The Mercurian

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A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 8, Number 4 (Fall 2021)

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

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

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Welcome to the Fall 2021 issue of *The Mercurian*! While vaccination and other medical, social, and political responses to the global pandemic have enabled some parts of the world to emerge from lockdowns and return to live performances, there remains great disparity in vaccination rates between and within countries making travel and many forms of cultural exchange difficult, if not impossible. In such a context theatrical translation can give us a sense of varied theatrical cultures and I hope that the five plays and one book review in this issue provide a means of exploring different traditions in parts of the world distinct from your own.

The issue begins with Amanda T. Perry's translation of Cuban playwright Antón Arrufat's play *Seven Against Thebes*. As Perry describes in her introduction, while the play won the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) Theatre Prize in 1968, it became the subject of heated controversy when two jurors voted against it on political grounds and UNEAC published the play with a preface condemning its contents. Arrufat was effectively banned from publishing throughout the next decade in Cuba. He published prose and poetry in the 1980s and 1990s, but largely abandon the theatre. In 2000 he won Cuba's National Prize for Literature. In 2001 *Seven Against Thebes* was republished and subsequently staged in a revised form in 2007. Perry's translation is of the 1968 version and is contextualized for us here by additional material including translations of the UNEAC preface and Leopoldo Ávila's article, "Antón Goes to War."

Next comes Jozefina Komporaly's translation of a stage adaptation of Romanian playwright Matéi Visniec's *Decomposed Theatre*. Going into self-imposed exile in France in 1987, where he works as a journalist for Radio France Internationale, Visniec moved from writing his plays in Romanian to writing in French. Komporaly has based her translation on a French and Romanian version of the play produced in 1993, as well as relying heavily on Visniec's subsequent Romanian version of the play. Visniec calls *Decomposed Theatre* a "modular text" and encourages theatre companies to perform its collection of independent scenes in a wide variety of permutations. The version published here was performed by Trap Door Theatre via Zoom in eight episodes between December 2020 and February 2021. Readers will thus encounter a play not only translated from two different languages with an endlessly flexible structure, but also one specifically conceived of for virtual performance. Each of these aspects of *Decomposed Theatre* presents its own translation challenges.

Decomposed Theatre is followed by Sharon G. Feldman's translation of Catalan playwright Gemma Brió Zamora's play *Liberto*. A well-known stage and television actor in both Catalan and Spanish, this is Brió Zamora's first play and is based upon her own personal experience of loss and struggling with the ethics of euthanasia. Loss, grief, and resilience have been so much a part of all our lives in the past year and a half, and I hope that Brió Zamora's play, with its formal mixture of monologues, dialogues, and video sequences, helps assuage some of the pain we have encountered.

Next comes Fatemeh Madani Sarbarani's translation of Iranian playwright Hossein Kiani's play *Tomb Dwellers* from 2009. The play was first staged after the hotly contested presidential election that brought Mahmoud Admadineajad into power for a second term. As Sarbarani describes in her introduction, mounting a production of the play involved creative manipulation of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's censorship. As a result, the play's sharp critique of Iranian authority becomes oblique and allegorical, yet fully comprehensible to its intended audience. Readers can judge for themselves how much of this approach translates for them.

The last translation in this issue is David McKay's translation of Belgian playwright Freek Marién's play *The*

Wetsuitman that premiered in Dutch in Antwerp, Belgium in 2019. A fictionalized rendition of true stories and historical events, *The Wetsuitman* was inspired by a newspaper article about two refugees who tried to swim from Calais to England, only to be washed ashore in Norway and the Netherlands. Along with several of the other translations in this issue, Marién's play breaks formal structural conventions, merging characters and timelines and can be performed by anywhere from three to twenty-eight performers. McKay's translation of *The Wetsuitman* is slated for two productions in 2022, one at London's Foreign Affairs and the other at the Cherry Arts in Ithaca, NY where Samuel Buggeln, whose translations of Rafael Sprelgelburd, Marivaux, and Molière's plays have appeared in previous issues of *The Mercurian*, is Artistic Director.

The issue ends with Adele Lee's review of Alexa Alice Joubin's book *Shakespeare in East Asia*. Joubin's book analyzes a number of East Asian stage and film adaptations of Shakespeare. *The Mercurian* has always taken a "big tent" approach to covering theatrical translation, and Joubin's book offers those who wish to approach Shakespeare through a non-Anglophone lens a window into East Asian performances of Shakespeare in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 9, No. 1 Spring 2022 will be February 1, 2022.

—Adam Versényi

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Tribute to Marion Peter Holt (1924-2021)
Remembering a Great Translator, Scholar Colleague, Mentor, and Friend

Dear Friends,

Long-time *Mercurian* contributor Phyllis Zatlin has sent us her moving tribute to the prominent translator of Spanish and Catalan theatre Marion Peter Holt. I first learned of Marion's work while in graduate school at the Yale School of Drama. I was the production dramaturg for a production of Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* at the Yale Rep directed by Travis Preston, now Dean of the CalArts School of Theater. Travis had directed Marion's beautiful translation of Antonio Buero Vallejo's *The Sleep of Reason* at Center Stage in Baltimore and described his joy of meeting and working with Marion. Subsequently, Marion became one of the advisers on my D.F.A. dissertation. I fondly remember visiting him in his apartment in the 70s in Manhattan where, frequently over lunch, he would critique my pages with consummate grace and generosity. The last time I was in touch with Marion he talked about his increasing frailty and the fact that he could no longer attend the theatre. In the next breath he excitedly described a new translation of a Catalan play he was working on that he thought would be a good fit for PlayMakers Repertory Company where I am Senior Dramaturg. That was Marion, always thinking of others and constantly promoting the Catalan and Spanish theatre that he so loved. While we were not frequently in touch, he was a mentor and friend. He will be missed, as can be seen in the tribute from Phyllis and others below.

—Adam Versényi

Photo by Maria Delgado, 2018

Marion Peter Holt (1925-2021) gained national prominence as a scholar of contemporary Spanish plays with the publication in 1975 of *The Contemporary Spanish Theater (1949-1972)* in the Twayne World Author's Series. In 1980 his TWAS book on José López Rubio appeared. By 1984 he became a member of the editorial board of *Estreno* and continued to serve in that capacity for more than 30 years, not only with founding editor Patricia O'Connor but also with three subsequent editors: Martha Halsey (1932-2020), Sandra Harper, and Lourdes Bueno. By the time Lourdes published the 40th anniversary issue of *Estreno* in 2015, only Martha and Marion remained from early board members.

Marion also served as a contributing editor for *Western European Stages* for more than 20 years and was a lifetime member of the Dramatists Guild. As evidence of his international stature, he was named a Corresponding Member of the Real Academia Española in 1986. His reputation as a scholar of Spanish Theatre aside, Marion often said that his best seller was Barron's *1001 Pitfalls in Spanish*; it first appeared in 1973 and in 2010 was in its fourth edition.

Marion grew up in Spartanburg, SC. He was drafted at the age of 18 and served in the Pacific during WWII. He was on Saipan (after its bloody conflict) and watched the atom bomb drop from its shores. Following the war, he attended Wofford College on the G.I. Bill, graduating in 1949, and began his teaching career at Converse College. His undergraduate school has published his moving memoir in its blog of Wofford alumni. After his retirement as a professor, he wrote a fascinating book about movie houses: *Magical Places: The Story of Spartanburg's Theatres and Their Entertainments, 1900-1950*.

He received his M.A. from Vanderbilt University and his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign. At CUNY he was Professor of Theatre at the Graduate Center and of Spanish at the College of Staten Island. He was also visiting professor at the Yale School of Drama, Hunter College, and Barcelona's Institut del Teatre.

Marion will long be remembered as the foremost translator in the United States of contemporary plays from Spain. In the *Estreno* issue he guest edited in 1988, he pointed out how difficult it is for translated Spanish theatre to reach the American stage. His own success, including multiple stagings of some works and having a literary agent, is all the more noteworthy. His translation of Antonio Buero Vallejo's *El sueño de la razón* (*The Sleep of Reason*) had its American premiere at Converse College in 1983 and then moved on to important professional theatres in major cities: Center Stage (Baltimore, 1984), Wilma Theatre (Philadelphia, 1986), and Bailiwick Repertory (Chicago, 1994). Recently Buero's *In the Burning Darkness* has received increasing attention. Marion once told me, however, that his most staged translation is *Burning Patience* by Chilean playwright Antonio Skármeta.

Like the list of his published play translations, Marion's list of staged translations is long indeed. I mention here only two performances in New York that deeply affected my family members. My husband still marvels about José López Rubio's great comedy *The Other Shore* that we saw in 1984. My son considers *The Foundation* the best play he has ever seen and told Buero that in person in 1994.

L. to R. José López Rubio, Víctor Ruiz Iriarte, Marion, Antonio Buero Vallejo.
Back to camera, Buero's wife Victoria Rodríguez. Photo facilitated by José Maria Torrijos.

It is difficult to get play translations published in the U.S., but Marion proved there are always exceptions. Like stagings of his translations, publications of them over many years are far too numerous to note here, even excluding editions of single play translations. In anthologies he often promoted works by other translators. Examples are *The Modern Spanish Stage: Four Plays* (1970), *DramaContemporary: Spain* (1985) and *Barcelona Plays* (2008). A volume limited to his own translations, *Antonio Buero-Vallejo: Three Plays* (1985) was a Choice Outstanding University Press selection. Equally noteworthy is the inclusion of Guillem Clua's *Marburg* in the important journal *Theatre Forum* (2011).

Living in New York City has advantages. Marion became well acquainted with the theatre world there and was better equipped to get his plays staged than translators in other places. On the other hand, his international success may be attributed only to the high quality of plays he chose to translate and the stageability of his translations. His translations have been performed in New York, London, and Australia, and at regional and university theatres throughout the United States.

After translating numerous works by Buero Vallejo, López Rubio, Jaime Salom, and other authors writing in Castilian, Marion turned his talents to promoting Catalan theatre. Among the many authors he translated from Catalan are Josep M. Benet i Jornet, Sergi Belbel, Ángels Aymar, Lluïsa Cunillé, and Guillem Clua. Catalan authors have been included in ESTRENO Contemporary Spanish Plays starting in 2000 when I was general editor.

Guillem Clua and Marion, 2007. Photo by Candyce Crew Leonard.

Marion was part of the doctoral dissertation committee for José Manuel Reyes, who later was on the *Estreno* editorial board. Thanks to encouragement from Marion, I joined the Dramatists Guild. I consulted him frequently on problems I faced and always he responded with helpful insights.

As proclaimed in tributes included here and others I have received since sharing the sad news of Marion's passing, many of us will miss him deeply as a mentor and friend. I thank all of those who

have shared their memories with me at this time of sorrow, John Gabriele for his editing, and particularly Richard Medoff and Steven Capsuto for their invaluable collaboration in preparing this tribute to Marion Peter Holt.

John P. Gabriele

Like many, I am deeply saddened by Marion's recent and unexpected death. The name of Marion P. Holt will forever be associated with countless translations of Spanish and Catalan plays, which have been staged in theatres in the United States and abroad, as well as with numerous book length studies and articles on Spanish Theatre. His enduring scholarship is truly impressive, but Marion casts a much longer shadow than that of his academic accomplishments.

My relationship with Marion began in 1986 when I interviewed Antonio Buero Vallejo. It was Marion who provided me with Buero's phone number and address. Several years later in 1993, and subsequently in 1997, Marion asked me to interview Guillermo Heras and Rodrigo García, respectively, for *Western European Stages*. In 1997, when Sandra Harper invited me to be on the Editorial Board of *Estreno*, I sought Marion's thoughtful, intelligent, and insightful advice. I did the same when considering the position of Associate Editor of the journal in 2008. I will always be grateful for his encouraging support and unfailingly good counsel.

For 35 years, we communicated frequently and, whenever possible, met at professional conferences. From my own personal experience and from what I observed in his dealings with other colleagues, I knew Marion to be consistently respectful, kind, and gracious. In whatever context one knew him (friend, colleague, scholar, professor), Marion stood apart as someone special. He was the epitome of a true friend and colleague. I shall always remember fondly his inimitable soft-spoken manner and wistful smile.

Gary Racz

Marion Holt was such a ubiquitous presence on the Spanish, Catalan, and Latin American theatre scene in New York City that I confess I can't remember how he and I actually met. It had to have been through an introduction from my mentor Phyllis Zatlin, who has doggedly kept my hand in the field of theatre translation for decades now. Since I consider myself primarily a poetry translator and feel a bit out of place at theatre conferences, I frequently introduce myself to the international literary figures there simply by saying that I am part of the circle of *Estreno* translators in New York, which is all the information these scholars, playwrights, actors, and directors seem to need. This *bona fides* continues to afford me instant credibility, as it indicates to all involved that I have been a close colleague of those perhaps most responsible for promoting peninsular theatre in the United States, including (besides, obviously, Marion and Phyllis) the current editors of ESTRENO Plays, Iride Lamartina-Lens and Susan Berardini, among others. Of this august group, Marion was our puckish *éminence grise*, much admired and loved by his peers.

A testament to Marion's enduring presence in my life is the wealth of photos in which we both figure, so many that those who survive him—saddened by his loss, but ever grateful to have known him—find ourselves having trouble remembering the dates and places of all these encounters. In the one pictured here, we are smiling in the lobby of the Thalia Spanish Theatre in Queens at a performance of Jaime Salom's *Las señoritas de Aviñón*.

L. to R.: Marion, Jaime's wife Montse Clot, Gary, Iride's husband Juan Lens, Jaime Salom, Susan Berardini and Iride Lamartina-Lens, co-editors of ESTRENO Plays. At Thalia Spanish Theatre in NYC, 2007.

Marion and I presented together on a panel at the *Estreno* Conference in Delaware, OH, a session of the American Literary Translators Association, and a roundtable at the Instituto Cervantes. I attended performances of his translations of Buero's *La Fundación* and *Las Meninas* as well as of Paco Bezerra's *El pequeño poni*; he came to see the students at LIU Brooklyn put on my rendering of *La vida es sueño* in its English-language premiere and, earlier, a staged reading by the Actor's Way of Jaime's *El señor de las patrañas* that I had translated as *Rigmaroles*. A bottomless archive of theatre lore, Marion never failed to offer encouragement and advice even the most accomplished of translators could not fail to find helpful.

Just how deep Marion's trove of theatre knowledge proved to be became evident to me during our collaboration on Jaime's *Three Comedies* (University Press of Colorado, 2004). As it turned out, he and Phyllis each had an older translation of a Salom comedy "in the drawer" (Marion's manuscript was mimeographed!). I had just completed a third, so I sat with Marion for a few hours in his famous apartment on Manhattan's W. 71st St. to discuss various matters regarding his text, which I would ultimately retype. Never in my life have I been the privileged beneficiary of so informative and insightful a tutorial! I learned more about theatre translation that day than at any other time in my career. As Marion's fellow New Yorker (albeit a Brooklynite), I visited him not infrequently over the years, often accompanying him to one of his favorite neighborhood restaurants, Santa Fe. He wore his learning lightly. Quick with a smile, glad to hear a joke, and always delightful company, Marion will be greatly missed. His considerable achievements and magnanimous personality will be remembered fondly by us all.

The academic and editor of Contemporary Theatre Review*, Maria M. Delgado, academic and former colleague Marvin Carlson, publisher and editor of PAJ Books Bonnie Marranca, and playwright Guillem Clua remember the distinguished Hispanist and Catalinist, academic and translator Marion Peter Holt.*

Maria M. Delgado

The passing of Spanish theatre scholar and translator Marion Peter Holt marks the end of an era. He was, alongside Martha Halsey and Pat O'Connor, part of a generation of US academics who focused on promoting the work of dramatists working during the difficult conditions of the Franco regime. These playwrights, largely unknown in the English-speaking world, sought to find ways of engaging with the conditions and abuses of the regime, often deploying the language of allegory to navigate the censorship regulations of the time. Marion was a champion of their dramaturgy, not only in publications like *The Contemporary Spanish Theatre: 1949-1972* (published by Twayne in 1975), but in providing translations that would ensure their work would circulate in the English-speaking world. He enjoyed a close friendship with Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916-2000), having translated a significant number of his plays, and following Buero's death, which he keenly felt, he forged a new close friendship with Josep M. Benet i Jornet (1940-2020), translating *Fleeting*, *Stages* and *Salamander*.

Increasingly, post retirement from the City University of New York in 2004 (he remained Professor Emeritus at CUNY until his death), it was translation that served as his real passion. Never one to remain in the past, Marion embraced the work of the new generation of Catalan and Spanish dramatists who emerged in latter decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century—from the black comedy *OffSide* by Sergi Belbel to the elliptical *Barcelona, Map of Shadows* by Lluisa Cunillé. The twenty-first century saw him move to a new younger generation of writers, whose careers had been nurtured by Barcelona's Sala Beckett, like Guillem Clua and Josep Maria Miró. He translated Clua's epic *Marburg* and in an email sent to the eminent University of Swansea-based Catalanist, Professor David George, two weeks before his death, he wrote glowingly of Miró's newest "searing monologue for a single actor or actriz—who has to portray 5 characters (male, female & transgender) who have their own long monologues in the text)—*El cos més bonic que s'haura trobat mai en aquest lloc*. It's a brilliant and powerful play and is scheduled for production at TNC in the winter."

To call on Marion in his New York apartment close to Lincoln Center, was to encounter his wall-to-wall collection of books on Spanish and Catalan theatre, new play manuscripts on one of the tables that he always spoke about animatedly and, proudly framed on the living room wall, the certificate of his election as a corresponding member of Spain's Real Academia Española in 1986. Marion was a quiet, discreet man, a great listener and a careful observer. He had impeccable manners—a Southern gentleman, with clear principles, political commitment and a calm, soothing voice. Marion reasoned, he never harangued. Dressed largely in black, there was something about his manner that was as if he had stepped out of a Tennessee Williams play with a quick detour through Larry Kramer. He was also not without his mysteries. When he stayed with us in 2007, I remember my then five-year-old son trying to prise out of him his age. He refused steadfastly to reveal it; he had even wiped it from the records of the Library of Congress. It was only after his passing that we found out that he was born in 1924. Marion knew how to keep a secret.

Dinner with Marion was always entertaining and edifying and, although he was frailer in the period post 2010, and rarely travelled to Spain, his great pleasure in reading of what was happening on the Madrid and Barcelona theatre scene was palpable. Facebook had offered him a way of keeping in touch with so many of the writers he championed and he delighted, whenever I visited, in sharing news on forthcoming productions or work in development. Any review I published in *Western European Stages* would always receive a generous, ebullient email from Marion. Marion supported writers and academics working on theatre in Spain because it mattered. But he also recognised the importance of seeing work in Spain within a broader context of international writing and of local traditions. In 2004 he published a study of the theatres in his hometown of Spartanburg.

I heard of Marion's passing from his close friend Richard Medoff. Marion regularly acknowledged the importance of Richard's friendship and care in his life and the difference it had made, especially during Covid. I was in Catalonia at the time Richard let me know and raised a glass of cava to Marion's memory and legacy. Marion always loved a glass of cava. He leaves behind an impressive list of plays published by CUNY's Graduate Center, PAJ Books and Estreno as well as a lasting example of intellectual generosity and warmth. Marion, *descansa en paz, amigo.*

Marvin Carlson

Although Marion Holt's primary position at the City University of New York (CUNY) was at the College of Staten Island, he was for many years also an active and dedicated member of the Graduate faculty at the Graduate Center. In both places he was a beloved and admired teacher, mentor, and colleague, whose quiet and unassuming manner somewhat masked one of the keenest minds in the study of modern Spanish and Catalan theatre. His interest was as much practical as literary, and his love of the physical theatre extended far beyond his particular national interests. Several generations of graduate students were provided with him by a stimulating insight into the often neglected Iberian stage in particular and into the richness of theatre-going in general, and a number followed his example more specifically and continue to make important contributions to the field.

In addition to his work in seminars and classrooms, Marion was highly active in the work of the Segal Center at the Graduate School, a non-academic institution which serves as a bridge between academia and the professional theatre as well as between the theatre world of the United States and that of other nations and cultures. Both of these concerns closely fitted Marion's own interests, and naturally drew him to the work of the Center. Two of his collections of Catalan theatre translations were published there and he participated in many of the Segal programs which featured the work and sometimes the physical presence of contemporary dramatists from Spain with whom Marion was connected. In many cases Marion served as the liaison between these dramatists and the New York stage directly as well as indirectly through the Segal Center programs.

One of the important ongoing relationships between Marion and the Segal Center was through his work on the journal *Western European Stages,* founded in 1989 to provide English speaking readers with

a unique ongoing chronicle of contemporary European production. Marion was one of the founding members of the journal, and a long-time contributor to it.

Even after his retirement, Marion continued to be one of the most faithful attendees at parties and other social events at the Graduate Center, providing a new generation of students to have at least a brief experience of his warmth and his wit and an opportunity to meet a now legendary figure in the field of modern Spanish and Catalan theatre. He will be greatly missed, personally and professionally.

Bonnie Marranca

In less than a decade after PAJ Publications began to publish books, in addition to the journal, I became acquainted with Marion Peter Holt as a translator from the Spanish language. Looking back over the decades, I count him among the major translators of modern and contemporary drama, such as Daniel Gerould, Philippa Wehle, Rosette Lamont, Michael Benedikt, Harold Segal, Eric Bentley, Bettina Knapp (several of them connected to the CUNY-Graduate Center or Columbia University), Ralph Mannheim, and Martin Esslin, who were responsible for bringing to English-language readers so many of the plays and essays that were not available in the U.S. They helped to give the field of contemporary drama and history an international perspective, they helped to establish the field. Not only did they translate the plays—in those days, mainly from France, Germany, Russia, Poland, and Spain—they wrote about the playwrights and societies they grew out of, illuminating for insular audiences the conditions the works were created under, often very culturally and politically restrictive. They actively solicited publication of the plays they translated. They and countless others who labor behind the scenes as agents, translators, artistic directors, and editors are part of the ecosystem that is the theatre community. Their work is so important in the current global exchange and the historical archive.

Marion edited and translated two important volumes for PAJ Publications in the DramaContemporary series we had started in 1985 for new plays in translation, organized by country or region, to make global drama available. They included Czechoslovakia, Scandinavia, India, France, and Germany as well as the Spanish-language volumes of Marion. In his *DramaContemporary: Spain*, which featured Antonio Buero-Vallejo, Jaime Salom, Francisco Nieva, Jose Martin Recuerda, he introduced what he called "Spain's Theatre of Transition," the post-Franco theatre's new writers and controversial productions, the state of serious theatre, and audiences, writing that "After the death of Franco in 1975, the change from dictatorship to constitutional democracy was more rapid and orderly than anyone would have predicted; however, cultural institutions were not suddenly transformed, nor were ingrained attitudes and habits so easily altered to accommodate the new freedoms."[1] The first significant new Spanish play produced in the U.S. followed a decade later at Baltimore's Center Stage.

[1] Marion Peter Holt, "Spain's Theatre of Transition," in *DramaContemporary: Spain*, ed. Marion Peter Holt (NY: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1985), 7-16 (8).

