat, he fell backwards and hit his head.

EMMA: What do you mean, hit his head?

DANNY: On a rock. I can still hear the sound of his head cracking.

EMMA: Are you telling me you killed...?

DANNY: (*Cutting in*) Yes, yes. I was just defending myself, but my bad luck showed up and what would've been self-defence became involuntary manslaughter.

EMMA: So that's why you're in here now.

Danny nods.

EMMA: Why didn't you tell me?

DANNY: There are loads of things I haven't told you, Sis. But bad luck exists, and it looks like me.

Danny smiles.

Emma is horrified, but she can't help taking his hand.

DANNY: I've been training all this time. I haven't left the gym. Look at that... feel that muscle...

EMMA: I can see.

DANNY: Feel it, Sis. It's unbelievable.

Danny stands next to Emma and points at his thighs.

Emma touches then quickly pulls her hand away.

EMMA: Yep.

DANNY: Pure iron, right?

EMMA: So what happened with the time trial?

DANNY: I fell over.

EMMA: You fell over.

DANNY: Well actually, I felt a bit rough and passed out.

EMMA: Are you eating properly?

DANNY: Well actually... I smoked a couple of spliffs.

EMMA: For God's sake, Danny!

DANNY: I was really nervous. I wanted to prove how good I am. And I wanted to shove my shitty luck right up there.

EMMA: You don't try hard enough and you have no volition. A word that's no longer used much but I like it.

DANNY: Don't go all teacher on me, I get enough lectures in here already.

EMMA: Without volition, we're weak, Danny. Like you.

DANNY: Like me? I could've run stoned, no problem. It wouldn't have been the first time.

EMMA: You don't get what I'm saying.

DANNY: They wouldn't even let me have another try.

EMMA: I could be talking to you for years and you would never get what I'm saying.

DANNY: Alright. It's all my fault. Happy?

EMMA: God, no! So what happens now? Will they make you change unit again?

DANNY: For smoking some spliffs?

EMMA: I'm guessing you're not supposed to do drugs in here.

DANNY: You can get anything you want in here, except a helicopter and a decent woman... someone nice like you.

EMMA: You have to keep training. You have to keep at it.

DANNY: The bloke who does it doesn't even want to see me. He's got it in for me.

EMMA: You have to stop blaming other people, ill will, luck, the world. You can change. Especially now the house is going through. My husband's boss was looking for a place for his nephew and they want to move fast. If we're lucky, we'll sell this month.

DANNY: See! You talk about luck too.

EMMA: As soon as it's all agreed, someone will bring you the papers to sign. Just don't get in any more trouble. This is the last time. And I want you to promise me that you'll apologise, and ask to be given another chance, when you do get out of here.

DANNY: Do you know the worst?

Emma looks at him waiting for something worse.

DANNY: I've started smoking again. But tomorrow I'll quit. Definitely.

Emma takes the packet of cigarettes.

EMMA: Quit now.

DANNY: No! Just give me one. Come on, just one more!

12. PRISON GYM

Danny is talking to his coach with his head down.

DANNY: I may not be the greatest person in here but if I tell you I'll win the race, I'll win it.

I have the willpower, coach, believe me.

And I wanna get out of here as soon as possible. Like everyone else.

I have a house waiting for me that was my mother's, my grandparents' before that – a hundred and eighty square metres.

Let me do the race, at least let me be the reserve.

Come on, I'm training hard; I can get it down to twelve seconds.

I'll do whatever you tell me, whatever you want.

I swear if I train hard I can get it down to twelve seconds, for sure. The best in the world does close to ten.

Yes, mate, course I can do you a favour! Two even! Go on, ask me.

I don't know, man, that doesn't sound good. That's your business, I don't really wanna get involved.

Don't fuck with me, coach! How can you be so...

Why did you sell it to him if you knew he couldn't pay?

Okay, yep. What d'you want me to do?

Fuck! What did he say? Man, I don't know...

That's a massive gamble for me, coach.

Okay, alright, I'll go mental.

Danny leaves in a hurry, like a colt bolting out of a stable.

13. PRISON CELL

Danny enters in a rage.

DANNY: What do you mean, what's got into me? What have you been saying about me? That I've got a house, that I'm rolling in it...?

So how does the coach know then? When you go and buy that shit you smoke from him, you go blabbing about everything, don't you?

Well, he wants me to break the arm of a bloke who hasn't paid.

And guess what his name is?

Alex Garner. Yep, that'll be you.

Danny tries to calm down.

Who'd go and score when they haven't got any cash?

How much do you owe?

Five hundred quid! For fuck's sake.

Well, I'm sorry, kid, that's one finger gone already.

Me? What can I give you?

Yes, mate! My sister doesn't pay for my vices, but she's gonna pay for yours? Break a finger, the one you like least. You don't need them all in here anyway.

It'll be worse if I break it for you.

Nah, there's no pain. It's piss easy. Take a finger, the one that gives you the most grief, place it against the wall like this, then push your whole body against it...

In mid-demonstration, a sinister crack is heard. Danny just broke his finger.

DANNY: Motherfucker! You just made me break my finger!

14. PRISON. ROOM WITH PARTITION SCREEN

Emma is waiting for her brother. When he enters, she sees his finger in a cast.

EMMA: What do you want?

DANNY: Wow, straight in there.

EMMA: *(Pointing at the finger)* What have you done this time?

DANNY: Yep, I did something myself, it wasn't that someone did it to me, or that it was an accident or...

EMMA: That you've been an idiot as always.

DANNY: The idiots are everyone else in here. You have no idea the idiots I have to deal with every day. And be happy for me, it could've been worse.

EMMA: Tell me what you want; I don't have much time. If you've made me come all this way, it must be for something important, right?

DANNY: Seeing your brother isn't important? Don't you wake up every day thinking you desperately want to see me?

EMMA: Danny, enough. I have to go.

DANNY: Where you going?

EMMA: Work. You wouldn't know about this, but normal people like me have this thing called a job.

DANNY: Now what have I done to you?

EMMA: You know.

DANNY: What did you talk to that f'ing shrink about?

EMMA: About how well you express yourself, with such intensity.

DANNY: She's got it in for me.

EMMA: Clearly. That's why your cellmate has a broken nose, because the psychologist has it in for you.

DANNY: The bitch snitched on me? She's gonna get it for that. She doesn't know who she's dealing with...

EMMA: No, she didn't snitch on you. I managed to coax it out of her.

DANNY: Who the hell do you think you are doing that?

EMMA: Your sister.

DANNY: Miss clever-clogs, eh?

EMMA: What do you mean by that?

Danny doesn't answer. The silence between them is thick, profound.

EMMA: The lawyer will come this week. You'll be told when.

DANNY: Right.

EMMA: I hope you'll behave yourself with him.

DANNY: I won't let you down, don't worry.

EMMA: It's not for me, Danny; it's for you. I couldn't care less.

DANNY: Maybe they'll give me weekend leave. It's been my turn for months and they've never given it to me.

EMMA: For some reason.

DANNY: Oh, here we go. Well, actually, you need someone to look out for you and since I don't have anyone on the outside...

EMMA: Right.

DANNY: Let's see if I can convince them.

EMMA: Right.

DANNY: Do you know the worst thing about being locked up? It's not the routine, in the end you get used to that. The worst thing is not seeing your people, your mates, the next-door neighbour's dog, the nutter with the motorbike. And this feeling of being no one, being worthless. You know your opinion is worth shit.

EMMA: Bye, Danny.

Emma starts to leave. Her brother's voice stops her.

DANNY: Come on, Emma, don't go off in a strop.

EMMA: Oh, should I be laughing then? Smiling? Saying, I'm so happy my brother is where he is, and on top of that he makes me feel like shit. Is that more like it? You lied to me.

DANNY: What the hell are you talking about?

EMMA: You heard. You lied, because when you were born I was so excited to have a little brother and you got bigger and I was still excited and one day you started misbehaving and you promised me you'd behave. But you kept misbehaving.

DANNY: I was seven years old, Emma. That doesn't count.

EMMA: Well, I believed you. Like always. I always believe everything with you. And you know what? I know deep down I shouldn't, I know you'll lie to me again. And again and again.

DANNY: You're just giving me shit 'cos you love me. You're my only family. I'd rather you gave me shit than said nothing.

EMMA: I haven't come all this way for this.

Danny moves so close to the glass he almost hits his head.

DANNY: Do I look like a bad person?

Emma stares at him, challengingly.

15. PRISON CELL

Danny, his finger in a cast, is with the social worker, though we can't see her.

DANNY: Have I been given leave yet?

Why not? I haven't been in trouble for ages.

I go to the gym, I clean up, I work whenever I can. I deserve it. I've been here almost four years and I haven't been out once.

I don't get it! Even the rapists get leave! What do I have to do, rape someone or bomb something so they let me out for two shitting days?

No, no, don't bring her into this. She's not gonna take that on for me, because I don't want her to.

I'm not gonna ask that!

I said no.

Thank you.

I know you've spoken up for me.

But I'm gonna win that race, I'm gonna bring back that medal and they won't have any choice but to give me leave.

I'm at 13.20. Did you know the fastest in the world does 9.58? When you're not a pro, below thirteen is a miracle, and I'm gonna get down to twelve, I swear. And the first weekend I'm out, Shrink, I'm gonna take you to see a boxing match.

Danny gets up and goes.

16. PRIVATE PRISON VISITING ROOM

Emma and Danny both arrive at the same time. Danny seems in a bad mood.

EMMA: I've spoken to the lawyer.

DANNY: Ah yeah, the snooty guy.

EMMA: Does everyone rub you up the wrong way?

DANNY: You don't. I like you.

EMMA: Why didn't you want to sign the paperwork for the house?

DANNY: Oh, now it all makes sense.

EMMA: Now all what makes sense?

DANNY: Your visit, all of a sudden, didn't seem like you at all.

EMMA: I wrote you a letter saying I was coming.

DANNY: I got it yesterday. You know, all of a sudden.

EMMA: I don't get you, Danny! I don't get you at all! Why didn't you sign the papers?

DANNY: Because they're taking us for a ride.

EMMA: Who? Who's taking us for a ride?

DANNY: Everyone.

EMMA: And you know this because you're... telepathic?

DANNY: The house is worth much more. When we were kids the area was a shithole, but now it's gone up in value.

EMMA: The bank valued it and it's correct.

DANNY: The bank? You mean, the biggest thieves around here? They're the ones who should be in prison, not me.

EMMA: If you were outside, you'd know how much the house is worth.

DANNY: We know about things in here too – we have TV, we don't live completely cut off from the world.

EMMA: Well, I'm telling you the house is valued at a good price. The buyers are decent people.

DANNY: They're a bunch of crooks who want to take advantage of you and me.

EMMA: They're relatives of my husband's boss. And they don't have to buy this house.

DANNY: Ah, your husband! If I'd known it was down to your husband, I wouldn't have even gone there. It'd be like messing with the Pope.

EMMA: Leave my husband out of this.

DANNY: Then leave him out of my shit too. You think I don't know how he whispers in your ear?

EMMA: Everything was going just fine and now you're ruining it all.

DANNY: No one can take me for a fool, okay!

EMMA: Okay. So we won't sell and that's that.

DANNY: Don't fuck with me now, Sis; I need that money.

EMMA: Sign then.

DANNY: When they pay what it's worth. Minimum three hundred and eighty thousand.

EMMA: It's not down to you to set the price. If we ask for that, maybe we'll sell in two years time, maybe never. There are 'For Sale' signs up all over the place round there.

DANNY: It's worth three hundred and eighty, no more no less.

EMMA: I knew I shouldn't have trusted you. I have to stop doing that, then I won't have to deal with your bullshit anymore.

DANNY: Why are you being so pushy about signing? Maybe it's you.

EMMA: What?

DANNY: Maybe you're gonna get something out of it. There must be some reason.

EMMA: I don't need the money to live. Do you think I'm going to scam my own brother? Do you think I'm like you?

DANNY: Hey, calm down. I don't scam people, okay? I stole to live, but I've never scammed anyone.

EMMA: No, just yourself. You've made your whole life one big long scam, and mine too, for always believing you...

DANNY: Well, why did you come then, you stupid cow? You're the one who sent the letter!

EMMA: That's the thing with you. You do things without realising who you're hurting.

DANNY: Oh poor little rich girl.

EMMA: I'm not rich; I work to earn a living. Unlike some!

DANNY: I wouldn't wanna be a sucker in a shitty job.

EMMA: Well then, deal with where you're at. You think you can just show up, promise the world, then screw everyone over?

DANNY: When have I screwed you over?

EMMA: My whole life.

DANNY: Your whole life I've screwed you over?

Finally Pandora's box is opened. Emma can't take it anymore and explodes.

EMMA: Do you know what it feels like to live in fear every waking hour? When we were kids, I was scared you'd play up and get punished. I'd go to my room and cover my ears so I couldn't hear the beatings. When we were older, I was scared you'd come and rob me. I tried to ignore the threats. Even the time when I didn't want to give you any more money, and you swore you'd wait for me outside my door and slice open my gut with a flick knife.

DANNY: I didn't mean it!

EMMA: You showed it to me, Danny. You showed me the knife. And for two months I slept with a phone next to my pillow waiting for the day you'd force open the door and show up while I was sleeping. Every time I hear a noise I think it's you, that you're finally going to go through with the threat.

DANNY: I'd never hurt you.

EMMA: You stole from me.

DANNY: But I did it when you weren't home! And I said I was sorry.

EMMA: That's not worth shit! Completely screw up then say you're sorry. Things aren't actually that easy.

DANNY: Even less so for me.

EMMA: For you and everyone else. Or do you think you're the only one who's had problems at home? But people grow up and get by without destroying others.

DANNY: Excuse me for living.

EMMA: No, I won't excuse you. Do you know how many times I've wanted to get a phone call saying they've found you dead? And I feel awful afterwards for thinking it.

DANNY: *(He shows her the scars on his wrists)* I've tried, eh, I've tried.

EMMA: The first time you called me from prison I was happy. At least I knew where you were. Then I was scared again, for what could happen to you inside. My whole life living in fear.

DANNY: But if you've been living in fear, imagine what I've been living in? It doesn't even compare. What's the worst thing you can think of? 'Cos, that's happened to me.

EMMA: Well I'm sorry!

DANNY: How the hell is being sorry gonna help?

EMMA: Is it my fault now?

DANNY: Maybe.

Emma stands up, furious.

EMMA: Go to hell, Danny, and leave me alone!

DANNY: You go to hell! The house too! Do you really wanna feel fear? Real fear. If you want, I can split your head open right now...

Danny gets up from his chair, livid, and walks towards his sister, intending to hit her. Emma retreats to the wall, seeking refuge. Danny keeps moving towards her.

DANNY: This is fear. Right now. The fear we get in here...

Danny lifts the chair as though he's going to throw it. Emma cries out.

DANNY: Come here, you fuckin' chicken!

Emma does as she's told. She moves towards him, shouting, and slaps him hard, leaving a mark on his face.

EMMA: Shut the fuck up!

Both are stunned by what has just happened. It's Danny who breaks the silence.

DANNY: *(Massaging his face).* Wow, some hit. Who are you, the woman of steel?

Danny seems to be taking what happened as a joke. Emma is still trembling in front of him; her body like a willow being whipped by the wind.

We hear the door lock being slid back.

Emma breaks down, crying, and runs out.

17. EMMA'S FLAT

Emma is in her flat, very upset. She's finding it hard to breathe. She places her hands on her knees to focus and calm herself down.

EMMA: I didn't realise we were going so soon. I've got loads of things to sort out still.

My things. I'm not just your wife; I have my own life.

Oh for God's sake! I come back absolutely wiped out and all you're worried about is your boss.

Yes, you said. You said he was going to make things difficult for us. You said he's never done anything for me. Not one good thing. I know he doesn't appreciate a single thing I do.

Alright, he's a bad person. Really bad. But nothing hooks you like a bad person.

(Shouting) He's a shit and I'm not going to see him again! I'm not going to bother with him ever again.

But he is not the only one to blame, let's be clear about that.

18. ISOLATION CELL

Danny is sitting in a corner of the isolation cell. His jaw is clenched, his eyes half-closed, his head down.

A tear slides down his face.

He wipes it away and stands up. He starts running like a madman the three metres in front of him before crashing into the wall. Barely showing the pain, he turns round and starts running again, before smashing into the opposite wall.

He does it again.

And again.

17. EMMA'S FLAT – CONTINUATION

EMMA: I already told you I'm done! Do you want me to sign an official declaration?

Is this tearing us apart? Is this tearing apart us?

Emma's voice cracks.

EMMA: Well then, maybe you should know I'm pregnant.

19. PRISON. ROOM WITH PARTITION SCREEN

Danny, his face stiff from self-inflicted blows and his finger still in a cast, looks more like a statue of Christ on Good Friday than a person. He has some documents in his hand.

He's sitting opposite the lawyer, who we don't see.

DANNY: And what's my brother-in-law like?

Is he taller or shorter than me?

I've seen him in a photo. He's got blond hair, right?

I think he wears glasses.

Maybe contacts. Do you know him well?

Do you think he loves my sister?

She deserves the best. Have you spoken to her?

Do you think if I call her she'll pick up the phone?

I thought lawyers knew everything.

But did she say anything to you? Is she still angry? I'd really like to talk to her to clear things up.

It's not about the sale of the house. I'm not gonna cause any more problems with that.

I wanted to get the biggest slice possible, that's all, for her too. But I'll sign whatever I need to. Are these the papers?

So, tell me where to sign and we'll be done.

No, you don't need to explain anything.

I trust you. Just tell me where to sign.

Are you deaf or what?

Tell her the problem's in my head.

Tell her I wanna be good, but there's another me that won't let me.

Danny signs various papers.

DANNY: Tell my sister she doesn't need to worry anymore.

No need. Pay in the money and that'll be that. Matter closed.

Danny signs another document and a tear falls onto the paper.

DANNY: But tell her everything I told you. I know how it is now.

It's not true that everyone is both good and bad. Deep down, we're only one. The hardest thing is to accept which one we are.

Tell my sister this, please. Tell her I know which one I am. And I'm glad she's different.

You'll get the papers at the entrance. Just ask the guard for them.

Get out of here now, man, before I start bawling.

20. PRIVATE PRISON VISITING ROOM

Emma is facing her brother. Neither of them dares start the conversation.

Danny is looking worse than last time and Emma looks at him with sadness. Deep sadness. She also has dark circles under her eyes.

EMMA: What a picture.

DANNY: I look like one of those Christ statues, don't I? (*He doesn't wait for his sister to answer*). I'd look alright if I had another nose.

Emma takes a deep breath and says what she's come to say.

EMMA: I've come to apologise.

DANNY: Really? How nice.

EMMA: Don't mock.

DANNY: I mean it. I'm usually the one who does everything wrong and who everyone wants to apologise...

EMMA: But then you wouldn't be you, you'd be some imaginary brother.

DANNY: The one you'd like to have had. What a pain you got me in the family lottery, eh?

EMMA: I've been going over and over it and I don't know how I let you get to me.

DANNY: I'm good at driving people nuts.

EMMA: But I'm not like that.

DANNY: Of course you're not, you're amazing.

EMMA: Don't overdo it now.

DANNY: The word perfection was invented for you.

EMMA: (*Half joking*) And imbecile was invented for you.

DANNY: Hey... didn't you come here to make peace?

EMMA: Yes. But with you it's impossible.

DANNY: Well, I can give you a good reason for being here.

EMMA: Oh yeah, what?

DANNY: I signed the papers.

EMMA: I know. Not much left to do now.

DANNY: And once what needs to be done is done, I won't see you again?

EMMA: Most likely.

DANNY: Jesus! It's not like I give you an allergic reaction.

Both go quiet again.

DANNY: So who's gonna straighten me out then?

EMMA: There is no way to straighten you out.

DANNY: Damn... with such brutal truths, how am I supposed to sort myself out?

EMMA: I'm so sorry.

DANNY: For what?

EMMA: Hitting you...

DANNY: Again, Sis? Well yeah, your little strops do tend to last a lifetime. When you were young, you were so proud, you'd never admit you'd done anything wrong.

EMMA: It's the first time I've hit anyone. I don't even have a reputation for being tough in school.

DANNY: Thank God they put me in the isolation cell. Otherwise, I'd have got the piss ripped out of me.

EMMA: I'd like to talk to the psychologist and explain... If there's one thing I hate in this world, it's people who solve their problems with violence.

DANNY: Well, don't worry, you didn't solve anything.

EMMA: I wish I could turn back the clock.

DANNY: For God's sake, stop it! Stop fretting so much. It's annoying.

EMMA: The thing is: if you're capable of hitting once, you're capable of hitting a thousand times.

DANNY: It was just a slap. Hard, but a slap, so don't go getting cocky.

Emma shakes her head. Her brother can say what he wants, she knows she hit him with all she had.

DANNY: It was like this.

Danny slaps his sister. But gently, as though trying to replace it with a single kiss. Emma returns the gesture, as though it's a game.

EMMA: Idiot...

DANNY: Wuss...

Danny keeps giving her little slaps, but Emma doesn't return them anymore. She just protects herself.

EMMA: Enough now, Danny.

But Danny keeps going.

DANNY: Come on, chicken... fight back... come on...

EMMA: Stop it.

DANNY: Come on, Emma, eh, stop shielding yourself and let me have it...

EMMA: Stop it, Danny.

DANNY: One two, one two...

EMMA: I told you stop it! You're hurting me!

DANNY: Fight back then...

Danny doesn't know his limits, so he really is about to hurt her.

EMMA: *(Shouting)* You're hurting me, you monster!

Emma pushes him and Danny realises he's gone too far.

DANNY: See? I know how to start, but not how to stop.

At this point, a bell is heard.

Emma breathes out. And Danny is the first to leave. He doesn't even turn to say goodbye, just lifts his hand and goes.

21. PRISON GYM

Danny has put on his sweatshirt and is listening downcast to the social worker, who we can't see.