In the 1986 volume *DramaContemporary: Latin America* (edited with George Woodyard), Marion collected plays by Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Antonio Skarmeta, Manuel Puig. Here the focus was on novelist-playwrights. At this time, and continuing today, American publishers who issued the novels of their authors did not also publish their plays, even if they were internationally celebrated. A number of these eminent authors whose plays they neglected would be published by PAJ, including Thomas Bernhard, Elfriede Jelinek, Marguerite Yourcenar, Elias Canetti. Marion clearly framed the situation in his commentary introducing the plays: "The contemporary Latin American novel has, over a period of almost two decades, enjoyed an ever-increasing popularity in the United States and Europe, inspiriting and determining a new world-view of the cultures to the south.… but the theatre of the vast area we know as "Latin America" is only beginning to be translated and performed abroad."[2]

Marion Peter Holt worked tirelessly as an educator, translator, and essayist to bring to the attention of the public the writers and theatre cultures of Spanish-language countries. He also reported on theatre festivals or new productions in Spain in the pages of *Performing Arts Journal*. I valued his devotion to his work and commitment to theatre, aspects of professional life forged in an era of personal relationships and collegiality that make publishing a joy.

Guillem Clua

I always thought Marion P. Holt was immortal. When I first met him, in the summer of 2006, I had just moved to New York. I was 33 years old, had two plays under my arm and an immense desire to take the world by storm. We agreed to meet at his Upper West Side apartment, and I immediately realised that I was entering a small temple of Spanish and Catalan theatre, a space that embodied an entire life, love and passion for our culture and a haven of conversation and tranquilty for a writer recently arrived from Barcelona.

Marion welcomed me into his home, his city and his world from the first moment that we greeted each other with the habitual introductory two Spanish kisses on the cheek. He showed interest in my playtexts and he actively helped me promote them, even though they weren't his translations. Thanks to his selfless effort, I received my first rehearsed readings in Manhattan, I published the first English edition of *Skin in Flames* and I secured a US agent. But beyond this professional help, Marion offered me something more valuable: his friendship.

During my years in New York, Marion became my regular companion at production openings, lunches and dinners. At those encounters, he displayed his enormous theatrical knowledge, sharing countless anecdotes about Antonio Buero Vallejo or Tony Kushner, and on occasion he even allowed himself snippets of gossip with a mischievous smile, but always within the confines of his impeccable manners. On the way home, I would usually reflect on the luck I had in being able to count on him. I'd crave his company as the exceptional wise man who appears in the key moment of a story when the hero is

[2] George W. Woodyard and Marion Peter Holt, "Introduction," *DramaContemporary: Latin America*, ed. Marion Peter Holt and George W. Woodyard (NY: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986), 7-18 (7).

about to be eaten by a dragon. Hence, I would feel that Marion was guiding me through the indecipherable labyrinth that Manhattan represented for me at that time.

He never told me his age (he was that vain), but I sensed that he had decades of experience, knowledge and also pain across his increasingly hunched back. The surprising thing was that his advancing age didn't stifle his passion for our theatre. Quite the opposite. He would immediately offer to translate one of my most complex plays, *Marburg,* followed by *The Promised Land* and *Smiley*. Once again, his efforts rendered their publication as well as readings in different theatres in the city, like the Martin E. Segal Theater, Repertorio Español and New York Theater Workshop.

And I wasn't the only one to benefit from Marion's generosity. Other writers of my generation, like Pere Riera and Josep Maria Miró, were also able to count with the mastery of his translations. He never stopped showing an interest in the new voices of Catalan theatre. That's why there are many of us who owe him a debt. His translations were not just read or heard in the USA, they were also the gateway to other translators accessing our work in other countries. Without a doubt, at this point in time, without Marion, contemporary Catalan playwriting wouldn't have its recognised world leading status.

For this and for many other reasons, I always believed Marion was immortal. Because he was always there, in person when I lived in New York and on the other side of an email thereafter. Because I could always rely on his strength and belief in a new project. Because his curiosity was infinite. And because his passion nurtured that of entire generations of writers decades younger than himself. Yes, I always thought that Marion was immortal. And now, looking back and testing the legacy he leaves behind in the Spanish and Catalan theatre, I know I was right.

Rest in peace, my friend. There will always be a reserved seat with your name on it in the theatres of Barcelona.

Seven Against Thebes

By Antón Arrufat

Translated by Amanda T. Perry

In 1968, Antón Arrufat's play *Seven Against Thebes* won the theatre prize administered by UNEAC, the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists. What should have been a major advancement in the young Cuban's playwriting career instead effectively ended it. Two jurors voted against the play on political grounds, and UNEAC took the extraordinary measure of publishing the piece with a preface condemning its contents. Beyond a small student production in Mexico in 1970, the play would not be staged for decades. Within the next three years, Arrufat went from being a well-connected and promising poet and playwright to working in the basement of a municipal library, banned from publishing throughout the 1970s.

Why would an adaptation of Aeschylus cause such controversy? Within Cuban literary history, the 1968 UNEAC scandal is often seen as the beginning of the end, as dogmatic bureaucrats curtailed the literary scene that had flourished following the 1959 revolution. Arrufat's role in this drama has generally been overlooked in favour of Heberto Padilla's, whose collection *Fuera del juego [Out of the Game]* won the 1968 poetry prize and was both more obviously critical of contemporary Cuba and more strenuously condemned by UNEAC. Padilla's later arrest in 1971 triggered a major rupture between the Cuban government and members of the international left, and the island moved into a period of increased censorship and state-sponsored homophobia. Returning to 1968, and to Arrufat's *Seven Against Thebes*, may help contextualize why an entire literary community, and not only Padilla, suffered in the years to follow.

This long overdue English translation will surprise anyone expecting a counter-revolutionary manifesto. Arrufat's adaptation of Aeschylus' tragedy can be strikingly faithful, as he reproduces long sections of the chorus' lamentations alongside lengthy messenger speeches describing the invading army. The play's diction is elevated and its overall flavour is decidedly Greek, to the point that I often felt I was translating a translation. The stage directions call for a stylized, minimalist approach marked by ritual gestures. Yet certain modifications, and Arrufat's provocative epigraph, suggest reading the play in closer dialogue with 1960s Cuba.

First there is the myth itself: Eteocles refuses to share power over Thebes with his brother Polynices and sends him into exile, leading Polynices to return at the head of a foreign army. The potential parallels with the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, where Cuban exiles backed by the United States attempted to depose Fidel Castro's government, are reinforced by other details. Arrufat invents the scene in which the six defending "champions" of Thebes appear, presenting Megareus as a farmer and Hyperbius as the builder of a school. These additions read as plausible allusions to the revolution's agricultural reform and its famous literacy campaign, especially when juxtaposed with Hippomedon, one of the invaders, whose thirst for land recalls the plantation owners expropriated by the new state. The most evocative section is the dialogue between Eteocles and Polynices, absent from Aeschylus and only loosely inspired by an exchange in Euripides' *The Phoenician Women*. This scene is at once the dramatic core of the play and the major source of Arrufat's condemnation.

Arrufat frames the brothers' conflict as a struggle between justice and "derecho"—a word that means both "right" and "law" in Spanish, and which I have at times translated as "lawful right." Polynices accuses Eteocles of erecting himself as a dictator and of confiscating and redistributing his inheritance. Eteocles counterattacks that Polynices had been a power-hungry ruler who could not "forge the happiness and grandeur of Thebes." He declares his willingness to accept impurity in the name of justice, insisting that he has done right by the poor, and criticizes Polynices for allying himself with foreigners. Transposed onto 1960s Cuba, Polynices frames the revolution as illegal—not sanctioned by elections or a constitution and violating the rules of private

property—whereas Eteocles argues that its accomplishments justify the means and that Cuban exiles have become imperialist puppets.

Censors are rarely good critics. I have included excerpts from the UNEAC preface and a widely circulated condemnation of the play written under the pseudonym Leopoldo Ávila. Both are laughably literal and at times improbable in their readings, taking issue with holdovers from Aeschylus, including the terror of the chorus and the fact that both brothers die. The play may also have been denounced for extratextual reasons. In an interview with Jesús Barquet, Arrufat points to professional jealousy: Vicente Revuelta had wanted to direct the play, and had his sister Raquel, part of the UNEAC jury, accuse the play of political problems after Arrufat refused. Arrufat could furthermore have been targeted as a homosexual. The vague phrases beginning Ávila's article may refer to Arrufat's orientation, and Ambrosio Fornet has speculated that Ávila was none other than Luis Pavón Tamayo, who, as Minister of Culture from 1971 to 1976, set out to remove homosexuals from positions of influence.

Nevertheless, the play was condemned on political grounds, and evaluating its politics has remained the central concern of literary scholars. Most notably, Jesús Barquet, in his monograph *Theatre and the Cuban Revolution: Subversion and Utopia in Seven Against Thebes*, argues that the play is essentially allegorical, endorsing the Revolution's central principles but attacking Castro's leadership. While Barquet's work is nuanced and rigorously contextualized, his interpretation hinges on a decidedly unsympathetic reading of Eteocles, as well as a one-to-one equation between the Theban leader and Castro. I have my doubts: Arrufat is far more generous than Euripides and no less so than Aeschylus in his portrayal of Eteocles, and productions would have a good deal of flexibility in how they present the character.

A more productive approach to the play may be to allow for its ambiguity. Allegorical readings are complicated by the play's close ties to Aeschylus, and its commentary on contemporary Cuba is neither clearly subversive nor propagandistically supportive of Castro's rule. Both brothers are given good lines, and the focus on the horror of war underlines a humanist rather than ideological position. The play's final scenes, in which Eteocles is honoured for his legacy and Polynices is buried out of mercy, demonstrate a desire to continue the project of social transformation and to break cycles of violence. That Arrufat's work could raise such ire is a sign of precisely how rigid the Cuban literary landscape was becoming. He had not demonized the enemy, and that was enough to make him a viable target.

After a decade of marginalization, Arrufat slowly returned to public life in Cuba. Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, he published new works of prose and poetry, although he largely abandoned theatre. In 2000, he was honoured with Cuba's National Prize for Literature. *Seven Against Thebes* was the last of Arrufat's works to be rehabilitated, as it was republished in 2001, followed by a critical edition and a staging in Havana in 2007. In published interviews, including with John Kirk and Leonardo Padura, Arrufat has typically been frank about the limits and possibilities of making art in the country he has continued to call his home.

My translation maintains the formality of Arrufat's language, with fewer syntactical inversions than in the Spanish. Because of the rich historical context detailed here, I have chosen to translate the version published in 1968, rather than Arrufat's 2007 revision, though I have flagged the most significant alterations. Some symbolically loaded terms proved tricky in English. I have usually rendered "soberbia" as arrogance, but occasionally as "pride." Arrufat also repeats the terms "brazos" and "armas," both of which would be "arms" in English; I have separated them out into "fists," to retain the emphasis on physical strength, and "weaponry." During a reading of the play in Montreal in January 2021, the gendered dynamics within the work leapt off the page. Eteocles and other male characters continually use the term "woman" to refer to members of the chorus,

and though the Spanish "mujer" is somewhat softer and more colloquial, the play presents a stark divide between anonymous, terrified women and martial, heroic men. I leave the interpretation of those dynamics, and the play as a whole, to the audience.

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Antón Arrufat (1935-) is a Cuban playwright, poet, essayist, and novelist. His first works appeared in the late 1950s, and he was a prolific writer during the 1960s, as well as the editor of *Casa de las Américas* magazine from 1961 to 1965. After the 1968 controversy surrounding *Seven Against Thebes*, he would not publish again for over a decade. He has since written two novels, *La caja está cerrada* (1984) and *La noche del aguafiestas* (2000), in addition to works of poetry and non-fiction, notably *Virgilio Piñera, entre él y yo* (1995). In 2000, he was awarded Cuba's National Prize for Literature.

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Seven Against Thebes

by Antón Arrufat

Translated by Amanda T. Perry

Followed by translations of the UNEAC preface and the article "Anton Goes to War" by Leopoldo Ávila

A certain friend, no stranger to letters, told me when he read Iphigenia, "Very good, but it's a shame the subject is foreign." "First of all," I answered, "the same could be said of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Goethe, Racine, etc. What's more, through my interpretation, the subject becomes my own. And finally, name Iphigenia Juana González, and already your deceptive desire for originality would be satisfied.

—Alfonso Reyes
Commenting on his play *Cruel Iphigenia*

(*Murmurs, stirrings, unintelligible phrases. Men and women move around, forming small rhythmic groups that act out apprehension or terror. Suddenly an imposing silence. The Chorus forms a circle: it opens and Eteocles appears in the center. His chest and feet are bare. As he delivers his speech, the men arm him in a ceremony of precise, dynamic gestures that should render unnecessary the physical presence of weaponry.)*

ETEOCLES:

Citizens, the time has come
for him to speak who watches over the homeland
without yielding his eyes to soft sleep
without listening to enemy voices
or surrendering to the memory of his own blood.
Listen to me. My own brother, Polynices,
fleeing from our land, forgetting
the shared days, the brotherhood
of youth, the paternal hearth,
our language and our cause
has armed a battalion of foreigners
and approaches to lay siege to our city.
I have sent spies and scouts.
I trust they'll soon return
and we'll know new details of the enemy camp,
the number of its weapons, its strategy,
the bravery of its men. Nothing will stay unknown,
and guided by these accounts,
we'll be prepared against all surprise.
The moment has arrived. It's our time.
In it we affirm our cause,
its justice and valor. For us
this battle flowers and etches
our faces in history.
Here I have the shield of my father,
the helmet of my grandfather, the sword
that my brother Polynices abandoned
so it would not remind him of his treason.

I shine these arms, I seize them.
With them I gather the breath
of all my family, its ancient
vigor, and swear to defend this city
and its cause. Let the day begin
when we will be the work of our own hands.

CHORUS: Release the birds of prophecy!

(*THE SEER leaps out from the group and acts out the release of the cocks with his body. THE CHORUS, with anxious intensity, moves and chants like the cocks in an abrupt manner that then ceases)*

THE SEER: Eteocles, the auguring signs
of song from the solar birds
that unite the sky and the earth
and sketch the future with their voices
declare that the invading army
has determined to attack the city
tonight. Its men are preparing.

THE CHORUS: The spies! The spies! The spies!

(The name is repeated as though passed along a chain of sentinels, until it fades)

SPIES 1 and 2:

(While one speaks, the other remains silent, physically dramatizing the narrated scenes)

We bring you news from the enemy camp
noble Eteocles. Hidden, breathless,
we watched seven commanders, ardent fighters,
sacrifice a bull over a black shield,
wet their hands in its blood and swear
to destroy this city or die in this land.
After, with their hands still bloodied,
they said goodbye to their wives
and their children. They wept. We saw their tears
drop thread by thread, but their faces
were stoic. Not a word
of mercy sprung from their pressed lips.
Their steel chests breathed in war
and advanced toward the massacre together
with their eyes. Before leaving, noble Eteocles,
we spotted your brother. He was there, beside
the foreign leaders. We saw him shake
the dice, we saw him start the game.
The game would assign each commander
one of the seven gates of the city.
In that moment, without seeing

which gate fate would throw them,
we decided to come inform you. We can still
hear the prophetic clacking of the dice.
Quickly, choose our most skilled
fighters and post them to the entryways
of the seven gates of the city.
Don't waste time. All could be lost.
The enemy army is raising a thick
cloud of dust, their weapons creak, clots of foam
drip from the mouths of their steeds.
Quickly, organize the defense, select
the ideal moment. We already seem to
hear the hoofs close to the walls.
Don't waste time. We'll continue
for the rest of the day, loyal and vigilant,
beyond the gates.

ETEOCLES: To the ramparts, to the gates, to the towers.
Grab your arms, old or new.
Breast plates on your chest. Steady. Courage.
Do not fear this crowd of schemers.
Our own fists will protect us. Steady.
To the ramparts, to the gates, to the towers.

(*The men exit. Eteocles stands aside for a moment)*

May these homes not crumble
under the enemy's blow. May the dust
of their stones not scatter in the wind.
If it is necessary
that I face my brother Polynices,
if it is necessary, so be it.
I am willing.
I deliver myself to Thebes' cause.
Must I strike
my brother with this sword?
Must I sacrifice myself?
Will my blood appease
his yearning for disasters?
Is sacrifice now necessary?
May I finally know
the breast I must annihilate,
the moment,
the memories.
May I finally know
the gate our triumph opens.

Now I am alone. I will be Eteocles. Let's go.

(*Exits*)

(*Offstage, the chanting of cocks in the distance. The women of the chorus remain. They shake with terror)*

CHORUS 1: I see the enemy fighters lurch
toward us in a savage assault.
I glimpse it through that dust that rises,
surrounds us, stains our faces,
a mute but certain, infallible messenger.

CHORUS 2: My face burns. My forehead sweats.

CHORUS 3: The dust blinds me. My eyes water.

CHORUS 4: Oh friends, who will save us?
Who will come to our aid?

CHORUS 2: The dust grows. I listen, listen
to the rumble of the earth, shaken
by the hoofs of their horses
that emerge from the dust
and come closer, and fly, and moan
like a victorious torrent, oh!

CHORUS 5: I see their shining weapons rise
from the dust, advance seeking
our breasts. Here, here.
Their sharpened spears pierce me.

CHORUS 3: What can I do but throw myself
begging before our altars?

CHORUS 1: These swords seek the hearts
of our men, of our husbands.
They split their flesh. The lips of their wounds,
trembling, spill their life forces,
and they close their eyes, and they forget their names.

CHORUS 4: I hear the clash of the shields,

CHORUS 2: of thousands of spears,

CHORUS 3: of thousands of chariots

CHORUS 4: of stones that batter the walls

CHORUS 5: of bronze that strikes our gates.

(*The chorus, consisting of women who speak while others act out the images with their bodies, reaches a state of hallucination.*)

CHORUS 2: Horror! I see from the ramparts
a vast field of the beloved dead.
Their body parts scattered on the ground,
mute and blind,
smashed by horses and shields.

CHORUS 4: Oh friends, who will save us?
Who will come to our aid?

CHORUS 4: Over there, over there: someone raises his arm
twitches, moves his fingers, calls to me.
He calls to me. It's a terrifying cry.
I'm on my way. Wait. But he's rigid,
his fingers parted. It's the wind.
Now it slaps the ribbons of his shield.
It's the wind. He's not breathing. He's frozen.

CHORUS 1: Eteocles' chariot is calling
at the seventh gate: it's empty.
His horse's reigns are loose,
its bridle stained with blood.
It neighs and wanders alone
through the field of cadavers.

(*Some women strike their thighs with their open palms, recreating with tragic force the movements of a horse, its neigh, while others repeat the same text from another part of the stage*)

CHORUS 4: Oh friends, who will save us?
Who will come to our aid?

ETEOCLES: Women! Is this the way
to serve the city, to give
courage to its besieged defenders?

(*He speaks to different women. He grabs their arms. He berates them.*)

Can't you do something else
besides lament and moan?
Even from the ramparts we can hear your cries.
Enough laments and mournful visions.
You, what do you fear? Why are you on your knees?
And you, what are you doing with those branches?
And you, why are you weeping and whimpering?
Your husband is on the walls.
I've seen him. I spoke to him.
Do you want to steal his courage with your lamentations?
Do you want him to surrender, inert, to the adversary?

CHORUS 3: I cast myself down only to place
my hopes in the gods...

ETEOCLES: Pray only for our men.
Trust in the force of their fists.

CHORUS 5: May the gods never wish to abandon us.

ETEOCLES: The gods abandon conquered cities.

CHORUS 2: What are those lights? Oh misfortune!
The relentless enemy soldiers
run through the city with blazing torches.

ETEOCLES: Don't ruin us, woman. Stop with the dark
omens. He who commands asks to be obeyed.
Don't forget it. And obedience to a single
head engenders the outcome that saves us.

CHORUS 5: The power of the gods is greater.
It can raise the helpless
from their troubles, dispel at once
the fog of pain in their eyes.

ETECOLES: Pray, if that's how you want it. May the Gods
listen to you. But don't stop helping
our fighters with your hands.
Master your terror. Remain composed.

CHORUS 3:

(Striking herself with the olive branch)

Oh, uncertain winds, oh. Death
threatens me, it wants to sniff my flesh.
Gods, accept my vows.
Where will this army drag me?

ETEOCLES: They will not drag us off. We will remain.
This is not the moment to doubt, to worry
about yourself. They advance
united, and we
destroy ourselves here inside.

CHORUS 5: They will surround the city of Thebes!
We will die of hunger and thirst.

ETEOCLES: I am here to coordinate our actions.

CHORUS 1: The horses are already neighing,
their crests are shaking! They move

like thousands of arms of death.

ETEOCLES: Act as if you can't hear them,
act as if you can't see them, woman!

CHORUS 5: The gates screech, they give way.

ETEOCLES: Quiet! Keep your prophecies to yourself. That's an order.

CHORUS 2: Gods of Thebes, don't give up the city!

ETEOCLES: Fear in silence. Fight for her.

CHORUS 3: Deliver me from slavery!

ETECOLES: You enslave yourself, and us all!

CHORUS 4: Gods, shield me from my enemies!

ETEOCLES: Are you still begging? I ordered you to be quiet!

CHORUS 4: I am out of breath. Terror ties my tongue.

(*The women, tearing at their clothes, breathless, on their knees, sprawled on the floor, end up surrounding him. His hands grasp theirs. Eteocles spreads his arms the length of his body*)

ETEOCLES: Listen. I beg you.

CHORUS:

(Uniting)

Say it quickly.

ETEOCLES: I ask you for silence.

CHORUS: We will fall silent.

ETEOCLES: I ask you not to fear.

CHORUS: We will not be afraid.

ETEOCLES: I ask you to join with us.

CHORUS: Our fate will be the fate of all.

ETEOCLES:

(He releases their hands)

Here, finally, a word that pleases me.
For it I will forgive you all the other words.
Rid of your fear of the enemy, listen
now to my vows.
If we are victorious
and the city is saved, I swear

that we will honor the fighters,
the dead,
those who knew to fight for us all,
renouncing for a moment their private happiness.
We will hang in our houses, along the walls,
on the seven gates of the city,
the vestments of the invaders
that will bear the glorious signs
of our weapons. The city will be
full of the trophies of victory.
For myself, I ask for nothing. If I die, remember me
as I am now, besieged by my brother
and our enemies. Let this moment
fix my image in your memories,
shining like the pure instant of my life.
If I come back, if my sword and my fist
grant me my return to these places
that I already begin to long for, I will govern
quietly, with caution and greater justice.
Women, sing now a jubilant hymn
Of martial daring. Then, help
the fighters carry their weaponry.
I leave to select six courageous champions
to defend the seven gates of the city.
I will be the seventh.

(*The Chorus divides. Two women sing a hymn of combat, their voices cheerful and boisterous. The others return to lamenting. Little by little, pulled in by their enthusiasm, they join the hymn.*)

CHORUS 3: I try to obey you, and yet
the anxiety does not leave my breast.

CHORUS 4: It casts a strange light on the future.

CHORUS 5: I am shaken by the curse of your brother.

CHORUS 3: Which pierced body will fall to the ground?

CHORUS 4: I am followed by the furious dog of nightmare.

CHORUS 1, 2:

(Singing)

God of war,
powerful fist
grant the Thebans
your overflowing bravery.
Sustain the city,

And over the body
extend your protecting shield.

CHORUS 3, 4, 5: What crime did we commit? What freedom will we lose?

CHORUS 1, 2: Beat the shields!
Blow the trumpets!
The war rings out.
March onwards!

CHORUS 3, 4, 5: We won't surrender the city to savage pride.

CHORUS 1, 2, 4: My heart races,
my blood burns.
Oh what I would give
to join the battle!

CHORUS 3, 5: Night comes and the key of destiny will break.

CHORUS 1, 2, 4: Our arrows
fly,
the spears glisten
beneath the sun of war. *(repeat)*

CHORUS 3, 5: What crime did we commit? What freedom will we lose?

CHORUS 1, 2, 3, 4: New flowers
we'll have
on their return.
And those that don't come back
will, in silence,
ready
the new spring.

CHORUS 5: It's the light of the torches. The champions enter!

(*The six champions enter. The ceremony of arms takes place, which, as in the case of Eteocles, should do without the physical presence of weaponry. When the champions enter, the women sing the first verse of the war song again. The women carry out the arming ceremony throughout this entire scene.*)

POLYPHONTES: Greetings, women. We are happy
to find you here. We are happy
to hear you singing in the city.
All men will abandon
their peace-time duties. No one
will sleep in his house tonight.
Faced with the danger of ceasing
to see, of losing the taste
of bread, the morning, the bodies'
desires, our greatest tools

are now the spear
and the shield.
Hyperbius, we'll have a great battle,
a battle that will halt
death at the gates of Thebes.
When the spies return, we'll leave.

CHORUS 5: Hyperbius is among us.
Son of Enopo, we have seen your
school. It is beautiful and simple.
How long did it take you to build?

HYPERBIUS: Much longer than this night,
in which I could lose it.
Slow is the work, but
destruction has quick feet.

MEGAREUS: Quick is our defense, quick the
arrow's strike over the enemy,
Hyperbius. We'll have a great
battle. Tomorrow we'll open
your school again.

HYPERBIUS: So it shall be.
Our sons
will not there learn
the mournful hymns
of the vanquished.

MEGAREUS: Women, from my labor in the fields,
I have another example.
While you adjust my armor, listen:
the orange tree accepts its humble obscurity
for many days, it works below ground,
waits for its fruit,
and erupts triumphant one morning,
in a triumph of yellow.
Without worrying, it waits for its time.
And it can, nevertheless, be lost
in an instant, extinguish
its yellow glow and die.
Polynices' men,
with worried hands, cut
the wait's measured rhythm,
impatient lovers of disaster.
Our time is another time.
We'll set it with new laws.

Tonight opens with that noble quest.

HYPERBIUS: I tell you it is beautiful, this moment,
because it is sad and beautiful.
We'll build the school, we'll plant
the orange tree for a second time
by defending them tonight.

LASTHENES: Woman, here, adjust the breastplates. You do
well by singing. Listen: with death nearby
I am more alive than before. Aren't you amazed?
The blood boils in my temples, almost
to the point of vertigo. I see the same things as always,
the amphora in the house, the olive's greenery,
and all of it's the same, and yet distinct.

CHORUS 4: Young Lasthenes, let's listen to Hyperbius and Megareus.
There is a space between life and death
in which things shimmer, and then we
know their worth. In it, we learn to live
in an instant, in an afternoon,
but after it will have been no mistake.
Is your heart heavy? Are you all right?
Then leave me, youth, a keepsake.

POLYPHONTES: He could not give you a lock of his beard like me.
Take it, woman. Don't torment yourself. I'll return.

CHORUS 4: I pray to the gods for you, Thebans.

POLYPHONTES: Soon we'll eat a lamb in your house.

CHORUS 2: With red wine and laurels.

CHORUS 3: And we'll sing until the night.

MELANIPPUS: Lasthenes will carry his cithara and Megareus his flute.
Their voices will be sweet on their return.

MEGAREUS: Perfume your hair, women, and wear
for that day a rose and a branch of myrrh.

CHORUS 5: You will see the apple orchard again,
and the water between the branches and the shade.

LASTHENES: Keep this broach for that moment.
I hope to see it on you when you serve the lamb.

CHORUS 4: I'll weave a white cloth and make myself a dress.
Your broach will shine on my shoulder.

MELANIPPUS: Have faith, woman. The shield is not so heavy.
The leather belt is firm.
Sometimes, one escapes the arrow's strike
behind it, and returns to breath in the scent of his home.

CHORUS 1: Who is this that passes
by the third gate
and again enters the city?
Who is it? Where was he born?

HYPERBIUS: It's Melanippus who comes back victorious
to his land of Thebes.

MELANIPPUS: And embraces his friend Hyperbius,
of generous blood, who fought
without fear of death.

(*They embrace)*

CHORUS: Thebans, the men that built
this city, hauled the stones
of its walls, one by one, patient,
with blistered hands and burnt
shoulders, who plowed the land and sowed
day and night, singing or silent,
who died the cloth and tempered the metal,
who hardened the leather of these shields,
who melted the bronze and baked the bread:
now they leave their work in your hands!

(*The Chorus divides*)

FIRST CHORUS: The spies arrive, Thebans, and seem
to bring some news of the adversary.
They come in a hurry, running to approach us.

SECOND CHORUS: And here is Eteocles in person.
In his hurry, his feet
hardly touch the ground.

(*The spies and Eteocles enter. Off-stage, human voices reproduce the sounds of the invading army. They begin with a rumble and end in howls, creating a tragic atmosphere, of dire foreboding. When the spies enter, the women scatter, apprehensive. Eteocles and the Six Champions group together.*)

THE SPIES: We have seen everything. We know the arrangements,
which gate luck assigned to each.

(*The Chorus acts out the gestures of the dice game. They shake their hands, rub them together, seem to throw the dice on the floor, clacking their tongues.*)

THE SPIES:

(*One of the spies speaks, while the other acts out the images with his body*)

To Tydeus goes the first gate, where
he shouts threats, yelling
at his men not to fear combat
and death.
He is dressed in black.
Black are his clothes, his weapons,
the crest of his mounted steed.
His metal adornments rattle
with terrifying noise. He carries
on his shield this arrogant emblem:
a night sky, all
bright with stars,
and the moon in the middle,
like a celestial eye.
That night threatens us,
it wants to put out our eyes
and the radiance of the day.
There he is, dark, haughty,
impatiently calling for battle,
a fiery horse that has heard the clarion.
Who will oppose him?
Who will be capable of facing him?

ETEOCLES: Forward, Melanippus! Take care of that madman.
Do you fear the might of his arms?

MELANIPPUS: Crests don't bite, nor do loud adornments.
Arrogant emblems don't cause wounds.

ETEOCLES: As for that night you have described to us,
as for those black clothes he wears,
they could perhaps be the prophecy of his own destiny.
If over his eyes the night of death should fall,
those things will have been the best of signs.
Good, Melanippus! Let the night cover him, since he asks for it.

CHORUS: Brave son of Thebes, may your spear not tremble.

MELANIPPUS: It will not tremble.

CHORUS: The god of war will cast the dice of victory.

ETEOCLES: But you shall raise your fist against defeat.
Forget her and it will not matter that she seeks you.

CHORUS: Brave son of Thebes, may your spear not tremble.

MELANIPPUS: It will not tremble.

THE SPIES:

(*Now it is the other spy who speaks*)

At the second gate
Hippomedon of Mycenae,
of gigantic stature,
thirsty for power, comes
against us screaming.
In his skilled
landowner's hands
I saw the enormous disc
of his shield spin, casting
glints of fire, and I felt
myself shaking. I would not do
well to deny it. Only
Hippomedon's howls of war,
frenziedly calling for battle,
managed to pull my eyes
from that hypnotic image.
I hear his voice, I wish I could
describe his shouts, the
shredding sound of his throat.
I shout like him, I scream,
I threaten, threaten to strip
Thebes of its lands
and enslave its men
to my lust for possession.
The land before me,
mine at last, as far as
my powerful sight reaches.
I dream of it, touch it,
bend down to kiss it, I burn,
yearn to rest my back
against its sweet hardness, twist,
roll around, beat my brow,
eat it by the fistful, knowing
that it's mine, mine alone,
and then cross it in my speedy chariot
while all take off
their hats and greet me
and call me, "Sir, sir,"
with voices tremulous and submissive.
Noble Eteocles, keep us

from this horror that tries to
enter by the second gate.[3]

ETEOCLES: I choose Hyperbius to stand against this schemer!

CHORUS: You know men. No one
like Hyperbius, steady and unhurried,
to vanquish greed.
Rightly you appoint him.

ETEOCLES: And nothing to fault in his conduct, his courage,
in the force and sturdiness of his weaponry.

HYPERBIUS: Let's go, Melanippus! Our gates are close.

ETEOCLES: He already wants to test his fortune.
Excellent Hyperbius! You have the gift
of building schools and you know how to defend them.

(*They exit*)

SPY 1:

(*Grabbing a torch from someone*)

"City, cursed by the hatred of brothers,
I will make you ashes. Only fire will purify you.
You will burn whole in a great fire, and then
we can enter without staining ourselves with this sin.
See in my shield a man armed with a flaming
torch, naked, implacable. Read what it says
in golden letters: I will set fire to Thebes."

ETEOCLES:

(*Suddenly he shakes, startled)*[4]

Who is it? Don't fear! Say his name.

SPY 1: Capaneus.

ETEOCLES: Ah!

(*He lifts his fist to his brow and turns his back.*)

Describe him.

SPY 2: He is a tall, pale, beardless fighter.
His eyes radiate with an inhuman brightness.

[3] The 2007 version tends to either reattribute lines where the spies express fear to the chorus or delete them.

[4] The 2007 version clarifies Eteocles' reaction here: *Thinking it is his brother, he shakes, startled.*

Nothing ties him to the world: not family, not friends.
He is sick with suspicion. He distrusts.
He distrusts everything. He only loves purity.

CHORUS: Deplorable enemy! He fights for other reasons.
He does not seek vengeance, plunder, virgins.
He will burn a city for a single fault.
We do not like this denier of life.

ETEOCLES:

(*Turns around*)

But Capaneus is mistaken. Purity does not rein
by steel. If he devastates the city, he will be
impure, and more guilty than my brother Polynices.
He'll add one crime to another. He'll pass through
a city that's smoking, then extinguished, then cold,
without finding purity. His hand will be black
and his chariot covered in ash. Oh vain thought!
He'll know that this flaming torch corrupted his plan.
And perhaps it's the hatred of my brother Polynices that stains
the gates, blinds, taints the water, casts a veil
over the radiant sun? Destroys the love of your son,
annihilates the strength of your body, scars your face?
It's his fault, Capaneus. Only his. To hatred
you lend your strength. You are his accomplice. You will not be spared.

THE SPIES: But who will stop him without wavering?

ETEOCLES: Polyphontes!

(*Polyphontes comes forward. Eteocles resumes his tone of sarcasm.*)

Remember his emblem? Dress then
this naked man with the clothes
of his master! His own defeated flesh
will crush the torch. Go forth without fear.

(*He puts out the torch with his foot.*)

POLYPHONTES:

(*While leaving*)

Woman, see that you prepare the lamb.

CHORUS: Perish he who divides men
into the pure and the impure! And proud of
his purity spills blood, invades
the city and launches persecution.

THE SPIES:

(*They share the text and physical enactment*)

"No one will cast me from this tower,"
wrote Eteoclus in his device, where
with resolve a soldier climbs
a ladder resting on Thebes' walls.
Eteoclus endlessly shouts his
arrogant emblem's warning:
"No one will cast me from this tower."
The veins of his neck swell
and his enraged face contracts.
The wind ripples his hair,
loose, with no helmet, thick, aggressive.
He whips the mares of his chariot,
calls them, rebukes them, making them
writhe tortured beneath the yoke.
The reigns are whistling with a grating noise,
the impatient beasts are panting.

ETEOCLES: I've already sent Megareus! He will decorate his house
with the soldier, and the ladder, and the tower.
His hands do not flaunt pompous displays,
but he will not retreat before the clamor of some mares.
His spear will pierce the chest of Eteoclus, *(He acts out the gesture*)
and the mares will scatter.

CHORUS: Those mares writhing in the same spot,
tortured, useless, foretell the torment
that Eteoclus has imagined for us.
All of Thebes yoked to a wheel that never
stops, stripped and sterile, hearing,
without respite, the echoing tongues of hate.

SPY 1: Your fears pierce my chest to the quick.
There is Amphiaraus, posted in front of the fifth gate,
standing in his chariot, handsome and solitary.

SPY 2: He says nothing. He offers no threats or boasts.

SPY 1: He is silent. His gaze is wise and melancholy.

ETEOCLES: What is this man doing alongside the others?

SPY 1: He fights for nothing and no one.
He expects nothing. Only the intoxication of the struggle.
Prophet of his own end, he knows
that he will fertilize this soil with his remains.

SPY 2: But he cannot avoid it. He lives delivering himself to death.

SPY 1: He seeks it, he beseeches it, he yearns for the sound of its step.

SPY 2: On his well-forged shield, there shines
no emblem, nor sign, nor inscription.
He advances with his shield empty.

SPY 1: Choose for this man a valiant
and skilled adversary. Fearful is he who knows his own destiny.

ETEOCLES: I do not admire this man. He is strange to me.
He is too concerned with himself. It is not just
to commit suicide through the death of others.
He looks for his own end
but needs to pass through the bodies of others,
leave them motionless, to find himself.
This is too costly and bloody a mirror.
We'll place him before the shining shield
of Lasthenes: he can watch himself in his death throws.

(*Lasthenes exits*)

CHORUS: See you soon, young Lasthenes.
Your eye is keen, your hand quick.
Here we'll await your return,
and the trophies of victory.

SPY 2:

(*He grabs a spear and raises it with open arms. He circles. He shrieks.*)

I love this shaft of wood, this point of iron.
It's my fist, my country, my eye, my father.
It thrums, it flashes, it ravages the air,
venerated metal, cold and piercing.

(*The chorus splits in two*)

FIRST CHORUS: The moans of the dying ring out.
There are men in the atriums of the houses,
rotting, rotting. A head
hangs from a window, the eyes bulging.

SECOND CHORUS: Dragged by the hair, dresses
torn by cruel and urgent hands,
we'll be raped against the wall, beneath
the olive groves, in the back of a kitchen,
in front of our terrified children.

SPY 2: You will not take pity, deaf
to laments, to supplications,
to the gush of spilled blood.

FIRST CHORUS: Oh wail of the newborns,
expiring on their mother's breast.

SPY 2: Pierce, cut, tear, cold flame.
You know no other feeling or pleasure.

SECOND CHORUS: To whom are you taking me? Whose slave will I be?
Black veils cover my shorn head.
Farewell for the last time, places I loved.

SPY 2: For you there is nothing but the tremble
in the air, the whistle of the flight
that seeks the neck, the chest, the back
and opens the gate to death.
I spin with you, I revive, I urge you far
from delicacy and tenderness.
Human pain, I do not recognize you!

FIRST CHORUS: We will be forced
to sing of enemy feats.

SECOND CHORUS: We will be forced
to work the land of others.

FIRST CHORUS: We will be forced
to learn to forget and stay silent.

SPY 2: Mouths wrenched off at my feat,
wet lashes, final rattles, I adore you!
I don't know who they were or what they were named.
But the ship of death does not ask,
it carries you tongue-less and nameless.
My sharpened edge cuts the ties.

FIRST CHORUS: Lift your foot, smile, bow, salute.
Dance in the triumphant enemy's feast.

SECOND CHORUS: Lift your foot, smile, bow, salute.
Intone cheerful songs of obedience.

SPY 2:

(*He strikes the spear against a shield)*

I, Parthenopeus, swear to raze the city!

ETEOCLES: Don't let this murderer enter, Actor!

Listen to the description of his shield
and annihilate this vermin. The air
will be clearer with his silence.

SPY 1: A wide and golden shield defends
his whole body. In the center,
with glittering nails, it bears
a bloodthirsty bird of prey
with open claws.

ETEOCLES: With your arrows, make Parthenopeus hear
the painful shrieks of the monster
that covers him. Let the bird turn
against its master and bite him!

ACTOR: Heart, my heart, if you are confounded by the labyrinth
of weapons, of shouts, the blow of arrows,
rise up and resist. Offer the adversary a firm
chest. Do not be too joyed by success if you vanquish.
Return humble. One is worth only this instant
when he decides, a little dazed, to die for others.

CHORUS: You have already seen, Actor, the evils of a conquered
city. Go out and fight. If your hand gives us back
peace, we'll work. Spring will be reborn
after this night. The earth is unbreakable and
enduring. We'll have its gifts tomorrow. Go out and fight.
Return with the calm light of heroes.

(*Actor gives the women a ribbon to remember him by. He exits. The spies and the chorus remain. The noise of the war suddenly stops.*)

ETEOCLES: What's happening? Why do they fall silent?

THE SPIES: We must leave. Don't you hear?

ETEOCLES: They've stopped. You cannot hear the chariots.

THE SPIRES: We'll go searching for news.

ETEOCLES: One moment! Someone is missing.

SPY 2: Is it necessary to say it?

SPY 1: Must we also name and describe him?

ETEOCLES: That's it.

THE SPIES: You already know, Eteocles.

ETEOCLES: Do you pity me?

THE SPIES: No. But we fear destiny.

ETEOCLES: You want to spare me from suffering!

THE SPIES: No. You're the same as the rest.

ETEOCLES: That's it. That's as it should be. Say it then!

SPY 1: Your own brother is at the seventh gate!

ETEOCLES: Finally fate strikes me in the eyes!
In vain I wanted to stay unaware. I believed for a moment
that the war's action would delay its arrival.
But it's here. It comes with the rolling of the chariots,
propelled by arrows, arriving at the hand of my brother.
What fault did you find in me, what inner evil
so that you will not let me be, so that you will not forget me
and finally you have your way, merciless?
My race, maddened, without rest, here I am!
But this is no moment to moan. I have no right.
Finish. Say what you know. This silence
is auspicious for them, sadly auspicious.
Then you'll go in search of news.

THE SPIES: Your brother pronounces no imprecations,
no curse, threat, or oath
that does not touch and name you.
His voice is frenzied. He invokes
the gods of his fathers and urges on
his men, to hasten
death among us.
His shield, of fine craftsmanship,
recently forged, has sculpted
this double symbol:
a woman leads a warrior
dressed in golden armor, and signs:
"I am Lawful Right.[5] I will return to Polynices
his homeland, and the inheritance of his father."
The tale is complete. Now it is up
to you to designate your brother's adversary.
You rule the city.

CHORUS: Such silence! Such horrible silence!
We were prepared for war
and suddenly this silence like a blank

[5] In 1968, this reads "Soy el Derecho," whereas in 2007, Arrufat adds "Soy la Ley y el Derecho," or "I am Law and Right."

and deserted space. Forebodings
sprout and leap into it and fight each other.
What will happen? Someone is approaching!

POLYNICES:

(*He appears in the back, alone, unarmed.*)

It's Polynices!

CHORUS:

(*Passing the name from one to another*)

Polynices! Polynices! Polynices!

POLYNICES: I offer you a truce, Eteocles.
I've come to speak to you.

ETEOCLES:

(*After a silence*)

Enter. What do you want?

POLYNICES: What a strange question! I have halted
my army at the gates of the city
and you ask me what I want?

ETEOCLES: To the misery of Thebes we have heard
the thundering of your army. We see,
these women and I, the shining of your
well-forged weaponry and the arrogant inscription
of your shield. You have turned yourself over
to other people, Polynices,
and with them you come to your native land.
You are a stranger, and that's why I ask you
what you want. I don't recognize your voice,
I've forgotten the light of your eyes.

POLYNICES: The trembling in your voice says otherwise.
But it doesn't matter. I know you must pretend
in front of these women. In that you are
a good leader. You use the mask
that others expect and at the right moment.
But it doesn't matter. It's enough for me that you see
the splendor of my weaponry.

ETEOCLES: I don't know if my voice was trembling before but now
I tremble with disgust and sacred fury.
You're the same as always. That's why

those men accompany you and you raise
those shields. We know you, Polynices.
We know you so well that we've started to forget you.
Say what you want. Say what you intend
by this lying truce.

POLYNICES: Your boasting doesn't surprise me, Eteocles.
You pretend to be sure. You're the hero
that saves the people with a strong gesture.
This isn't the first time. There was another night
when you were as sure as you are now.
And yet, here I have an army
that follows me, that calls me their chief
and carries out my orders. You never thought
that your brother would return to his city
in the middle of, surrounded by a powerful host.
Wake up, Eteocles. Your end is beginning.
No one, only a mad man, would feel
sure faced with an army like mine.
I trust in its loyalty and its strength.
You will obtain nothing from a barefoot people
that clutches old spears and rotten shields.
Deliver me the city and I will save you
from the humiliation of a defeat.

ETEOCLES: Now I know what you want. These women
and I know it.

POLYNICES: Don't mix them into this. They
don't govern the city.

ETEOCLES: They too are the city.
I trust them and want them as witnesses.
I have nothing to hide, Polynices.
This night finally ends all distinctions.
Your truce teaches us to know ourselves
and affirm our cause.
It's your army that unites us,
it's your cruelty that saves us.
We are a barefoot people, we are
a crazy people, but we will not surrender
the city.
Thebes is no longer the same:
our madness
is founding something in the world.

POLYNICES: You won't destroy my army with words!
I'm offering you a way out. Abandon
the government and leave in silence.
I will explain your reasons to the people.

ETEOCLES: Enough, Polynices! You can offer nothing
to Thebes that would interest it. We have
listened to the description of your army.
We know why they come and the ambition
that unites them. We will not deliver the city to them!

POLYNICES: Then there will be blood. The fault
is yours!

ETEOCLES: Did I raise your army?

POLYNICES: You are not innocent, Eteocles.
If this army is here, it's your fault.
If blood is spilled, it's your fault.

ETEOCLES: Your tongue is quick, you argue smoothly.
You're a good speaker!

POLYNICES: We had the same teacher. Don't you remember?

ETEOCLES: I remember that we lived in the same house.
I remember that we ate together,
and together went out to hunt. I remember
that one day, your most skilled javelin
saved me from death.
We held each other, breathless,
while the boar was writhing
on the grass, gushing blood from its belly.
He died in gruesome convulsions.
I was long in loving your fist's strength.
I would observe it slowly, with caution and fervor.
We returned home and I told everyone.
The light was different that day,
life was more important to me.
What else do I remember?
I remember that you have summoned an enemy army
to destroy this house, to smash
this city, raising
the same fist as that day.

POLYNICES: Clever Eteocles! You know
how to search for sugary reasons.
In that moment I saved my brother,
now I come against my enemy.

My fist is the same
but you are not the same person.
In forgetting, one becomes someone else.
Still, it's not easy:
one day brings another day
and nothing is immune. You will not
be able to bury your guilt in the ground.
I have returned to remind you of it,
and I also remember. I remember
the pact we made three years ago,
and I remember that you destroyed it.
I swore with you to govern one year
each, to share the command
of the army and the paternal house.
You swore to comply. And you have broken
the oath and your promise.
Alone you govern, alone you decide,
alone you live in the house of my father.
Don't you remember?

ETEOCLES: And it's them that you've entrusted
to remind me? It's with the sound
of their weapons, with the screams
of their foreign mouths
that I should remember this?

POLYNICES: They will help me restore lawful right!

ETEOCLES: Capaneus will help you with his flaming torch?
Parthenopeus will help you spilling the blood
of your brothers with his thirsty spear?
Hippomedon will help you stealing their lands?
Murderers are helping you, Polynices. You claim
your right with the bloodied hands
of a mob of schemers.

POLYNICES: Do you believe everyone who opposes you is a murderer?
Do you believe everyone who opposes you is a schemer?
You pillaged my house and profaned an oath!
You hold a power that does not entirely belong to you!
What did you say in Thebes to hide your treason?

ETEOCLES: I rectified the errors of your government.
I divided the bread, I drew close to the poor.
Yes, it's true, I pillaged our house.
You will find nothing in it. I divided
our goods, divided our inheritance,

down to the last items, the amphoras,
the fabrics, the furs, the wheat, the spoons.
Our house is empty, and still
there was not enough for all.
Yes, it's true, I profaned an oath.
But I don't care. I accept this impurity
but not injustice.