DANNY: I'm not good enough, shrink. I need to lose another half a second.

Half a second is a lifetime in this.

I don't give a shit about the Olympics. I don't give a shit about anything. I'm never gonna get out of this place, not alive anyway.

I already told the coach. Nobody can force me to train.

I'm done with getting my hopes up only to screw it all up again.

I've tried. I've scrubbed enough floors to cover ten stadiums; I haven't missed a single gym session...

I try to be a better person, honest I do. But then something snaps in my head and I mess it all up again.

22. EMMA'S FLAT

Emma enters the house carrying a bag of things she's collected from school.

EMMA: That's it, I'm no longer a music teacher.

Not angry, no. I've come to terms with the fact that you asked for a transfer without talking to me first.

Yes, I went to see him to apologise. I'm really ashamed of what I did.

Nope, he couldn't care less; he thought it was a pathetic slap. But I'm not like that. I don't want to be like that.

I want to feel safe bringing up our child. I'm never going to talk to him about his uncle – him or her, whichever.

Don't talk maths to me, I don't like it. Everything works on logic with maths, everything tallies. But life's not like that.

21. PRISON GYM – CONTINUATION

DANNY: My sister writes music and she explained it to me once.

It only takes one note, just one, for something that sounds good to sound bad. I have a note that sounds bad right here (*he points to his head*).

Yeah, of course, I'm proud too.

I don't think you're an idiot for getting up every day and going to work.

I want to work.

What do you mean I need to get off my arse then? You think I can't get off my arse? What do you bet?

Danny's eyes flash. As always with him, it's hard to know if he's simply taking in the words he's hearing or getting ready to hit someone.

DANNY: The trouble is one day I'll get to twelve seconds, and that'll be the day I break my leg.

22. EMMA'S FLAT – CONTINUATION

EMMA: My brother could have been one of the best. He's got what it takes. But the one thing it was never possible to do was teach him how to learn.

Because the system doesn't work.

Yes, of course, it's easy to blame others. He does the same.

I haven't given up on my whole life, just teaching. Because it seems to me people don't change.

And if you can't change, why bother trying?

23. PRIVATE PRISON VISITING ROOM

Danny enters the visiting room. He sits opposite Emma. He doesn't dare look her in the eyes. After an uncomfortable silence, he breaks down in tears.

Emma has a sinking feeling in her stomach. For a second, she's tempted to comfort him, but she understands it's better to let him express how he feels. For a few seconds, which feel like an eternity, his facial contortions are the only form of communication between them.

Finally, once he's calmed down:

EMMA: I've brought you the papers.

DANNY: Okay.

EMMA: Here's the account number. They've transferred a hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds.

DANNY: A hundred and fifty-five?

EMMA: Yes, in the end they paid more.

Danny reads the documents.

DANNY: Mr... Mr Daniel Trafford... I've got enough here for two offices, with air conditioning. And two cars. With one car I'll go to one office; with the other, I'll go to the other. And I'm going to buy a phone, with air conditioning too. I thought about calling you a hundred times, but I knew you wouldn't pick up. You wouldn't have picked up, would you?

EMMA: No.

DANNY: See, you are a cow.

EMMA: See.

Danny wants to reach out and touch her, but Emma fears he'll be aggressive. Though she immediately regrets thinking this.

DANNY: If you want, I'll ask them to put me in handcuffs.

EMMA: I'm here, Danny, you can see me, right?

DANNY: Yeah, course, I can see you.

EMMA: And that will mean something.

DANNY: Yeah, that you're not such a nasty cow.

EMMA: It will mean something else.

DANNY: I know, I know, but I'm no good with those kinds of things.

EMMA: Are you still training?

DANNY: Twelve and a half seconds. I can't do it; I can't get there. I asked the lawyer to tell you...

EMMA: He told me.

DANNY: And you've come to the conclusion your brother's a dick.

EMMA: I knew that already.

Danny smiles.

DANNY: I am, it's true.

Now it's Emma who smiles.

EMMA: At least we agree on something.

DANNY: And I can make you laugh. You don't laugh much, do you, Sis?

EMMA: I liked those things you said about me.

DANNY: I bet you'll cry when I'm gone, won't you?

Emma and Danny sink back into silence.

DANNY: Do you have any tissues?

EMMA: Do you want some?

DANNY: No, they're for you, you're gonna need them.

EMMA: I'm pregnant, Danny.

DANNY: Son of a bitch! Wow, that is news. If it's a boy, you have to call him Danny.

EMMA: Do you think I'm a sucker for punishment?

DANNY: Don't worry, there'll never be two Dannys the same. I'm sure he'll be just like... Ivan.

EMMA: His name's not Ivan. It's Evan.

DANNY: I would've loved it if someone adopted me. When I was getting a bollocking, I used to imagine some parents coming to look for me. Like you and Ivan. They would talk to Mum... "Is this the boy you don't want? Well, he can come and live with us then."

EMMA: Seriously?

DANNY: Yeah.

EMMA: And Mum would give you away?

DANNY: Happy as Larry. "Here you go, he's yours forever."

EMMA: And you lived happily ever after?

DANNY: Of course not! The imaginary parents took me back after a month. "He's very handsome, and very smart, but completely impossible to deal with. Here you go."

EMMA: Really?

DANNY: No, silly! They stuck with me and I behaved myself and became the managing director of my father's business. I'm being such a twat.

EMMA: Do you think it's the parents who are to blame?

DANNY: You and I are proof it's not.

EMMA: But your mother never hit me. If she had...

DANNY: You would have apologised and she'd have given you a reward.

EMMA: Or I would have turned out like you.

DANNY: Impossible. You'd have to be born like me. Although you were the favourite. You could eat chocolate whenever you wanted, and I was never allowed.

EMMA: What I don't understand is why she treated us so differently.

DANNY: Because she saw me coming. And you know what? She was right.

EMMA: That doesn't make you angry?

DANNY: What?

EMMA: Proving her right. If only for that, I...

DANNY: I'm working on it.

EMMA: How long have you been out of trouble now?

DANNY: Two months and one day.

EMMA: A record.

DANNY: Not true! My record is eight months. When I worked at that airport hotel. Fucking Spanish tourists!

Emma looks at him and doesn't know if she feels sorry for him.

EMMA: Sometimes I'd brag about you.

DANNY: About me?

EMMA: "My brother's a criminal." I'd drop you into the conversation at a dinner party and

people would be fascinated, asking me questions as though I was suddenly more interesting because of you.

DANNY: Well, I've bragged about my sister too. "She's a pianist, she composes songs and she's going to be on TV someday soon."

They fall into silence again. Emma is finding it hard to say what she's come to say to her brother.

EMMA: Danny, I'm going.

DANNY: They haven't rung the bell yet.

EMMA: My husband's been transferred, so I won't be able to come again.

DANNY: Far?

EMMA: I don't actually want to tell you.

DANNY: Must be really far then.

EMMA: I know everything's going to get better, but if it gets worse, I don't want to know.

DANNY: Bury your head then.

EMMA: I'm going to a place where you win the race, they drop your sentence, you go to Brazil and have some fun, and you end up being managing director.

DANNY: Cool place, eh? Maybe if they have a decent boxing arena where you're going, I'll come and visit you.

EMMA: Maybe this is the last time we see each other, Danny.

DANNY: Harsh.

EMMA: It's up to you.

DANNY: How is it up to me if I don't know where you're going?

It seems like they're going to hug, but then the end-of-visit bell rings. Danny gets up suddenly.

DANNY: How many months are you?

EMMA: Two and a half.

DANNY: Son of a bitch.

And he runs out to avoid saying goodbye.

He runs so fast he would clearly run a hundred metres in twelve seconds.

24. NEUTRAL SPACE

Danny is getting ready for the race.

He stretches his muscles, jumps up and down, tries to relax his body.

The whistle blows.

Danny sets off like a hare.

Emma, from her flat, shouts:

EMMA: Go, Danny! Run!

On the track, Danny is about to reach six seconds but his vision becomes temporarily blurred.

DANNY: My sister Emma isn't coming back. And it's because of me. Of course. I'm the one who steals, the one who does stupid things... She says she feels sorry for me, but it's bullshit. If she really felt like that, she wouldn't be going away. And I'm supposed to just get out of here and be a good person?

EMMA: Come on, Danny, run!

DANNY: Okay, I'm a loser, I've said it myself a thousand times... But don't worry, I don't care if you don't come and see me, better for you. I hope you'll be happy with your husband and your kid and if you don't call him Danny, well, too bad for him, Danny is a great name. And I'm gonna get out of here and come find you. I'm gonna show you some of my boxing moves, Emma, and you're gonna laugh. You have to laugh a little, Emma. You're so serious. So serious!

Danny, with tears in his eyes, runs with all he's got.

EMMA: Go, Danny! Show that bad luck where to go! You can do it, run!

Danny flies. He gets to the finish line and tries to catch his breath.

DANNY: Time?

EMMA: A tenth of a second under twelve.

DANNY: Did I win?

EMMA: You came second.

DANNY: Son of a bitch!

And he passes out.

25. NEUTRAL SPACE

Emma drags a suitcase. She looks at the sky. The sun has finally come out. She smiles before starting to walk.

EMMA: Yes, I locked it with the key. *(She takes a deep breath)* We're gonna be travelling under clear skies. Son of a bitch, as my brother would say.

And she walks towards her new future as we come to the

END

Traffic Jam

By Alina Nelega

Translated from Romanian by Jozefina Komporaly

Hotbed Festival Cambridge (UK), 19-21 July 2024

Alina Nelega's *Traffic Jam* (*În trafic*) received the UNITER Award for Best Drama in 2013, and the author herself directed the text with the Romanian company of the Târgu Mureş National Theatre in 2014. The play consists of the monologues of six women and a dog—the fragmented dramaturgy reconstructs the action from the different perspectives of characters, showcasing a wide array of female destinies. An abused housewife, a businesswoman, a PR manager who had lost control, an insensitive doctor, a humiliated policewoman—they are all random participants and characters in an event that stops the traffic. Life comes to a halt for a moment, and this stillness gives rise to a series of monologues that offer a cross-section of society. In Nelega's play, the events are triggered by a woman who rebels against her marriage: she communicates her decision to divorce while sitting in the car, and her action leads to a series of reactions from other people as if the crisis had forced everyone to reconsider their own lives, there and then. This script-in-hand performance was directed by Paul Bourne, with a cast including Afia Abusham, Vanessa Ackerman, Cassandra Hercules, Bethany O'Halloran, Catherine Walston, Susanna Wolff.

The aim of this project, supported by the Romanian Cultural Institute in London, was to give a flavor of Romanian drama, in the context of contemporary writing for the stage in the UK. Showcasing an instance of Romanian playwriting in translation as part of a festival dedicated to new writing in English, has the potential to break down barriers between translated and indigenous work, and to introduce audiences to some of the specificities and themes that preoccupy the Romanian stage at present.

Hotbed Festival, started in 2002, is an annual festival of new writing for the stage, curated by Menagerie Theatre Company. In over 20 editions to date, the festival has showcased the work of a wide range of emerging and established artists, including commissions, original plays unseen before and work developed in-house. An archive of past festivals is available here: [Hotbed Theatre Festival 2024 — Menagerie](#)

Since 2000, **Menagerie Theatre Company** has been nurturing, producing and developing new plays, having worked with hundreds of playwrights, putting their work in front of audiences. Always open to new forms, new ideas and new challenges, Menagerie have toured work regionally, nationally and internationally: as far away as India and California, and as close by as Cambridge Junction and Storey's Field Community Centre.

Alina Nelega is one of Romania's finest playwrights and authors, her work being translated, published and performed in Romania and internationally. She is a winner of the UNITER Award 'Best Play of the Year' (2001, 2014), holds the 'European Author' accolade from Heidelberg

Stückemarkt (2007), and is an Honorary Fellow in Writing at the University of Iowa. She founded *Dramafest*, the first new playwriting festival in Romania, that ran between 1997-2000, also working extensively with independent companies. Between 2010-2012 she was a columnist for the *scena.ro* theatre magazine, running her own column 'Adverse Reactions'. She won the 2020 Prose Award of the cultural magazine *Observator Cultural* for the novel *As If Nothing Had Ever Happened*, the 'Sofia Nădejde' Award for women's literature and the Best Novel Award for *A Cloud in the Shape of a Camel*. As a professor at the University of the Arts in Târgu-Mureş, she runs the Playwriting MA, a course most accomplished young Romanian playwrights have graduated from. She was a mentor on the *Drama5* playwriting residency, developed by the independent *ReActor* company in Cluj-Napoca, and between 2012-2017 was the Artistic Director of the 'Liviu Rebreanu' company of the National Theatre of Târgu-Mureş. She also acted as the co-ordinator of the Romanian partnership in the *Fabulamundi. Playwriting Europe* project (2012-2023).

Jozefina Komporaly is Reader in Performance at the University of the Arts London and a literary translator from Hungarian and Romanian. She is editor and co-translator of the drama collections *How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients and Other Plays* (Seagull, 2015), *András Visky's Barrack Dramaturgy* (Intellect, 2017) and *Plays from Romania: Dramaturgies of Subversion* (Bloomsbury, 2021), and author of numerous publications on translation, adaptation and theatre, including the monographs *Staging Motherhood: British Women Playwrights, 1956 to the Present* (Palgrave, 2007) and *Radical Revival as Adaptation: Theatre, Politics, Society* (Palgrave, 2017). Her translations were produced by Foreign Affairs, Trap Door, Theatre Y, Trafika Europe Radio, Menagerie Theatre, and were among the finalists for the EBRD Literature Prize, longlisted for the Dublin Literary Award and recipients of PEN Translates Grants. She is a member of the UK Translators Association.
Website: <https://jozefinakomporaly.com/>

Director of Menagerie and The Hotbed Festival, **Paul Bourne** has directed and produced over sixty professional productions in ten different countries. His work has ranged from productions on the fringe through to major international touring. Highlights include *Guignol* (Tennessee Williams) in New York and the UK, the world touring production of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged (out of Washington DC), and the European premieres *Oleanna* and *The Secret Garden*. Previously Artistic Director at the Frankfurt Playhouse and Center Stage New York, his focus is on creating and developing new work for the stage, offering appropriate productions that entertain, challenge and inspire. Paul also runs the corporate training for Menagerie and has delivered training and support for companies at all levels, including Liverpool F.C and the BBC.

Traffic Jam

By Alina Nelega

Translated from Romanian by Jozefina Komporaly

1.

IULIA

Holding a heelless shoe, barefoot and dishevelled.

Fuck these shoes!

Of course, I haven't chosen the right time. We have been married for thirty years, and he keeps repeating almost daily that I don't know how to pick my moment. For him, it's never the right time.

So, it's all the same. Right or wrong, now's the time. It will be thirty years. In three days. Except that instead of an anniversary, we'll have a funeral. Thank you! And if I end up burning in hell forever for how I feel now, it has still been worth it! It can't be worse than the last thirty years.

To feel him every day,
even if I don't look at him,
to smell him every day,
even if I don't touch him,
to be reminded of him against my will,
several times a day,
to have sex with him,
three times a month on average,
without as much as thinking of him.

Otherwise, I can't complain,
our sex life
was put to good use.

We have four children.
All male,
and that makes them feel
superior.
They are right.
You can't rely on arithmetics -
in reality,
one is of a higher order than two.
So, all this time, I've been saying to myself:
I've done my duty.

All my life so far
has been nothing but a form of debt,
which has been paid back,
well over its net value, with a high interest,
my husband, my personal banker,
keeps asking for his instalments all the time,
the instalment 'no-matter-what-I'm-still-your-husband'
the instalment 'your-body-doesn't-excite-me-anymore'
the instalment 'the-children-are-fine-this-is-all-that-matters'
the instalment 'you're-good-for-nothing-anyway'
and especially the daily instalment
'I'll-smack-you-if-you-don't-shut-up'
and the weekly instalment
'shut-it-you-slut-or-I'll-smack-you-again'
and the monthly instalment
'I've-fallen-off-the-chair-while-hanging-the-curtains'
and some major, annual instalments
'your-wife-has-suffered-a-shock'
or
'don't-worry-we'll-release-her-in-three-days-but-the-plaster-cast-will-come-off-in-a-month'

Yet, over all this time, I only cheated on him once. The day before yesterday.

He was very young
and a little drunk.
He wanted to take some money out
of the cash machine at our branch,
but had nothing left in his account.
And then he offered his services.
For a fee.
Why not, after all
it was my payday.
So, we did it in the staff toilet.
I had to celebrate somehow
that I finished paying my instalments.

It was the right time.

While driving, you can't hit out with both hands,
and with both feet,
We were coming back from work - he from his bank,
I from my bank,
we've been coming home together for almost thirty years,
at first, we had a Dacia 1300,
then a Dacia Solenza,
then we got a Logan

and now we have a Duster—always a Dacia, of course,
for thirty years, he has been driving me home from work,
he, and no-one but him.
You'd say this is love.
And maybe it is.

Love is when you take care of her
so, she doesn't take a detour on her way,
to have a bit of fun
staring at the clouds or at the sky
or to hook up with some man,
because she enjoys swinging
like a coat on a hook
or like a stray bitch,
whoever finds her, she's theirs,
like I was his, too.

We'd drive in silence
for thirty years, every single day,
we'd drive in complete silence,
except for him mumbling under his breath,
look at that asshole pulling out,
fuck you, man,
and this other one, look at that parking,
as if in a farmyard,
obviously,
there's a blonde cunt behind the wheel,
for fuck's sake, accelerate -
signal, asshole,
death is looking for you at home, Santa
pull over to the right.

But today was different,
today, I told him,
in the middle of the rush hour,
as he was swearing most profusely.
I simply told him, there and then.

I'm leaving you.
But he says nothing.
I'm leaving you, did you hear?
And he, what the fuck
hey, just go back to the kitchen,
and honks for a long time.
I'm leaving you, I'm telling him one more time,
much louder,

to outdo the woman who's yelling,
she winds down her window and shouts:
Fuck you, idiot
stupid asshole,
who on earth has put a steering wheel in your hand?

I'M LEAVING YOU!!! I scream,
and he puts on the brakes, so I hit my head against the windshield
and he slaps me, just like that,
shut up, you hysterical bitch
is this the best time you could find?
Are you blind, you cow?
Can't you see that you're blocking my way?
I was on the roundabout.
As for her,
well, she's driving a Dacia, shut up and keep your eyes open,
he says, suck my dick,
she goes, you suck, you wanker,
he retorts, cocksucker, slut,
I'm-leaving-you-I'm-leaving-you-I'm-leaving-you -
he slaps me one more time, even louder, over the mouth,
blood gushes out of my lower lip,
while the upper lip swells up in an instant.
I'm leaving you,
I tell him, again and again, though this time it's harder to speak,
I'm-leaving-you-I'm-leaving-you-I'm-leaving-you,
today, was the last day.

He stops all of a sudden,
and I'm freezing,
he's going to kill me, I must run,
must call the police or something -
but he's getting out of the car,
red like a lobster,
she has an SUV twice the size of ours,
but can't get past,
so she stops, too,
in the middle of the pedestrian crossing.
Someone is screaming,
but I can't see anything anymore,
because of my tears,
and I swallow the blood flowing out of my lip,
I think I swallowed a tooth, too,
who cares,
it helps with digestion. I'm trying to get out of the car,
I just want to run away,

I'm never going back home again,
never ever,
let him give an explanation
to our neighbours, kids, friends,
that's it, all over.

I'm going to sit here by the roadside,
I'll hitchhike
no matter where,
I'll find some place,
where no-one knows me,
I'll wash dishes, look after kids,
I'll be a hooker,
why not,
I'm used to it.
Just don't hurt me anymore,
thirty painful years
no beaches, no short skirts,
no bare arms.
Thirty years to contemplate
how skin colour turns from bruised purple to yellow, and then beige
until nothing can be seen,
as if nothing had ever happened.
But it happens, again and again
Regularly, not a day goes by without pain,
I want the day to come
when I can put my finger anywhere, press down
and no longer hurt.

He rattles the car door,
it's black and huge, nickel-plated,
he kicks it,
he screams - I remember those words,
having heard them before so many times.

He's not looking at me,
now is the time!
But she, she's watching.
And she sees the blood trickling down my dress,
as I get up from the ground because I tripped over and broke the heel of my shoe,
to hell with these shoes,
I can run much better barefoot.

Then I hear the gunshot.
The bullet hits him squarely in the face.

Don't come looking for me.

I'm fine.
I'm celebrating.
I paid all my debts.
Thank you!

2.

PIP

Wielding a gun.

I told him I hated guns,
so, he took me behind the house
and put a gun to my head.
Do you feel fear? - he asked me. Wouldn't you like it to be in your hands?
He then taught me how to shoot.
It wasn't hard at all,
much better than playing strip pool
with him,
during the long nights when he couldn't sleep,
and would drink a whole bottle of Chivas - Regal, no other kind.
Let him cry in my arms
until morning.
I have already found out quite a lot
about the art of leadership.
Right from the horse's mouth.

I found out how many Government ordinances
are issued in exchange for political support,
how to build a motorway,
how much a gold mine is worth,
for how much a factory is sold
be it chemical or not,
and I found out
how a phone call works,
when given at the right time in the evening,
or what the word 'protocol' really means:

it means
black cars with soft leather seats,
personal jets and hostesses, all under the age of 25,
grace-and-favour homes with seventy rooms,
scantly dressed girls, two per room,
and it also means

barrels of wine poured straight into bellies,
and hundreds of corpses roasting on the meadow
in the moonlight,
the dead bodies of wild boars,
rabbits
and deer, all impaled,
that's why it's also known in certain circles as
Vlad - although it's actually called something else,
I'm not telling you what,
it's a secret. A state secret.

However, from your eyes I can tell
that 'protocol' means something entirely different to you.

It means the daily monitoring
of your bank balance,
the need to carefully plan the purchase of new children's clothes:
I'll buy it for you when it's your turn,
and I don't want to hear another word about
that video game,
computers do your head in.