POLYNICES: I will not forgive you. You didn't pillage my house
for yourself, but for others.
My things are in strange and unknown hands.
I despise your order and your justice.
It's an order built on disorder.
A justice based on an injustice.

ETEOCLES: That's how it needed to be, Polynices.
I hate all zeal for absolutes. I work
in the world, among men.
If it's necessary, I know how to dirty my hands.
To be just, it's necessary to be unjust a moment.

POLYNICES: For you justice is named Eteocles.
Eteocles the homeland and the good.
I oppose this justice, I fight
against this homeland that despoils and forgets me.
The night that you refused, full of arrogance,
to share power with me, destroying
our agreement, you contaminated everything.

ETEOCLES: That night lies behind us.
It will not return. If I was unjust with you,
I have been just with the rest.
I don't accept your purity, Polynices.
Your right is contaminated
by the men that second you.

POLYNICES: Do you know exile, Eteocles?

ETEOCLES: I know those who deserve exile!

POLYNICES: You hate me!

ETEOCLES: You hate your homeland!

POLYNICES: Against my will
I make war.
The gods are my witnesses!

ETEOCLES: The Thebans are witness to the fury of your army!

POLYNICES: You are godless!

ETEOCLES: But not an enemy of men.

POLYNICES: Are you the enemy of your brother?

ETEOCLES: My brother is enemy to Thebes!

POLYNICES: What have you said in Thebes of my exile?
How did you explain that unjust order?

ETEOCLES: I reminded them of the evils of your government.
I reminded them of the unfulfilled promises, the disillusion
of the final months.
You are incapable of reigning with justice.
You are obsessed with power, but you do not know
how to forge the happiness and grandeur of Thebes.

POLYNICES: Only you know, Eteocles. Only you know.
You decide what is good or evil.
You deliver justice, you measure the value of men.
You alone are free in Thebes!

ETEOCLES: But the people are on the walls.
But the people are ready to fire against your army.
No one is waiting for you. You are alone, Polynices.
There are no Thebans with you.

POLYNICES: You are an obstinate and arrogant man!
You see yourself everywhere. You are the city.
Your mind is Thebes and Thebes is your mind.
Bring, then, the fire, bring on the steal!
Neither of us two will renounce what is his
or share it with the other.

ETEOCLES: Get out of here! Do you see my hand?

POLYNICES: I see that you carry my sword.

ETEOCLES: Now it's the sword of Thebes.
Get out of here!

POLYNICES: I will not return to exile, Eteocles.
Either I enter the city victorious
or I'll die fighting at its gates.

ETEOCLES: You'll die!

POLYNICES: Let the gods and the earth
that raised me be my witnesses!
If any evil befalls you, city,

do not accuse me, but this one.
The fault is his.
Remember the evils of exile:
drifting through strange lands, writing
and waiting for letters, while faces,
names, columns come undone in memories.
Here is everything that I am, and that I love.
Against my will I make war.
Against my will they exiled me.
Eteocles, I'm repulsed by what you represent:
infallible power and an iron fist.

ETEOCLES: Justice will not take your side!
Your cause requires blood and the spear.
Because of you the workshops are closed,
masons, tailors, potters
deliver themselves to the fury of war
against their will. The cattle drift
through the fields, the harvests are lost, rotten.
Is this, Polynices, restoring lawful right?

(*Polynices exits*)

Soon we will know what your emblem is worth.
In this I have confidence: the work of all
will not be destroyed by one man alone.
Brother against brother, enemy
against enemy. We cannot now
reach an understanding. Let death decide
at the seventh gate!

CHORUS: Oh you, who are so dear to me, fate
opens the seventh gate searching for you. It asks
for you, says your name, walks to meet you.

ETEOCLES: If this could be stopped! But it's not possible now.
Everything has gone too far. It has gone where
I wanted it to go. I will not flee from fate
finding me; my hand looks to shake its own.

CHORUS: You are greeting yourself, Eteocles. Your hand
in the air finds your other hand.
You will be, like him, a victim of pride!
Pride reigns in a dark room,
with a mirror where you contemplate yourself forever.
Put aside this mirror. Remember
that there are other men in the world.

ETEOCLES: The wind blows with fury this night.
Countless, merciless stars, silent
spectators to the sacred fury of justice,
I do not greet you. I reject your complicity
or your absence. I turn towards you, women;
your human eyes, passionate, mortal,
can approve or reject this spectacle –
a brother marching against his brother—
but you can never be indifferent.
I am already beyond the company of things, and among men.
For them is my act, for them the end.

CHORUS: The roar of the battle distorts your senses.
Do not shed the blood of your brother!
Keep your clean hands, your reason and your restraint.

ETEOCLES: Why keep flattering destiny so as to delay it?
Now I know it's not cruel, or merciless, or violent.
It carries in its arms the part of me that was missing:
what Thebes demands, my father, myself.
Perhaps you demand it without knowing it.
All that I have been, since childhood,
was preparing for this instant. The circle
will close. The sphere becomes whole.

CHORUS: Oh Eteocles, you who are so dear to me, we must
attend a farewell that we cannot understand.
You have upheld the city, organized the defense,
inspiring our fighters and ourselves,
without caring for yourself or your blood ties,
pointing to the just, to what must be done, and its time.
The Thebans are on the walls and they wait for you.
But they don't wait for you to face your brother.
Why seek out Polynices, why mix your blood
with his blood, staining the city and your mission?

ETEOCLES: I now know, women, that it is not my brother
that is important. I do not march against him
– I will not see the shadow of his emerging beard,
the proud arch of his lips that
reminds me of my father—but rather against myself:
against that part of Eteocles named Polynices.
I am calm and cool. I do not feel love or hate.
My eyes are dry and without tears.
It would be sweet to sleep
and stroll without fear;
govern the city quietly;

cheer ourselves with music and statues,
with harvests and country festivals;
but the Thebans are on the walls
and I have no right to save myself
for a better time.
This is the better time!
The defense of the city unites us
in a greater, common good.
I will not save my life.
My life happens tonight and is fulfilled.
Polynices awakens us with a harsh light:
installing justice is a rough and sad
act, it occasions cruelty and violence.
But it is necessary. This is the final
clarity that I have reached on this final night.
Remember this: it is necessary.
In your fragile hands I leave
this certainty.
Peace will come after, placating fury.
Remember this: it is necessary.
Somehow we will stop injustice
in the world: with a punch, with a kick,
with a scream.
Farewell, women!

(*He exits*)

CHORUS:

(*With alternating voices*)

What is this feeling?
It has a name. Say it!
What is it that floods
my arteries, the beat
of my heart, squeezes
the throat and feet,
and thunders in the back
as though boring a hole?
It has a name. Say it!
In vain I call on reason,
I hide its presence in vain.
It has a name. Say it!
Terror! Terror! Terror!
You open all the gates,
you enter and leave through my pores,
you keep us awake

and suddenly put us to sleep.
Terror! Terror! Terror!
It twists in all the possibilities,
contradicts itself, calls,
hears us and forgets us.
It shows its teeth, touches
its hand to its hat,
lifts the axe, throws
the spear, the torments
begin in our minds.
Terror! Terror! Terror!
I close my eyes so as
not to see you, and it is you
that closes them and throbs
beneath the clenched lids.
Imagined tortures happen there,
a ruined city, brothers
in a tower slitting each other's throats.
Terror! Terror! Terror!
Go away. Go away. Let go
of my voice. I am not
one who shouts, moans, bites,
but you, animal of my mind,
that bars sleep
by setting my hair on end.
Out! Out! Out!
You jump on my chest,
kick, leave me breathless,
slave and free all at once.

(*The chorus splits*)

FIRST CHORUS: Tonight destruction lets its voice
be heard. It shrieks misfortune,
it foretells an irreversible verdict.
Pitiful will struggling in the shadows!

SECOND CHORUS: They are in a game that has already been played,
dice that have long been rolling
on a table in another house with another owner.
Pitiful will struggling in the shadows!

CHORUS: The arena ready, spears raised,
reins tense, gazes fixed on the other,
destruction blows in their chests,
ruins, eyes blinded
by a single feeling, by a single idea,

by a mirror where their restless faces appear.
Brothers that gouge with their own nails
and charge against themselves, deranged.

(*The chorus splits*)

FIRST CHORUS: Who will triumph? Who will lose?

SECOND CHORUS: What pierced body will fall to the ground?

CHORUS:

(*With alternating voices*)

Iron, try your luck tonight!
Blaze, blind arbiter of our future.
Either Eteocles enters or Polynices enters.
Choose, iron, we hang from your thread.
You disregard our desire and our cause:
you gleam only to the fire of the torches.
Iron, try your luck tonight!
Point to who will occupy the silent earth
when your brilliance is put out in his flesh.
Nothing matters to you: you only vibrate to the air.
You are energy, steel, fist, chance.
Who do you condemn, who do you absolve?
From whom does death want his blood
to breath, scattered and condemned?
Blood curdled and black, the blood
of fratricide, who will wash away your marks
and dress his body?
Who will offer in his name
a sacrifice of expiation?
After this misery, sisters,
what other will come?
What will misfortune leave over Thebes?
Open and show your dark breast!
By giving us evidence, teach us to resist.

(*The rumble of the siege begins again)*

Friends, the war again, now
and always the war.
The spears are raised, the chariots are running,
death is unfolding its pavilion.
What long expiation!
But where is the fault? What is it?
We wanted nothing other than to live,
to inhabit the earth and divide its bread,

and we engender hatred and vengeance,
resentful eyes, lips of rancor,
emblems and shields and echoing arrows.
How the night falls over us!
Voracious hands let the shade loose.
Dark waves release their fingers,
rancor coughs up its black spit.
Night with its hands lays siege to the city.
Shadowy hands search for us, hands
after loot, after power, dreaming
of reigning over men.
Oh madness, when will your stinging end.

(*They grab the weapons and start the dance. There is no music other than the ongoing sound of war, and from time to time, the clashing of the weapons, which they make with their mouths.*)

What husband did we lose, what brother, what friend?
Which of our sons will return?
Upright in every dwelling, with impatient
lips, with rabid pain,
we wait. We are struck by the faces
that left, the glint of teeth,
the quick steps, the door that closes
on farewells and makes backs vanish.
And suddenly that door opens
and gives us back ash and armor.
We would trade it all for death.
Oh madness, when will your stinging end.

CHORUS 1: Friends, I know war.

CHORUS 2: Friends, I know war.

CHORUS 3: When the ships returned
from the war in Troy,

CHORUS 4: from the war in Africa,

CHORUS 1: from the war in Asia,

CHORUS 2: I left my house very early
to greet my son.

CHORUS 5: I arrived at the sea.

CHORUS 3: There was the fleet, their sails
furled, oars
motionless in the water.

CHORUS 1: I heard laughter, lament, orders,
and great coffers of gold passed by.[6]

CHORUS 4: I was at the port for hours,
feverish with the sea air.

CHORUS 5: It was already night when all
the ships stood empty,
and my son had not come down.

CHORUS 1: And my son had not come down.

CHORUS 2: The son that it took me so much
time to raise.

CHORUS 4: Like a little tree in the countryside,
like a lamb

CHORUS 3: Like all that's worth something in life,

CHORUS 5: He bloomed slowly

CHORUS 1: And still died
from a single blow.

CHORUS 4: I looked for him everywhere,
calling for him, calling for him.

CHORUS 3: I returned on foot from the sea.

CHORUS 5: I was running, calling for him, calling for him.

CHORUS 2: Oh, I felt guilty, friends.

CHORUS 1: I let him leave.

CHORUS 4: I let him leave.

CHORUS 3: And now,
if suddenly he came back from the dead,

CHORUS 5: I would not have
the courage to look him in the face.

CHORUS 1: Friends, I know war.

CHORUS: Spear against spear.
Shield against shield.
The wind of war rises.
What will happen outside?

[6] In the 2007 version, two lines are added here. Chorus 3: None were for us. Chorus 4: None stopped at our door.

Who wins?
Who loses?
Soon the spies will arrive.
Polyphontes against Capaneus.
Lasthenes against Amphiaraus.
Bloodied crests.
Dead horses.
Arrows that fly and blind.
Actor, Parthenopeus.
Names, bodies that collapse.
What will happen outside?
Who will win?
I look for you, Hippomedon, I find you.
Melanippus, Melanippus, defeat Tydeus.
No one will cast me from this tower.
Forward, sisters, forward.
Don't retreat, Eteoclus: death is yours.
Let the dance favor victory.
Smashed heads.
Away, away with destruction.
Our happiness comes with victory.
Forward!
The spies are entering!

(*The dance ends abruptly. The noise of war has faded.*)

SPY 1: Thebans, good cheer:
the city is saved!
The vows were fulfilled.

SPY 2: Those threats
of arrogant men
crashed to earth.
Thebes now grows calm.

SPY 1: The towers standing,
the ramparts intact,
the gates strong!

SPY 2: We knew how to place men
capable of defending them.

SPY 1: Soon they will enter, women.
Victory gives them back.
Recite their names.

CHORUS: Lasthenes and Melanippus.

SPY 1: Actor and Polyphontes.

SPY 2: Hyperbius and Megareus.

CHORUS: Names of our blood!

SPIES: Names of Thebes!

CHORUS: Names of our sons!
We speak of six gates.
We speak of six men.
What about the seventh?

SPY 2: At six gates
we were the victors.

CHORUS: What are you saying?
What do you mean?

SPY 1: Destruction
at the seventh gate
reserved victory for itself.

CHORUS: What calamity
sweeps over the city?

SPY 2: The city is saved.

CHORUS: But the brothers...
What! Who?
You frighten me!

SPY 1: Recover
your spirits and listen.

CHORUS: Oh misery!
I guess at this evil.
Which of the two
has died?[7]

SPY 1: They shed their blood
one against the other.

CHORUS: Eteocles, Polynices,
they came to this!
Say it all
even though

[7] The 2007 version reworks this part of the scene. The Chorus continues: Say it quickly,/even though/it is cruel to hear. Spy 1 responds: Recover/your spirits and listen. The following 16 lines are removed, beginning again with "Dressed in their armor." The largest change between editions, this one serves to generate dramatic tension by withholding the information that both brothers had died.

it is cruel to hear.

SPY 1: They wounded
one other
dying
at each other's hand.

CHORUS: With brotherly hands
they tore out life.
For both
the same destiny
was waiting.

SPY 2: Dressed in their armor,
they were resplendent and serene.

SPY 1: "Gods of my father," exclaimed Polynices,
"grant me the death of my brother.
I want his blood on my victorious sword-hand.
Let him pay for his ambition and my exile."

SPY 2: "Let my victorious spear
sink into the breast of Polynices
and kill him for attacking his country
and for not understanding justice."

SPY 1: And they charged at each other full-speed
sending off lightning bolts as they joined in battle,
their lips full of foam.

SPY 2: Sparks leapt from their spears.

SPY 1: Their shields moved quickly,
blocking the blow of the metal blades.

SPY 2: Agile, they stole flesh from death.

SPY 1: Suddenly Eteocles tripped
and offered his adversary a clear target:
Polynices sunk the spear into his leg.

SPY 2: And Eteocles, clenching his teeth with pain,
tried to strike his brother in the shoulder
but the spear broke and left him unarmed.

SPY 1: He retreats, and throwing a stone splits
Polynice's spear down the center.

SPY 2: And he rips the spear
from his leg without a sound.

SPY 1: Now the fight is even.

SPY 2: So they bring out their swords.

SPY 1: Their bodies come closer.

SPY 2: The shields clash.

SPY 1: And suddenly Polynices falls to the ground,
gushing blood: Eteocles' sword
is in his stomach nailed up to the ribs.

SPY 2: "With my own sword you kill me.
That and your hand close the world for me."

SPY 1: Eteocles approaches. He pants. He drags
his leg. He leans over his brother
to take away his arms.

SPY 2: But with a trembling hand, touched
by death, Polynices grabs
his sword and lodges it
in his brother's liver.

SPY 1: They both fall, they roll together.

SPY 2: Eteocles, a horrible rattle
twisting in his chest, lifts his hand
and bids farewell to his men.

SPY 1: He cannot speak.
He gushes blood and spits.

SPY 2: "Who are you now, Eteocles?[8]
I no longer recognize you.
I cannot hate or love you.
Where are you? Close my eyes."

SPY 1: And both closed each other's eyes.

CHORUS: And now should we rejoice,
and now should we celebrate
with jubilant voices
the salvation of the city?
Or will we mourn these unfortunates
who could not understand each other?

[8]The 2007 version clarifies the brothers' final moments. Spy 2: "Who are you now, Eteocles?/Where are you? Brother, close my eyes." Spy 1: After a silence, Eteocles' fingers/closed Polynices' eyes. Spy 2: Then, before dying, Polynices lowered/Eteocles' eyelids. Spy 1: And so, one to the other,/ they closed each other's eyes.

What separates them? What army, foreign
and dark, splits our homeland
and the paternal house in two?
Who pushes aside memories,
transforms faces,
and separates them forever?
We wanted our work to
unite us with equal ties,
and Polynices cut them with
blood and steel!

SPIES: Things to be celebrated
with joy and with grief!
The city saved: the body
of its defender dissolves
in the earth. The work
completed, death enters.

(*They exit*)

CHORUS: Would it not have been better to stop and think?
Would it not have been better to return victorious
and govern peacefully, with caution and greater justice?
Should I perhaps lament Polynice's fate?
Remember the evils of exile?
Will death purify his crime against Thebes?
Oh stubborn, stubborn, stubborn.
I break into funeral chants for you both.
No one will reproach our tenderness
before he who perishes in error.
Later, Polynices, we will fulfill our duty.
You are no longer our enemy; you are a man who is dead.

(*The bodies of Eteocles and Polynices enter*)

CHORUS:

(*With alternating voices*)

Now they are here. Now it's not a matter of words.
Reality strikes like a flaming sword.
Twin misfortune, twin solitude.
Oh, what a strange night: mixing
misery with joy,
arrogance with justice,
leaving us with gratitude and pity.

(*The chorus shows with their bodies and voices, without bland stylizations, the movement of the funeral boat, the oars striking the water, etc.*)

Friends, the wind of lamentations is rising.
Their heads knock to the rhythm [9]
of the beating oars
so that the favorable sound spreads,
and the ship with black sails,
with its two pilgrims,
enters the kingdom of death.

(*The chorus divides.*)

FIRST CHORUS: Your voices did not persuade me
or break my tribulations.
Who will lead us now?
What will become of your work?

SECOND CHORUS: No one has dressed you, Polynices,
or washed your body.
No one wants to dress
an enemy.

FIRST CHORUS: How is it that on your behalf,
through your work, the homeland was
to be delivered to foreign ambition! No one
will sing such a lovely feat.

SECOND CHORUS: You have your weapons on, Eteocles,
and it's good that it's that way.
Thebes is ready to bury you
with honor and sorrow,
and it's good that it's that way.

FIRST CHORUS: The air is calm now,
quiet, without noise, without harm.
Your generous blood
makes the air more pure.

SECOND CHORUS: The towers of the city
draw closer
and innocent they shine.

[9] These six lines are changed in the 2007 version. They read: The boats move, the oars are moving./What do their eyes see now/what laurels, waters, nameless birds?/Turn around, Eteocles. See this hand wave farewell./Friends, the winds of goodbyes are rising./The boat detaches from our shore./May the favourable sound spread,/may the black sails swell/may the pilgrims enter the kingdom of death.

FIRST CHORUS: Hate vanishes
in this motionless body,
dies in this mute mouth.
It leaves us free, without inheritance.

SECOND CHORUS: Both received their share.
The share that destiny and their will
had reserved for them,
and a bottomless richness
beneath their bodies:
the earth.

FIRST CHORUS: Soon will come the spring,
the rain, moving the earth
with tenderness,
and new leaves will show themselves
over the blood, friends.
The sacrifice completed,
open the doors.

(*The Champions and the Spies enter. The funeral procession is organized. The Champions and the Spies place themselves next to the body of Eteocles. Alone, to one side, lies the body of Polynices.*)

CHORUS: With you the sun rises, Thebans.
We are sad and joyous to see one another
again. But we will not be ashamed
tomorrow to embrace each other and eat the lamb.

POLYPHONTES:

(*He approaches the body of Eteocles*)

We will not disturb you with laments and tears.
Farewell, Eteocles. We cannot blame you:
your work is within us. We shall continue
this justice that does not regret or stumble.
For you, a new order will reign, while you sleep.
For that, tomorrow we can eat the lamb.

(*They lift the body of Eteocles. Funeral chants ring. The procession slowly leaves.)*

POLYPHONTES:

(*To some women*)

You there, bury him.
We will have for him the pity
that he did not have for Thebes.

(*While they cover the body of Polynices, the sun rises.*)

Appendix I: The UNEAC Declaration

The following is a translation of the UNEAC preface to the 1968 publication of *Seven Against Thebes*. It has been shortened, removing the extended discussion of Heberto Padilla's *Fuera del juego*.

The UNEAC Declaration

On October 28th of this year, there was a joint meeting between the executive committee of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union (UNEAC) and the foreign and national jury members it selected for the literary competition that, as in previous years, it had hosted. The purpose of said meeting was to jointly examine the prizes awarded to two works: in poetry, one titled *Fuera del juego* [*Out of the Game*] by Heberto Padilla, and in theatre, *Seven Against Thebes* by Antón Arrufat. From the perspective of the Union's executive committee, both contained controversial points of a political nature that had not been taken into consideration in delivering this judgment. After a very wide-ranging debate that lasted several hours, in which every attendee spoke with complete autonomy, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

1. To publish the prize-winning works by Heberto Padilla in poetry and Antón Arrufat in theatre.
2. The executive committee would insert a note in both books expressing its disagreement with them on the grounds that they are ideologically opposed to our Revolution.
3. The votes of the jury members regarding the disputed works would be included, as well as a statement of the discrepancies maintained by some of said jury members with the executive committee of UNEAC.

In compliance, then, with the above, the executive committee of UNEAC would by this means make known its utter disagreement with the prizes awarded to the works of poetry and theatre that, along with their authors, were mentioned at the beginning of this text. The leadership of UNEAC does not renounce the right or the duty to oversee the maintenance of the principles informing our Revolution, one of which is without doubt its defense, both from its declared and open enemies, and from those—and they are the most dangerous—that use more subtle and duplicitous means to take action.

The Fourth Literary Competition of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union took place at a moment when certain phenomena typical of the ideological struggle, present in every profound social revolution, reached a singular intensity within our country. Currents of ideas, positions, and attitudes, whose roots are still nourished by the society abolished by the Revolution, developed and grew, subtly adapting to the changes and variations imposed by a revolutionary process without accommodations or compromises.

The Cuban Revolution's respect for the freedom of expression, shown by the facts, cannot be called into doubt. And the Writers and Artists Union, considering that these phenomena would progressively disappear, erased by economic and social developments that would be reflected in the superstructure, authorized the publication within its catalogue of literary texts whose ideology, on the surface or underlying, at times departed widely from or opposed the ends of our revolution.

This tolerance, which aimed to unite all literary and artistic creators, seems to have been interpreted as a sign of weakness, encouraging the intensification of a struggle whose ultimate objective could be none other than an effort to undermine the indestructible ideological resolve of the revolutionaries.