And anyway,
I have already told you, you'll get it for your birthday
or for Christmas,
from your grandpa.

It means
saving up for a cheap vacation
in Bulgaria,
or to the monasteries of Moldavia.
And it also means
being unable to buy a bigger house,
your credit card,
the car loan instalment,
the monthly mortgage payment,
the interest on your personal loan,
remember,
you stayed a whole week
at that private hospital near the maternity ward -
Back then, you wanted the best,
stem cell harvesting
and doctors who didn't expect bribes,
nurses to take care of you
not to humiliate you,
this is why you took out that loan,
it was all good,
you had the right medication,

you tapped into my savings,
you didn't suffer,
you felt like a human being.
But everything has a price.
And you're going to pay for that week
until your child starts school.

See, I know,
I have my own sources of information.

Protocol also means
a 70-hour work week,
pressure and relief,
as job cuts are being made,
restructuring and reshuffling.

It means to ask yourself what tomorrow will be like,
what ideas will
the head of protocol
come up with?

Head of protocol - now that's really something,
that's a truly important role.
How does it look like to you,
just seeing me in this role,
what do you think, did I deserve
to be named his head of protocol,
only because I'm always there for him,
I understand the hardships the country's struggling with,
and I struggle along.

I'm going to make tracks now,
sorry I can't talk anymore
I'm called away on important business,
of a protocolary kind,
I'm going to get in my car,
in that classy Infinity parked just over there,
kind of blocking the traffic.
Isn't it gorgeous,
with all those nickel-plated bits and bobs,
not to mention the interior!

He bought it for me. One weekend,
when I didn't make it to the meeting on time,
in Sinaia -
the police stopped me for speeding -

I had a fuzzbuster and was trying to slip
under the radar
but it didn't work.
Until I explained who I was,
and why I was in a hurry,
an hour had passed.
So, he says, fuck it, never mind, Pip - that's me,
B-84 PIP
Here are the keys, from now on,
this is your car,
don't go slower than 175 per hour,
and when I call you,
don't even think of keeping me waiting.
Just make sure not to have an accident,
because then we have our work cut out for us again,
like when my son ran that little girl over,
right on the pedestrian crossing
after she got out of school,
goodness, the parents kicked up such fuss -
he's just a kid, and you guys are young,
you can still have another child,
but they would hear none of it.
He should pay, the woman was yelling,
pay, not get away,
but when they were offered some money,
they started to scream even louder,
they threatened us,
and made a huge scene.
Well, it's not nice,
these are people who don't know what they want,
no wonder they vote the way they do.
To our luck,
the woman went completely ballistic,
killer, killer, she kept howling,
they had to check her into a loony bin,
and she never recovered.
Well, how's such a thing possible?
Not to be able to hold your temper
not to control yourself,
and simply allow emotions to take the better of you?

Then I sorted it out with the man,
I got him out of his depression real fast,
using a technique I'd known
ever since I was working freelance,
not as a public official,

with the help of a young girl, by the name of Nelly,
the mother of all bombs
that no-one can resist.

This sort of thing doesn't happen to me,
I don't cause accidents,
hence I expect to be respected,
to be given priority,
because I'm out and about on business,
I'm not just going to the shops
or hanging around the street.

The key is to act without violence.
Without ugly words,
swearing or insults,
I'm very sensitive to these,
I've never heard so much foul language in my life
in one place,
spoken all at once.
He was flying like a castrated dog,
meddled with, and panting,
I recognize the howl,
I spent some time at a friend's house, who's a vet,
right next to the dog shelter.
I could hear them yelp
after losing their balls,
anaesthetics are expensive,
and it's over very quickly,
it's easier without,
after all, they are only stray dogs,
no-one's to blame
if they give up their ghosts.

Except that this one wasn't castrated,
I swear,
he had the wife by his side,
she could only be his wife,
I recognize that, too,
by the way she holds her head,
never high,
but slightly tilted to the right,
dodging away.

I saw her, and could sense her fear,
I recognized her.
I see all kinds of fears, ten or so a day.

I could also see his fear.
I see it every morning,
I listen to it at night,
from our protocol venue,
where I sleep without him knowing,
it's always locked, always,
no-one's allowed in,
because one can hear everything that's going on in his bedroom,
but every night,
I listen to him breathe,
and we carry on like this, nights on end, wall-to-wall,

I listen to him breathe, I listen to what he's talking about in his sleep,
I listen to what he says
when he wakes up and thinks that no-one can hear him,
no-one can see him,
but I have to see him, haven't I?

I need to know about everything that's going on with him,
after all I am the head,
his head of protocol.

All he has is me.
And it.

Fear and I
are his girlfriends,
he calls it Power,
but it has a secret name,
longer,
and more complicated

it's called
the fear of looking at yourself,
that shatters mirrors,

it's called
the fear of asking yourself,
that prints schoolbooks,

it's called
the fear of thinking,
that votes for laws,

and it's also called
the fear of receiving,

that makes you punch,
and the fear of loving,
that makes you hate,
and, above all, it's called
the fear of life,
that actually makes you live.

We're best friends,
us two,
and we must be with him at all times,
me - there for everything, ready for anything,
she - indestructible,
deep, sweet,
and murderous.

I told him I didn't like guns,
especially firearms,
I hate violence.
But his fear put a gun in the glove compartment.
I found it by accident,
when I was looking for my cell phone,
the one I'm meant to be calling him from,
a safe phone,
that can't be tracked,
it's protected from tracing,
reserved just for him.

I wanted to call him,
to let him know I'd be late.
but I had to deal with this,
I had to stop this man,
he was holding me back.

Now I must go somewhere,
I always have to be somewhere,
look, he's calling me,
I think he already knows what happened
and is upset that it took me so long to solve the problem,
thanks for the chat,
I haven't chatted to anyone in such a long time,
but now I must leave at once,
you know very well
that he doesn't like to be kept waiting.

3.

IOANA

Letting go a heavy shopping bag. She'll hold this position throughout the scene.

Fucking asshole! My heart was about to jump out of its place!
What if she ran me over?!
She's off her head!
She was blonde, right? I know. These blondes...
You can't cross the street without one of them honking at you.
That person was run over by her, too?
May the Lord forgive me!
Good thing I got away!
And she's allowed to get away just like that?
Where's the police, where's the ambulance?
And that dead man at the junction - someone should attend to him!
Maybe you guys, 'cause I'm not going to get any closer.
Look at the state I'm in; she broke all my eggs!

Goodness, and now what?
I have enough on my plate as it is.

Farewell, Auntie Virginica's special,
my mother's favourite home-made cake,
which she baked at every opportunity, and especially for my birthday -
today is her birthday and I wanted to make this cake for her,
it's expensive but well worth it:
has chocolate cream
and the best base in the world.

You only need two hundred and fifty grams of ground walnuts,
I already have this, left over from Christmas,
plenty of flour, a pack of butter - it's in my handbag,
the cashier put it in a plastic bag for me,
so it doesn't melt over the documents from the notary -
and ten eggs.

Well, the eggs are now gone
and we're left without dessert
at the festive table.
I've tried my best -
with all these dishes,
appetizers as well as fancier courses,
not just cabbage *à la Cluj*,
aubergine salad
and roast with pickles,

like everyone else -
no, they now want complicated things,
as seen on television:
cheese puff pastry,
stuffed salmon,
duck à l'orange
avocado sauce,
chocolate cake.

I simply don't have any eggs whatsoever.
And now I don't have time to buy any, either.
I'm going to order a cake from somewhere.
Why should I agonize over such a thing?

Thank you, my Lord, today is the day when it all comes to an end!
May they all leave at once,
never to see them again.
For the last week, I've been cooking, polishing and tidying,
I took time off work,
luckily, my boss is quite decent,
he let me off without too much fuss
but still,
I've done overtime,
handed in the balance sheet,
finished with the payroll,
took all the documents to the bank,
everything's in tiptop shape,
can I take some days off?
Now, in the middle of the year?
Yes, right now, it's been 7 years since we lost our mum,
and finally - we managed!

We sold the house.

An old house, but in a good location,
right in the middle of the village,
by the church,
across the street from the school.
We sold it for a good price,
to a neighbour - she's three years older than my daughter,
but already married, with a four-year-old daughter,
who's super sweet.
Porca miseria,⁴ she says,
you're really setting a high price!

⁴ Holy shit! (Italian)

She's based in Italy,
her Marco's in love with our plum brandy,
who needs *grappa*, plum is holy - he laughs like a *mascalzone*,⁵
like a mobster, or else how could he have so much money?
It's my mum's house, I tell her,
the house we used to come home to every week
from boarding school,
where I grew up,
where I spent my holidays,
me and my brothers, as well as my children,
and their children,
but now we want to sell it,
because we have bank loans
and student fees to pay.
Please don't tear it down.
I beg you.
Sure, she says, we'll keep it
as it is, with these shutters,
it looks like a Tuscan house,
only uglier -
in any case, in front of it, we'll build another house, with ten bedrooms,
a loft,
two garages,
and central heating
we'll knock down the fence and the gate,
we'll cut down these dwarf trees, too,
as they only yield sour apples,
we'll pave the yard,
build an artesian fountain
with swans,
and install an intercom and alarm system
linked to the mayor's office.
In short, we sold it,
and it's now in good hands.

They all turned up for the last supper:
brothers, sisters-in-law,
cousins and grandchildren.
They came from all over the world.
They didn't lift a finger.
My brother from Germany
showed up dressed to the nines,
in a Hugo Boss suit,
you should have seen him walk up and down the yard,
with his hands in his pockets,

⁵ Scoundrel, villain (Italian)

giving orders.
My sister from New York
turned up a little later,
she's sick, the poor thing,
has got diabetes,
finds it hard to move,
and has memory lapses, too,
so what can you expect from her?
The grandchildren went to the orchard,
the girls were crying,
hugging, and looking at photos,
my sister's little Marion doesn't speak much Romanian,
Karina and Kurt even less,
but they all speak perfect English.

Luci, the boss's smartarse secretary, asked me -
well, aren't your sisters-in-law helping out?
They're helping out fuck all,
one didn't even turn up,
the other suffers
from kidney failure
and is trembling like a leaf all day,
as for the third one,
I don't even want to see her,
deaf and lazy that she is, she needs a whole day
just to make some mashed potatoes.
I'm better off without their company!

Look at you,
Puiu, my husband, pointed out,
although you're quite petite,
you've taken care of absolutely everything,
even to the notary you went all by yourself,
you made the reservations -
seeing that we ate at the restaurant, albeit just one time,
on Sunday,
after the church service.
You did absolutely everything,
everything, everything...

I was the one closest to her,
and held her in my arms when she passed away,
I chose her casket
and the clothes in which they buried her,
after the funeral, I went back to the house
and stayed there until the next morning,

all by myself,
as in a torture chamber,
waiting for the break of day.
I cried, then I didn't cry,
I shouted, then I didn't shout.
What else could I have done -
ask for help?
Who could have possibly come?
I was alone,
for the first time in my life,
there was no-one there,
except for mercy and fear,
two hungry bitches rummaging around the place,
and fighting over every little thing in that house.
Over the gold earrings and the pendant,
the engagement ring,
the 12-people dinnerware set
from Alba Iulia,
over the Biedermayer furniture,
and
the willow rocking chair
made by my dad from that tall willow tree just around the riverbend,
where we used to fish and bathe in the summer.

I just sat there
and could only think
about grandpa's fork.
Where could that fork be?
He ate with it his whole life,
it was made of stainless steel,
and he brought it back from the front,
after the Second World War.
In our village,
this was the first fork,
people kept coming round to marvel at it,
they grabbed it and tried to figure out how it worked,
later, grandma and mum wanted to put it on display,
next to the china,
but Grandpa took it back and continued to eat with it,
even though he was no longer on the front.
Wars can be good for something, too,
he kept laughing,
to which grandma replied: well, husband,
you certainly like war, don't you,
give that fork a break,
throw it away so I won't see it again.

But he laughed and didn't want to give it away,
he was wearing it like a kind of keyring
hanging from his belt,
he'd never go anywhere without it,
and would have much rather done without grandmother
than that the fork.

He left it to my dad,
pulled it out from under the pillow
on his deathbed -
but when my dad passed away,
my brother didn't want it,
seeing that by then, forks had become the norm
for all and sundry
and we all got some,
even some knives,
we didn't have to take food to mouth by hand,
and get our fingers dirty,
so my brother didn't want that fork anymore,
it was rather bent and crooked,
I want it, I said,
but they didn't give it to me,
it was a war fork,
and girls don't go to war.
Nobody wanted it anymore,
and my mother continued to eat with her hand,
especially when she thought that no-one was watching,
she took pleasure in this,
and the fork was tossed into a drawer
with a bunch of other useless things.

I've been looking for it all night,
until dawn,
but couldn't find it.

I've been looking for it again,
I've plundered the past,
together with the eighteen members of my family
who are all gone,
I looked for it with my daughter,
who came back from Spain for the occasion,
she lives in Barcelona,
and writes soap scripts, you know,
she learned Spanish,
and speaks it better than Romanian,
nobody wanted her here,

but over there, they really liked her,
she's happy there -
she came with her boyfriend
a nice, quiet guy - who doesn't sniff at our food,
all three of us were looking for that fork,
then others came, too,
they were laughing and searching,
they stopped, cried, split up, got together again and kept talking,
and then it occurred to me,
to put on a big feast,
for everybody,
the last supper,
just like my mother wanted to see us all
on her birthday,
with ten courses,
including starters,
and at the end, that cake,
auntie Virginica's special,
and who knows, during the meal,
that fork may come into view, too.

But now, it's all over,
that woman with the fancy car
opened my eyes,
good thing she didn't run me over,
somehow, nothing makes sense anymore,
here we are, the fork's gone.
Done and dusted!

I'll just throw this bag with the broken eggs away,
and take a taxi,
I'm not wasting any more time,
I'm going straight to the notary,
to sign the papers,
then we'll all gather in our apartment,
I'll order some pizza from the corner,
the owner's Italian, so the quality's decent,
and we can eat with our hands.

My mother's dead anyway.
I was stupid enough to do as much as I did.

But take note that
I'm not going to bury this one, too.
How can't anyone think of giving him a hand?
He's alone, all by himself -

Is he at least well and truly dead?

Isn't there a doctor around here?

We're talking about a human being, after all...

I'm not going any nearer, not in the mood for trouble - but maybe a doctor -
they get paid for such stuff,

it's their job, right?

No doctors around?

4.

CARMEN

A doctor, smoking.

He's dead. Can't you see?

And even if he wasn't, I'm not touching him.

I just stepped outside to smoke a cigarette and I'll be right back.

My patients are waiting for me, some have been waiting for three to four days.

There's no way you can convince me.

None of my business if he's dead.

If he's alive, even less so.

Call the emergency rescue service.

What if the traffic is congested, they can come by helicopter.

And if he's still alive and kicking, let the nurse book him in for an appointment,
he may be seen in three to four weeks.

He's dead, it's pretty obvious even from here.

You don't have to be a doctor to work that out.

And I don't want to hear about the Hippocratic Oath,
who believes these days in oaths
invented three thousand years ago by some naturist woodsman,
living in a warm country, feeding on roots
and not needing a house, a car, or fashionable clothes?

Don't get the impression that I owe you anything.

Do you know any mechanics who repair cars for free?

Do lawyers work without charge?

Do you know any programmers who work *pro bono*,
a handyman who tells you on the phone

how to fix your fridge yourself
or your television?
Is there a priest who buries, for nothing,
your father or girlfriend?

Why is then everyone expecting doctors to jump to the rescue
at the smallest complaint,
to listen to all these stories of human suffering
without cracking up,
like a bottomless sack where you throw all kinds of rubbish,
to poison their brain with the pain of patients,
to find remedies and solutions,
and to know everything, and do everything, as well?

At parties or when I go out with friends,
I haven't told anyone I'm a doctor in a while,
so they don't start confessing their fears,
telling me about their issues,
revealing their most intimate side,
like beggars showing their
deformed and sick bodies,
with the supplicant voice and gaze of battered animals.

I don't want to hear
of people's headaches when there's a change in the weather,
of stomach burns after benders,
by the way doctor, what shall I take to get rid of piles?
And how about hiccups, or this dizziness when I get out of bed,
my urine is green,
my joints are hurting,
my legs are swelling,
I get cramps when I eat,
how do I go about artificial insemination,
can you recommend somewhere for liposuction,
please pierce the ears of my six-month-old baby girl,
shall I take Xanax or shall I not,
is it okay to drink beer with antibiotics?
Is vitamin C harmful?

But sometimes, my imagination
is playing tricks on me,
I'm talking to a guy I like
and I begin to see his orbicular muscle,
his buccinator muscle,
the procerus muscle,
then I lower my gaze

to his pectoralis major,
the coracobrachialis,
his biceps, triceps, round pronator,
the great dorsal,
the subscapularis,
the serratus major and even lower
to the pelvis and the iliacus muscle
and even lower,
and I realize that I'm counting muscles, bones, tissues,
instead of thinking about what I'm saying,
I don't see people anymore
just muscles, bones, tissues,
organs, fluids,
and flesh.

No, I don't want to be a doctor anymore, except at the surgery,
otherwise
I say I'm an actress,
everybody talks to me about theatre then,
or books
or movies.
It's great that nobody's making me diagnose
sophisticated games
poetic subtleties
or directorial visions,
nobody asks me if the diction, gestures, posture,
are correct or could be improved,
I'm a specialist in emotions,
but nobody wants to know if their feelings are sick,
maybe suffering from a virus,
covered in red boils
or small greenish-black spots.

If they wanted, I could tell them they had
dangerous feelings and emotions,
which spread through the world
at the speed of a deadly virus.
Without knowing,
we contaminate one another,
directly -
but also
through other means: communication, for instance -
such as literature, film, theatre, television.
This is how the most terrible diseases are spread,
they lead to mass murder,
they destroy us and leave us empty, poor, barren:

the epidemic of indifference,
swathes of arrogance, blinding greed,
chronic self-discrimination,
acute envy,
this inconspicuous deadly love, pink, sweet and full of shit,
which breaks up in splashes
when touched,
it can't cope with the slightest of blows,
being ever so fragile.

But the fastest of all,
the one that leaves you powerless,
that kills you softly and annihilates you completely,
worse than multiple sclerosis,
more painful than stage 4 cancer,
more contagious than flu,
the one that pollutes all human relationships,
and intoxicates everything that moves,
is the herpes of mercy.

You must watch out,
to keep apart,
not to touch others,
not to breathe the same air as him
or her -
not to feel pity,
because if you do, you're lost in an instant.
Have no pity for the elders,
for children or pregnant women,
treat all these bodies without mercy,
they are nothing but bodies,
they fret about,
making a great effort, promising and regretting,
then they recover and carry on,
they work, dance, have sex, reproduce,
give birth, urinate, defecate, vomit,
go to school, get into politics,
fight wars, go on strike and make grand discoveries,
and do everything that's in their power
in order to keep on living.

Mercy is perversity,
only good for telenovelas,
the church or when commemorating the dead,
but here, at the junction,
there's no place for it,

as there's no place for it in medicine,
except perhaps in forensics.

So, in case he's not dead, all the worse for him.

As for me, my ciggie break is over.

5.

DANA

Talking on the phone, handsfree.

Dana. Yes, I was the one who called you. I left it on your desk, under the folder. Yes. Let's leave it until next week. Ciao... What? Fine, fine. How many? No, you're not exaggerating. Okay, for him, too. Bye! *(Answering a call)* Dana. Yes, it's me. I'm on my way, Corina. I'm caught in traffic. Yeah, it's crazy around here. I don't know, some people shot themselves. No, I'm not joking. No, I promise you, I won't be late. We had an emergency, YES, Corina. I told you that I'm not going to be late. Okay, you can't trust me. Yes, it's on me. And the documentation, too. Up to ten percent. It's a lot, I know. But this is the market. Okay, I said okay - read it again. As you wish. *(Long break, she nods and takes sips from a mug of coffee)* Leave it then, we'll discuss it on the way. At once, didn't I tell you? *(Beat, she drinks)* What should I drink, coffee, I'm behind the wheel, as I told you! All right, go through security and walk up and down the duty-free. Okay. Make sure you don't...! I'm on my way! Bye!

(Hangs up. Still handsfree)

Hey, Axel. Sorry, I was talking to... it doesn't matter. I look forward too. Oh, Axel...are you trying to ...hm, youknowwhat me? Ha-ha-ha... of course, a joke. Ok, now - seriously: is there anything I can do you for? Ha-ha! Absolutely. Tonight? Dinner? I don't know...no, tell me. YOU tell me. Hold on a minute.⁶ *(Switches between lines)*

Yes, Corina. What do you mean you don't know what to do? You mean, you're bored? Well, go to Victoria's Secret and buy a set of that lingerie, you know. In black, for me. Buy one for yourself, too. Just for the heck of it. Okay - try to have some fun. I'll be there in no time. Bye. *(Handsfree.)*

Yes. Yes...Let me check my diary. Yep. Great. Let's do that. See you there. Sure, bye.
(Silence. Drinks some coffee. Sighs. Another call.)

Dana. Sure. Yes. Of course, that's where I'm going. What? No, no. Everything's under control, don't worry. Yes, I know. Yes. I KNOW. ...seriously?! *(Beat)* Yes, I'm drinking coffee. What do you mean by improved? No, it's just black, no sugar. Yes, I did those yoga exercises. Yes, grandma!!! I do them every day. No. Believe me, no! I keep my fear in check. I control it very

⁶ Sections in bold are in English in the original.

well. I'm okay, can you hear me? Please don't keep me, I'm going to miss my plane, and I'm going to lose out on the project. Yes, Corina's already there. She even has the right underwear for this project. That Axel has a soft spot for her, I've seen him looking at her. All the executives look at her like that, *nice piece of arse*. Sorry, I do know you're not a speaker of English. It means she's a looker. Yes, a very fine one. *(Beat)* You're cute. Come on. Leave it. *(Yelling)* No, YOU KNOW WELL that she's one fine piece. Stop playing the innocent. *(She takes a sip)* Please don't insult my intelligence. *(Beat)* You really want to have this conversation now? *(Beat)* On the phone? *(Beat)* No, I'm not accusing you. You know what, let's just forget it. *(Beat)* Listen, I'm stuck in traffic, and I'm going to miss my plane if you keep me very long. *(Beat)* You're right, it's not you holding me back, I can't make a move anyway. *(She drinks)* Okay, let's talk then. *(Beat)* I know. I know. *(Beat)* Since last time I missed my plane. I didn't tell you... because I didn't tell you. Anyway, you thought I was in London at that executive meeting. But I couldn't leave. It wasn't just fear of flying. It was my birthday. I was thinking, there's no harm done, I'm coming home and he'll be happy. But you weren't home, were you? You were in the country, in our cottage, on your own with the Swiss geraniums and garden lanterns. Or so I thought. I'm not being sarcastic. Let me explain, what the hell? *(Beat, she produces a hipflask from her bag and takes a sip)* Are you still there? All right. So, I went there, to surprise you. You didn't know, did you? *(She drinks)* It's not alcohol, how many times do I have to tell you! What do you want, a breathelyser phone? *(Beat)* No, I wasn't checking on you, I simply wanted to surprise you. Yes, exactly three months ago, to the day. I'm telling you now! Imagine who had the surprise - I'm parking the car in the garage, as quietly as I can, and am about to go into the kitchen. Good thing about that little window and luckily, I peeked before I went in. It seemed to me that I heard some unusual sounds—I was saying to myself, my man can't be shagging the cook, ha-ha!—and indeed, it wasn't the cook, it was Corina. Over the dinner leftovers, some meagre sandwiches, you didn't even have the decency to order pizza or something. Hold on, someone's calling me. *(Switches between lines again.)*

Dana. And you're telling me now? You realize I have no choice. Okay, right. Yes, I understand. Okay, we'll sort it out somehow. Send them by email. Yes, I know. I know, I told you I know. Don't worry, I'll handle it. Okay. ALL RIGHT. Cristina knows? No? So I told you not to worry. Seriously, I'm going to miss my plane. I don't think I'm going to leave here today. Listen, I think I'm going to leave the car here, can you do something for me? Okay, thanks...Send a car to Revolution Street. Yes, there - formerly known as Lenin Street, near the hospital, I shall walk to the station - and send someone to collect my car from here? At that roundabout by the Ambassador Hotel. The other side. Okay, I'll call you when I get there. It's going to be just fine. Me too. **See ya.** *(Hangs up)*

Are you still there? Okay, let me continue. *(She drinks)* So... well, she was very good. She was whimpering like in those XXL movies, and kept producing a piece of salami, a cucumber, a slice of lemon from everywhere - so I could see how young and great she looked, no cellulite, no stretchmarks, no fat on her belly, firm breasts, it was a real pleasure to see how well she moved. She was beautiful, with tanned thighs and narrow hips and that lingerie from Victoria's Secret. *(Beat)* Of course I'm telling the truth, why do you think I'm lying? *(She drinks)* Yes. Probably. Excuse me - one second. *(Switches between lines)*

Yes, Corina. Yes. Mouthwash, chewing gum, intravenous vitamin C and a strong coffee. Dorin will send a car. In...five minutes. There, yes. Yes. I'm doing my best not to be late, as you heard. Do you have any other questions? Corina, damn it, I'm coming right away! *(Beat)* What? You knew about it? You forgot... Okay, we'll fix it. Yes, I know, Corina! Do what I said. Okay, sure - me, too. *(Switches between lines)*

Yes. What was I saying? *(Beat)* Well, what was I supposed to do, I got the car out of the garage again and went back to the airport, because there's a 24/7 solarium there, with massage and fitness, and I've been boosting my endorphins all night. Then, when I came back from 'London', I brought you some duty-free whisky as it were, and you were really sweet. Since then, Corina has been coming with me on all my business trips. I guess you noticed that, didn't you? So, I'm not in the mood for surprises, I can't miss this plane. *(Beat)* Sure, now I'm the perverse one. Yes, I did drink - and so what? I wasn't behind the wheel. You know very well that I get quite anxious on the plane. *(Beat)* No, seriously...? You're such an idiot. *(Takes a deep breath.)* Look, I get plane sickness. I'm not an alcoholic, I'm just stressed. Hold on. *(Switches between lines. Beat, takes a sip, sighs. She's not talking, she just obviously needed a break in the conversation.)*

Sorry, it was your friend Corina on the other line. I'm not being sarcastic. What's the matter with you? I was just saying. No, leave it, don't even try. Sure, I also think it's a stupid subject. There's no need to talk about it anymore. No, I'm not upset, why should I be? Same to you. Off you go, bye! ...big kiss! Yes, I know. Me, too. *(Beat, drinks. Handsfree.)*

Dana. Hey...sure, I'll get it. Anything else? No, everything's just fine. I'll be there. Sure, look forward to. We'll have a great night. Bye, Axel. Take care. *(Switching between lines)*

Dana. Yes, Corina, well go. Did you take everything? And the receipts? Of course, it's all reimbursed. No problem whatsoever. On offer? Bravo! Listen, if you have nothing to do, call Dorin one more time, so he doesn't forget to send someone to pick my Ford up from here, or else it will be towed away after traffic resumes its course. I'll be there in ten minutes. If not, there's another plane in a couple of hours. You'll manage, don't worry. I'm coming. Bye, I have another call, I think it's the driver. *(Switching between lines.)*

Dana. What do you mean you couldn't stop? Did you just go through without stopping? And I wasn't there? Well, of course I wasn't, I don't have wings to fly! Can't believe this...What police?! Fuck the police - I'll pay the fine. Go back right now! Come on, you can! Turn right and... Yes. Yes. What do you mean you can't? Okay, I'm not shouting, sorry. Ex-cuse me. Okay. Did you make it to the corner? Wait there. What do you mean you can't? Put on the emergency lights. Let them honk at you, so what? Okay? Just stop there and wait for me! So what - I'll pay the fine, didn't I say so? Wait for me there, I'm telling you! Wait until I come! I'm on my way.

6.

LELO

A she-dog.

All I want is to cross the street.
What's the big deal?
But this one's standing in the middle of the road
and the traffic lights aren't working anymore
and I can't cross the street alone,
surrounded by so many eyes,
so, I wonder
which one of you is going to throw the first stone?

I just want to get to the other side.

For this, I must move forward,
in order to get closer.
To you.

Which one of you will hang me by the ear,
dangle me with my feet down,
stick a knife in my belly,
kick me,
while screaming, get out of here, you mutt, scumbag, straydog,
smash me against the tarmac,
joyfully,
wrap me in barbed wire,
hang me from a tree,
so I die screaming, as slowly as possible,
howling like my puppies that you drowned,
suffocated,
blind puppies,
who can't even cry,
you threw them in a pit and covered them with earth,
because their fathers weren't of pure breed,
because their mother wasn't of pure breed.
And because we were born strays,
we deserve to be euthanized.

We dogs recognize about four hundred words:
Shall we go outside?
Be a good dog -
come to the table -
want it?
Down, down, as I say,
sit,
lie down,
well done,
lovely, what a cute, handsome dog,
marvellous,

No, I said NO.
Come here.
And we also recognize:
kindness, gentleness, humanity,
legal, moral.
And compassion.

But people - people are really complicated,
they don't recognize these words,
when they're LEGALLY rounding us up in shelters,
when they shoot us, poison us and starve us on a MORAL BASIS,
and when they burn us in crematoria,
I call that
EUTHANASIA.

Well yes, that sounds familiar,
You recognize this word, don't you?
Thousands of starving dogs,
mere skeletons, killed out of COMPASSION,
and burned.

And those who are caught wandering about freely,
without an *Ausweis*,⁷
are killed on the spot by well-meaning people,
who just want their street to be neat.

And after you're done with the abandoned mutts,
the mongrels, the strays, you'll move on to dogs who may have owners,
but have run away or got lost.
Even though dogs with a master are generally of pure breed.
Genetically selected. *Aryan*, so to speak.
Guard your dogs - or better still, if they get sick
or grow old and become a burden,
let them loose on the streets.
The dog catcher police,
will clean up this country.

And after you get rid of dogs, beggars will follow.
They're nothing but stray dogs,
full of diseases, limbless, what frauds!
Calling upon your COMPASSION.
They think they have rights.
What, you treat them as people?
No way, they're much worse than dogs.

⁷ ID (German)

It's time to show them what COMPASSION really means.
To give them HUMANITY.
To hoard them in shelters, castrate them and force them to work.
That's why they're poor, because they are stupid.
Idle, not working.
They need education, from youngest to oldest, women to men.
Dogs should be working.
And if they don't want to, then that will be it.
You guys have done your best.
The next step: to clean up this country, once and for all.
To have peace of mind, to sip drinks *al fresco*,
And not to be harrassed for small change, daytime or night,
To stop finding filth in most parks and green spaces.
All this is a must for the good of us all.

Next, you'll move on to gypsies.
What Rroma, who do they think they are, before you know it, they'll want to be Vikings.
When in fact, they're nothing but dogs.
Dogs that broke free from the leash and are rambling through Europe,
pretending to be Romanian,
what insolence,
they don't hail from our ancestors Decebal and Trajan,
they're actually canine,
worming their way on the banks of the Ganges.
And multiply, like dogs.
Illiterate dogs, defying all rules,
Refusing the harness,
they reject any master, are dangerous, they steal,
they loiter round houses,
they rummage through rubbish.
They're dangerous mongrels.
They're dogs, that's what they are.

Even if the law hasn't been passed yet,
it doesn't quite matter, it will be, so do listen up.
You'll have the right to kill dogs,
No matter what kind.
They may well be gay-dogs, depressed-dogs,
or young-dogs, pups - with malformations,
They are of the same ilk, dogs one and all.

Know what? I'll tell you a secret.
Of all the species, none are more like humans than dogs.
None are so promiscuous.
They don't forgive lightly, don't go back to those who hurt them,
don't run away only to return,

don't eat so much shit
with such extreme pleasure,
don't shag around
with whoever's on standby,
then roll up their feet,
looking all virtuous, ready to play.
No other species
are such good mates to humans,
none so affectuous,
delightful, or fake.

But humans don't resemble dogs.
They resemble wolves instead.

All I want is to cross the street.
Which one of you will euthanize me?

7.

NINA

A cop.

Can somebody tell me what exactly happened here?
Can you?
You didn't see anything?
Were you here when it happened?
You don't know?
What car was he driving?
Which way was he going?

It would be great if at least one of you opened your mouth. Was there anyone else in the car with the victim? That's his car, right? The blue Duster with the engine still running that the boys are towing away right now, yeah? Please understand, I need you to be honest and tell me everything you know. This is a serious investigation here.

I need to find at least one witness,
an anonymous call was made to the station,
from some office,
someone called in and said,
you must clean up here,

assess the situation so
everything can return to normal,
traffic's been halted for an hour,
but the traffic light cameras aren't showing anything,

they are out of order today,
as usual.
Send Nina over,
said the somewhat absent-minded boss,
the big cheese -
we have serious business to handle,
let her go,
seeing that we have no work to give her anyway.
She's no good at directing the traffic,
the other boss, of lower rank,
observed,
during the one week she was in charge,
there were more collisions than in an entire year.
It's not my fault, I say,
all men were staring at me,
and even some women.

Women aren't any good,
the boss says,
the big boss -
neither in the army,
nor in the police,
and yet, how strange, how interesting, we're being allocated more and more places for them at
the police academy,
it's a decision from above,
you must do something with these poor women, after all.

While they're young
we send them to carry out fieldwork,
always accompanied by a man,
who tells them what to do,
where to look,
where to park,
what to write,
he's always of a higher rank -
This is great,
in this way
we've also created some extra jobs,
for officers to be on the beat with our women,
who can then have the satisfaction
to role-play being a cop.

If so,
why are you sending me
to a crime scene?
Why shouldn't I just sit at my desk, like I used to,

to prove myself useful
doing paperwork,
like a secretary,
filing documents
or turning up at schools,
to talk to young people about juvenile delinquency?

I should stick with prevention and education - where I can't go wrong,
and mistakes have no consequences,
prevention isn't worth a thing,
who cares about education these days?

Because this isn't a murder case,
the boss says,
the big cheese,
young lady, I hear you're ambitious,
you want to progress your career,
listen to me then,
there's nothing for you to solve,
you just turn up there, do your assessment,
then, the forensic team arrives, removes the victim,
we call the family,
there was an accident,
with a fatal outcome,
and the perpetrator fled the scene.
We don't know who,
we don't know how,
we don't know why,
we have no leads to pursue,
so the incident is classified.
So off you go, get on with this assessment,
come on, compile the file,
it takes three days to do this,
your desk is crying out for being used!

What do you mean, someone got shot,
there was a homicide -
well, what can I say! it was a blunder,
a traffic accident,
because it happened while stuck in traffic,
I don't want to hear about 'murder',
what murder - where's the manslaughter?
You watch too much television,
those American movies, you know,
with all those sexy women wielding guns,
in charge of an army of men -

who can possibly believe such a thing?

This is a tough job, young lady,
stinking of sweat,
cheesy feet and sperm,
we're not playing games here,
young lady,
we don't treat things with kid gloves,
and, above all,
this is not America.
Over here, if girls want to be cops,
they get deployed at most on the drug squad,
and when we stage the odd arrest,
we dress them in short skirts,
give them some seized perfume,
we also like to see them without their uniforms,
because, bless them,
some are beautiful as hell.
We may also use them on the vice squad,
to catch some bigger fish,
making them work undercover.

And let me tell you one more thing,
says the boss,
in case anyone tries,
or as much as dares,
to insinuate that a woman has fired
some kind of gun,
registered or not as a firearm,
laugh in their face,
and make them give a statement straightaway,
saying exactly what that girl looked like,
the make, numberplate and color of her car,
as well as the gun type,
and if something's amiss, it means they're trying to mislead the authorities,
which is punishable by 3 to 5 years in prison.

So let me ask you,
in all honesty,
has anyone seen anything?
Did anyone fire a gun
or it was just a traffic accident,
the guy got out of his car,
perhaps had heart problems or something
and collapsed in the roundabout,
where he suffered

a fatal injury.
More than likely, this is what happened,
but if anyone knows otherwise, it's best to say it now.

If not, please sign here -
I wrote everything down exactly as it happened.

And now, please make a move!
There's no reason for you to stay here.
There's nothing to add - the press will embellish
and spice things up, as they do,
but you can confirm that nothing of note happened,
only a fact of life, a mere fact of life.

Knight Errant

By Florent Carton Dancourt

Translated from French by James Magruder

Over the course of my life, I have made tens of dollars by translating stage comedies, mostly French, all but one in the public domain. Two of them, Marivaux's *Le Triomphe de l'amour* (1732) and Lesage's *Turcaret* (1709) were, when I translated them for my Yale DFA, masterpieces unknown to the English-speaking world. (In the intervening decades, I am pleased that genuine attention has been paid to Marivaux.) I have adapted several Molière comedies for ready commission monies from American non-profit theaters. To carping critics and scholars—and there have been many—I maintain that Molière's enduring, weatherproof hide can easily withstand the japes of my moment. I translate not for the library, but for the stage, and I take delight in and inspiration from the endlessly mutating American lexicon. Where appropriate, diction shifts arising from class difference or psychological stress or the moment at hand are my meat and drink. I know the French, but I'd rather go for the (potential) laugh.

In 1685, Louis XIV made his most colossal non-martial blunder when he expelled the efficient capitalist Huguenots from France. Dancourt's *Le Chevalier à la mode* premiered two years later. No lost masterpiece, it is highly entertaining nonetheless, and, in a corrupt, socially anxious, money-mad society where the King is selling titles to all comers to fill the royal coffers depleted by the construction of Versailles and his senseless foreign campaigns, it is sharp where it needs to be. Like most comedies of manners, today *Knight Errant* would have migrated to television, where a three-timing scoundrel like the Chevalier de Villefontaine would have a great arc on Season Four of *The White Lotus*. Three hundred years after his death, I am happy to bring Dancourt and his people—in full-throated American dialect—to our similarly careening body politic.

Like many a French playwright of decent birth, **Florent Carton Dancourt** (1661-1725) abandoned law for the theater. This career pivot was compounded by the abduction of the actress Thérèse Lenoir de La Thorillière, the daughter of François Lenoir de la Thorillière, a leading member of Molière's troupe known for originating the role of Philinte in *Le Misanthrope*. Thérèse and Florent entered the Comédie-Française as actors in April 1685, a path their two daughters would follow. His ease with public speaking led to his being chosen the troupe's orator in ceremonial circumstances, and he was known for his *Alceste*. The year he entered the C-F, his first comedy, *Le Notaire Obligant, ou Les Fonds Perdus*, premiered to some success. At his death, he had written between sixty and eighty plays (not all of which survive) in several genres, among them opera parodies, short prose pieces known as *dancourades*, and mythological fantasies. Dancourt's most enduring works were *comédies de mœurs* that satirized a growing bourgeois class maddened by a thirst for pleasure and social climbing. His plots, amoral but not indecent, provided a cavalcade of crooked notaries, merchants, and magistrates, soldiers, louche noblemen, vain, grasping matrons, maidens on the make, and back-talking servants. *Le Chevalier à la mode* (1687), considered his finest work, remains in infrequent rotation in the French repertory.

James Magruder's stage translations and adaptations have been developed and produced on and off-Broadway, across the country, and in Japan, Germany, England, Canada, and Australia. They include the book for the Broadway musical, *Head Over Heels*, a blank verse mashup of Sidney's *Arcadia* and the song catalog of the Go-Go's; *Christmas Carol 1941*; Marivaux's *The Triumph of Love* and the book for its Broadway musical version, *Triumph of Love*; Labiche's *Eating Crown*; Lesage's *Turcaret*; Molière's *The Miser*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, and *Bougie Man*, a SoCal version of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*; Gozzi's *The Love of Three Oranges*, Giraudoux's *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, and *Der Bourgeois Bigshot*, a reconstruction of the Hofmannsthal/Strauss musical comedy, *Der Bürger als Edelmann*. His *Three French Comedies* (Yale University Press) was named an "Outstanding Literary Translation" by the American Literary Translators Association. His first—and last—book of non-fiction, *The Play's the Thing: Fifty Years of Yale Repertory Theater (1966-2016)* was released in 2024. He has also published five books of fiction.

Knight Errant
By Florent Carton Dancourt
Translated and adapted from French by James Magruder

Cast:

THE CHEVALIER DE VILLEFONTAINE

MADAME PATIN, a wealthy widow in love with the Chevalier

M. SERREFORT, her brother-in-law

LUCILE, Serrefort's daughter

THE BARONESS

M. MIGAUD, counsel to the Baroness

LISETTE, Mme Patin's chambermaid

CRISPIN, the Chevalier's valet

M. GUILLEMIN, a notary

LABRIE, a lackey to Mme Patin

(Labrie and Guillemin may double: 5m,4w)

The play takes place in Paris in the drawing room of the home of Madame Patin.

ACT ONE

(MADAME PATIN enters in great haste and confusion, followed by her chambermaid LISETTE.)

LISETTE

What is it, Madame? What's wrong? What has happened to you? Did something happen to you?

MME PATIN

Snubbed! Oh, I can't breathe. I've been snubbed—it's unspeakable. Get me a chair—

LISETTE

(giving her a chair) Snubbed? Someone snubbed *you*, my lady? Is that possible?

MME PATIN

Oh Lisette, it was fierce, fierce! I'll die of shame! Some hag cut me dead in the middle of the street.

LISETTE

Cut Madame Patin, the widow of a tax collector who socked away two million pounds in the service of the king and died unindicted! Who was this insolent, *ignorant* wretch?

MME PATIN

A Countess. The Countess of I don't know what. She had the nerve to claim the inside of the of the pavement for her carriage. I was forced to follow behind her.

LISETTE

She's the Countess of Vulgaria, that's who she is. And today of all days—your first ride in your new carriage, two dapple-gray steeds, the driver's beard waxed to a point, six footmen trimmed in more braid than an attendant on a merry-go-round— you mean to tell me that all your trappings didn't count with her?

MME PATIN

Absolutely not! She was riding in the back of a broken-down carriage, like a tramp, dragged by two worn-out horses, and a small swarm of moth-eaten lackeys.

LISETTE

Death of my life, where was Lisette? I would have told her where to get off.

MME PATIN

I started to, in a tone equal to my carriage; but she, with a "Hold your tongue, you commoner," knocked me right off my seat.

LISETTE

Commoner! She couldn't see those six-pile scarlet velvet cushions fringed with gold you were sitting on, now could she? What did you say to her?

MADAME PATIN

I was so discombobulated, I hadn't the strength to respond; I had the driver turn around and head home hell for leather.

(LABRIE enters)

LISETTE

Is this a joke, Labrie? What's the idea looking like this in front of my lady?

LABRIE

You should see the rest of us. I came to tell Madame that Lafleur and Jasmin got their heads busted open by that Countess's footmen.

LISETTE

Didn't you tell them who your mistress was?

LABRIE

Of course we did.

MME PATIN

And?

LABRIE

Begging your pardon, Madame, but I think that's what set them off.

LISETTE

Blockheads!

MME PATIN

You may go, my child.

LABRIE

Lafleur and Jasmin are at the doctor.

MME PATIN

See that their wounds are dressed properly and tell them to stay out of any more trouble.

(LABRIE exists)

LISETTE

Look on the bright side, my lady; it wasn't you they insulted, only your name. you can change that—if you hurry.

MME PATIN

I have made up my mind to do it, but still I rage against Fate for not having made me a noblewoman to begin with.