In the last months we have published various books that, to a greater or lesser degree and by diverse routes, pursued this same goal. It was clear that the decision to respect the freedom of expression, up to the very point

at which it starts to be freedom for counterrevolutionary expression, was being interpreted as an emerging climate of boundless liberalism, always the result of the abandonment of principles. And this interpretation is unacceptable, as no one is unaware that the Cuban Revolution's deepest and most beautiful attribute is precisely its respect and unwavering loyalty to the principles that are the profound root of its life.

As we said, in two of the six competing literary genres, Poetry and Theatre, the Union's leadership found that the prizes had fallen upon works constructed on an ideological basis openly opposed to the thought of the Revolution.

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The Cuban Revolution does not propose to eliminate critique, nor does it demand praise songs or apologetic hymns. It does not purport that intellectuals should be a supporting chorus with no standards. The accomplishments of the Revolution are its best defense before history, but the intellectual that situates himself critically toward society should know that, morally, he also has an obligation to contribute to building the revolution.

In approaching contemporary society analytically, one needs to consider that the problems of our epoch are not abstract: they have names, and they are concretely located. One must specify what one opposes, and in the name of what one fights. Colonialism is not the same as struggles for national liberation; imperialism is not the same as countries that are economically subjugated; Cuba is not the same as the United States; fascism is not the same as communism, nor is the dictatorship of the proletariat at all similar to Latin American military dictatorships.

***

As for the work of Antón Arrufat, *Seven Against Thebes*, one need not be an extremely suspicious reader to establish more or less subtle approximations between the fictitious reality staged by the play and the no less fictitious reality that imperialist propaganda disseminates to the world, proclaiming that it represents the reality of revolutionary Cuba. It is by this means that the "besieged city" of this version of Aeschylus can be identified with the "captive island" spoken of by John F. Kennedy. All the elements that Yankee imperialism wished were Cuban realities are in this play, from the people terrified by an approaching invader (the mercenaries of the Bay of Pigs were convinced that they would find this mass terror paving the way for them), up to the anguish concerning war that the city's inhabitants (the Chorus) describe as the greatest of all possible horrors, implicitly making us think that it would be best to avoid the horror of a fratricidal struggle, of a war between brothers. Here also there is a fictitious reality: those who abandon their homeland and take shelter in the house of the enemy, to conspire against her and prepare to attack her, cease being brothers and become traitors. Against the turbulent backdrop of a terrified people, Eteocles and Polynices engage in dialogue with the same level of fraternal dignity.

Now then, who do these books benefit? Do they benefit our revolution, slandered in this way, wounded by such means of betrayal?

Obviously not. Our revolutionary conviction allows us to assert that such poetry and such theatre benefit our enemies, and their authors are the artists that they need to feed their Trojan horse till the time when imperialism decides to put into practice its policy of direct military aggression against Cuba. The commentary that this situation is eliciting in certain quarters of the Yankee and Western European press is proof of this, as is the defense, sometimes open and sometimes implied, that such press has started to generate. This is "in the game," not outside of it, as we already know, but it is useful to repeat it; we must not forget it.

Ultimately this comes down to an ideological battle, a political confrontation in the middle of a revolution in progress, which no one can stop. Not only creators already known for their craft but also young talents emerging on our island will take their part in it, as, doubtlessly, will those who work in other fields of production and whose judgment is essential within an integrated society.

To sum up: the leadership of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union rejects the ideological content of the prize-winning book of poems and work of theatre.

It is possible that this measure could indicate to our enemies, declared or hidden, and to our confused friends, a sign of increased rigidity. On the contrary, we understand it to be entirely healthy for the Revolution, because openly declaring the ideological struggle indicates that Revolution is being deepened and strengthened.

Executive Committee of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union

Havana, November 15, 1968

"Year of the Heroic Guerilla"

The Theatre Jury's Statement

The Theatre Jury for the Competition of the Cuban Writers and Artists Union, composed of Ricardo Salvat (Spain), Adolfo Gutkin (Argentina), Juan Larco (Peru), Raquel Revuelta and José Triana (Cuba), having met at UNEAC's headquarters on this date, has decided to award the prize to the play *The Seven Against Thebes*, subtitled "A Role of the Dice," with the following votes: three in favor and two against, which the members of the jury will justify in the attached pages; and to unanimously award a mention to the play *KRAK!*

We also recommend, by a majority of votes, that the following plays be staged by theatre groups:

The Little Curtain

Sleep My Child, Sleep My Love, Sleep Little Pieces of My Heart

The Delegates Arrive at Dawn

The Bird Paints

These works are not listed according to any hierarchy or sense of priority.

Signing in accordance with this statement are:

Adolfo Gutkin

Ricardo Salvat

Juan Lorco

José Traina

Raquel Revuelta

Dissenting Votes of Jury Members Revuelta and Larco

We, the members of the jury signing this declaration, have believed it necessary to place on record that our disagreement with the prize-winning play is of a political-ideological nature.

We are in favor of a critical, anti-dogmatic theatre, free of conservative prejudices. But we cannot for that reason give our vote to a play that maintains, in our view, ambiguous positions regarding the fundamental problems facing the Cuban Revolution.

Raquel Revuelta

Juan Larco

Appendix II: Leopoldo Ávila's "Antón Goes to War"

Following the controversy over the UNEAC prizes, five articles appeared in the military magazine *Verde Olivo*, or *Olive Green*, under the pseudonym Leopoldo Ávila. These articles called for a new, more rigidly politicized program for intellectual activity, and two specifically targeted Heberto Padilla and Antón Arrufat. Ávila has never been conclusively identified, but Ambrosio Fornet speculates that he may have been Luis Pavón Tamayo, who was the Minister of Culture from 1971 to 1976, a period often referred to as the "quinquenio gris," or "gray five years."

Ávila, Leopoldo. "Antón Goes to War." ***Verde Olivo*****. November 17, 1968. 16-18.**

For some time now, Antón Arrufat has been known in literary circles for his nonsense, his shifting character, and finally a series of big and small things of a different nature that are beside the point. What matters is that he is also and above all known as the author of more than one of those "strange" poems that, if analyzed well, are not strange at all: they are simply and plainly hostile to the revolutionary process.

Antón is one of the most versatile members of the *Lunes* group. He started to make his name in the magazine *Ciclón*, where alongside some serious articles (such as Portuondo's essay on Villena) one always found that tempestuous attitude that Feo and Piñera (the flashy editors), alongside Cabrera, gave and give to many of their subjects. Later he was in the United States, returning to Cuba in 1959 to join the aforementioned group. As they had paper and a publisher, Antón flooded the pages of the magazine and his little books were edited with stubborn frequency. Even though his poetry did not reach the level of great poetry, nor his theatre that of great theatre, nor his short stories that of great prose, Antón had friends. And that was sufficient.

The problem is that now Antón has gone to war.

But there are antecedents that are worth remembering. From *Lunes* he moved to the magazine *Casa*. There he published his people widely. He topped it all off by publishing the poem "Envío" by José Triana, which concerned sexual inversion described in the crudest detail. Antón left the magazine, dedicating himself to advising theatre groups and other literary activities. Three years later, he sent a play to the Union contest. On the jury, the vote of José Triana, alongside that of two foreigners (one of whom, at least, was completely ignorant of the Cuban situation and Antón's situation), awarded it the prize, against the worthy dissenting votes of Raquel Revuelta and Juan Larcos on ideological grounds.

The Seven Against Thebes is Antón Arrufat's declaration of war. If until now he was known for his ambiguous little poems, now he wants to be as clear as water. The result, logically, is murky enough.

The subject matter of an ancient Greek tragedy is this time the means of delivering a counter-revolutionary argument. This is the story of two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices. Eteocles governs the City (Thebes) and defends it against the aggression of Polynices, who, backed by a foreign army, lays siege to it. Eteocles promises the people villas and castles if they triumph, and even to "govern with greater justice." The chorus, meanwhile, doubtfully proclaims:

"What crime did we commit? What freedom will we lose?" or other obviously devious, allusive, and hesitant things. The spies describe the invading army as thirsty for power and land-owning. There is a fleeting third character, Capaneus, who is not tied to anything in the world, neither family nor friends. He distrusts everyone. He only loves purity. He wants to burn the City and the chorus does not like him for being a "denier of life." Here one must pause in Antón's war. The chorus comments:

> "Perish he who divides men
> into the pure and the impure! And proud of
> his purity spills blood, invades
> the city and launches persecution."

The City, under siege by the enemy, stops, meager and bereft, hearing the ceaseless echoing of the languages of hate. Polynices comes to demand the return of his homeland and his father's inheritance. The meeting between the two brothers is the most poisonous part of the play. Eteocles reproaches Polynices for coming with foreign troops. Polynices responds that Eteocles is a hypocrite that knows how to pretend in front of the people. Polynices offers a truce, tries to persuade Eteocles that he will achieve nothing with a barefoot people grasping old weapons. "We are a barefoot people, we are a crazy people, but we will not surrender the city," argues Eteocles.

But Polynices—who comes with the enemy army—has been unjustly exiled. And Eteocles is guilty of governing the paternal house alone. If he reproaches Polynices for coming with enemy weapons, the invader's reasons are to "restore lawful right." Polynices says to Eteocles that he believes everyone who opposes him is a murderer. It was Eteocles who divided the bread and drew close to the poor, but "he did not pillage the house for himself, but for others, his order is built on disorder, his justice on injustice."

Do we need to go on with this "Greek" fable?

If we must go on, allow us to rush a little. Here is Polynice's lament over exile:

> "Remember the evils of exile:
> drifting through strange lands, writing
> and waiting for letters, while faces,
> names, columns come undone in memories.
> Here is everything that I am, and that I love.
> Against my will I make war."

If we must go on, we'll say that the chorus underlines the arrogance of Eteocles who refuses to surrender the city to the brother who comes with enemy troops. And it recommends not spilling the brother's blood, and when Eteocles dies (both brothers die), the Chorus cannot understand the death of the defender of the City. After all, Eteocles and Polynices, hero and traitor, are for Antón one and the same.

"Terror, terror!" cry the women. "We wanted nothing other than to live, to inhabit the earth and [to divide its] the bread, and we engender hatred and vengeance." "We would trade everything for death," etc.

Enough. Or more? The chorus comments, "Stubborn, stubborn, stubborn." "Would it not have been better to stop and think?" And Antón includes, in addition to a strange and somber army that divides the paternal house in two… Eteocles could have "governed peacefully, with caution and greater justice."

Here, we see, is Antón in all-out war. One need not be very imaginative to realize what he means—what he is saying—in this dramatic work. But if there are doubts, the daring Antón, the skittish Antón, the fanciful Antón clears them up with an opening note, taken from Alfonso Reyes, in which he responds to someone who reproaches him for the subject matter of one of his plays, "Iphigenia," being foreign. "Name Iphigenia Juana González, and you would already be satisfied," proposed Reyes. Which is to say that Antón helps one understand his fable in all of its vile, wretched content.

What is this man thinking? That we are going to celebrate his joke? That we are going to stage his play: let Piñera or Rodríguez Feo come out to shower him with praise? No, our own war is a real one, it is not a game. It is not a struggle between brothers that has been spurred on by arrogant and ambitious people; it is a struggle against imperialism with no possible truce, and he who comes to take the City is not going to find weepers who say "stubborn, stubborn, stubborn" nor that ask what freedom we will lose. But rather a people that knows how to defend, at any cost, the freedom that it has, and that will win.

This devious fabulist, up till now, never dared so much. His most audacious act was that publication of "Envío," of which we spoke at the beginning. But now he speaks and clears things up. If in some other moment he has tried to publish other counter-revolutionary things, someone always—with good intentions, to see if Antón would change—gave him friendly advice. And Antón held onto his little poem. But now of his own account and at his own risk he goes to war with armour and all. To war against the Revolution. And so no. No little groups that take this work abroad with the Revolution's money or flights to European capitals. Here we do not celebrate insolence, even when it comes from such an insignificant man. Here we do not applaud infamy, because the Revolution was made against infamy. Here we do not raise pedestals to lies because, because [sic] the Revolution was made with truth. And besides, do not hold the people in such disdain, do not believe that the people will not understand your crude and pseudo-aristocratic attacks. The people understand them and reject them. His insolence will not go unnoticed while he laughs at the people from behind the curtain. This will not happen again.

Stay quiet, take your pills, calm down. But please, at this point, do not come with your shameless attacks. This is no time for messing around.

Decomposed Theatre
By Matéi Visniec
Translated by Jozefina Komporaly

Over the last three decades, Matéi Visniec has generated a substantial body of work that situates him as a major voice in European playwriting and an influential commentator on topical social and political issues. The latter is closely intertwined with his career as a journalist for Radio France Internationale, where he is regularly reporting on current affairs. Visniec started out as a dramatist in his native Romania and consolidated this practice after his self-imposed exile to France in 1987. Although he has continued to (also) write plays with a focus on Eastern European realities, he switched from writing in Romanian to French and this transition had an instant impact on his style, leading to a much more pared down and direct mode of expression. This transition has also reframed the reception of his work, and as the playwright contends, his success is considerably down to the French theatre system, where small-scale companies can afford to take risks with contemporary experimental work. For many of these companies the creative process culminates in taking productions to theatre festivals, especially the Avignon OFF Festival, where Visniec has become one of the most frequently staged contemporary Francophone authors.

Visniec's plays have often been described as being in the tradition of the theatre of the absurd, and his veneration of Beckett and Ionesco—to whom he has dedicated plays—continue to fuel such parallels. He draws on key absurdist themes, such as the crisis of language and communication, confinement, estrangement, angst, alienation, however, he generally highlights the role of external (rather than internal) factors and his protagonists are at the mercy of hostile circumstances and regimes. Words make an attempt at expressing the absurdity of the human condition, yet they keep failing and there are no solutions on offer, audiences and readers being invited to search for these themselves. Visniec often points out that in communist Romania, absurd was a reality rather than an aesthetic trend, and he even gets his alter ego of sorts, the poet Sergiu Penegaru to clarify this to the virtual character of Eugène Ionesco in *And Now Who's Going to Do the Dishes?:* "Here, we live the absurd, while, over there, you write it." In this respect, Visniec emerges as a playwright closely tuned in to actual lived experience, and joins a long line of politically engaged writers.

Decomposed Theatre is based on a French original entitled *Théâtre décomposé, ou l'homme-poubelle,* first produced in 1993 in French and Romanian by Theatrum Mundi and the French Cultural Institute in Bucharest, directed by Cătălina Buzoianu. The translation has also relied heavily on Visniec's own subsequent Romanian version entitled *Teatru descompus sau omul pubelă.* This play is among the formally most innovative Visniec texts, whereby the playwright offers what he terms a "modular text"—a selection of independent scenes that can be combined in various permutations in performance—allowing theatre companies full flexibility in mise-en-scène. In the course of these self-contained monologues and dialogues, Visniec illuminates topical psychological traumas, by conjuring up an atmosphere of anguish and confinement and featuring a constant deployment of menace that blurs the boundaries between actual and imaginary situations. For this reason, the play has proven to be particularly poignant during the ongoing pandemic. In addition to this episodic version below, Trap Door Theatre has also produced an earlier digital version directed by Josiah Davis for the Internaional Voices Project Chicago (30 September 2020), while an audio production directed by Kate O'Connor was aired on Trafika Europe Radio on 24 April 2021.

Further information on Visniec's work is available in the volume *How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients and Other Plays,* ed. Jozefina Komporaly (Seagull Books, 2015) and Komporaly's essay "András Visky & Matéi Visniec: Challenging boundaries of cultural specificity," in *Contemporary European Playwrights,* eds. Maria M Delgado, Bryce Lease and Dan Rebellato (Routledge, 2020), pp. 76-94.

This play was translated for Trap Door Theatre's unique stage adaptation of Visniec's "dialogic spectacle of monologues," directed and performed live on Zoom by an international ensemble and relayed online in 8 episodes between 3 December 2020 and 4 February 2021.

In this imaginative series, Trap Door decomposes and recomposes Visniec's modular text into a new structure, finding novel synergies between individual scenes and reinterpreting a timeless play written under the hallmark of open dramaturgy for the here and now. This new adaptation boldly explores the play's inherent modularity and permutability, and the dialogues thus established between the various scenes and episodes offer a multitude of readings and associations.

Many thanks to artistic director Beata Pilch for approaching me with this project, and to Seagull Books for their kind permission to rework the play, originally published in the volume *Matéi Visniec: How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients and Other Plays* (ed. J. Komporaly, Seagull Books, 2015).

Matéi Visniec (aka **Matei Vişniec,** born 1956) is one of the most prolific writers of fiction, poetry, and drama in the Romanian language, also known for a significant output of dramatic work originally authored in French. His many awards include prizes from the Romanian Writers' Union, the Romanian Theatre Union (UNITER), the Avignon Festival, the French Society of Writers and Composers, and the 2016 Jean Monnet Award for European Literature for the novel *The Merchant of Opening Lines*. Visniec's plays are among the most frequently performed works at the Avignon OFF Festival, and he has a growing international profile with productions in over thirty languages. In his native Romania, Visniec has achieved quasi-canonical status since the fall of communism (his work was banned prior to 1989); most theatres stage his work on a regular basis and the Suceava Theatre was named in his honour. Visniec's work is available in the following English publications: the anthologies *Balkan Plots* (ed. Cheryl Robson for Aurora Metro Books, 2002); *Playwrights before the Fall* (ed. Daniel Gerould for the Martin E Segal Center Publications, 2009), and *How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients and Other Plays* (ed. Jozefina Komporaly for Seagull Books, 2015). His Kafkaesque novel *Mr K Released* was published by Seagull Books in 2020, and two of his plays are included in *Plays from Romanian: Dramaturgies of Subversion* (ed. Jozefina Komporaly for Bloomsbury, 2021).

Jozefina Komporaly lectures at the University of the Arts London and translates from Romanian and Hungarian into English. She is editor and co-translator of the drama collections *How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients and Other Plays* (Seagull Books, 2015) and *András Visky's Barrack Dramaturgy: Memories of the Body* (Intellect, 2017), and author of numerous publications on drama and performance, including essays on Romanian and Hungarian theatre and the monographs *Staging Motherhood* and *Radical Revival as Adaptation* (Palgrave, 2017). Her stage translations have been produced by Foreign Affairs (London), Trap Door and Theatre Y (Chicago), Trafika Europe Radio, and recently translated work includes two volumes of essays on directing by Mihai Măniuțiu (co-translated with Nicoleta Cinpoeş) and the novel *Mr K Released* by Matéi Visniec (Seagull, 2020—shortlisted for the 2021 EBRD Literature Prize). Her latest publication as editor and translator is the transnational drama anthology *Plays from Romanian: Dramaturgies of Subversion* (Bloomsbury, 2021). She is a member of the UK Translators Association and of International Federation of Theatre Research.

EPISODE 1. DIRECTED BY KATARZYNA WIŃSKA, 3 DECEMBER 2020

THE RUNNER, THE ILLUSIONIST

Cast: John Kahara, Michael Mejia

THE RUNNER: PART 1

I can't stop. This hasn't happened to me before. This morning, I left for my usual run. I got as far as a couple hundred feet when I suddenly realized I couldn't stop.

As I passed the newsstand, the seller called out "Hello!"—I tried to slow down to answer him and I turned my head but I was already too far away.

It's funny how people still haven't realized what's happened. Everyone knows that I'm the town's marathon runner, that I run without stopping—always at the same time and always the same route. So everyone's used to me running. I greet them as I run, answer their questions as I run, give them a friendly wave as I run.

But this time, I couldn't. I can't stop. And what's more, I can't turn left or right, I'm forced to run straight ahead. Obviously, something's wrong. But what?

I'm approaching the outskirts of the town. People usually watch me pass with admiration, so Mr. Kuntz calls out: "How's it going?" I shout back: "Badly!" But I'm already far away, too far, and he can't hear me . . . Oh, good God, won't they stop clapping me? And there's Mrs. Cantonelli exclaiming: "How fast he runs! How supple! How graceful!"

"Enough, madam, enough!" I start feeling dizzy. Evidently, my body isn't listening to my brain. "Help me!"

Just look at them all, lounging on their terraces and in the cafés. They have nothing else to do all day but sit back and sip beer and white wine—and watch me running. Oh Christ, stop, stop saying that I'm disciplined, that I'm handsome, that I'm admirable, that I'm strong, that I'm bursting with willpower. Stop it because I can't stop!

"Stop me, please stop me!" Evidently, they can't hear me. "Mr. Pippidi! Mr. Pippidi!"

That's the baker. He blows me a kiss, the stupid bastard.

And here's the last cafe, the last houses, the end of the town. I'm drenched in sweat. For the first time in my life, I'm afraid. Here comes the last street to the left, but I can't turn left. Here comes the last street to the right, but I can't turn right. I make a superhuman effort to stop myself at the town gates, but I can't.

"Help me! Help me!"

My final chance lies there—where the three old men who always sit on the bench in the sun, in the same place where you enter the town. Whenever I pass them, the first one always says: "Very talented, that runner." And the second one says: "He's as handsome as an angel." And the third adds: "He's definitely going to win." But this time, as they turn their heads to watch me, I've already disappeared over the horizon.

In a way, I'm glad that it's all behind me.

THE ILLUSIONIST: PART 1

So perhaps I shall start by discovering, say, who among you has violated the regulations and brought prohibited animals onboard.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, many people don't want to be separated from their white mice or their black rabbits or their other little beasts.

What's this? Mice? But how can this be? Mice are forbidden onboard. Perhaps they're your favorite animals, after all, there are people who can't make even a single move without their animals.

For example . . . for example . . . you sir, yes, you! What are you doing with that little hedgehog under your rear? What? There isn't one there? Would you mind standing up for a little bit, ah, there you go! That doesn't bother you at all, sir, a hedgehog under your rear?

And you, sir, why are you wearing a live butterfly under your tie? You might end up crushing it, the poor thing, Go on, take it, see how beautiful it is! Perhaps you'd like to attach it to your neck?

No?

And you, madam, why do you have that frog in your handbag? Would you allow me? Frogs, madam, will eat anything, you know, so I'd advise you to check that all your things are still intact.

Now look at all this! What have we collected so far? Two rabbits, four mice, a snake, a lizard, a butterfly, a frog, a turtle, a hedgehog, two snails, and a squirrel—that makes quite a nice zoo! I'll keep all of these in my hat for you, if that's all right.

Hmm, I have the feeling they won't get on well together at all. Goodness me, aren't they quite a cocktail!

THE RUNNER: PART 2

The town's now a fuzzy shape that gets smaller and smaller in the distance. Christ, what are these, tears? I'm crying? Well, there you go, I run and I cry. But I don't feel tired or scared. I simply cry. And I don't try to understand. I can only feel the tears running down my face. They're making me cold but I can't raise my arms to wipe them away. My arms are frozen into a shape that offers me the best aerodynamic profile to help me run like a racing car. I charge ahead with my head bent forward, carving the optimum passage through the air.

The road is more or less deserted. From time to time, cars drive in the opposite direction. I don't call for help any more but simply smile at the drivers who give me a friendly wave. Now I'm running through a forest—I had to abandon the road because it curved and I can only go in a straight line. I take a path. I climb a hill. I run down into a valley. I don't have the energy to think any more. All I can do is watch the countryside go by. My main worry is avoiding the trees. When you run this fast, trees become dangerous.

Night falls, but I keep on running. I stumble across an unknown village and then a new town, also unknown to me. Everyone is asleep at this late hour and no one knows I'm the only living thing running at night.

I'm running in the dark, in fact. The lights from the last village have disappeared. Now I can't see anything in front of me. I barely miss the rocks and trees, following my instincts, but occasionally a night bird flies into me. I count my injuries. I've already killed a fair number of birds and even a few animals which I've inadvertently trampled over. More and more often, I hear wild cries and screams of sadness.