LISETTE

I don't think you have full cause for complaint; you may not have a title, but you're rich. You know as well as anybody that a title can be bought, but birth does not guarantee wealth.

MME PATIN

And yet there's nothing so enchanting as a title.

LISETTE

But think how mortifying it would be if you found yourself in the situation of certain titled women, who are known only to the flock of creditors who shout their names at their doors from morning to night.

MME PATIN

That's a mark of distinction.

LISETTE

Take my word for it, it's better to be snubbed by a *countess* than a dressmaker; and isn't it nice to be able to leave by the front door without fearing that a troop of sergeants has camped out to seize the coach and horses? What if you had to get home on foot, like several women of quality we know?

MADAME PATIN

Make me a countess, and I won't care what happens to me.

LISETTE

You're joking.

MADAME PATIN

I'm not. I would rather become the most down-on-her-heels countess at court than remain the window of the richest financier in France. I'll be a countess or a duchess or a marquess, not matter what the cost. And the first thing I have to do is break with the riffraff in my drawing room—starting with Monsieur Serrefort.

LISETTE

Your brother-in-law?

MADAME PATIN

My *brother-in-law*? Watch your language.

LISETTE

Excuse my ignorance; I thought Monsieur Serrefort was your brother-in-law, because he is the brother of your late husband.

MADAME PATIN

Brother to my late husband, so be it; but my husband is dead, and Monsieur Serrefort is nothing to me! Not that the skinflint doesn't imagine he's something to me, the way he lectures me about my conduct, and attempts to control all my actions. He had the nerve to suggest that I imitate the

example of his wife. He actually compares me to her!

LISETTE

The fool—you are incomparable. He's merely your brother-in-law, and she's merely your sister-in-law. Formerly, that is. At one time. In the past.

MADAME PATIN

And it doesn't stop with them! Their precious little Lucile has been putting on airs. When we go out for a drive, she has the cheek to sit right next to me in the back of the carriage. On foot, she walks right alongside me and leaves no distance between us.

LISETTE

She's preposterous.

MADAME PATIN

And her obnoxious, incessant simpering! She gets all the attention. I tell you, there'll be some changes made around here.

LISETTE

No trouble there; a mother-in-law has more influence than an aunt.

MME. PATIN

Her *mother-in-law*? Do you think after what just happened to me in the street I would have the slightest interest in keeping my word to Monsieur Migaud?

LISETTE

What is the connection between what just went down in street and the arranged marriages between you and Monsieur Migaud, and between his son Horace and Lucile?

MME PATIN

Migaud—ho, that name would really get me on the guest list. No thank you, I'd rather stick to Patin.

LISETTE

But Migaud is a distinguished legal name; Patin only ranks as finance.

MME PATIN

Law or finance, neither is exactly Madame la Duchesse de la Fourcade-Petit Truc- Machin.

LISETTE

Did you just make that up?

MME PATIN

I made up my mind last week to nab a delicious mouthful of a title.

LISETTE

(*aside*) Then Monsieur Migaud is out of luck.

MME PATIN

What did you say?

LISETTE

A title is heavenly; but there's a husband to go with it. You have to be very careful when you go title-hunting.

MME PATIN

I'm a good judge of character, and I have the tastiest morsel of a man in my sights.

LISETTE

You mean you've been holding out on me?

MME PATIN

The Chevalier hasn't wanted me to tell you.

LISETTE

You don't—you can't possibly mean the Chevalier de Villefontaine?

MME PATIN

The very one.

LISETTE

Hold on. You intend to *marry* the Chevalier de Villefontaine?

MME PATIN

Precisely.

LISETTE

You've got to be kidding, my lady. He hasn't a penny to his name.

MME PATIN

I have enough for both of us. The divine hand of justice is at work in our love match. My late husband foreclosed on the Chevalier's ancestral estate. I feel it's a mandate from heaven to restore one of the oldest families in Normandy to its former glory.

LISETTE

Oh well, if it's a marriage of *conscience*, I have nothing more to say. Won't Monsieur Migaud be surprised though when he gets wind of this?

MME PATIN

I shall take good care to keep him uninformed, for he won't fail to run and complain to Monsieur Serrefort about it. Who will then tax my ears with his insufferable advice. Neither of them is to know a thing until I am Lady Villefontaine.

LISETTE

But before you marry the chevalier, don't you think you might have to break it off with Monsieur Migaud?

MME PATIN

I've thought of that, Lisette; I'll trump up a quarrel with him just as soon as I see him. Even a numbskull can take a hint.

LISETTE

Here he is. Start trumping.

(MONSIEUR MIGAUD enters)

MIGAUD

Forgive my intrusion, Madame, but I thought it better to respond personally to the letter you wrote me last night.

MME PATIN

I wrote you, Sir?

MIGAUD

Indeed, Madame. A baroness with a lawsuit I've taken on, brought me a recommendation from you yesterday.

MME PATIN

Yes, yes, she's been harassing me for days to get you to speak in her favor, but I recommended yesterday that you dump her toot sweet.

MIGAUD

Glad I am of that, Madame; there is more fancy than reason to her case, and I think there's nothing to gain in getting mixed up with it.

MME PATIN

Do you suggest, Sir, that you won't help her win her case?

MIGAUD

I? Madame, the outcome hardly depends on me alone. Justice--

MME PATIN

Justice! Justice! If justice were on her side, I would hardly have to ask you to help her. What about your duty to me?

MIGAUD
But Madame—

MME PATIN
No buts, Sir! I won't pretend that the world thinks my testimonial is worth a listen; but neither am I such a nobody, it seems to me, to allow the world to think I can't bribe a judge when the occasion arises.

MIGAUD
But what would compel you to take an interest in a suit that might only disgrace you in the end?

MME PATIN
And what would compel you, when I ask, to refuse to cast an ugly business in a favorable light. Shame on you!

MIGAUD
Seriously, Madame—

MME PATIN
That's enough backtalk, Migaud. I have made my wishes clear: it's up to you to carry them out. Lisette, if the person to whom I was referring earlier arrives, please send word to me at Araminte's. I'm going there to play cards.

(MME PATIN exits)

MIGAUD
Lisette.

LISETTE
Sir?

MIGAUD
What do you call that mood?

LISETTE
You're not pleased with it?

MIGAUD
Have I cause to be pleased with it?

LISETTE
No.

MIGAUD
What do you make of it?

LISETTE

I think you know what it means. You're not that dumb.

MIGAUD

Help me to fathom it.

LISETTE

You "appreciate" my mistress Madame Patin, and you had reason to believe until now—that she "appreciated" you.

MIGAUD

If I didn't respect her, I would think—

LISETTE

Drop the respect, Sir, and admit you think she's a lunatic.

MIGAUD

Since you're being so frank, Lisette, I admit that Madame Patin is an absolute terror. If it weren't for Horace's benefit, I'd never dream of yoking myself to her. Monsieur Serrefort fears that his sister-in-law is squandering everything her husband left her. To keep her family in the family, Serrefort will only give Lucile to Horace on the condition that I marry Madame Patin.

LISETTE

And you submit to that condition?

MIGAUD

I submit my family to forty thousand pounds a year.

LISETTE

And that's worth staying on a slow boil for the rest of your days?

MIGAUD

I'll suffer less than you might think. I am a man who can bring a woman to her senses.

LISETTE

Better start now; because if you wait until you're married to bring her to her senses, you run the risk of watching her die a madwoman.

MIGAUD

What are you saying?

LISETTE

I'm saying I hope Horace will get better use out of forty thousand a year than the fop Madame has them earmarked for.

MIGAUD

Your mistress has changed her mind?

LISETTE

Catch up, honey. She's got the court on her brain; and to force her début there, she plans to marry the Chevalier de Villefontaine.

MIGAUD

That can't be.

LISETTE

I don't know if that can be, I just know that it is.

MIGAUD

You're joking. The Chevalier de Villefontaine is a dissipated, penniless boozebagging sponge, renowned at court for dipping snuff and cheating at cards. He's a permanent bachelor. I'm not sure I believe this.

LISETTE

Believe, don't believe, you'd better warn Monsieur Serrefort just in case. Here comes our Chevalier, go.

MIGAUD

The mind of a woman is a strange thing.

(MIGAUD exits, and the CHEVALIER enters)

CHEVALIER

Good day, my dear Lisette. Ah, you've some gambol afoot—you're decked out even more than usual, and, as ever, you're tastier looking than the most lipsmacking Duchess. What a saucy embonpoint, like a melon-patch in June....

LISETTE

My lady has been waiting quite a while for you, Sir.

CHEVALIER

Has she now? You are one of the most bewitching girls I've ever met. All credit to the seamstress who sculpts your bodices. And this is the most elegantly arousing apron one could ever hope to see through. And how you dress your hair, you wicked little jade.

LISETTE

Would you like me to tell Madame that you are here? She's at a friend's house, two doors down.

CHEVALIER

Oh Lisette, one minute more or less couldn't make a difference.

LISETTE

Permit me to advertise your impatience, Sir; look, here's your stooge.

(LISETTE exits and CRISPIN enters.)

CRISPIN

I've been looking for you everywhere. The Baroness—

CHEVALIER

Shhhhh! Don't you see where we are?

CRISPIN

Yes, Sir, but the Baroness—

CHEVALIER

Quiet! How many times do I have to tell you, when I'm at one woman's house, you're not to post news of another?

CRISPIN

But this is the Baroness who—

CHEVALIER

You dolt, once and for all, shut up! Don't spoil what is possibly the best investment of my life.

CRISPIN

You mean she's talking marriage? Do you love her?

CHEVALIER

Love her? How old are you?

CRISPIN

Then which investment are you talking about?

CHEVALIER

I'd marry Madame Patin but for the fact she nauseates me so.

CRISPIN

Well, let Old Scratch take me if I can follow your line of thinking.

CHEVALIER

I'm in love with her forty thousand a year.

CRISPIN

Then it's the forty thousand you'd marry.

CHEVALIER

God, you're slow. If I were to love someone, for Christ's sake, it wouldn't be Madame Patin.

CRISPIN

That rules out the Baroness as well; every eight days you promise to marry her the following week, and that charade has been going on for a year now.

CHEVALIER

If the Baroness wins her lawsuit, I'd back her over Madame Patin. She may have twenty more years to go, but the settlement would give her twenty thousand more pounds than Madame Patin has.

CRISPIN

Well, how about giving me one of your also-rans; because, just between us, sir, chambermaids have become too decent nowadays. Do you love only plunder?

CHEVALIER

You cut me to the quick, my child. Who's to say I don't at this very moment love a certain spicy brunette. If she turns out to be as rich as she claims, I wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice that pair of worn-out mules for her.

CRISPIN

What spicy brunette? What's her name?

CHEVALIER

I have yet to discover it. I met her four days ago at the Tuilleries. I've laid siege to her every night since and told her I am the Marquess of Guérets.

CRISPIN

Four days, huh? She's tough.

CHEVALIER

The father is strict; it's only under cover of visiting an aunt that she can get out at night.

CRISPIN

Young, pretty, a perfect liar...

CHEVALIER

Virginal, and stacked. A man couldn't ask for anything more.

CRISPIN

Damn.

CHEVALIER

Let's drop the subject. Getting hold of some cash comes first. For now, I cannot afford to risk my heart with this woman.

CRISPIN

What heart is that?

CHEVALIER

We must stick to the birds in hand. Bagatelles a-plenty...

CRISPIN and CHEVALIER

As soon as the checks have cleared!

CRISPIN

Well, if Madame Patin is the riper bird for basting, I'll just pop back home and send the Baroness away with her gifts.

CHEVALIER

Gifts? What are you talking about?

CRISPIN

I only came to tell you that the Baroness has been cooling her heels in your drawing room with some booty. I'll just tell her to leave.

CHEVALIER

Hold on a minute. What gifts?

CRISPIN

Oh, a big ol' coach that she snuck into your carriage house, two fine steeds in your stable, a groom, and a significant springer spaniel. I can send them away.

CHEVALIER

No no, stay. I cannot upset the Baroness. The poor mad creature.

CRISPIN

Don't you think Madame Patin—

CHEVALIER

The coach is handsome?

CRISPIN

It's a bed on wheels.

CHEVALIER

The poor Baroness. And the steeds?

CRISPIN

Such a free and easy air they sport. You've never seen anything like them.

CHEVALIER

A desperate, lonely soul. Relay to her my most heartfelt thanks and tell her I'll see her this afternoon.

CRISPIN

Without you? Nothing doing. She'll sic the spaniel on me and ride off in the rig as fast as blazes if you don't thank her in person.

CHEVALIER

Tell her I promise to see her later today.

CRISPIN

What makes you think my word is any good with her after breaking promises for you— oh, let's see, six hundred times now,

CHEVALIER

I hear jingling. Madame Patin is back. Go do what I told you.

CRISPIN

If you want to keep the coach and horses, you'd better show.

CHEVALIER

Shut up, you dunce; I have to make a clean getaway first.

(MME PATIN and LISETTE enter)

MME PATIN

I have made you wait, sir, but please do not be offended at not finding me here. Since I am home only to you, I find it necessary to flee the pack of importunate visitors who feel they have a right to plague me all hours of the day. I have ordered my servants to slam the door in their faces, but they lack the force to do so. *(Sighs)* The house needs a man's influence.

CHEVALIER

Dearest Madame Patin. My own dear Patina. The pain of waiting for you is more than compensated by the awesome splendor of seeing you here, larger than life. I would wait for you forever—as long as I knew you would appear.

MME PATIN

What a charmer you are! Lisette told me how you feared arousing suspicions by having her come and get me. You are a man of exquisite delicacy. But had she followed your orders, I'd have slapped her silly.

CHEVALIER

I was only thinking of how desolate your party would feel to lose your company.

MME PATIN

Just some gals playing cards. No rivals for you to fear.

CRISPIN

(low, to the Chevalier) The coach in the carriage house is starting to rust.

CHEVALIER

Be quiet.

MME PATIN

What was that?

CRISPIN

Just muttering under my breath, your grace.

MME PATIN

Let's go to my room—we can get comfy, and such.

CRISPIN

(low) The steeds are switching their tails.

CHEVALIER

Will you shut up?

MME PATIN

Shall we, sir?

CRISPIN

GOODBYE

CARRIAGE!

MME PATIN

What is he going on about? What carriage?

CHEVALIER

Perhaps my harness-maker is waiting for me. Is that it, Crispin?

CRISPIN

Yes sir, and your new team awaits you as well.

CHEVALIER

Why didn't you say so in the first place? I must beg your pardon, Patina my pet. I've just purchased a new carriage.

MME PATIN

Let me go with you. We can take a spin around the Tuilleries. Lisette, cancel the waxing—

CHEVALIER
Oh my lady, please consider...

MME PATIN
Consider what?

CHEVALIER
Oh my lady, please consider...

MME PATIN
You said that, honeybee.

CHEVALIER
Oh my lady, please consider...

MME PATIN
WHAT?

CHEVALIER
Please consider what society might make of your interest in my every little movement. Catching wind of you in my stables—that alone would blow the cover off what we feel for each other. And if the slightest bit of gossip were to bring down any painful remonstrations from your family or mine, I would just die, Patina.

CRISPIN
If my master were to be seen trying you out in the front seat—trying out the carriage with you in the front seat--it just wouldn't be decent.

MME PATIN
Society folk sure are sensitive. I have so much to learn, Professor.

CRISPIN
The harnessmaker's wife is a vicious gossip.

CHEVALIER
Indeed. There are repercussions, my lady, but I was too timid to broach them with you. Goodbye, my heart, I'll be back in an instant; that is, if you will permit me to return.

MME PATIN
Goodbye then, my lord. Do not delay. Oh. Be sure to stop by the you-know-who for the you-know-what.

(THE CHEVALIER and CRISPIN exit)

MME PATIN
This corset is too tight.

LISETTE

My lady, that was a great hand you had. Was it worth leaving the game to be sacrificed to the Chevalier's carriage?

MME PATIN

What a ninny you are, Lisette. A man's impatience counts for a lot. I'll bet he had that carriage made just for me. I hope he's put his monogram on it. Did I bust a seam or something?

LISETTE

Hold still. Aristocrats a strange species. You may think this one's your sweetheart, but you see how fast he ditched to pay his respects to a carriage. If he should ever become your husband, he'll leave you at four in the a.m. to watch his horses get a rub-down.

MME PATIN

You don't know what you're talking about.

LISETTE

I'll have to let out this skirt. Damn.

End Act One

ACT TWO

(LISETTE is alone. MONSIEUR SERREFORT enters)

LISETTE

At least tell her I tried to keep you out. She can't stand the sight of you, and I don't want her taking it out on me.

SERREFORT

When I finish reading her the riot act, she won't have the strength to take anything out on anybody. Pulling these disastrous stunts all over town—she's demented. If the court gets wind of this last one, they'll invent an insanity tax just for her.

LISETTE

What are you talking about?

SERREFORT

Weren't you with her this morning when she had that run-in in the street with a countess?

LISETTE

When did you hear about it?

SERREFORT

About fifteen minutes after it happened, and as soon as I finished hearing that one, Migaud came to warn me of her scheme to marry the Chevalier of Villefontaine.

LISETTE

Face it, sir, you're going to have a lot of trouble controlling your sister-in-law today.

SERREFORT

I'll do it, even if I have to burn money.

LISETTE

Be sure to yell real loud. And use that tone of authority you have. She may vilify you behind your back, but she's too afraid of you to contradict you face to face.

(MME PATIN enters)

MME PATIN

What do you want?

LISETTE

I tried, my lady, but Monsieur Serrefort wouldn't budge.

MME PATIN

Let's make it quick.

SERREFORT

What kind of tone is that for a sister-in-law to take? Listen up—your hoity-toity airs don't become you at all, and quite aside from my business with you, let me predict—

MME PATIN

Get me a chair, Lisette; I see Monsieur is going to put me to sleep.

SERREFORT

If you have even a shred of sense left in you, what I have to say should wake you up.

MME PATIN

Stop with the sermons, okay?

SERREFORT

If you listened to my sermons, you wouldn't commit fresh follies every day!

MME PATIN

I don't know why you take such a bizarre interest in my conduct.

SERREFORT

If not me, who then? You are the aunt of my daughter, the widow of Paul Patin, my brother, and

I won't have it said in the world that the widow of my brother and the aunt of my daughter is an utter lunatic.

MME PATIN

Lunatic? Show some respect, Monsieur Serrefort, or I'll have you thrown out into the street.

SERREFORT

What needs throwing out is your highfaluting manners. Then you won't be snubbed in the street like you were this morning.

MME PATIN

Snubbed only because people are under the mysterious impression that I am your sister-in-law! But you know what I'll do, Monsieur Serrefort? I'll have it advertised that since the onset of my widowed state, I am no longer your sister-in-law. I'll renounce you, and from this moment on, even if my spending habits, my elegant manners, and all that I do or say each and every day can't help me atone for the original sin of having been the wife of your brother, I'll claim to—

SERREFORT

Atone? The name Patin is the best thing that ever happened to you. Where would you be now without my brother? Herding goats in Burgundy!

MME PATIN

Why you—

SERREFORT

And if it weren't for the industry and economy of your poor late husband, you wouldn't be in a position to ape the ridiculous manners of the day. I'd like to know why—

MME PATIN

Go on, buster.

SERREFORT

I'd like to know why it wouldn't do you just as well to have a simple coach with olive upholstery, a tasteful monogram, a humble coachman dressed in brown, one lackey for opening the door, and a modest team of horses, rather than prancing about the city with a sumptuous retinue and arrogant horses spattering pedestrians with mud, all begging the question of who in the devil is this mysterious Queen of Sheba—you should renounce all this pomp that makes you scorned by people of quality, envied by your peers, and cursed by the rabble.

MME PATIN

I live according to my own ways. I am a poor widow all alone in the world, with only myself as a resource. What gives you the right to come here and lecture me? I could hardly stand that from a husband.

SERREFORT

When Monsieur Migaud is your husband, he will do as he pleases.

MME PATIN

If Monsieur Migaud is my husband, he'll get used to my ways, or I'll adjust to his. Is that the plan? Have you said everything? Will you leave, or shall I?

SERREFORT

I'll go. Once these knots are tied, I shall darken your doorstep no more.

(SERREFORT exits)

LISETTE

What a boob, to go on and on like that.

MME PATIN

His role in life is to wear me out. How I loathe him! I won't be satisfied until something absolutely desperate happens to him.

LISETTE

Once you're his daughter's mother-in-law, you'll have plenty of opportunities to desperate him.

MME PATIN

His daughter's mother-in-law! In your dreams, Lisette. I told you about the Chevalier.

LISETTE

Oh. Right.

MME PATIN

I can promise Serrefort anything he wants for the day after tomorrow. As of tomorrow, I'll no longer be in a position to keep my word.

LISETTE

Because?

MME PATIN

Because the Chevalier and I have taken the necessary measures to get married at five o'clock tomorrow morning.

LISETTE

Tomorrow? Damn—Here's your niece.

MME PATIN

Good god—the father, the daughter—the family might as well pitch a tent on my doorstep.

(LUCILE runs in)

LUCILE

I thought father would never leave. I've got something to tell you, Aunt Nannette, that will prove that I am for your interests as much as my father is against them.

MME PATIN

For, against, it's all the same to me, my child.

LUCILE

I thought you'd care to hear what my father has found out.

MME PATIN

What's that?

LUCILE

That you plan to marry a title. You won't believe what he going to try to do to stop you.

MME PATIN

He didn't let on that he knew. How could he find that out?

LISETTE

Maybe the Chevalier snitched. They're such blabbermouths.

LUCILE

I'm just dying for you to get a title, Aunt Nannette.

MME PATIN

Any day now, my dear. (beat) Let me advise you that it's never too early to begin treating me with the proper deference.

LUCILE

What do you mean, Aunt Nannette?

MME PATIN

First of all, no more "Aunt Nannettes." Start calling me "My lady." Or you can stay at home with your folks.

LUCILE

But if you are my aunt, why should I have to call you anything else?