And now it's morning, and I'm nothing but a running wound. Behind me is a long trail of blood. Before me rise the mountains. The air is cold. It's going to rain. That's good, the rain will cleanse my injuries. The sea lies just beyond those mountains and, naturally, you should always be cleansed before you plunge into the sea.

THE ILLUSIONIST: PART 2

Thank you, ladies, thank you, gentlemen!

Perhaps we should stop here. No? Would you like to see another trick? OK, I know another little trick but it's a touch dangerous, it's the one with the magic wand, but it doesn't always work. I mean, sometimes the wand doesn't obey me.

Particularly when I want to make something reappear. Let's say, a watch. Sir, would you kindly pass me your watch? Thank you. Let's see if we can make this one vanish. One, two, three! Oh, dear. That didn't work, did it, madam? What? It's your husband who disappeared?

Look, it's not a problem. Hang on, you'll have your husband back. One, two, three!

Strange . . . very strange indeed! Did you see that? The lady just vanished, too. But that was just what she wanted, she wanted to be with her husband, and they are, without a doubt, together at this very moment but on the other side of the barrier that separates our ordinary world from the world of fantasy.

But look, it's no big deal. We'll make both of them reappear. One, two, three! Oh no! That's a bit too much, isn't it? I see that the whole first row of the audience has vanished. There are only two possibilities open to us: either we just stop right now and accept these minimal risks, or else we try again and take some real risks! Shall we?

One, two, three! Oh, damn, another row gone. Ladies and gentlemen, wait a moment, please don't panic.

A moment, please. Allow me to concentrate. One, two, three! What's this? The dome? No, that's no big deal, we can see the vaults of heaven so much better now. One, two, three! What's that? The stars? All of them? It's all going so fast now, eh? It's fast with this screwy wand isn't it? But what are you all doing? You can't leave me like this. Look, give me another chance. Wait! One, two, three!

Weird. That one even made the sea disappear. Where are we now?

One, two, three, make everyone come back! Obviously I'm making the same mistake each time, but which mistake is it, good God, which one?

How many do we have left now? One, two, three, four, five . . . ten? Well, gentlemen, now that we're all men here, I feel I can reveal the secret of this routine. I'm afraid I've forgotten the magic formula, that's the truth.

One, two, three! Son of a bitch! What a mess! Sir! Good heavens, are you sleeping? Wake up sir, the show has just finished, and yes, you're the last one here because you didn't give a shit about my act and fell asleep during . . .

Yes, everyone's left, that's it, so you didn't see a thing? Well, look, could you do me a tiny favor? I'd be infinitely grateful, it's no big deal, here, take my wand, point it at me and say "one, two, three, abracadabra!"

That's right, go for it! What? The wand disappeared? So that's really it. Sir, I think we're the only ones left on

this vessel, and what worries me most is that just a minute ago we could see a strip of land on the horizon, and now we can't . . .

EPISODE 2. DIRECTED BY ZACHARY NICOL, 10 DECEMBER 2020

THE MEAT EATER

Cast: Zachary Nicol

red gloved hands holding and twisting pepper grinder

Wow, don't we love buying meat! Beef, pork, lamb, chicken, fish, and snails, all of it is good for your body's flesh.

We are basically flesh that devours flesh. In fact, we live in a universe of flesh. I have no doubt of that. Everything is meat.

red gloved hands drop grinder

So when did I first realize that buying meat was my only true pleasure? Well, even when I was a child, I'd stand staring at the displays in the butcher's shop window. The sight of raw meat, fresh, triggered my first orgasms.

All my life, I've only ever wanted to buy meat. Pig ears and entrails, cow's brains, sheep's tongues and kidneys, pheasant's gizzards, cod livers, lobster tails, snake-eye soup—what delicacies!

turn toward wall, fall down wall

I am a slave to my passion for flesh. Even if I'm full up, I'll still pop a chunk of raw meat into my mouth. I'll just keep chewing on and on, without swallowing it. If I do swallow by accident, a sudden feeling of sheer emptiness and loss overwhelms me.

But when exactly, as I was eating a hamburger I had dropped on the table, did I first take my first bite of the table itself? That must have happened not long after the night my husband mysteriously disappeared from our bed.

red gloved hands emerge from bottom of frame

The shock of such an unsettling experience brought me intimately closer to what we know as inorganic nature. In a flash, I understood that everything that surrounds us is flesh. And that everything we touch is simply the membrane of the giant stomach that contains us. I tasted, yes I tasted, my oak table, and then my leather suitcases, the windowpanes, my silverware and, in one particular night of ecstatic revelation, I gobbled up half of my books. Believe me, everything is meat.

emerge from bottom of frame, trace segment of stomach

What is the definition of man? A piece of meat that devours all the meat around him. That's the definition of man. The definition of meat, then? Me! I'm a piece of meat that thinks about the meat surrounding me. How truly wonderful it is that every type of meat has its own taste and flavor! I can't describe to you the intimate self-knowledge I gained after I sampled my own flesh for the first time.

mouth and hand, trembling

But it was tasting my own heart that plunged me into the interior of my own self with no turning back. Since that moment, I have had no desire for any other type of meat to enter via my mouth. My tongue is all I need.

My goal now is to venture backwards and inwards, foraging all the way down to my entrails.

I dream of being wrapped up in my own mouth and living sealed up in the cocoon of my taste buds.

remove glove and blacken teeth

I have become a perfect 'perpetuum mobile', capable of eating my own flesh without excretion. Nourished by my own flesh, I charge myself with the exact same energy I need in order to eat my own flesh, which always grows back after I consume it.

The most fascinating point of this feast is when I nibble at the cortex of my brain. Nothing grows faster in my mouth (which surrounds me like a scab around an open wound) than my brain as it's being chewed. I even fear, because of its regenerative powers, that I may be growing.

replace glove and lean on wall

What is the root of this desire to consume the innermost strata of my own cerebellum? To be honest, I no longer know. There has to be something drawing me to the core of my brain, where I most of all long to sink my teeth, but unfortunately it grows faster than I can eat. Its protective coating expands as I eat it, and I feel as if I'm being pushed back by an unknown force.

At the moment, I'm concealed in my bedroom—a giant sphere encircled by a mouth, filling the room like a single organism with its walls. A few more days and, the whole room will, no doubt, explode as a result of my brain swelling like rising dough. Right now, I can hear the ceiling cracking and it sounds like my neighbors above are fleeing down the stairs.

I dig faster and faster into the outer matter of my brain, which never stops expanding. Together, we pour out of the windows and doors, and I can hear people screaming as they evacuate the neighborhood.

red gloved hands signal

I have no idea how all this happened. I've always been so agreeable, so calm . . . I've always considered myself more inclined to discretion and solitude than to uncontrollable explosions that threaten the streets where I live.

turn towards wall, fall down wall

A little more, and this carnivorous avalanche, the struggle between my mouth and my mind, will engulf the whole town.

Please, please, I'm begging you, don't leave me alone, please do something!

Is no one honestly going to stop me?

search light

EPISODE 3. DIRECTED BY MICHAEL MEJIA, 17 DECEMBER 2020

THE BRAINWASHER (I), THE MAN WITH THE COCKROACH, THE BEGGAR

Cast: Logan Hulick, Neema Lahon, Leslie Lund, Carl Wisniewski

Pre-show: Whack-a-mole with who is on screen, rotate with different gestures and rushed movements, popping in and out of the grid

Sound cue: Something creepy to establish a beat

THE BRAINWASHER (I)

LESLIE: Eleven announcements for the general public:

NEEMA: 1. Are you stressed? Anxious? Disappointed? Alienated? Are you tormented by existential doubts? Do you fear old age and death? Now you can forget it all! Brainwashing is for you!

CARL: 2. Each of us is still trapped in the days of our cavemen ancestors. Four thousand years of civilization have still not managed to erase a million years of anxiety. Our species is sick of its primitive, irrational past. The subhuman in us that lingers in our minds holds us back and blocks us from attaining new heights. Brainwashing cuts the umbilical cord that ties us to the savage brute that lies within.

LOGAN: 3. It is scientifically proven that all the disruptive evil in our lives originates from inside us. Let us then turn inward to heal ourselves. Brainwashing is the only therapy that directly addresses the root of our misfortunes.

LESLIE: 4. Brainwashing is 100 percent safe. It changes neither the personality nor the mentality of those who practice it. The brain's vital functions (memory, imagination, reason) are completely unaffected. The washing procedure removes only the morbid impulses of our subconscious.

NEEMA: 5. Ancestral animalism is the source of individualism and egotism, and thus compromises social harmony. With brainwashing, we abandon this shibboleth of primitivism and step closer to our fellow men.

LOGAN: 6. Brainwashing gives you access to tried and tested protection against nightmares, madness and split personality.

CARL: 7. Thanks to brainwashing, we are able at last to purify our most intimate nature—the weight of animalism is relieved so that man may triumph in the balance. Brainwashing is the re-baptism of our being.

LESLIE: 8. Only through this process can we bring ourselves infinitely closer to God. Purification of the being is also purification of the soul. At the summit of our soul's perfection, God becomes more accessible.

CARL: 9. Brainwashing restores our essential self to the core of our being. Instead of a labyrinth, we become the clearest mirror for the whole universe.

NEEMA: 10. Through brainwashing, we attain immortality, because nothing is closer to immortality than those who have overcome within themselves all fear, including the fear of death.

LOGAN: 11. Brainwashing is the ultimate freedom, the power to live individual and social ecstasy to the full.

Here is your gateway to supreme happiness.

CARL: So hurry, ladies and gentlemen, to your local brainwashing center!

LOGAN: There you shall find the best specialists and counselors at your service, and their expertise free of charge to you!

All lenses covered—sound cue—we slowly start to see all lenses uncovered then shut off with Logan's lens appearing—we only see a slight shadow

Silence—breath-scratching is heard—full lights on Logan's lens

THE MAN WITH THE COCKROACH

LOGAN: Whenever I go into the kitchen, it's there. It waits for me at the end of the table, and sometimes I get the impression it's watching me. It's not a cockroach like all the others. It's the biggest one I've ever seen. Perhaps the darkest, as well. I always ask myself why I didn't squash it the moment I first saw it on my table. Was it its fixed gaze that paralyzed my hand? And, for that matter, is it even watching me?

NEEMA AND LOGAN: If it's watching me, does it really see me?

LESLIE: I admit I know nothing at all about cockroaches, but its magnetic immobility, like it's the king of the cockroaches, leads me to believe that it's always watching me. It's clear to me this cockroach is endowed with a certain wisdom. It isn't afraid of me. And if I haven't killed it, this is also because I do understand that it isn't afraid of me. It must be very old as well. I've tried to work out how long it has been living in my house.

CARL AND LESLIE: How long do cockroaches live, in any case?

CARL: I'll have to make inquiries. One morning, before heading off for the office, I left a breadcrumb for the cockroach on the table. When I returned in the evening, I saw that it had eaten it. Since then, I leave a breadcrumb out every day. I've noticed that the cockroach won't eat in my presence. I offered it a crumb while I was eating, but it didn't make a move. What a shame.

CARL AND NEEMA: We could have breakfast together.

NEEMA: Oh good! It has come to dinner as well. This has already become a ritual. In the morning when I leave, the cockroach is perched on the left corner of the table. When I return, it's waiting for me on the right corner. I wonder what it does in the meantime. Saturday morning, when I usually like to cook, the cockroach stays with me the whole time. There's no question of killing it now.

CARL: We often spend the weekends together at home. We look out of the window a lot. The cockroach may be old but it's fast. Ten seconds to scramble down the table and disappear into its hole behind the stove. Thirty seconds to join me at the window. Less than a minute to climb onto the desk in my library. A minute to get comfortable on its stool after I switch on the TV. This morning, when I opened my eyes, it was perched on the ceiling, directly above my head. When I took my shower and shaved in the bathroom, it climbed down and settled back on the kitchen table. It sleeps on the ceiling above me more often now, but that doesn't bother me.

CARL AND LOGAN: It's like it's watching over my slumber.

LOGAN: I have to admit that I do sleep better, when I feel that it's above me.

NEEMA: It's amazing how well the cockroach knows all my reactions, my tics, my habits. At eight o'clock in the evening, when I listen to Bach, it climbs onto the bell of the phonograph and sits still and listens, inspecting the inside of the bell as if it were a great chasm. And, in my turn, I've been initiated into its own habits, especially those concerning its dietary preferences. I'm aware that it's quite fond of fruit, that it detests meat, that cheese makes it queasy. When it comes to music, the cockroach is a great lover of Vivaldi, Corelli, and Handel. It struggles to digest Debussy. Once, while listening to Mahler, it lost its balance and fell into the abyss of the phonograph bell. I have read out loud to the cockroach works such as Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Le Clezio's *The Verbal Process*.

LOGAN: Our communication has become increasingly sophisticated.

LESLIE: Everything I read, I read aloud to the cockroach, who usually doesn't move a muscle until the last page. And then, sometimes, it will leave me at page 50 to retire back into its hole in the kitchen. I no longer read books it doesn't want to listen to after page 50. But nothing is more fascinating than our walks through the apartment. If I choose one particular route and trace an invisible geometric shape with my steps as we go, the cockroach is able to retrace it. If, on the walk, I trace out one or more figures-of-eight, the cockroach reproduces them exactly. Sometimes, I invent extremely complex figures, going back over my own steps with simulated hesitations. But nothing's impossible for the cockroach, it swiftly retraces my path as if it were the very memory of my steps. Another game is when I close my eyes and turn around, approach an object chosen at random and then, when I decide to open my eyes, the cockroach is magically perched there—

NEEMA: on a painting or on a lamp, on a shelf or on the stove, there at the exact level of my gaze.

LOGAN: Sometimes it's the cockroach who starts to turn around, but I never understand what it is it wants from me. I watch the cockroach, it turns, it outlines larger and larger circles, it stops and waits until I react in some manner or another.

CARL: Oh, how ashamed I am of my inability to understand! But when I'm there in its circles, the cockroach moves quicker and its movements betray a certain gaiety.

NEEMA: I am patient, waiting for this game to take us somewhere.

LESLIE: At any rate, I now repeat everything the cockroach suggests to me because I find that in its own way the cockroach is communicating the mystery of its being.

LOGAN: Whenever it jumps upon something, I go up to touch it.

NEEMA: When the cockroach stays without moving for an hour or two on a chair, I don't move either until it moves.

CARL: On the table, the cockroach has invented another little routine. It climbs up the side of my empty glass and, in what appears to be an act of suicide, throws itself in.

LOGAN: What is it trying to communicate with a gesture like this? The last time, while waiting for the cockroach to finish its dive and hit the bottom, I fell asleep, my head on the table.

NEEMA: I awoke to the trumpets of a Vivaldi allegro. It was dark and I realized that I too was in a freefall down the infinite abyss of an enormous phonograph bell.

Rapid whack-a-mole—a cacophony of sounds and slams

Sound cue squish

Silence—we see Carl's lens come up

Silence

We see Neema's lens

Silence

Logan's lens

Silence

Leslie's lens

We only see a shadow of Leslie and Logan / full up on Carl and Neema

This scene is playing with a lot of light distortion—the idea is that two people are always in shadow, while we fully see the other two in their surrounding

THE BEGGAR

LESLIE: It all begins on a beautiful spring morning, most likely a Monday. You wake up with a start and a massive headache. The minutes pass by. You have no idea what's going on and then you realize it was the silence that woke you. You check the alarm clock. Strange. It's six thirty-two and Mrs. Cantonelli hasn't walked her dog, the refrigerated van hasn't stopped at the butcher's, and Mr. Matarazzo, the saxophonist, hasn't started his morning musical exercises.

LOGAN: At eight o'clock sharp, as you head for the office, you notice at least two things that are out of the ordinary: the door to your landlady's apartment is half open, and Mrs. Cantonelli's gloves have been dropped (one on the third floor, the other on the first). There's no one in the street. You walk to the bus stop to discover that scattered all over the pavement are a suitcase, a woman's shoe, two slippers, an umbrella, a pair of broken glasses, Mr. Matarazzo's saxophone, and a dog collar (but not that of Mrs. Cantonelli's poodle, Piccolino). There's no one at the bus stop, either. You wait for a good half hour and the bus still hasn't shown up. Since you're a disciplined and punctual civil servant, you decide to walk to the office. It's only then, as you cross the town, that you fully appreciate the strangeness of this day.

Silence

NEEMA: The streets are completely empty. All the cars are abandoned, as if their drivers had suddenly slammed on the brakes and then run off to hide. Most of the buildings' windows and doors are wide open. There's no noise from inside, no movement to betray the slightest human presence. The streets are strewn with objects, hastily discarded as if they had hindered a panic-stricken mass of people in flight: hundreds of handbags, hats, umbrellas, baskets, coats, canes, overcoats, overturned strollers, broken mirrors. There's no one at work either. You take the elevator to the sixth floor, where your office is. You go in and wait for something to happen.

ALL: But nothing does.

CARL: Your secretary doesn't come in. Your boss doesn't call. Still, you do try to get a little work done on your files but the silence starts to get on your nerves. Eventually, you pluck up the courage to tour the office, only to find there isn't a single soul there. All you can see are files (some of them highly important) scattered all over the floor. At first, you refuse to let the evidence of this strange situation intimidate you, and you force yourself to continue with your office duties as expected until noon. Then you leave, as you always do, for a bite to eat at your favorite deli. The deli is just as empty as the office and every other deli in town, but that doesn't stop you from taking a seat at your usual table. You gaze out at the empty street and try to concentrate.

Silence

ALL: Is this the scene of a collective nightmare, which only you have escaped?

LESLIE: Or, better still, is it a monumental practical joke played on you with the whole town in on the joke? You're still hungry, so you go behind the counter to make a sandwich. You also pick up a beer. You eat your meal calmly, deposit ten euros in the cash register, and return to the office. Stubbornly, having decided not to play this pointless game, you continue working until five o'clock. Meanwhile the elevator stays motionless, not a step echoes in the hall, your phone doesn't ring, and the keyboards remain silent. It's only when you're walking home that evening that you start to get really worried. The town seems completely abandoned. There aren't even birds in the sky. Not a cat, not a dog, not a rat. The animals and insects have disappeared along with the people. There's not a breath of wind. The world watches you obstinately, the air hanging heavy with silence. Even the trees have something frozen about them, as if they had wanted to rip themselves from the earth to rush off along with the humans but instead were left behind, as if paralyzed by some silent order to desist.

ALL: You run back home.

Silence

LOGAN: You knock on your landlady's half-open door. No one answers, so you decide to venture in. Mrs. Cantonelli isn't there. You then knock on Mr. Matarazzo's door. No one answers because Mr. Matarazzo's apartment is also empty. You knock on every door in the building, you enter every apartment. You go into every building on the street but there's still no one to be found. Shops, cafes, bakeries, newsstands—they're all empty. The sun's going to set soon, and a terrible fear overwhelms you. You barricade yourself inside your home. The electricity still works and you turn on every light in the apartment. You turn on the radio and the TV but there's nothing to listen to and nothing to watch.

Silence

CARL: The phone seems to work and you dial your best friend's number. No one picks up at the other end. You start dialing random numbers but no one ever answers. You don't sleep at all that night. You wait, seated in a chair facing the door, listening to the silence. Over the following days, you realize that there's nothing to do and that

ALL: You are alone.

Silence

NEEMA: Now you have to get really organized. The stench of rotting food has become intolerable and you begin a large-scale cleaning operation, starting on your own street. You put everything perishable into large rubbish bags. You close every door and every window in the town. This takes you about six months. You collect all the abandoned objects and divide them into categories. In two years, you have cleaned up every street

and parked every car in a correctly designated area. You're no longer afraid to go to work in the town and you're pleased to see that cleanliness reigns once more. The only real problems you encounter are the few fires that broke out on the day of the evacuation. One petrol station burns for months. For three years you can't go anywhere near the Institute of Chemical Research. You also have to face a number of major floods and at one point you are terrified at the prospect of losing all your drinking water. Time passes and you become accustomed to the new normality. You are finally a free man and omnipotent. You have access to all the town's secrets. You spend weekends in the homes of the bosses who never invited you over. There, you discover their secret drawers and hidden vices. You read their letters, rummage through their files, blow the doors off their safes. During the week, you explore the places marked PRIVATE, FORBIDDEN, DO NOT ENTER, DANGER. You visit bank vaults, police and military archives, the CEO's personal chambers, the meteorological station, the local television studio, the mail-sorting center, the hospital's gynecology wing, the prison, the hospital for the mentally ill, brothels, the morgue and the medical-legal institute, the Carmelite convent, the catacombs, the sewers, the caves.

Silence, age character

CARL: For a long time you try to maintain, through rigorous discipline, a certain continuity between the past and yourself. You write letters to yourself that you place in your own letterbox every evening, just to experience the surprise of finding them in the morning. Once a fortnight you visit your absent mother, never forgetting to bring her a cake. To maintain contact with what you call reality, you read a newspaper after breakfast (you discovered a collection of old newspapers from the fifties in your local library).

LOGAN: In order to make a living, you continue going to the office, and at the end of each month, you withdraw your salary from whichever bank is closest. But there are times, when you can't resist the urge to smash a few shop windows on your afternoon walks. And there are times when you can't help but drive all day and all night across the town, laughing and screaming incomprehensibly until you're completely exhausted. If a building worries you, you condemn it to death without hesitation and board up its doors and windows. While visiting art galleries, you often come upon canvases that bring back painful memories. You judge them, then throw them, for a while, in prison.

Silence, age character

LESLIE: All the cells are now full of paintings you have judged to be a danger to the moral wellbeing of the town. In the park, in the city center, you embark on major projects, along with the vision of dividing it down the middle with a wide boulevard bearing your name. From time to time, you celebrate the anniversary of your solitude and organize fireworks (time is something you count off from the day you found yourself alone in the deserted town). One night, a telephone rings in the apartment next door. You jump out of bed, race over and pick it up just as the other end hangs up. You don't want to speculate, you don't want to draw conclusions. It's this sort of rigorous self-censure that has kept you alive all these years. There is a savage smile etched permanently on your face now that the phones echo with increasing frequency throughout the town. You hear them everywhere, in the building across from you, in the cafe as you drink your coffee at noon, in the library as you collect another collection of old newspapers.

ALL: But you no longer pick up.

Silence—we start to hear the critters from earlier, slowly speeding up through the last section

CARL: You know it's useless, that the person on the other end is always quicker than you. Your smile weighs heavier and heavier on your face, but you have no choice.

LOGAN: It's your only response to the calls that harass you day and night from every building, from every house, on every corner. Like an emperor, you walk down the centers of the grand boulevards as phones ring out desperately from each building—even the phone booths ring as you pass them by, as if your presence triggers the same secret emergency number.

LESLIE: You understand everything now. You no longer sleep, as you used to, in the palaces of the rich, the mansions of the famous and the town's most sumptuous hotels. You don't even want to go home. You prefer to lie down in train stations, in the metro, and near large stadiums. In winter, you spend the night under bridges, church entrances, and occasionally in a concierge's office.

NEEMA: During the summer, you sleep on park benches or on the steps of public buildings. It's there, completely by chance, that you learned to beg. You fell asleep once, with your hat forgotten at your feet, and in the morning, it was full of coins. The same thing happens over and over again, and, even though the town remains pitifully deserted, there's always something for you to find in your hat.

A blast of sound as this last section builds.