MME PATIN

Because if I become a woman of quality, and you don't, I shall decline to be your aunt.

LUCILE

You would be mistaken then, my lady. You see, I'm about to get a title too.

MME PATIN

You what

LUCILE

I need only say yes to become at least as great a lady as you. Maybe greater.

MME PATIN

I beg your pardon?

LUCILE

I'm engaged to the dreamiest courtier I know. I've seen him in the Tuilleries.

MME PATIN

What is his title?

LUCILE

He is the Marquise de Guerets. And he's rich to boot. That's what he says.

LISETTE

What about Horace?

LUCILE

Horace Migaud is a turnip.

MME PATIN

I must say, my niece, it pleases me that, despite your hideous upbringing, you have defied your parents and succeeded in remaining my relative.

LUCILE

Might you do me a little favor then? Obtain your title as soon as possible. That will serve as precedent for my marriage; and when my father attempts to wage war against me, all I have to say to him is "I've done no worse than my aunt."

LISETTE

Example is a terrible thing.

LUCILE

But hurry! The Marquise de Guerets is an impatient lover.

MME PATIN

Well, my niece, let me confide in you. I'm getting married at five in the morning.

LUCILE

Tomorrow morning?

MME PATIN

At five. If my example is any encouragement, you may now set your date.

LUCILE

I'll write to the Marquise immediately. Adieu, dear aunt.

MME PATIN

Adieu, my niece.

(LUCILLE exits)

MME PATIN

Lisette, Lucile's engagement is just the thing to desperate her father. Now, if only her parents died of chagrin, the world would be rid of two desperately horrible bores.

LISETTE

You're going to help her?

MME PATIN

In any way I can.

LISETTE

Noblesse oblige.

MME PATIN

That, and Serrefort will hit the ceiling.

(THE CHEVALIER enters)

CHEVALIER

My lady, am I not the very pattern of diligence?

MME PATIN

However briefly you have tarried, I find moments without you long indeed, and my impatience—

CHEVALIER

—is nothing compared to mine, sweet Patina; do me the honor, I beg of you, of believing that I only live for as long as I am near to you.

MME PATIN

How inestimably gracious you are to—

LISETTE

(to audience) Jesus, these two can go on like this for hours. Let's pray for an interruption.

MME PATIN

Lisette, tell everyone below that I'm not at home to anybody this afternoon.

LISETTE

Yes, my lady.

MME PATIN

And protect us from all intruders.

LISETTE

(to audience) I suppose I can rustle one up myself.

(LISETTE exits)

MME PATIN

Oh darling, are you happy with your horsies?

CHEVALIER

I'm taking the coach out tonight; and if it's to your liking, then it—and I—shall lack for nothing.

MME PATIN

Did you go to the notary?

CHEVALIER

He wasn't there, so I left a note.

(LISETTE enters, trying to keep THE BARONESS out)

LISETTE

No, your grace, no—

BARONESS

Let me by, hussy. Your mistress is always home to me.

CHEVALIER

Lisette can't follow the simplest instructions—someone else is barging in.

(THE BARONESS enters)

CHEVALIER

(aside) Holy hell, it's my Baroness.

LISETTE

I couldn't just grab her, and neither the doorman nor I could convince her that you weren't at home.

MME PATIN

And why would you tell her I wasn't at home?

LISETTE

But you said—

MME PATIN

I am always at home for a Baroness.

LISETTE

Not even—

MME PATIN

I must beg your pardon, my lady.

BARONESS

Don't make me say it, dear, but you're an utter beast. What—The Chevalier de Villefontaine? What are you doing here?

CHEVALIER

And you, my lady, what stroke of fortune finds you...

MME PATIN

(to Lisette) They know each other.

BARONESS

I came one last time, dear, to ask for your help as a character witness in my lawsuit, but I was hardly expecting to find the Chevalier de Villefontaine in your drawing room. What is he doing here?

MME PATIN

My lady, how to put this—

CHEVALIER

(to Mme Patin) Oh my lady, you must press the Baroness's trials to your inmost bosom as if they were my very own. Nothing could please me more. *(to the Baroness)* You see how I take an interest in your affairs, my sweet.

MME PATIN

(to the Chevalier) This is an incomprehensible muddle.

BARONESS

(to the Chevalier) What was that supposed to mean?

MME PATIN

I don't quite understand what business it is of yours, my lady, how or where the Chevalier spends his afternoons, nor by what motive.

BARONESS

What *motive*? What are you suggesting?

CHEVALIER

(to the Baroness) Madame, please. *(To Mme Patin)* May none of this astonish you. *The Baroness is a noblewoman who-* (to B) She's my first cousin. —(to P) Esteems me a hundred times greater than I merit. (to B) I'm her heir. *(to P)* She's funny that way. (to B) Don't mention our marriage. *(to P)* I am sincerely grateful that she looks after me. (to B) She'd only stand in our way. *(to P)* And since she has particular ideas about my fortune and my settling down, she is afraid my wishes will run contrary to hers.

BARONESS

That is my motive.

MME PATIN

Please forgive me, your excellence.

BARONESS

Don't be silly, girl. Just tell me, what are his dealings with you?

MME PATIN

Dealings? What are you suggesting?

CHEVALIER

(to the Baroness) Can the Baroness possibly be ignorant of the fact that the salon of Madame Patin is the most illustrious rendezvous in Paris? *(to Mme Patin)* She's a preposterous loon. (to B) And that her acquaintance is a prerequisite for a decent reputation *(to P)* Say nothing of our plan. (to B) And that my reputation was in tatters until I came under her tutelage? *(to P)* With a secret she's incontinent. (to B) And that I do all that I can to repay her many kindnesses, and that is why I am here.

MME PATIN

That is the nature of our dealings.

BARONESS

Now it is I who must demand pardon.

CHEVALIER

Please, ladies, let us indulge no further in dreary explanations. I beg you to remain friends for love of me. Let the one who esteems me more open her arms to her sister.

(There is a collision as the two smack into each other)

BARONESS

I am your servant.

MME PATIN

I am your servant's servant.

CHEVALIER

Why don't we discuss your lawsuit, my lady?

MME PATIN

(To the Baroness) It pains me to say that I've been informed that you haven't got a case.

BARONESS

I don't know where you've been getting your information. Monsieur the Chevalier can vouch for its worth; he knows all its ins and outs. Tell her, sir.

CHEVALIER

You have so many lawsuits pending that I hardly know to which one you refer. I only know that they are all shrouded in mitigating circumstances that I only half-remember.

BARONESS

I shall let you be the judge, my lady. The case was brought into action just before the Battle of Pavia. My great-grandfather, who led a regiment, was killed in the battle. If he were still alive, I'd be certain to win my case. So you see *(she notices Lisette laughing)* What's so funny? Your chambermaid is a perfect horror, my dear. She's not showing the proper reverence for my ancestors.

LISETTE

I haven't had the pleasure of meeting them.

BARONESS

Out of consideration for your betters, you—

MME PATIN

You may go, Lisette. *(LISETTE exits)* Go on, dear. I'm just dying to hear the rest of the case.

BARONESS

Where was I? Refresh my memory, monsieur.

CHEVALIER

The Battle of Pavia.

(CRISPIN enters)

CRISPIN

(to the Chevalier) Psssst.

BARONESS

Oh yes, the Battle of Pavia. (*Trying to remember*) Here's the long and short of it, my dear. I have a windmill. It's my windmill, and I'm legally forbidden to use it, to make the thingamabobs turn, to grind...uh, things, to do...what it is that windmills do? I only ask for the peaceful restitution of my windmill—is that so wrong?

MME PATIN

It's no longer in your possession then?

BARONESS

Not for a hundred and fifty years.

CRISPIN

Psssst.

MME PATIN

Your suit is 150 years old?

BARONESS

It is. About 150 years ago, the grandfather of my opponent had an ornamental hedge planted in front of my country estate.

CHEVALIER

(to *Crispin*) What do you want?

BARONESS

Out of pure spite, he had that hedge planted to block my view, and well that villain knew that over time, a great forest would grow from those little acorns.

MME PATIN

You mean hedge.

CRISPIN

Psssst.

BARONESS

And to retaliate, I had an abandoned mill rebuilt.

CRISPIN

I have to speak to you.

BARONESS

And since this mill is older than the forest of my opponent, and this forest—here's the crux of the matter—and this forest...

MME PATIN

Really my lady, I haven't a head for legal affairs, but I will be sure to offer my support for your cause to Monsieur Migaud should an opportunity arise.

BARONESS

Why don't we go see him right now? My carriage is below.

MME PATIN

I'm dead on my feet.

BARONESS

But my case is to be tried in the morning.

CHEVALIER

The readiness is all, ladies. *(to Mme Patin)* I order you to accompany the Baroness to Monsieur Migaud's. If you don't get her out of here, we'll have to postpone our wedding for another day.

MME PATIN

Why?

CHEVALIER

Why ask why? Go!

MME PATIN

You'll wait for me here?

CHEVALIER

Standing at attention.

MME PATIN

(to the Baroness) Let us take our leave.

CHEVALIER

Hurry it up.

MME Patin

Coming?

BARONESS

Right behind you, dear.

(They exit.)

(LISETTE enters.)

LISETTE

(aside) What could Crispin possibly want this time? There's only one way to find out.
(She hides to eavesdrop)

CHEVALIER

My God, they've worked my last nerve. An now what are you on fire about?

CRISPIN

This letter explains everything. The porter says it's financial.

CHEVALIER

Let's see it. Give it to me. Is that it?

CRISPIN

No.

CHEVALIER

What's that in your hand then?

CRISPIN

It's a list of all your conquests—names, addresses, distinguishing features. Jeannette and I compiled it in the Tuilleries the other day.

CHEVALIER

Are you insane? Rip that up.

CRISPIN

I don't think so. When it's open season again, this will save us a lot of legwork.

CHEVALIER

The letter then.

CRISPIN

Here it is. No wait, that's the poem you ordered for the Baroness the other day. You gave the poet your old hunting jacket for it.

CHEVALIER

You imbecile. Where is today's letter?

CRISPIN

Excuse me, here it is. It's addressed to the Marquise de Guérets.

CHEVALIER

It's from my luscious brunette. *(He reads)*

“You demonstrate such a longing to meet, that I have decided to satisfy your curiosity. I'm waiting for you in the Tuilleries, with a thousand things to tell you. Do not fail to meet me

there. Adieu.”

CRISPIN
Where to now?

CHEVALIER
I have to find her.

CRISPIN
You promised to wait for Madame Patin.

CHEVALIER
Don't worry. I'll get back here before she does. And if not—well, let me leave her a not. That poem you sent to the Baroness?

CRISPIN
Yes.

CRISPIN
Where to now?

CHEVALIER
I have to find her.

CRISPIN
You promised to wait for Madame Patinn.

CEHVALIER
Don't worry. I'll get back here before she does. And if not—well, let me leave her a note. That poem you sent to the Baroness?

CRISPIN
Yes.

CHEVALIER
Give it to Madame Patin.

CRISPIN
That makes woman number eight. Stop the madness.

CHEVALIER
Do you know what would happen if I had to order up something fresh for every woman I meet?

CRISPIN
Your wardrobe would be fresh out of jackets—and shirts—and pants—and cravats—and— If that poet had sold the poem as many times as you've sent it, he'd own a house in the Place de Ville.

CHEVALIER

Wait for Madame Patin and give her this.

CRISPIN

I'm tired of hanging around. Leave it with Lisette. She's been skulking about.

CHEVALIER

No, you stay.

CRISPIN

I want to meet your luscious brunette. I'm as curious as the next guy. Maybe she has a sister.

(Lisette coughs and appears)

CHEVALIER

Dear Lisette, I just remembered I have an urgent matter to attend to—it cannot wait.

LISETTE

Really? That's the fifth one today.

CHEVALIER

If your mistress returns before I do, give her this note.

LISETTE

She'll bust another seam.

CRISPIN

Don't bother reading it.

LISETTE

I am utterly lacking in curiosity. Plus, I can't read.

(They exit)

LISETTE

Much. *(She starts)*

"List of my master's conquests. Names, addresses, distinguishing features."

(Skimming, mumbling names) "Sidesaddle Cécile?" "Marie the Muff?" This is a feast.

End Act Two

ACT THREE

(LISETTE and MONSIEUR MIGAUD are in conversation)

LISETTE

Sir, my lady isn't the only one to be stricken with court-itis. Lucile has followed her aunt's example. She's flouncing about town with her hair up. She claims she's planning a clandestine marriage with a Marquess. Madame must be de-infatuated.

MIGAUD

At once! I'm worried that Horace won't win Lucile over.

LISETTE

Her father will set her straight when he finds out what's going on. Provided you keep her in chains for two or three months, I don't think you or Horace have anything to worry about.

MIGAUD

I'm more afraid of what happens after the wedding. A young wife whose will has been thwarted can fall into terrible irregularities of conduct. The worst possible situation is when the husband dotes on a wife who loves another man.

LISETTE

I can't argue you with you there. But for the time being, the essential thing is to cure Madame Patin of her *maladie d'amour*. I've got some hard evidence against the Chevalier that won't fail to alarm even her.

MIGAUD

Better to attack her from all sides--I can embroil the Chevalier in some shady business deals.

LISETTE

I hear her coming. Stay in there until I tell her you're here.

(MIGAUD exits and MME PATIN enters)

MME PATIN

Where is the Chevalier, Lisette? Did he say anything while I was gone? What has happened to him?

LISETTE

He hit the pavement as soon as you turned you left.

MME PATIN

What? I only left on his orders; he promises to wait, and now he's gone!

LISETTE

Are gentlemen like the Chevalier made to sit still? A trustworthy, sensible man like Monsieur Migaud, who has come to speak with you, couldn't be budged until he heard that you had

returned.

(MIGAUD appears and bows to MME PATIN)

MME PATIN

I was just at your office, sir. And I was quite annoyed to find you away from your desk.

MIGAUD

Had I known beforehand that you would grace me with your presence, I would have tarried, but I happened to be entertaining a countess...

MME PATIN

Entertaining a countess, sir? Ooh, which one? It seems to me that service people like yourself should be either at the office or in court, occupied solely in advocating for their clients. Not sucking up to a countess! What was she wearing?

MIGAUD

Our clients don't occupy us completely. Time must be made for social engagements. After this particular rendezvous, I'd like to pass on some advice that concerns you. Your name came up.

MME PATIN

With the countess? What did she say about me? Tell me!

MIGAUD

You had some fracas in your carriage this morning with a Countess named Dorimène?

MME PATIN

Who told you that story? Hold on—this isn't the Countess you were talking to?

MIGAUD

Yes.

MME PATIN

And you've just come from visiting her?

MIGAUD

I have.

MME PATIN

Then you can just turn yourself around and run back to her, if you please. Your Dorimène is the template of vulgarity. I find it peculiar that you spend time with her and then come rub it in my face.

MIGAUD

My visit was to oblige you, my lady. I know her; she has a nasty streak. If she feels you've offended her, she'll be only too delighted to smear your name in society.

MME PATIN

Indeed, sir? Am I a woman to smear?

MIGAUD

There is nothing more popular today than to ridicule those who least deserve it. But there are worse things to fear than ridicule.

MME PATIN

What have I to fear?

MIGAUD

Everything. Your superior soul and your personal magnificence make people jealous. Your global resplendence is backed by a stupefying fortune that enrages everyone. One would only have to dig a little into your background, your late husband's business practices, a certain flock of goats in Burgundy, etcetera, to disrupt your tranquility. The results of such malicious research are invariable, infallible, precipitous downfalls.

MME PATIN

Your countess could no more cause my downfall than she could make me move my carriage this morning.

MIGAUD

I have already used what little power I have with her.

MME PATIN

Let her rant and rage! I also have a tongue in my head.

MIGAUD

Hers is forked. She's a cobra, and the venom she spreads takes no prisoners. It's up to you to supply the antidote.

MME PATIN

I repeat—what am I to do?

MIGAUD

Visit her and pay your respects.

MME PATIN

Pay my respects to that gutbucket? Are you out of your mind?

MIGAUD

Then send a third party—a mutual acquaintance with more powers of persuasion.

MME PATIN

How happy I am to say we have no friends in common.

MIGAUD

Hmm...it shouldn't be too difficult to find someone who can influence the Chevalier de Villefontaine.

MME PATIN

Villefontaine? What?

MIGAUD

He governs her. Absolutely.

MME PATIN

The chevalier is in love with the Countess?

MIGAUD

The other way around. The Chevalier suffers her tender attentions long enough to have her back his checks.

MME PATIN

(a wail) Lisette?

MIGAUD

I find it hard to believe, given his reputation with the ladies, that one of your friends wouldn't be in his thrall. From what I hear tell, at least five or six have entered into some form of engagement with him—for some sort of marriage.

MME PATIN

Lisette!

MIGAUD

An interesting character indeed to juggle five or six nuptial contracts at any one time. Depending on his balance sheet, he promises each in turn that he will marry her. One takes care of his horses, another his gambling debts, this one underwrites the tailor's bills, the other the furniture and the rent. He has a mistress in charge of every liability. He's the only one who can appease the Countess and spare you any damaging slander—I believe she takes care of his laundry. Don't fail to mend the breach, I beg you. It's critical.

(MIGAUD exits)

MME PATIN

Do you think it's possible, Lisette, that the Chevalier is as much of a knave as Migaud would have me believe?

LISETTE

That's not what passes for knavery today. As far as society goes, he's gentility itself.

MME PATIN

Migaud hasn't a clue I know him.

LISETTE

If he thought you did, he would have never spoken so freely.

MME PATIN

Then the Chevalier is cheating on me! And I'm just one of the five or six he's engaged to!

LISETTE

One more pearl on his choker. Oh—here's a note from him. I wasn't about to hand it to you in front of Migaud.

MME PATIN

Let's see. (*She reads*) Oh Lisette, this is why he went away. He must have been too shy to give this to me in person.

LISETTE

What is it?

MME PATIN

He wrote me the most touching poem imaginable. Migaud is a dirty scandalmonger, and the Chevalier has given me a thousand proofs of his gallantry.

LISETTE

What did I tell you?

MME PATIN

What's the other paper?

LISETTE

It fell out of that moron Crispin's jacket. It's rather amusing—I saved it for your entertainment.

MME PATIN

"List of my master's conquests; names, addresses, distinguishing features" Entertain me, Lisette? You have a sick sense of humor.

LISETTE

Keep reading. It gets better.

MME PATIN

The beginning wasn't so funny. "Countess Dorimène the Tittle-Tattler." Dorimène! Dorimène! That's my countess. Migaud was right. A chair, Lisette, I can't bear it.

LISETTE

I didn't think these trifles would upset you, my lady. If you're so sensitive, don't read the rest.

MME PATIN

No! I want to know all his love affairs. Each will drive a stake in my love to hate him—drive a stake in my heart to kill him—drill a hole in my hate to—you know what I mean, Lisette.

LISETTE

Say no more. Keep reading.

MME PATIN

"The Mushmouthed Marquess, Betsy Street, the Picardy Hotel"-Traitor! "Simpering Silvanetta, rue Montorgueil"—I'll kill myself!

"Luscious Lucinda, the Court Pump"—I despise him! "Boom-Boom the Butcher's Wife"—I detest him! "Sophie the Slut, parts unknown"—He's a monster!

"The Oblong Duchess, rue de Plâtre"—That's it! No more!

LISETTE

You forgot "Sidesaddle Cécile" and "Marie The Muff!"

MME PATIN

Enough!

LISETTE

I hear him coming!

MME PATIN

Where are you going?

LISETTE

I'm going to give him the gate.

MME PATIN

No. Let him come in, Lisette.

(THE CHEVALIER and CRISPIN enter)

CRISPIN

(to the Chevalier) The Baroness is getting antsy, I tell you.

CHEVALIER

Time enough for everything. There you are, my pet. I've been dying to see you.

MME PATIN

Really? Who did you tear yourself away from? Simpering Silvanetta? Boom-Boom the Butcher's Wife?

LISETTE

Don't forget Sidesaddle Cécile and Marie the Muff.

CHEVALIER

What do mean, my lady?

MME PATIN

What do I mean, devil!

CRISPIN

Oh no!

MME PATIN

Crispin knows what I mean, don't you? Come here.

CRISPIN

My lady?

MME PATIN

You heard me. Do you recognize this handwriting?

CRISPIN

My lady, I have this little errand to run for my master—It won't take but a minute.

MME PATIN

No, you have to explain yourself first.

CHEVALIER

Explain yourself yourself, my lady. What's that piece of paper?

MME PATIN

Crispin can fill you in better than I can.

CRISPIN

Master...

CHEVALIER

Speak, jackal!

CRISPIN

Master, it's a list of your mistresses...

LISETTE

With their addresses and most important parts.

CHEVALIER

A list of my mistresses?

LISETTE

With their addresses and—

CHEVALIER
Silence!

MME PATIN
Scoundrel!

CHEVALIER
Who made you pen these absurdities?

CRISPIN
I told you—it was Jeannette.

MME PATIN
Who is Jeannette?

LISETTE
Another mistress, I suppose. Jeannette the Juicy, Jeannette the Jiggly—

CRISPIN
The devil take me, but she's the flower seller at the gate of the Tuilleries.

MME PATIN
The dumpy wretch with the lazy eye?

CRISPIN
Ah, but underneath! Jeannette is one of the most enchanting creatures known to man. You have to know how she spends her time, and just how many of the most fashionable women in the city are delighted to have Jeannette working in their interests. She manages, all by herself, more intrigues than the English have the pox.

MME PATIN
What is all this gibberish?

CRISPIN
All by way of saying, your highness, that Jeannette is a good friend of my master's and that, since we like a good laugh, I'm one of her friends, and that, the other day, as I mentioned, we cobbled together this list of women who exist only in our imagination. Jeannette's and mine, that is.

MME PATIN
As witness for the defense, not bad Crispin. So, Countess Dorimène the Tittle-Tattler is a complete fiction, and this is just a harmless pastime for Crispin. Am I right, dearest?