EPISODE 4. DIRECTED BY MARIAN MASOLIVER, THURSDAY, 7 JANUARY 2021

THE HUMAN RUBBISH BIN, THE PHILOSOPHER, THE ANIMAL TRAINER

Cast: Caroline Hart, Emily Lotspeich, Keith Surney, Kevin Webb

THE HUMAN RUBBISH BIN

Soundtrack continues throughout the title, then it continues into the bathroom. It then fades down as a background sound but loud enough so it is clear and present.

An empty bathroom.

After 2 seconds: A man enters, he is running away from a fight outside. He is flustered and angry. He walks to the mirror and looks in it (the mirror has 3 parts, 3 mirrors). He washes his face and looks back into the mirror.

KEVIN: It all starts one day when, as you briefly pause to light your cigarette, an old woman opens the door of her apartment building, steps out with a rubbish bin and, without looking at you, dumps her rubbish all over your feet.

"Fuck!" "Are you out of your mind?"

But she acts as if she doesn't hear a thing. She goes back inside and closes the door behind her without so much as a look back.

To camera.

You dust off your feet and continue on your way.

A few days later, you're reading the newspaper waiting for the bus and a small dog pisses all over your shoes. The other people waiting there can hardly suppress their giggles but you stand there so stunned you can't even remember to kick the dumb animal.

Back to the mirror, he flattens one of the parts and now there are two mirrors.

At the office, your co-workers slip bundles of paper in your pockets. "Must be a new sort of prank going round," you tell yourself, but you don't dare stop them.

Soundtrack fades up for the transition from Kevin to Keith who is in another location.

The man looks at himself in a specific position and freezes.

KEITH:

Another man in another bathroom. He looks into the mirror in the same position as the man before.

Soundtrack fades down and stays as background sound throughout, as before.

In the street, more and more often, people shove their orange peel into your mouth.

"Everyone's going mad!" you tell yourself, but you don't have the energy to fight it.

He puts cream on his face. Looking into the mirror.

By the time you get home at the end of the day, your pockets are stuffed with bundles of paper, toothpicks, crushed drinks cans, bottle tops, empty bottles, cigarette butts and smashed watches.

He stops and looks at himself in the mirror.

"So maybe I really am a human rubbish bin," you wonder in a moment of astonished solitude.

He washes his face, badly.

A few days later, a man crumples an empty cigarette pack under your hat.

He changes his physicality. Young man.

Character 1 (young man): "Excuse me, sir, do I really look like a rubbish bin to you?"

Change of physicality. Older man.

Character 2 (old man): "Oh, yes, sir. You do."

Change of physicality. Young man.

Character 1 (young man): "But that's not really possible is it? I mean, how could I be a rubbish bin?"

Change of physicality. Older man.

Character 2 (older man): "I don't know, but that's exactly what you are. You are a human rubbish bin."

To camera.

"Well there you go, that's what I am, I'm evidently a human rubbish bin,"

you think afterwards. "But what's actually happened is that they've all gone stark staring crazy."

Soundtrack fades up for the transition from Keith to Emily who is in a third location.

To camera.

And so, every day you, the human rubbish bin, walks home stuffed with bits of rubbish. The lining of your clothing gets heavier and heavier. It baffles you why people shower you with all of their litter, leftovers and filth.

Looking at the side mirror, putting make up on her eyes.

Leaving the office, the way home becomes more of an ordeal each day. People wait to slip shards of glass and used razor blades into your briefcase.

To camera.

And even on the bus, the passengers don't spare you. They plonk their old tickets in your hand, while their children take freshly chewed gum out of their little mouths to stick on your coat.

Looking at the side mirror

"I really am far too accepting," you constantly tell yourself, but you feel no desire to protest.

To camera, medium shot.

On the contrary, whenever someone shoves a piece of rubbish into your pocket, a sort of discreet and reassuring warmth overwhelms you.

To camera, close-up shot.

Sometimes, if the person doesn't seem in too great a hurry, you dare to ask them, very politely, for an explanation.

To the side mirror.

Character 1 (Young woman): "Excuse me, may I ask you a question?"

To the mirror as rehearsed.

Character 2 (older woman): "Yes, of course. No problem."

To the side mirror.

Character 1 (young woman): "Why do you want to throw your rubbish over a living human being rather than in a litter bin or rubbish bag?"

To the mirror as rehearsed.

Character 2 (older woman): "I don't know, it's strange, a bit like an involuntary reaction."

To the side mirror.

Character 1 (young woman): "But you can perfectly well see that I'm a human being, that I move, I breathe… You can see that I'm a citizen like anyone else."

To the mirror as rehearsed.

Character 2 (older woman): "Yes but… there's something else about you… Your appearance, your bearing, the way you are… well, how can I put this… your person, if you like, just seems to attract rubbish."

Soundtrack fades up as much as possible without masking the voices of the actors

KEITH:

Looking in the mirror.

As a human rubbish bin, your excursions outside become increasingly dangerous.

A taxi driver, displaying a clear hatred for rats, deliberately tries to run you over and chases you down the streets like a madman for hours on end, crisscrossing the whole town.

To camera

It's a risk you take consciously, repeatedly won over by the allure of the inevitable.

KEVIN:

To camera (about to cry, underplayed).

A nice old man with a gentle face come up to you and spits in your face.

Three impeccably dressed businessmen snatch you off the street and throw you into an empty room. They gag you and tie you onto a chair.

EMILY:

To camera

The town philosopher jumps onto a stage and delivers a long lecture to you on the problems of being.

Your mind eagerly registers all this, like a black hole trapping the detritus of the creation of the world.

Oh, immortality!

What rubbish!!!

Black Screen—Soundtrack, 8 seconds

THE PHILOSOPHER

Camera straight on, mid-body shot. We see the paper on the desk that she writes on. Camila is sitting at her desk. She writes. Final dot. She reads what she has just written:

Dear Bartolomeo,

I am well, except I have put on a little weight (ha-ha!). Anabeus is well, too.

I'm still working on my treatise on decomposition, infinity and the diversion of the self. I am about to finish the chapter on amputated infinity and I do believe that I am on the verge of setting forth the most complete and insightful classification of the forms of infinity to date.

She looks out the window, checking something.

In other news, life goes on as usual. With the exception of some existential worries, I dare to call "atypical worries of a gardener."

Camera gets closer. Extreme close-up.

This is what's going on (I tell you all this in the hope you'll give me some advice):

As I said in my previous letter, this year I decided to plant cabbage and only cabbage in my vegetable garden. At first, all went well, the spring here being long and sunny. The trouble began in May, when the cabbages started to sprout. Every night, someone would steal a single cabbage from me. In the morning when I would go out to water the garden, there was always one missing.

She looks to one side and when she turns back to camera:

So, I set myself on the lookout

She stands and leaves the room. Camera follows her behind. She gets to the back room, puts on wellies, a jacket and a head torch. Full body shot. We see her fully dressed in her gear. She goes outside. Camera follows her from behind (as if someone was close behind her, breathing on her neck.) After a little while, camera on the grass, moving as if walking, looking for something. We may catch her wellies occasionally as she walks.

It cost me several sleepless nights…

Camera stops on rabbit droppings. Her hands pick up some rabbit droppings. Camera shot of her hands. She inspects them. As if telling us, she looks straight into the camera.

…but, I was finally able to identify the thief:

Mid-shot on Camila.

a white rabbit coming from the forest. He was the one pilfering a cabbage every night!

Of course, I set a trap and the next night I caught him.

She walks to homemade trap. Camera follows. Mid-shot. She sets the trap.

I locked him in a cage. *Grunt*. For several days, my cabbages breathed easy. But then, a second white rabbit penetrated my garden to pilfer a cabbage each night!

I captured him! I placed him in the same cage as the first. I had two night's repose. And then, a third rabbit discovered my cultures. I trapped him as well!

Camera to the wall.

I made a meticulous inspection of the wall surrounding my garden, but I could not find a single hole anywhere…

Back to Camila, mid-shot. Sign and cabbages.

None of this stopped a fourth, fifth, and sixth rabbit from making their appearance. I captured all of them without difficulty.

Grunt. Alert look.

But the cabbages in my garden dwindled by half. And still the rabbits keep coming.

She walks to chair and sits. She sips her tea. Camera follows. Full body shot including table.

I'm vegetarian and never kill animals. There are now a good hundred rabbits in my cages, and I have no idea what to do with them.

Grunt. Look, ah…it's the cat...

Selling them is out of the question because then they'll be killed.

Camera close-up

To release them into the forest would be stupid because they'll return to eat my cabbages and this'll start all over again. To keep them would be worse, because I have to feed them, and I don't have anything to give them but the rest of the cabbage from my garden!

I sowed cabbages and harvested rabbits.

There's something amiss with this story. I'd even be tempted to say I've found a little of my theory on increased infinity, no? What do you think? And when I feed these rabbits, they look at me with a mocking gaze that drives me crazy.

She gets up.

Well, that's that.

Camera points to the grass in the darkness and we catch Camila's wellies as she walks. Suddenly she stops. Camera on Irish Rabbit Master, full shot. Irish Rabbit Master shakes his head looking at Camila. Close-up of Camila's face, reaction. Close-up of Irish Rabbit's Master face, still, looking at camera intently. Close-up of Camila's face again, freaking out. Mid-shot to full body shot as Camila runs away screaming. Enters the house. Camera follows her. She shuts the door and stops behind the door for a few breaths. Camila walks back and sits at her desk. Panting, deranged. Camera follows. Camila picks up the pen and writes.

waiting to hear from you.

Yours affectionately,

Camila.

She collapses.

THE ANIMAL TRAINER

Music—La vie en Rose.

A man in his thirties enters from the kitchen of his small apartment with two white soup bowls. He is smartly dressed. A beautiful young lady is sitting on the table set for two. He walks to the table limping on the left leg, and places a bowl in front of her (the camera), and the other in front of him.

Music fades down (to hear the sips he will be doing) nice and loud. Progressively music fades down completely, very subtly, so the audience don't even notice (this is something to try on tech day).

He sits. He sips his soup, making a lot of noise, twice.

I live alone. I limp on my left leg.

When people first meet me, they immediately invite me over to their home. But always I say: "Thank you madam, thank you sir. Not today but possibly some other time."

But there never is some other time.

Everyone thinks I'm timid and introverted by nature, But really, most of the time I just think about my animals.

He slurps his soup again, twice.

My real life begins at ten o'clock, when the noise of the apartment building dies down. It's then that I open the padded room where I keep all of my animals. I have ten snakes, twenty or so white mice, several frogs, a dog, three cats (a black one, a white one and a ginger one), two Cochin cockerels, a cyclone of scorpions, approximately sixty little red fish in a large aquarium, a hedgehog and thirty marvelously colored diurnal butterflies.

He gets closer to her (the camera). He looks at her eyes, skin, lips…taking it all in.

I also have a specimen, who's still quite young, of a species I have yet to identify: a sort of stag with a horse's mane, *(he looks at her hair)* red on the sides, black on the chest, and white on the neck. The more he grows, the

more I realize he has human eyes and his mouth *(he looks at her mouth)* is the exact shape of a real woman's mouth.

He gets up and takes a step towards the drinks area.

I give *(looking at her)*

warm milk to the snakes

He takes another step (looking at her)

soft bread to the mice

He walks to the end of the room, picks up a shaker and shakes the Martini.

cheese soufflé to the frogs

He serves one cup

meatballs to the dog

He laughs a little

chicken soup to the cats

He spills on his tie

corn to the cockerels

He serves the other cup

rice to the scorpions

He holds both cups, looks at her and fools around, moving his hips.

whole grain bread soaked in red currant sauce to the fish

Takes 2/3 steps towards the table

hazelnuts to the hedgehog

Close to her now

wild honey to the butterflies

He removes his jacket and lets it drop to the chair.

And the stag with the horse's mane shares my food.

The music fades down to silence. He turns off the lights and draws the curtain.

Then I take off my clothing and run a scented bath. I rub my skin with lavender oil. I lie down in the middle of the room, on my back, naked. Silently, one by one and in strict order, my animals join me:

(as if he is reviling his secret to her, intimately.)

the first snake curls around my left leg

the second snake around my right leg

the third around my left arm

the fourth around my right arm

the fifth around my neck

the sixth around my testicles and penis

the mice hide themselves in my beard, as if in a forest

the frogs pack themselves on top of my stomach

the dog sleeps at my feet

the black cat curls up on my left shoulder

the white cat curls up on my right shoulder

He starts to laugh

the orange cat curls up on the top of my head

the first Cochin cockerel climbs up on my left nipple

He laughs more and more

the second climbs up on my right nipple

The laughter dies down and transform into a feeling of sadness. Almost crying.

the scorpions climb over my feet and rest in between my toes

the hedgehog sits above my heart

the butterflies sleep on my eyelids

the fish line up against the glass of the aquarium and watch us

and the stag with the horse's mane walks around and around me all night.

This is how we sleep, my animals and I, in deep communion. We are truly together and I know the moment is approaching where all limits will be crossed. My animals have already begun to delicately taste my blood and flesh, and by morning I shall awake… wounded.

Music—La vie en Rose, fades up gently to accompany until the end.

Untying his tie.

Perhaps my little stag with human eyes will know how to tell the story, one beautiful day, of the night of grand universal love that is about to devour me.

He toasts and drinks his Martini. Possibly all of it. As he leaves, he lets his tie drop to the floor and starts to unbutton his shirt.

We see the empty room for 2 seconds. Music ends.

EPISODE 5. DIRECTED BY NICOLE WIESNER, THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY 2021

THE BRAINWASHER, QUIET MADNESS, LUCID MADNESS, FEVERED MADNESS

Cast: Maryam Abdi, Venice Averyheart, Natara Easter, Miguel Long, David Lovejoy, Robin Minkens, Emily Nichelson, Ruben Nicolaescu, Tia Pinson, Matty Robinson

PROLOGUE: APARTMENT 2

Zombie Insect tableau

Piotr: The war is over. It's now time to come together and bury the bodies. Now we have machines to collect and bury bodies. It's quicker this way. The bodies were far too scattered so we invented machines to do the collecting and burying. The collector-burier machine operates extremely cleanly and efficiently to distinguish the bodies of the victors from those of the vanquished. It weighs each body and takes measurements, and then washes it after removing all the clothing. Then it digs a hole, constructs a coffin of plastic, places the body in the coffin and the coffin in the hole.

Scene 1 Apartment 1

Katia: *Song:* A little frog looked me in the eye/for she saw a tear drop from my eye/ and she said to me Katia would you lend me your tears/The universe is in your tears/ But my tears were in my mouth and I swallowed them/and with them I swallowed the universe/and the frog began to cry

Yuri: You know Katia, you are very beautiful

Katia: You're not afraid?

Yuri: Afraid of what?

Brainwasher N: In our nation, brainwashing is free and mandatory. Each citizen must wash their brain at least once a year.

Katia: Butterflies have overrun our town. Gigantic, multi-hued and flesh-eating. We've never seen so many butterflies here before. They're everywhere—on the streets, roofs, cars and trees. Anyone who was caught on the streets when they came swarming in was devoured.

Yuri: From the window, I can see the skeletons, the bones picked clean, of three humans and a dog.

Brainwasher R: We advise all members of the same family to carry out their annual brainwashing together and at the same time.

Katia: The butterflies go for your eyelashes first, then your eyebrows, eyelids, lips, vocal cords and taste buds.

Yuri: (*ventures out)* At this particular moment, the entire town is paralyzed. Everyone has barricaded themselves into their homes, peeking through windows covered in butterflies at the streets covered in butterflies. It looks as if the insects have come to stay forever.

Katia: And still they keep flying in, the butterflies, more and more like multi-colored snow.

Yuri: (*to Katia*) Our armed forces are powerless against the butterflies. We simply have to live with them.

Brainwasher N: Ancestral animalism is the source of individualism and selfishness, and thus compromises social harmony.

Brainwasher R: With brainwashing, we step closer to our fellow man.

Apartment 2

Dealer: Mesdames et messieurs, place your bets!

Patient 1/ Piotr: Woman, right side

Patient 2/ Solomon: You're wasting your money. No woman ever comes from the right side.

Patient 1/ Piotr: Piss off!

Patient 3 and 4: Pfffff…. (*breast squirt*)

Dealer: Come on, place your bets!

Brainwasher R: Brainwashing gives you access to tested protection against nightmares, madness and split personality.

Patient 3/ Sasha: Animal! Animal! Dealer: How much Sasha? Shit! how much?

Patient 3/ Sasha: One

Dealer: Let's go! Emilia, play!

Patient 4/ Emilia: A couple, right side, 3

Patient 1/ Piotr: Oh no. that's too much—3 - she can't do that

Dealer: Shut up Piotr. (*to patient 4*) That's too much. You can't do that.

Brainwasher N: Brainwashing is completely safe. It changes neither the personality nor the mentality of those who practice it.

Brainwasher R: The washing procedure removes only the morbid impulses of our subconscious.

Apartment 1: *Katia and Yuri are in slow motion*

Katia: Eventually we worked out that the butterflies only devour living things that make sudden movements.

Yuri: If you move very slowly, the butterflies won't react. You can even squash them under your shoes and they won't fly up but will instead die without a sound.

Katia: You can't walk down the street without treading all over them. Because they are so delicate, almost transparent, the butterflies you crush vaporize into a fine powder made from their own bodies.

Yuri: Life in our town goes on in complete slow motion.

Brainwasher N: At the end of the workday, the washers will wash each other's brains.

Apartment 2:

Piotr: Woman, left side

Sasha: Two times left? Impossible!

Dealer: Shut up. Place your bets, mesdames et messieurs!

Emilia: Bicycle, bicycle, bicycle

Dealer: Ok, ok… how much?

Emilia: Bicycle, Bicycle, Bicycle

Dealer: One? Two?

Piotr: Let's go! Let's go! Place your bets.

Dealer: I'm the one who gets to say that. I'm the one who gets to say "place your bets."

Brainwasher R: Through brainwashing, we attain immortality, because nothing is closer to immortality than the one who has overcome within himself all fear, including the fear of death.

Piotr: The flesh-eating butterflies have been driven out of our town by the stink-snails. They emerged from every nook and cranny—from the depths of the earth, the canals, caves and sewers. They crawl up the walls and over the windows, leaving behind them fine trails of slime.

Solomon: They don't eat anything at all, but the stench they give off is unbearable. People have to move at a run to avoid collapsing in the street with disgust.

Piotr: C'mon Solomon, place your bet.

Solomon: Dog.

Piotr: You're losing it. They don't have dogs here.

Solomon: Dog. Left side. One.

Sasha/Emilia: Pffff

Dealer: Shut up! No more bets!

Sasha: What an asshole!

All: Shhhh!

Sasha: The problem with the stink-snails is that they get into your house. You wake up in the morning and get out of bed only to find your slippers stuffed with snails. You go to the bathroom to find your washbasin is overflowing with snails. You can't see yourself in the mirror because of the hundreds of snails already stuck all over it like gangrene.

Emilia: You go to the kitchen, cut your bread into slices only to find a stink-snail lurking in the loaf. It's impossible to heat up a little milk or make yourself some coffee—in each pot or pan there's already sitting a black snail with green horns, and highly mobile too. On each chair you'll find perched a huge great stink-snail staring back at you guiltily

Brainwasher N: It is imperative that brainwashing is performed immediately upon every newborn child immediately after their umbilical cord is cut, to act as the entrance into social life for the new citizen.

Apartment 1

Katia: As a result of all this, as well as our slowed-down thinking, we talk to each other at the rate of just one word a day.

Katia and Yuri: And if we're making love, we try to be just as slow, as well.

Brainwasher R and N: Any person denouncing brainwashing shall be declared an enemy of social harmony.

Apartment 2

Dealer: Mesdames et messieurs, place your bets!

Piotr: Civilian in handcuffs, right side

Solomon: You're up a tree. No civilian in handcuffs ever comes from the right

Piotr: Lay off!

Emilia and Sasha: Pffff

Dealer: Come on, place your bets!

Emilia: They slide unbelievably quickly over the furniture, up the curtains and drag themselves happily along the ceiling. The second you open a book, a tiny flattened snail will plop out. Your old gramophone doesn't work anymore—the snails have made a nest there. Even your tightly locked drawers are swarming with snails with their hairy little horns.

Sasha: Corpse on a gurney, corpse on a gurney! Right or Left!

Dealer: How much Sasha? Shit! How much Sasha?

Sasha: One!

Dealer: Go Emilia, play!

Sasha: You know, Emilia, that I am very angry with you.

Emilia: Yes, Sasha.

Sasha: You know, Emilia, that I am more than angry, I am out of my mind with rage.

Emilia: Yes, Sasha.

Solomon: Things were much better with the butterflies, we all realize that now. You can't even shake hands with someone because in a flash a snail will zip in between your palms.

Brainwasher N: It is scientifically proven that all the disruptive evil in our lives originates from inside ourselves. Let us then turn inwards to heal ourselves. Brainwashing is the only therapy that directly addresses the root of our misfortunes.

Emilia: Black car… from the right… 3!

Sasha: Oh no, that's too much, 3?! She can't do that!

Dealer: Shut up Sasha! That's too much, you can't do that. Two! Let's go! Place your bets!

Piotr: Undercover agent - left side!

Sasha: But I'm the one who said undercover agent!

Dealer: Shut up. You said corpse. Place your bets, mesdames et messieurs!

Emilia: All right ,Solomon, speak.

Solomon: Dog.

Piotr: Shit, enough of your dogs. There are no dogs. You drive me nuts with your dogs.

Solomon: Dog, left side. I do what I want.

Piotr: It gets on my nerves. For two months, all you ever say is dog, dog, dog.

Sasha: He does what he wants. It's like Switzerland. You do what you want.

Dealer: Shut up moron. No more bets!

Emilia: What an asshole!

All: Shhhh!

Dealer: No one bet on that. House takes all.

Sasha: If you buy a newspaper, you're almost guaranteed that if you reach into your pocket for cash you'll find a snail. The stink-snails that have been crushed under people's shoes and car wheels have formed a fine layer of slush mixed up with their blood and little bits of flesh.

Piotr: Because everyone has to run all the time, we don't say much to each other. Those who do dare to stop to exchange a couple of words risk immediate nausea. "The butterflies were so clean!" says the first person retching. "And they were so pretty!" replies the other before vomiting.

Sasha: To live with the stink-snails you first of all have to learn how to be silent. For every word you speak, there's a little stink-snail that'll take its place right inside your mouth.

Brainwasher R: Should the patient succumb during the washing, this is due to the fact that the emptiness has killed a seditious memory. The washer will continue to wash the brain in question even after clinical death of that brain.

Apartment 1

Katia: The stink-snails were driven out by a huge, all-pervading creature, whose body has the shape of a benign rain that never stops falling on the town.

Brainwasher N: Brainwashing restores our essential self to the core of our being. Instead of a labyrinth, we become the clearest mirror for the whole universe.

Katia: Yuri…

Yuri: Yes.

Katia: Nothing. *Silence* Yuri?

Yuri: Yes.

Katia: Can I recite to you my poem about frogs?

Yuri: Go ahead, Katia.

Katia: I have written thirty poems about frogs.

Yuri: Choose one.

Katia: A little frog looked me in the eye/For she saw a teardrop in my eye/And she said to me" Katia/Would you lend me your tears/The Universe is in your tears"/But my tears were in my mouth/And I swallowed them/And then I swallowed the universe/And I began to cry.

Brainwasher R: Thanks to brainwashing, we are able at last to purify our most intimate nature - the weight of animalism is relieved so that man may triumph in the balance. Brainwashing is the re-baptism of our being.

Apartment 2

Sasha: The stink-snails were driven out by a huge, all-pervading creature, whose body has the shape of a benign rain that never stops falling on the town.