CHEVALIER
No. I know Lady Dorimène, and perhaps each one of these women committed to paper. He has even left some of them out, but they are not my mistresses. And since the list pains you so grievously, I think it is time for Crispin to justify his actions...

CRISPIN

Me, sir?

CHEVALIER

Yes, you idiot. Take pains to tell my lady just why it is that I visit these other women.

CRISPIN

Oh, but you're such a better explainer.

CHEVALIER

No, dig yourself out or it's a hundred lashes.

CRISPIN

But what should I say?

CHEVALIER

Go on, my lady. Read.

MME PATIN

Oh Lisette. He sounds so sincere.

LISETTE

Sincerity masks the foulest toads.

CHEVALIER

Interrogate him, my lady! What is holding you back?

MME PATIN

Oh honey, you could be innocent, I just don't know.

LISETTE

(in Mme Patin) The Mushmouthed Marquess.

MME PATIN

Yes, this Mushmouthed Marquess in the Picardy Hotel? What merits has she to attract you?

CHEVALIER

Enlighten her.

CRISPIN

She's not asking me.

CHEVALIER

ANSWER her.

CRISPIN
My mind's a blank.

CHEVALIER
If you don't—

CRISPIN
The Marquess is a drooling maniac. With no teeth. You can't understand a word she says. My master visits her out of sympathy. And feeds her porridge.

(Pause)

MME PATIN
Sympathy is an admirable quality.

LISETTE
And Luscious Lucinda the court coquette—

MME PATIN
Is it for sympathy's sake that he visits her?

CRISPIN
Oh, I wouldn't say he visits her. He sort of finds her on the corner outside Rousseau's tavern when he's half-cocked. They have a rowdy time of it, believe you me.

CHEVALIER
Are you crazy?

CRISPIN
Well, she asked. *(To Patin)* Luscious means she's a lush. She really should be called Lushy Lucinda. Have you a pencil?

MME PATIN
And the Oblong Duchess? What type of arrangement does he have with her?

CRISPIN
He only sees her out of admiration.

MME PATIN
Admiration?

CRISPIN
Admiration. Forty years ago she was thirty. Today she's only thirty-two. Her secrets for aging gracefully are staggering to behold.

MME PATIN

Your lackey has a very nimble brain, sir.

CRISPIN

My lady, I relate these things to you with a clear conscience.

MME PATIN

I'd like to believe you're innocent, since you're trying so hard.

CHEVALIER

I won't have it, my lady. I shall not abuse your indulgence. If my behavior is criminal, I must be punished. Examine the length and breadth of my conduct. Appearances are against me, I admit. For two entire months, I have forbidden myself all the pleasure outings proposed to me; I have endeavored only to see you, to love you, and to tell you so. I have sworn it to you constantly; I have overcome the natural aversion that the young men of our century have for marriage. I have renounced all other society; I have broken with twenty more agreeable transactions; I have thrown the most bewitching women in France into despair. All of that is the work of a scoundrel. I am perfidious, it is true, but truer still, my lady, my pretty Patina, is the fact that it is all your fault.

MME PATIN

You are cruel, and I am helpless before you.

LISETTE

What a skunk.

(LABRIE enters)

LABRIE

Monsieur Guillemain the notary wishes to speak with you, my lady.

CHEVALIER

Send him away. I had told him to come when our hearts were still of one accord, but now our souls flee the dream of conjugal happiness.

MME PATIN

No, have him enter at once. I abandon myself to your will. If you are despicable enough to abuse me, you will be all the guiltier in the eyes of heaven. Come in sir, come in.

CHEVALIER

No, Monsieur Guillemain, I beg you to leave. This morning we drew up a marriage contract, but how was I to foresee this tragic turn of events. My lady has changed her mind. In an instant I have been tarred with the brush of slander. Because of my tiresome popularity with the fair sex, I now appear unworthy of her love.

GUILLEMIN

Your judgement is poor, my lady.

MME PATIN

Come into my study, Monsieur Guillemin. You too, Fancypants. We need to reach some agreement.

CHEVALIER

Exactly what I wish to avoid. What would you have me do with you and Monsieur in your study? What position should I take? What is there to say, really? That a young man of quality would hardly condescend to marry the widow of a financier without considerable gain in mind? That my endless, boundless, limitless, never-ending, incessant grueling passion for you would not shield me from the contempt of decent society. And that in the end, to justify myself at court, I'll have to admit that you purchased me with your fortune. I shall not have these things bruited about, my lady, that is not in my character. I would rather be dead than to have my honor sullied in that manner.

GUILLEMIN

My lady is equally aware of the way the world operates. She loves you. Cupid himself will stare down the slander.

MME PATIN

Oh, dearest one, if my entire fortune could prove the extent of my passion, I only wish I had a thousand times more to prove my love a thousand more times.

GUILLEMIN

This is what it means to love.

CHEVALIER

Very well, Monsieur Guillemin, if my lady so wishes, let's go into her study. Rewrite the contract to suit her specifications, and I shall sign it without even reading it.

GUILLEMIN

He is the picture of disinterest.

MME PATIN

You come too, darling.

CHEVALIER

Carry on without me, honeypot.

LABRIE

Your niece is at the door, my lady.

MME PATIN

Go quickly—she can't see you here. I'll get rid of her. Come back right away. Not that way, she's out there. Take the back stairs.

CHEVALIER

(to Crispin) The Baroness awaits.

(They exit. LUCILE enters)

LUCILE

Aunt Nannette, I've come to tell you—who's this?

MME PATIN

A notary come to draw up my marriage contract.

LUCILE

Can you do one for me too? *(to her aunt)* I met with my gentleman in question, and you won't believe how my proposal excited him. He was over the moon—saw no obstacle—his passion exceeded mine—he's even more impatient than I am—so I wanted to let you know.

MME PATIN

Well Lucile, I'm about to sign off with my gentleman in question. When that's finished, I'll return to compare notes.

(She exits with GUILLEMIN)

LISETTE

And I have to keep both rockets from going off. It's time for the whole thing to blow.

LUCILE

Lisette, I'm the happiest girl in the world.

LISETTE

Enjoy it while you can. Your father will find out.

LUCILE

My father always insists that I please my aunt, so he'll have nothing to say when he sees how I've done what she wants.

LISETTE

But if she marries a title, your father's hopes for your fortunes are dashed.

LUCILE

But when I marry my own courtier, with his own title, who cares a fig for my aunt's money?

LISETTE

Do you think a courtier stands any chance of being rich in this day and age? The hard-up ones are stooping to conquer, and the better-off ones are on the verge of ruin.

LUCILE

Money isn't everything, Lisette, as long as he loves me.

LISETTE

Gallants today have very fickle hearts.

LUCILE

This one is different. He writes poetry. Poetry that rhymes.

LISETTE

Poetry, huh? Excuse me...

LUCILE

Here's a poem he wrote for me right on the spot. *Impromptu*. Listen and measure the depth of his feelings for me. Actually, why don't you read it aloud?

(THE BARONESS enters unseen)

BARONESS

I love verse. I have a feel for it.

LISETTE

*The bewitching thing what I adore
Burns with the flames which on me light fire. But I feel I love her more
A thousand times—maybe higher.*

(To audience) It sounds better in French. Trust me on this.

BARONESS

That's my poem! The Chevalier wrote it for me!

LUCILE

What are you talking about? Who are you?

BARONESS

(ripping the paper out of Lisette's hands) Curiosity killed the cat, you minx. I find it the height of rudeness to read aloud something that I left here accidentally. Give me back my poem!

LUCILE

Who is this blowsy old beldame?

BARONESS

And who are you, you nasty baggage?

LUCILE

Give me back that piece of paper.

BARONESS

I give you this? You're quite the fresh piece of baggage to insist on having a poem intended for my eyes only.

LUCILE

Your eyes? You're hardly of an age to inspire poetry. That poem was written for me.

BARONESS

Who is the trull?

LISETTE

Watch your mouth, she's my mistress's niece.

BARONESS

If she were Madame Patin herself, I wouldn't find her any less insolent for stealing my poem.

LUCILE

Give me back my poem, you hag!

BARONESS

Shut your hole, guttersnipe, you're breaking my eardrums!

(MADAME PATIN enters)

MME PATIN

What gives in here?

LISETTE

Just in time to break up a fight. Here, my lady, help me pull these cats apart.

MME PATIN

What's the matter, my lady? What are you doing, Lucile?

LUCILE

Make her give me back my poem—or she's going to be sorry.

BARONESS

Whip the daylights out of your niece, or I'll do it myself.

MME PATIN

Shhh. Shhh. Calm yourself, my lady. What is the source of your disagreement?

LUCILE

I showed Lisette a poem that was written for me by my sweetheart, and this nutjob came out of nowhere and tore it out of my hands, saying it was written for her.

MME PATIN

Why get so carried away? Moderation becomes a young woman. And even if reason should give you the upper hand, why act like a fishwife about it?

BARONESS

What did you say? Reason give *her* the upper hand? She's a brazen, bold-faced liar. This poem is an epic to my charms!

MME PATIN

And even were that so, is it becoming at your age and at your station to go to these extremes? Shouldn't you blush to babble like this over some bad verse?

LUCILE

Bad verse? Bad verse? It's the finest poem in all the world. You have only to read it to feel how I inspired it.

MME PATIN

Let's see it then, my lady.

BARONESS

It shan't leave my hands. I'll recite it by heart.

The bewitching thing what I adore

Burns with the flames which on me light fire. But I feel I love her more

A thousand times—maybe even higher.

LUCILE

There you go, Aunt Nannette.

MME PATIN

So—you have the audacity to insist that this poem was written for you!

LUCILE

Am I not the bewitching thing?

BARONESS

You agree then that your niece is deluded.

MME PATIN

No. I agree that all three of us are big fat dupes. Here my lady.

BARONESS

Hold on. I gave those papers to the Chevalier yesterday.

MME PATIN

Who left them with me.

BARONESS

What an odd coincidence.

LUCILE

Well, I don't know of whom you speak, but I watched the poem being written down with my own eyes. And I'll come back with proof!

(LUCILE exits)

BARONESS

I shall hunt down the Chevalier, and when I find him, I shall remove his face.

(THE BARONESS exits)

MME PATIN

Oh Lisette. Cheating on both the Baroness and me—and perhaps that innocent child.

LISETTE

Oh, he'd cheat you all a thousand times—maybe *even higher*.

MME PATIN

I'm wretched, positively wretched. It's lucky I haven't signed the contract. Send the notary home. Then run to Serrefort to conclude my marriage with Migaud and let's hope I never hear that rotten little chiseler's name mentioned again. And if he comes here, have the porter slam the door in his face.

End Act Three

ACT FOUR

(The CHEVALIER and CRISPIN are conversing)

CRISPIN

Such violence from the doorman. Madame Patin must know something.

CHEVALIER

You don't have to be a sorcerer to figure that one out. The poem I wrote for the Baroness I gave to Madame Patin—

CRISPIN

And they've both found out.

CHEVALIER

Worse. They've been joined by a third, who was too scatterbrained to keep her poem to herself. My

heavenly brunette.

CRISPIN
Not the same poem?

CHEVALIER
Of course. I haven't ordered a new one for a couple of weeks. Who has the time?

CRISPIN
Which one spilled the beans?

CHEVALIER
The Baroness was foaming at the mouth when I found her.

CRISPIN
She's a tough old carcass.

CHEVALIER
No kidding. I practically had to use leg irons. She howled like a banshee, and I howled a hundred times louder. You have to show them who's boss. They like the rough stuff. After I took the edge off her fury—I explained my actions as best I could.

CRISPIN
Which she took like a baby, I'll bet.

CHEVALIER
Actually, she had another wild fit. I finally found no other way to bring her to heel than to adopt an indifferent air.

CRISPIN
Catnip.

CHEVALIER
Catnip. We're closer than ever.

CRISPIN
But what's going to happen when she finds out about your marriage to Madame Patin?

CHEVALIER
What would you have me fear?

CRISPIN
How do I know?

CHEVALIER
If it's only a husband she wants to console her for the loss of me, she can marry you— with your

permission.

CRISPIN

Well, as far as that department goes, I can be of as much service. Maybe more.

CHEVALIER

If my latest plan succeeds, you'll get to choose between her and Madame Patin.

CRISPIN

Have a heart—I

CHEVALIER

Oh, Crispin... (*he sighs*)

CRISPIN

Ye-es.

CHEVALIER

I think I'm in love, Crispin. I who could never love.

CRISPIN

In love? Who with?

CHEVALIER

Guess.

CRISPIN

Your spicy little brunette.

CHEVALIER

My *heavenly* little brunette.

CRISPIN

When did she lose her spice? What are we doing here at Madame Patin's then?

CHEVALIER

I have to wrestle her just like the Baroness, so that both wind up doing me a big favor.

CRISPIN

Only say the word and they shall be fleeced.

CHEVALIER

My brunette is an heiress, but of low birth.

CRISPIN

That's not a problem.

CHEVALIER

Indeed, how delightful to raise her up. Her family will be only too happy—and generous--to sign her over to me.

CRISPIN

But how are Madame Patin and the Baroness going to help you out?

CHEVALIER

You didn't see it straight off?

CRISPIN

No.

CHEVALIER

To make a good showing with her family, I need money, so those two old shipwrecks are going to set me up—each one to spite the other—which will then facilitate the conquest of my brunette.

CRISPIN

God, you're good! *(they start laughing)*

CHEVALIER

Never was there such a man as I.

CRISPIN

I hear Madame Patin—on your marks.

CHEVALIER

Look sharp.

(Mme PATIN enters with LISETTE)

MME PATIN

Ah Monsieur, in good humor as ever, but I can't imagine what you could have in mind to make you split your sides.

CHEVALIER

I beg your pardon, my lady, but I'm just brimming over. Do you remember that poem I gave to you a little while ago?

MME PATIN

What's so funny about it?

CHEVALIER

The funny thing, my lady, is that four or five silly women have imagined themselves the recipients of my poem. Since you yourself were so kind as to praise it, I flattered myself

that it wasn't bad. So, I couldn't keep myself from telling that to people. I must ask your pardon for that, my lady; ego is a weakness in people of quality. Anyway, someone took the poem, made copies of it, and in less than two hours, it had been turned into a popular song.

LISETTE

(aside) God, he's good.

MME PATIN

(to Lisette) He's unbelievable. *(To the Chevalier)* And are you pleased sir to hear how popular your verses have become? Are you enjoying your celebrity?

CHEVALIER

Aren't you yourself delighted? As it was written for you, the honor is yours, not mine.

MME PATIN

You lying handcart of road apple!

CHEVALIER

I'll pretend I didn't hear that. Our friend the Baroness did her own little part in putting you in fashion. Oh, but she's a difficult relation; my hopes of inheritance are dwindling.

LISETTE

(to Madame Patin) Slyboots. The Baroness is related to him, and I'm the Prince of Denmark.

MME PATIN

Let's hear him out.

CHEVALIER

You can't imagine where the fantasies of this old woman lead, and the scandal she's making trying to get my designs to match hers.

CRISPIN

(aside) Literally worth his weight in gold.

CHEVALIER

I stopped by to ask her about a sum she had lent me, which I intended to return—so as to break with her forever, my lady. Simply to make conversation, I recited your poem: she found much to admire in it. She had me repeat it several times, and then to my astonishment, the old reptile had learned it by heart. She flew out of the house and went from neighbor to neighbor, to all her friends in fact, parading the poem in high society and claiming that I wrote it for her.

MME PATIN

Suppose he's telling the truth, Lisette?

LISETTE

What a goose you are. That may cover the Baroness, but what about your niece?

CHEVALIER

It only gets better, my lady. I went to the Tuilleries, where I met up with five or six gallant wits. They're as common as tulips there.

MME PATIN

And then?

CHEVALIER

Well, they told me that the Marquis of Guerets had given the poem to a young milliner, that the Abbot of Cluny had sent it to his favorite candle snuffer, that the Duke of Burgundy had honored his mistress with it, and that two of these poor silly women had, unfortunately for them, met up with the Baroness, where a most entertaining scene took place.

MME PATIN

Your gallants are spiteful wasters to joke about something like this.

CHEVALIER

But imagine the absurdity of these three women about to have a catfight over a silly madrigal. The righteousness of those two ninnies and the folly of our very own Baroness— doesn't make you sick with laughter? Put yourself in their shoes.

MME PATIN

(to Lisette) I'm going to burst.

LISETTE

(to Mme Patin) Pull yourself together, my lady and give him the what-for!

CHEVALIER

You're not laughing, my Patina.

CRISPIN

You're not laughing, Lisette.

CHEVALIER

It is clear to me that it upsets you to have a poem written for you fall into the hands of the world. I am indiscreet to have made it public; on my honor, I beg a thousand pardons for this fatal lack of judgement. And I swear to you that the song I composed for these unhappy verses, my own version of the poem, will not suffer the same fate. You shall be the only one to hear it.

MME PATIN

You've made up a tune for it?

CHEVALIER

Another one of my little gifts. I entreat you to hear it. It is chock-full of the tenderness my heart feels only for you.

CRISPIN

(aside) Music soothes the savage beast.

CHEVALIER

(he sings his poem, repeating certain phrases) *The bewitching thing what I adore, Burns with the flames which on me light fire.* Did you notice the charm of this little passage? *(sings)* *But I feel I love her more.* Can you feel the love in this part? *(sings)* *A thousand times more.* You must admit that that is a very passionate thing. *(sings)* *Maybe even higher.* You say nothing. Your insensitivity to my chromatics tell me that you love me no more.

MME PATIN

Oh, you cruel cruel man, to what pain you have exposed me.

CHEVALIER

How do you mean?

MME PATIN

I was one of the women in that little scene you found so droll.

CHEVALIER

You?

MME PATIN.

The scene took place in this very room.

CHEVALIER

Oh, I shall die of this. Kill me now. To deal the fatal blow, you have only to tell me that you hate me as much as I deserve. Do it; I command you, darling; give me the supreme pleasure of convincing you of my love; let me expire at your feet for having compromised you so.

MME PATIN

Get up. Get up! O you cruel cruel man. Did you know that there is very little keeping me from becoming the wife of Monsieur Migaud?

CHEVALIER

Migaud? Migaud the lawyer? You married to a lawyer? I shall go tear his robe and wig in front of the very arms of justice, it shall be a bloody occasion—

MME PATIN

No no, my chevalier, leave him in peace; tis sorrow enough for him to lose me.

CHEVALIER

We have made a great escape, have we not?

MME PATIN

I suppose you could have consoled yourself in the arms of the Baroness.

CHEVALIER

Fie! Speak not to me of that woman. I have been focusing solely—and I swear this to you—upon returning her thousand pistoles. I have to repay her immediately. On my life, when that is done, I shall be free.

MME PATIN

Is that all? I've got the money in my office.

(LABRIE enters)

LABRIE

Monsieur Serrefort is coming.

MME PATIN

Heavens! What are we to do? Go wait with the notary—leave Crispin with me so I can let you know when I'll be alone again.

CHEVALIER

Crispin, remain and wait upon my mistress's pleasure.

CRISPIN

Will she give me the thousand pistoles?

CHEVALIER

Shut up, you boob.

MME PATIN

Take the back stairs. You remember.

CHEVALIER

Adieu, my pet.

(The CHEVALIER exits)

MME PATIN

(to Crispin) Stay right here. And keep quiet.

(SERREFORT enters)

SERREFORT

I was told you stopped by my office and wanted to speak with me.

MME PATIN

But I didn't leave word to call on me here.

SERREFORT

No matter. I'm only too happy to chase you down. Besides which, I have something of my own to communicate as regards this morning's embarrassment.

MME PATIN

This morning's embarrassment? Didn't you promise to keep your nose out of it?

SERREFORT

I had, except that I was informed of your altercation with the Countess.

MME PATIN

Yes, and that tacky mess has made me no amends.

SERREFORT

It's up to *you* to make amends--without delay.

MME PATIN

I? I, the aggrieved party? You haven't a clue to proper protocol. Tradesman. Accountant. Petty Bourgeois.

SERREFORT

(removing a paper from his pocket) I've taken care to draw up these articles of compromise for you.

MME PATIN

Articles of compromised? Who made you my agent anyway? Did you hear that, Lisette? Articles of compromise! Go on—let's hear 'em.

SERREFORT

Firstly, you are to present yourself at the Countess's lodgings, modestly attired.

MME PATIN

Modestly?

SERREFORT

Yes, modestly. In a dress, to be sure, but with a shorter train than that to which you are accustomed.

MME PARTIN

I wouldn't trim two inches of my train for all the countesses in the world.

SERREFORT

Having arrived at the Countess's lodgings, you are to ask for her through the lackey standing guard.

MME PATIN

A lackey standing guard? Who does she think she is?

SERREFORT

While the aforementioned lackey goes to alert his mistress that you are in the antechamber, you are to remain standing-and silent—until it pleases the Countess to have you enter.

(swift pause)

MME PATIN

This means war!

SERREFORT

There is no other way to repair your blunder.

MME PATIN

Here is my reply to the Countess. *(She makes a vulgar gesture)*

SERREFORT

Your manners conform in every point to what I, and all of decent society, have heard of them.

MME PATIN

You have spies who examine my conduct?

SERREFORT

Who needs spies? You're a laughingstock, a target of ridicule, and I won't have it said that you led my daughter into the same state of lunacy with some sort of marquess, who for all I know is as penniless as your gigolo chevalier, and that her father accepted it all without retaliation.

MME PATIN

Are you suggesting that I'm a lunatic? I defy you, you miserable bean counter!

SERREFORT

I will come back day and night; I will lay siege to your house and mine, and if anyone gets in, I will hurl them out the windows, so that the rooms don't stink of eau de marquis or chevalier.

MME PATIN

Start walking before I push you down the stairs. That's right—one flat foot in front of the other and don't look back.

SERREFORT

Adieu, Madame Patin.

MME PATIN

Adieu, Monsieur Serrefort.

SERREFORT

You shall have news from me, Madame Patin.

MME PATIN

I shan't care to receive it, Monsieur Serrefort.

SERREFORT

Adieu, Madame Patin.

MME PATIN

Adieu, Monsieur Serrefort.

(SERREFORT exits)

MME PATIN

Did you ever see anything so bizarre? Tooth and nail that man works to persecute me, Lisette. What did I ever do to him? Crispin!

(CRISPIN enters)

CRISPIN

My lady?

MME PATIN

Run tell your master that I won't be able to see him until ten o'clock, but that he shouldn't fail to meet me on the dot.

CRISPIN

Is there anything else you'd like me to tell him, my lady?

MME PATIN

No, hurry. I don't like to keep him waiting.

CRISPIN

It seems to me, my lady, that the sooner those one thousand pistoles are returned to the Baroness, the better.

MME PATIN

I'll have them all ready for him at 10 o'clock.

CRISPIN

I could always take them to him now, if you like.

MME PATIN

Tell him he shan't leave my thoughts until I see him again.

CRISPIN

And so I shall, my lady.

(LISETTE and MME PATIN exit)

CRISPIN

Well, with no cash to carry, I don't exactly have to hop like a bunny. Now where are we? Here is Monsieur le Chevalier de Villefontaine about to score 1000 pistoles off Madame Patin and just as much from the old Baroness—no harm done there. But all in the service of making off with a young girl—now, that's a little shady. The long arm of the law is sure to reach into this business, and someone will have to hang for it. The boss will slip out of the plot—like a greased weasel—so you can bet that yours truly will take the rap and swing. *(Pause)* It's not looking too good for me. Maybe it's time I pulled out. On the other hand, who knows, maybe some great stroke of fortune will knock from another direction, one I wasn't expecting. If the Baroness wants a husband, I could steam her sheets as well as any other man, and she could always marry me out of spite. Stranger things have happened. I wouldn't be the first footman who pulled the rug out from under his master's feet. He'll surely blow when he finds out I didn't get the 1000 pistoles. Off we go—then I'll see what it is I have to do.

End Act Four

ACT FIVE

(LISETTE and SERREFORT are in conversation)

SERREFORT

Don't worry, Lisette. Madame Patin will never know of your part in this.

LISETTE

I thought she was joking at first, but when I saw she was serious...

SERREFORT

You were right to come to me. You're saving her a lot of distress.

LISETTE

What a surprise for them to find you at their wedding.

SERREFORT

Without an invitation.

LISETTE

You aren't the only obstacle I've thrown in their path. There's a Baroness with a lawsuit—

SERREFORT

Not the one with the windmills?

LISETTE

The same. She's also in love with your sister-in-law's Chevalier. One of my cronies is her solicitor, and I've kept him up to date, so I can guarantee she'll be there with bells on.

SERREFORT

What a find you are.

LISETTE

Now go hide in my chamber until they come back with the notary.

SERREFORT

That poor deluded fool.

LISETTE

Save your pity for now. She's been working hard to bring you down. She expects your daughter to follow her example.

SERREFORT

I'll straighten Lucile out. Madame Patin is a plague upon a good bourgeois family.

LISETTE

I think I hear her now. Here's the key to my room, don't fall asleep. (*SERREFORT exits*)

(*MME PATIN enters*)

MME PATIN

Now where is he? Any word?

LISETTE

You told him to come at ten.

MME PATIN

I don't know why I'm so nervous.

LISETTE

It's only nine.

MME PATIN

Serrefort is to blame. Without that animal butting in, the Chevalier would already be here. And he wouldn't have had the time to cheat on me again

LISETTE

It'll be hard to get used to a man like that, my lady. You'll have to keep him under lock and

key.

MME PATIN

I won't worry so much after we're married. Until then, he is safe from no woman. Any news from my niece?

LISETTE

No, my lady.

MME PATIN

I wish she'd get here with her gallant. I'd love a double wedding. I can't decide what makes me happier--marrying the Chevalier or ruining Serrefort. But who's this? The Baroness at this hour? Good God, will I never be rid of her?

(The BARONESS enters)

LISETTE

(aside) Already?

BARONESS

All alone, my dear? Where's Monsieur le Chevalier?

MME PATIN

Monsieur le Chevalier doesn't live here, if that's who you're looking for.

BARONESS

I have some business with you.

MME PATIN

This is hardly the hour for solicitations.

BARONESS

This is not about my windmill. *(to Lisette)* Run along, child, go outside and see whether I have been followed.

MME PATIN

What do you mean? Lisette, stay here with me.

BARONESS

Coward! What are you afraid of?

(The Baroness draws two swords)

MME PATIN

My lady, have you come to assassinate me?

LISETTE

This isn't funny, your grace.

BARONESS

Leave us, girl—or I'll slice off your ears. As for you, madame, choose your weapon.

MME PATIN

Draw a sword? Why?

BARONESS

To kill me, if you can.

MME PATIN

I don't want to kill anyone.

BARONESS

But I want to kill you.

MME PATIN

What on earth have I done to merit your bloodlust?

BARONESS

(brandishing her sword) What have you done? What have you done?

MME PATIN

Lisette, keep her away from me.

LISETTE

I'll try.

BARONESS

You have stolen the Chevalier from me, he belongs to me as much as the mill of my ancestors. *En garde!*

MME PATIN

Do you mean it's the Chevalier de Villefontaine who has curdled your brains?

BARONESS

Surrender him or die!

LISETTE

Watch out, she's mighty sturdy.

BARONESS

If you renounce your claims upon him, I may spare your life.

MME PATIN

Lisette! How do we get her out of here? She's insane!

BARONESS

Enough shilly-shally! *En garde!*

MME PATIN

I'm dying! Help! Assassin! Help!

LISETTE

(to Baroness) You can't be serious, my lady.

BARONESS

Low thing!

LISETTE

Hand me that sword.

BARONESS

Gross soul!

MME PATIN

Jasmin! Labrie! Lafleur! Lajonquille! Lapensee! Help!

LISETTE

(to Baroness) Why brawl, my lady, lay down the sword.

(LABRIE enters)

LABRIE

What's happening?

MME PATIN

Oh my dear dear children, please push this woman down the stairs.

BARONESS

The first one to touch me gets two blades in the chest.

(Labrie and Lisette manage to subdue the Baroness)

MME PATIN

I'll let you go now, quietly. Take the staircase.

BARONESS

Ignorant commoner. You don't even have the class to test your strength with a Baroness!

MME PATIN

Generations of inbreeding have made you lose your marbles!

LISETTE

Shhhh. No more noise, my lady. That's right. Shhhh.

BARONESS

She wants to be a woman of quality, and yet she refuses to duel. When the Chevalier finds out about this, he'll change his mind. And if he doesn't, I'll hack him to bits.

(The BARONESS exits)

LISETTE

Did you hear that?

MME PATIN

Let her go. Better to have her wandering the streets than lying in wait for him here.

LISETTE

But the woman could stalk you for the rest of her days.

MME PATIN

The Chevalier will protect me. I think she might have really hurt us.

LISETTE

There's nothing more dangerous than an old woman in heat.

(LUCILE enters)

LUCILE

Oh, Aunt Nannette, I've just had a terrible fright.

MME PATIN

(to Lisette) She ran into the Baroness.

LUCILE

I seek asylum from the tyrannical injustice of my father.

MME PATIN

What has he done?

LUCILE

My misery knows no bounds. Oh, to be the daughter of such a man.

MME PATIN

Tell Auntie everything.

LUCILE

You can't guess? He found my beloved at our house. Marton, my mother's chambermaid let him come by way of the garden gate.

MME PATIN

Gracious. What did your father do?

LUCILE

He slapped me twice on the face and treated my gallant most uncivilly.

MME PATIN

Did he hit him too?

LUCILE

He didn't dare! But to slap me in front of my fiancé—how humiliating.

MME PATIN

The brute.

LUCILE

I have vowed revenge. I need some advice.

MME PATIN

More?

LUCILE

My beloved thinks the best thing to do is to kidnap me. What do you think?

MME PATIN

What do I think? I must be done. Where is he right now?

LUCILE

He has gone off to take 2000 pistoles to his steward, and he's going to meet me in his carriage on the Place Victoire. Marton is waiting for him there and will let me know when he shows up.

MME PATIN

Here's what you have to do. As soon as he turns up at the appointed place, have him come here—I'm dying to meet him—I'll hitch a team to my carriage and you can flee to a country inn where no one will find you.

LUCILE

Oh thank you, Aunt Nannette! Now I just need to send somebody to Marton to bring him here.

MME PATIN

Send somebody, Lisette.

LISETTE

Yes, my lady. (*aside*) I'll send somebody to Monsieur Migaud instead. Why should he miss out on all the fun?

LUCILE

Kidnapped! How thrilling! My dear sweet aunt, I could have never done this without you.

MME PATIN

Follow my counsel and you need never fear reproach.

(*The CHEVALIER and CRISPIN enter*)

CHEVALIER

As soon as I get her thousand, we'll skedaddle.

LUCILE

Oh pumpkin! Somebody already told you I was here!

CHEVALIER

Another hitch, Crispin. It's my brunette.

CRISPIN

Here? The brunette?

LUCILE

This is my Aunt Nannette, about whom I've told you so much.

CHEVALIER

Her aunt?

CRISPIN

Aie! Aie! Aie!

CHEVALIER

Mademoiselle, what an honor it is—

MME PATIN

Niece, who is this?

LUCILE

This is my kidnapper.

CHEVALIER

Yes, my lady, I have bid your niece to—

MME PATIN

Then it is true. It is true that you are the greatest scoundrel in the kingdom.

LUCILE

What are you saying, Aunt Nannette? You told me to tell him to come here and then you insult him when he does?

MME PATIN

Oh, my poor niece, what an adventure.

CHEVALIER

Crispin.

CRISPIN

Very tricky.

LUCILE

What's going on, Aunt Nannette?

MME PATIN

You miserable cheating double-crossing three-timing fortune-hunting rogue.

LUCILE

But Aunt Nannette!

CRISPIN

Let us depart.

MME PATIN

To see you constantly clear all hurdles to marry me, and on the very same day, propose to kidnap my niece!

LUCILE

What?

MME PATIN

Yes, my child, he was to be your new uncle.

LUCILE

You...you...you...jerk!

CRISPIN

I said, let's get out of here.

CHEVALIER

Silence.

LUCILE

What have I ever done to you, sir, that you should use me so cruelly?

MME PATIN

Why should you choose either one of us as the object of your treacheries?

LUCILE

Answer me!

MME PATIN

Speak!

CHEVALIER

My ladies, what can I say? No court of law could ever persuade you that what you see is not what it appears, but am I as guilty as you suppose? Is it my fault that all three of us should meet here?

MME PATIN

And still you jest!

CHEVALIER

I do not. I shall speak with the utmost gravity. Could I have guessed that you were the young lady's aunt, and that the young lady was your niece?

CRISPIN

If we had, we'd have taken other precautions.

CHEVALIER

If you were not known to one another, you would never have confided in one another, and we would presently have been spared this vexing revelation.

LUCILE

And if that were the case, you would be less guilty? And we would be less wronged? And you would be able to wash your hands of such a nasty business?

CHEVALIER

Put yourself in my place and see whether I have committed any wrongs. I have a title, ambition, and no money. A beautiful, alluring widow, who loves me tenderly, holds out her arms to me. Shall I behave like the hero of a novel and refuse the 40,000 pounds a year that she's thrown at my feet?

MME PATIN

Why then, villain, if you find with me all those advantages, why do you fall in love with my niece?

CHEVALIER

As for that, one had only to look upon her. The sight of Lucile will tell you more than I can ever say.

CRISPIN

I've got a funny feeling he'll wiggle out of this.

CHEVALIER

Into my path strays a young ravishing creature. I cannot be indifferent to such beauty. How could one be so insensitive, Madame? There isn't a heart in the world that could resist so many charms.

MME PATIN

All your simpering glances have stolen the chevalier's heart from me, you coquette. I will never forgive you.

LUCILE

That's right. He would love only me if it weren't for your 40,000 a year. It is I who shall never forgive you.

CHEVALIER

Oh, my dears, don't get yourselves so worked up. If it is true that you both loved me as much as it flatters me to believe, let the one who loves me more convince me of it by making the supreme sacrifice of yielding me to the other. I can guarantee you that the one who doesn't get me, won't be the unhappier.

MME PATIN

I am passionately in love with you, ingrate, but I'd rather see my niece dead than with you.

LUCILE

I challenge the rest of the world put together to love you as much as I love you; but to see you wedded to my aunt would be unendurable.

CHEVALIER

Then we've come to a crisis.

LUCILE

I hear my father's tread.

MME PATIN

You had better hide, you—you—

(SERREFORT enters)

SERREFORT

No need for concealment, sir. Ah, dearest sister, is this the dashing Chevalier you intend to marry?

MME PATIN

Yes, the same Chevalier that your daughter has been disgracefully chasing all around the Tuilleries, and who, without my designs, would be your very own son-in-law right about now.

CHEVALIER

A pleasure to see you again, sir.

SERREFORT

Marry my sister and my daughter all in the same day. You have a passion for persecuting me.

CHEVALIER

Au contraire, sir. As mark of my esteem for you, I shall instantly marry whichever one of these two women you like less.

SERREFORT

S

Well, you don't have to go that far.

(MIGAUD enters)

MIGAUD

One of your servants rushed to tell me you wanted something from me.

MME PATIN

Here is my hand, sir; as of tomorrow, I will marry you, but only on the proviso that your son Horace marries my niece at the same time.

MIGAUD

Well, the proviso delights me.

SERREFORT

I don't think my daughter will have the audacity to defy me any further.

LUCILE

My despair yokes me to your will, father.

MME PATIN

You'll never get my niece.

LUCILE

You'll never get my aunt.

CHEVALIER

Farewell sweet sisters, until we meet again. Think of me on your honeymoons. My only regret is the loss of your thousand pistoles. What to do? What to do?

(A racket by the door. The BARONESS enters, sword drawn.)

CHEVALIER

Cupcake!

END OF PLAY

***The Methuen Drama Book of Contemporary Uruguayan Plays*, ed. Sophie Stevens and William Gregory. Trans. Stephen Brown, William Gregory, Catherine Boyle, Rachel Toogood, Kate Eaton, and Sophie Stevens. Methuen Drama Play Collections, London: Methuen Drama, 2025.**

Reviewed by Sarah M. Misemer, Texas A&M University

This latest translation project by Sophie Stevens and William Gregory features six outstanding plays from a collection of seasoned and emerging playwrights working in Uruguay's capital as well as its provinces. The curated collection of works in translation includes *Ana versus Death* (Gabriel Calderón, trans. Stephen Brown), *They All Sleep at Siesta Time* (Léonor Courtoisie, trans. William Gregory), *Basic Principles for the Construction of Bridges* (Jimena Márquez, trans. Catherine Boyle), *Prelude to Anne* (Sandra Massera, trans. Rachel Toogood), *I Will Give You Verses, Not Children* (Marianella Morena, trans. Kate Eaton), and *Emotional Terror* (Josefina Trias, trans. Sophie Stevens). The editors and translators are all associated with the UK-based Out of the Wings collective that researches, translates, and stages Ibero-American theater for English-speaking audiences. Uruguayan theater has often gotten short shrift when compared to the attention its neighbor Argentina receives, but as many of us know, and as the contributors to this volume clearly make evident, that is a very unfortunate oversight. In fact, Stevens specifically traces important historical roots for River Plate theater's origins to figures situated in Uruguay such as the celebrated River Plate playwright Florencio Sánchez (1875-1910), who wrote about Uruguay and issues that resonated with local Uruguayan audiences, as well as famous Spanish exile, actress Margarita Xirgu, who established Uruguay's drama school, now known as the Escuela Multidisciplinaria de Arte Dramático Margarita Xirgu (EMAD). As Stevens points out with these examples and others, there is a deep-seated tradition of high quality dramaturgy that sustains current generations. Stevens also points to a growing interest in Uruguayan theater evidenced in productions like Daniel Goldman's translations and direction of Sergio Blanco's work that has been staged primarily at the Arcola theater in London over a number of years (2016-2024). I would also add that Goldman's recent translation and blockbuster staging of Blanco's *Tebas Land/Thebes Land* in London in 2022 was especially important in piquing world-wide interest in Uruguayan theater with international attention.

This anthology is meant to be accessible for even novice theater lovers, but it also appeals to practitioners and academics. The collection begins with a foreword by Adam Versényi, an introduction by Stevens, as well as a "further reading" section that lists historical, cultural, and theater-specific texts on Uruguay. Versényi's foreword highlights universal themes that connect the plays (death, cultural memory, intimate stories/communal experiences), the use of iconic figures such as Delmira Agustini, Mario Benedetti, and Anne Frank, as well as brief overviews of the plays and techniques for staging. Stevens' introduction is organized around the following questions: Why this Anthology?, What is Uruguayan Theatre?, What Were the Criteria for Selecting these Plays?, and it ends with a summary of each play titled "The Plays". The translated plays follow; each play is introduced by a short description of when/where the play has been staged along with information about the cast and director, as well as publication information and awards, followed by an "About the author and translator" section that includes professional biographies for each. The details included for each play are an invaluable resource for experts and non-experts alike. For some of the plays, there is a Brief Glossary section after

the play that includes explanations about music and song titles, places, and other culturally-specific references that those unfamiliar with the region and culture might not understand (*They All Sleep at Siesta Time*) or a list of texts that were cited in the play (*Basic Principles for the Construction of Bridges*). The historical overview in the section of the introduction titled “What is Uruguayan Theater?” gives only the briefest timeline of key moments in theatrical development including mention of the independent theater tradition as well as the government-sponsored Comedia Nacional and important cultural moments such as the civic-military dictatorship 1973-1985 and the economic crisis of 2002, and I would have liked to have seen this section expanded a bit more despite the further reading that is encouraged. It is, nonetheless, a helpful starting point for non-experts. The section devoted to explaining the criteria used for selecting the plays makes connections among the playwrights and their subject matter in compelling ways, and here Stevens provides important context for the real-life iconic figures featured in some of the plays (Agustini, Benedetti, and Frank) and their historico-cultural milieux, she highlights innovative forms of staging, and she explains the intricacies of translation and the processes that were used.

The plays that were chosen are excellent and could easily be used for a unit on Uruguayan theater for an undergraduate or graduate class. They are also entertaining reading for theater aficionados. For those working in applied theater, the plays can all be easily staged with compact casts and modest economic investment. Calderón’s *Ana Versus Death* revolves around a mother’s desperation to save her son who is dying from cancer and it exploits the limits that she will go to help her son when she no longer has monetary resources. The play forces audiences to confront issues such as justice, forgiveness, righteous anger, and collective/individual responsibility. Courtoisie’s *They All Sleep at Siesta Time* is a complex examination of inhumanity, inequality, and questions of status, sex, and gender that limit and determine the choices three village girls can make. These parameters lead them to rebel against those limitations. The play’s simple language, juxtapositions, and absurdist elements belie a profound look at rural life and the search for beauty and freedom. *Basic Principles for the Construction of Bridges* explores generational gaps that come to a head as actors prepare to honor Uruguayan writer and member of the famed Generation of ‘45, Mario Benedetti, on the centennial anniversary of his birth. They grapple with nostalgia for a Montevideo that did not belong to them, and their own stories and unresolved issues intersect with the effort to inventory and portray another’s life on stage. *Prelude to Anne* is a metatextual play about theater and playwriting with the dead Anne Frank returning to give advice to the playwright Elena about how she should be depicted in the play. The work examines death and the afterlife, historical parallels between crimes committed in Nazi Germany and in the civic-military dictatorship in Uruguay, and the complexities involved in staging the life of a real figure and the grappling with the legacy of re-presenting and embodying H/history on the stage. In *I Will Give You Verses, Not Children* is based on the centennial death of Uruguay’s celebrated poet Delmira Agustini’s death at the hands of her ex-husband. The work explores the societal constraints that Agustini faced in her time as well as those that haunt the reconstruction of her story as a commemorative act, and the violence surrounding both. The last work included in the collection *Emotional Terror* is an intimate look into a young woman’s emotional life after a break up with her partner, her relationship with her own body and mind, and how she tries to move on over the course of a year as she writes a monologue about her experience titled *Emotional Terror*. These plays capture the variety and breadth of talented dramatists working in contemporary Uruguayan theater today.

Sarah M. Misemer is a professor and serves as head of the department of Global Languages and Cultures in the College of Arts & Sciences at Texas A&M University (TAMU). She most recently served as senior associate dean for faculty affairs in the College of Performance, Visualization & Fine Arts (TAMU). She is the author of three monographs [*Secular Saints: Performing Frida Kahlo, Carlos Gardel, Eva Perón, and Selena*, (Tamesis, 2008), *Moving Forward, Looking Back: Trains, Literature, and the Arts in the River Plate* (Bucknell UP, 2010), *Theatrical Topographies: Spatial Crises in Uruguayan Theater Post-2001* (Bucknell UP, 2017)] and co-editor of *The Trial That Never Ends: Hannah Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem in Retrospect* (Toronto UP, 2017). Professor Misemer has published numerous articles on contemporary River Plate, Mexican, Spanish, and Latino theater and performance, and she recently served as an invited guest editor for *South Central Review* and authored a chapter on Uruguay's iconic Teatro Galpón for *Fifty Key Latin American and Latinx Artists* volume co-edited by Paola S. Hernández and Analola Santana (Routledge 2022). She is the editor for the *Latin American Theatre Review Book Series*, as well as a contributing editor as a Southern Cone expert for the *Handbook of Latin American Studies, Hispanic Division*, which is published every other year by the Library of Congress. Professor Misemer is also a member of editorial and advisory boards for peer-reviewed journals such as *Latin American Theatre Review* (University of Kansas Press) and *South Central Review* (Johns Hopkins University Press).