Piotr: We soon came to realize that the rain wasn't real rain because it leaves no drops or puddles.

Solomon: The rain-creature soaked everything.

Emilia: Now it's in the very fabric of the town—in the stone of the walls, the glass of the windows, the asphalt of the roads, the wood of the trees, the water of the canals, in the air that we breathe.

Dealer: Let's go. Place your bets.

Sasha: Street cleaner a month from now!

Dealer: How much, Sasha?

Sasha: One!

Dealer: Perfect.

Brainwasher N and R: It is the obligation and duty of every citizen to denounce enemies of social harmony.

Pan of bodies in all houses

Emilia: The rain-creature feeds on the substance of things. Slowly, imperceptibly, it empties out anything that has a heart, a soul, a thought

Sasha: Now you only see bodies around the town.

Emilia: There's no point in buying apples, they'll only be hollow on the inside. Loaves don't have crumbs any more, hens lay transparent eggs.

Sasha: The trees are just inflated trunks. Pick up a stone and you'll find that it's strangely light. Fish with skin of just air float on the surface of our rivers.

Emilia: Each time a dog tries to bark, you'll hear it wheezing instead and you might even see it collapse to the

ground like a house of cards.

Dealer: Let's go, let's go place your bets.

Sasha: C'mon Solomon. Speak.

Solomon: Dog.

Piotr: Shit! Enough of your dogs already. You know very well there's never any dogs! We've never had a dog!

Solomon: Dog that pisses on the window. One. Left side. I do what I want.

Piotr: Ah, it gets on my nerves. For 10 years all I ever hear is dog, dog, dog.

Dealer: No more bets!

Sasha: What an asshole!

All: Shhhh!

Solomon: Can I recite to you my poem about frogs?

Piotr: Go ahead, Solomon!

Solomon: I have written thirty poems about frogs.

Piotr: Choose one.

Solomon: A little frog looked me in the eye/For she saw a teardrop in my eye/And she said to me" Katia/Would you lend me your tears/The Universe is in your tears" /But my tears were in my mouth/And I swallowed them/And when them I swallowed the universe/And I began to cry.

Brainwasher N: Those who oppose brainwashing, even after their second or third complete brainwashing, will have their brain "shit-frittered".

Sasha: The rain-creature seeps in deeper and deeper, further and ever wider.

Emilia: There is no shelter against the rain-creature, we've tried everything: metal umbrellas, armored capes, reinforced underground bunkers, resistance and silence.

Solomon: And now, the rain-creature is attacking time. No one knows any more whether it's night or day, if you're waking or sleeping, if you're alone or swimming in a crowd, if you're touching your own skin or the skin of someone else you're rubbing shoulders with in the vast throng of empty beings.

Piotr: Because the rain-creature also lives in the flesh of us humans, in our blood, in our movements and in our dreams, it has the ability to be absolutely everywhere.

Sasha: You can do nothing to hide from it—it knows everything, each moment of the night, each moment of the day.

Emilia: It monitors all our brains at the same time, because it breathes at the same time in all our brains. And it speaks to us, like a second voice inside us.

Piotr: We desperately miss the time when the stink-snails were here, at least they didn't make any noise…

Brainwasher R: Brainwashing is the ultimate freedom, the power to live individual and social ecstasy to the full. Here is your gateway to supreme happiness.

Solomon: A little frog looked me in the eye/for she saw a tear drop from my eye/and she said to me Katia would you lend me your tears/The universe is in your tears/But my tears were in my mouth and I swallowed them/and with them I swallowed the universe/and the frog began to cry.

Piotr: You know Solomon, you're very beautiful.

Solomon: You're not afraid?

Piotr: Afraid of what?

Piotr: If by chance the machine breaks down, a repairman is informed immediately. I'm one of those repairmen. I live inside my repair machine.

Often I get to see truly magnificent parts of the countryside. My greatest joy is writing short poems about the grandeur of all the places I've visited. Over time, I've discovered this gift I have for poetry.

I now have around one thousand poems about birds, trees, rocks, wind, snow, the moon, stars, clouds, rainbows, grass, meadows, and a thousand other things. One day, I'd like to publish them.

Brainwashers/All: The washer will continue the washing, even after their own death.

EPISODE 6. DIRECTED BY CRISTINA PRONZATI, 21 JANUARY 2021

THE BRAINWASHER, THE MAN IN THE CIRCLE, THE VOICE IN THE DARKNESS, THE ILLUSIONIST, THE ANIMAL TRAINER, THE MAN WITH THE COCKROACH

Cast: Davide Borella, Anarosa Butler, Gary Damico, Kasey Foster, Mike Steele, Keith Surney, Nora Lise Ulrey, and Kevin Webb

Intro music

All ensemble backstage activity choreographed to the music

Switch to live piano transition

THE BRAINWASHER (I), (II)

Everyone

Davide: Are you stressed? Anxious? Disappointed? Alienated? Are you tormented by existential doubts? Do you fear old age and death? Now you can forget it all! Brainwashing is just for you!

Keith: Let us turn inwards to heal ourselves. Brainwashing is the only therapy that directly addresses the root of our misfortunes.

Anarosa: In our nation, brainwashing is free and mandatory. Each citizen must wash their brain at least once a year.

Mike: Brainwashing is completely safe. It changes neither the personality nor the mentality of those who practice it. The washing procedure removes only the morbid impulses of our subconscious.

Kevin: Any person denouncing brainwashing shall be declared an enemy of social harmony.

Antonio: For those traveling, there are washing centers specifically placed at train stations, airports, harbors, and at all motorway tollbooths.

Kasey: Only through this process can we bring ourselves infinitely closer to God. Brainwashing is the ultimate freedom, your gateway to supreme happiness.

Davide: So hurry, ladies and gentlemen, to your Local Brain-Washing Center!

Transition music

THE MAN IN THE CIRCLE

Man1: Keith

Man 2: Davide

Man 1 (Keith): If I wish to be alone, I simply stop wherever I happen to be. I then take a piece of black chalk

out of my pocket and draw a circle around myself on the ground. There in my circle, I'm safe. No one has the right or the ability to speak to me while I'm in my circle. No one has the right or the ability to enter it, touch me, or even look at me for long.

I don't hear the traffic or the waves or birdsong. I can stay here as still as I like, as long as I like. I don't have a care what goes on around me. My circle isolates me from the outside world and from myself. It's total bliss, total peace.

Inside my circle, I no longer feel cold, hunger or pain. Time stops. I plunge into the abstract like a protective dream. I become the circle's center.

Man 2 (Davide): Ever since the invention of the circles, the world has gotten better. There are no wars, famines or natural disasters. Crime has dropped.

Man 1: You can't ever put two people in the same circle at the same time. People have tried but nothing happens. There's no such thing as a circle for two, and there never will be.

Man 2: Some have tried taking small animals like dogs, cats and mice into the circle with them. But again, nothing happens. If there's anything or anybody else living in the circle with you, it won't work.

Man 1: The town has changed completely after people began to use the circles. Now circles are everywhere you look. Things are far quieter and cleaner now.

Man 2: And everyone agrees that the circle is the answer. No one's unhappy any more. Whenever I want to leave the circle, I simply stretch my hand out and break the chalk line. No one can do this but me. No one else on the outside can break the circle for me. The magic of the circle is that it comes with total security.

Man 1: People are saying that the circle has a hidden trap, where you can get stuck forever. There are whispers of people being locked in the circle against their will. Some insist that the majority of circles have stopped obeying their creators. Once encircled, you can no longer exit.

Man 2: And you'll never leave again.

Live piano transition music

Actors change and walk into next set-up

THE VOICE IN THE DARKNESS (I)

A: Keith (Animal Victim)

B: Davide (Animal Owner)

Sir!

—Yes?

Is this small animal with four mouths yours?

—Yes, it's mine.

If I'm not mistaken, it seems to be biting my toes.

—Yes, I gather it's always hungry.

I've never seen a creature like that before.

Strange. It's biting my calves but I don't feel a thing.

—It's always like that, always very gentle with whatever it does.

What does it normally eat?

—Meat, sir, only the freshest of meat.

And you think it's going to eat me?

—Oh yes, sir. When it starts gnawing at something, nothing can stop it.

I hope you don't take it out a lot.

—No, we only go out once or twice a year.

—So it was bad luck really that I came along this way.

—Do you suffer from insomnia?

—I never sleep before four. It really likes gobbling people up.

—It's one of those things, to be honest. It starts with the extremities. It doesn't take it long to do that.

—That's because you're so calm. If people make a huge fuss, it doesn't like that. So how much longer do I have to live?

—About five minutes. I have a packet of cigarettes in my pocket. Would you light one for me?

—Of course.

Thank you.

—Anything else? A word to your wife?

No, I'm all alone.

—That's hard, being alone. For me as well solitude is a torment.

Yes, but you have your small animal…

—I can't tell you how difficult it is to feed.

It's at my crotch.

—I have tried everything. I wanted to turn it into a vegetarian.

I feel so lightheaded! It's at my heart.

—I wanted to teach it to drink water. Can you believe that this creature never touches water?

It's at my neck.

—In fact, if you watch it closely, you'll see it doesn't breathe either.

Now it's looking at me straight in the eye. Do you think it'll rip out my tongue?

—Yes, but it'll never forget your words.

Live piano music transition

THE ANIMAL TRAINER

Kasey: I live alone. My name is of no importance.

When people first meet me, they immediately invite me over to their home. But always I say: "Thank you. Not today but possibly some other time."

But there never is some other time.

Everyone thinks I'm timid and introverted by nature, and I do nothing to dissuade them of that fact. But really, most of the time I just think about my animals.

I have been working on a number of tricks with my animals, which the world has never seen before.

I also have a specimen, who's still quite young, of a species I have yet to identify: a sort of stag with a horse's mane, red on the sides, black on the chest, and white on the neck. The more he grows, the more I realize he has human eyes and his mouth is the exact shape of a real woman's mouth.

First, I open all the cages and talk to my animals as I feed them.

What I give:

ANIMAL TRAINER 1, ORIGINAL SONG BY KASEY

warm milk to the snakes

hard-boiled eggs to the tortoises

soft bread to the mice

cheese soufflé to the frogs

fresh fennel to the snails

meatballs to the dog

chicken soup to the cats

corn to the cockerels

apricot stones to the parrot

grape seeds to the turtledoves

rice to the scorpions

cabbage to the rabbits

whole grain bread soaked in red currant sauce to the fish

hazelnuts to the hedgehog

pollen grains to the ladybirds

wild honey to the butterflies.

And the stag with the horse's mane shares my food.

Then I take off my clothing and run a scented bath. I rub my skin with lavender oil. I light a candle whose flame burns with infinite reflections in the two mirrors placed at opposite ends of the room. I lie down in the middle of the room, on my back, naked. Silently, one by one and in strict order, my animals join me:

ANIMAL TRAINER 2, ORIGINAL SONG BY KASEY (ACAPPELLA WITH KEVIN AND MIKE AS CHOIR)

the first snake curls around my left leg

the second snake around my right leg

the third around my left arm

the fourth around my right arm

the fifth around my neck

the first turtle climbs up my left knee

the second turtle climbs up my right knee

the third turtle climbs upon my navel

the frogs pack themselves on top of my stomach

the two snails climb up slowly and sleep in the bells of my ears

the dog sleeps at my feet

the black cat curls up on my left shoulder

the white cat curls up on my right shoulder

the orange cat curls up on the top of my head

the first Cochin cockerel climbs up on my left nipple

the second climbs up on my right nipple

the parrot perches on my forehead

one turtledove on my left cheek and one on my right cheek

the scorpions climb over my feet and rest in between my toes

the rabbits gather in my armpits

the hedgehog sits above my heart

the ladybirds split into two rows and place themselves in the lines of my palms

the butterflies sleep on my eyelids

the fish line up against the glass of the aquarium and watch us

and the stag with the horse's mane walks around and around me all night.

This is how we sleep, my animals and I, in deep communion. Together we form a single dream that tells the story of our common being. We are truly together and I know the moment is approaching, where all limits will be crossed. My animals have already begun to delicately taste my blood and flesh, and by morning, I shall awake wounded.

Perhaps my little stag with human eyes will know how to tell the story, one beautiful day, of the night of grand universal love that is about to devour me.

Recorded music transition

THE MAN WITH THE COCKROACH

Anarosa (+ KASEY ON LIVE PERCUSSION, NOT VISIBLE)

Whenever I go into the kitchen, it's already there. It waits for me at the end of the table, and sometimes I have the impression it's watching me.

It's not a cockroach like the others. It's the biggest one I've ever seen. Perhaps the darkest, as well. I always ask myself why I didn't squash it the moment I first saw it on my table. Was it its fixed gaze that paralyzed my hand? Is it even watching me? Does it really see me?

Clearly this cockroach is endowed with a certain wisdom. It isn't afraid of me. It must be very old as well, but it's fast. Ten seconds to scramble down the table and disappear into its hole behind the stove. Thirty seconds to join me at the window. A minute to get comfortable on its stool when I switch on the television.

When I cook, the cockroach stays the whole time with me. It won't eat in my presence, what a shame. We could have breakfast together.

There's no question of killing it now. We often spend the weekends together at home. We look out of the window a lot.

It sleeps on the ceiling above me more often now, but that doesn't bother me. I have to admit that I do sleep better when I feel that it's above my head.

It's amazing how well the cockroach knows all my reactions, my tics, my habits.

When it comes to music, the cockroach is a great lover of Vivaldi, Corelli and Handel. It struggles to digest Debussy. Once, while listening to Mahler, it lost his balance and fell into the abyss of the phonograph bell.

Everything I read, I read aloud to the cockroach, who usually doesn't move a muscle until the last page.

But nothing is more fascinating than our walks through the apartment. If I invent extremely complex figures,

the cockroach reproduces them exactly: nothing's impossible for the cockroach.

But I never understand what it is it wants of me.

Whenever it jumps upon an object, I go up and touch it. When the cockroach stays without moving for an hour or two on a chair, I don't move until the cockroach begins to move.

Oh, how ashamed I am of my inability to understand!

I find that in its own way the cockroach is communicating the mystery of its being.

On the table, the cockroach climbs up the side of my empty glass and, in what appears to be an act of suicide, throws itself in. What is it trying to communicate with a gesture such as this? The last time, while waiting for the cockroach to finish its dive and finally hit the bottom, I fell asleep, my head on the table. I awoke to the trumpets of a Vivaldi allegro. It was dark and I realized that I, too was in a freefall down the infinite abyss of an enormous phonograph bell.

Recorded music transition

Anarosa keeps falling in slow motion, while Mike's Illusionist appears at the same time and lights his candles for "The Illusionist"

THE ILLUSIONIST

Mike, Part I

Kevin, Part II

Entire cast appears as silent audience vignettes throughout

Live piano by Gary

Mike: Ladies and gentlemen! Good evening! Permit me to introduce myself, Bartolomeo the Illusionist!

If you have never heard of me before, it's because you haven't yet tried to enter the large and generous door of magic—ha, ha!

Today I'm here before you to ensure that your voyage towards this new world is ever more pleasurable. I'm about to show you some of my most famed routines.

No, not the little trick with the playing cards—I hate that, that's not conjuring at all. So perhaps I shall start by finding out, say, who among you has violated the regulations and brought prohibited animals onboard.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, many people don't want to be separated from their white mice or their black rabbits or their other little beasts.

What's this? Mice? But how can this be? Mice are forbidden onboard, but you, for example, you sir, you, why have you hidden this white mouse here in your pocket? This isn't normal, really, this could very well degenerate, become a mania, a perversion.

And you, madam? What's this black rabbit doing under your hat?

Wait, sir, I'll get to you in a moment. Oh, what's this you're hiding? Would you hand me your glove? Thank

you - and what's this? Oh dear, a small snake in your left glove?

And here? A lizard? Unbelievable. I'd never dare to put on gloves with these two reptiles inside. Personally, I'd find that dangerous to say the least. Would you like to keep them? Go on take them, sir, they're yours, they came out of your gloves, didn't they? But no sir, they're your gloves, here you go, everyone has witnessed it. Well, if you're telling me that you no longer have a need for these creatures, I'll keep them for you until the end of the journey. But are you really sure? Perhaps they're your favorite animals, after all there are those who can't make even make a move without their animals.

For example… for example… you sir, yes, you! What are you doing with that little hedgehog under your behind? What? There isn't one there? Would you mind lifting up a little bit, ah there you go! It doesn't bother you, a hedgehog under your behind?

And you, sir, why are you wearing a live butterfly under your tie? You might end up crushing it, the poor thing, Go on, take it, see how beautiful it is! Perhaps you'd like to attach it to your neck? No?

And you, madam, why do you have this frog in your handbag? Would you allow me? Frogs, madam, will eat anything, you know, so I'd advise you to check that all your belongings are still intact.

Well, well, well, what do we have here again? Sir, would you please pass me the tortoise climbing up your left leg? That's it, thank you. And the two snails climbing up the lapel of your jacket, thank you, What's this again?

Ah madam! There's a squirrel in your scarf, does it keep you warm? Thank you. Now look at all this! What have we collected so far? Two rabbits, four mice, a snake, a lizard, a butterfly, a frog, a turtle, a hedgehog, two snails, and a squirrel - that makes quite a nice zoo! I'll keep all of these in my hat for you, if that's all right?

Hmm, I have the feeling they won't get along very well together... Goodness me, aren't they quite a cocktail! Well, let's see what comes of it, shall we? Two rabbits with four mice, a snake, a lizard, a butterfly, a frog, a turtle, a hedgehog, two snails and a squirrel, one, two, three, hop! Hey, and a parrot!

Parrot comes up, speaks, then goes off

That's an easy one to carry, particularly when it talks! How simple that was!

Thank you, ladies, thank you, gentlemen!

Perhaps we should stop here. No? Would you like to see another trick?

Gary plays live piano music transition, which escalates faster and faster while Mike and Kevin exchange scarf

Mike throws a scarf to Kevin, who picks it up. It's several scarves tied together, he struggles to get them through as they're never-ending. Increasingly faster and frustrated as music also escalates.

Kevin: Okay, I know another little trick but it's a touch dangerous, it's the one with the magic wand, but it doesn't always work. I mean, sometimes the wand doesn't always obey me.

Particularly when I want to make something disappear. Let's say, like a hat. Sir, would you kindly pass me your hat? Thank you. Let's see if we can make this one vanish. One, two, three, hop!

Oh, dear! That didn't work, did it, madam? What? It's your husband that's disappeared? Oh well, but… it was his hat that was supposed to have disappeared. Look, it's no big deal, the wand can make anything it's made disappear reappear again straight away. Hang on, you'll have your husband back. One, two, three, hop!

Strange… very strange indeed! Did you see that? The lady just vanished too. But that was just what she wanted, she wanted to be with her husband, and they are, no doubt, together right now but on the other side of the barrier, the barrier that separates our ordinary world from the world of fantasy.

But look, it's no big deal. We'll make both of them reappear. One, two, three, hop!

Oh, no! That's a bit too much, isn't it? This wand is playing terrible tricks on me, but I see, madam, I see that the entire first row of spectators has disappeared.

Well, what do you want me to do? There are only two possibilities open to us: either we just stop right now and accept these minimal risks, or else we try again and take some real risks!

Shall we?

One, two, three, hop!

Oh, damn, another row gone. Ladies and gentlemen, wait a moment, please don't panic. I'll make everything reappear, just be patient for a moment. One, two, three, hop! Oh, oh! What happened this time? Who disappeared? The lifebelts?

A moment, please. Allow me to concentrate. One, two, three, hop! What's this? The masts? No, that's no big deal, we can see the vaults of heaven so much better now. One, two, three, hop! What's that? The stars? All together? It's all going so fast now, eh? It's fast with this shitty wand isn't it? But what're you all doing? You can't leave me like this. Look, give us another chance. Wait! One, two, three, hop!

Strange, that one even made the sea disappear. Where are we now? What's all this stuff all around us?

One, two, three, make everyone come back! Hop! Obviously I'm making the same mistake every time, but which one, good God, which one?

How many do we have left? One, two, three, four five… ten? Well gentlemen, now that we're amongst men, I can tell you the secret of this routine. I'm going to tell you because I feel as if I'm going mad and I'm afraid, yes, the truth is I'm afraid I've forgotten the magic formula, that's the truth.

One, two, three, hop!

Son of a bitch! What a scandal! What a mess! This is going to cost me dearly! Sir! Hey, good heavens, are you asleep? Wake up sir, the show has just finished, and yes, you're the last one here because you didn't give a shit about my act and fell asleep during…

Yes, everyone's left, that's it, so you didn't see a thing? Well, look, could you do me a tiny favor? I'd be infinitely grateful, it's no big deal, here, take my wand, point it at me and say "one, two, three, hop!"

That's right, go for it! What? The wand disappeared? So that's really it. Sir, I think we're the only ones left on this vessel, and what worries me most is that just a minute ago we could see a strip of land on the horizon, and now we can't…

Music transition

THE BRAINWASHER (I), (II)

(Same text as the beginning)

Everyone

Davide: Are you stressed? Anxious? Disappointed? Alienated? Are you tormented by existential doubts? Do you fear old age and death? Now you can forget it all! Brainwashing is just for you!

Keith: Let us turn inwards to heal ourselves. Brainwashing is the only therapy that directly addresses the root of our misfortunes.

Anarosa: In our nation, brainwashing is free and mandatory. Each citizen must wash their brain at least once a year.

Mike: Brainwashing is completely safe. It changes neither the personality nor the mentality of those who practice it. The washing procedure removes only the morbid impulses of our subconscious.

Kevin: Any person denouncing brainwashing shall be declared an enemy of social harmony.

Antonio: For those traveling, there are washing centers specifically placed at train stations, airports, harbors, and at all motorway tollbooths.

Kasey: Only through this process can we bring ourselves infinitely closer to God. Brainwashing is the ultimate freedom, your gateway to supreme happiness.

Davide: So hurry, ladies and gentlemen, to your Local Brain-Washing Center!

Finale music

All ensemble curtain call activity choreographed to music

EPISODE 7. DIRECTED BY NEEMA LAHON, 28 JANUARY 2021

THE RUNNER, THE MAN IN THE CIRCLE, THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

Cast: Edward Joe Bentley, Lyndsay Rose Kane, Susan Mele, Benjamin Nathan-Serio and Nora Lise Ulrey

PRE-SHOW music by KID SUDA

VIDEO 1: 5 minute film, all actors doing daily rituals in their homes e.g brushing teeth/showering/ washing face/eating. Music by: Lullatone Track: Wake Up, Wake Up

SCREENS IN GRID MODE: All actors on screen continuing to do a daily ritual. After 10 seconds of watching the actors PLAY TRACK 1 RUNNER V/O.

THE RUNNER

[RUNNER IS A PRE-RECORDED V/O]

Lyndsay Kane int. Living Room cleaning the space.

Joe Bentley int. Office at desk with computer.

Susan Mele ext. In garden with a fire pit and ladder reaching the second floor. Ben ext. on a hill in his garden landscape. Climbing a tree and chopping wood with an axe. Nora int. narrow corridor with empty cardboard boxes.

I can't stop. This hasn't happened to me before.

This morning, I left for my usual run. I got as far as a couple hundred feet when I suddenly realized I couldn't stop.

As I passed the newsstand, the seller called out

"Hello!"—I tried to slow down to answer him and I turned my head but I was already too far away.

It's funny how people still haven't realized what's happened.

Everyone knows that I'm the town's marathon runner, that I run without stopping—always at the same time and always the same route.

Everyone's used to me running.

I greet them as I run, answer their questions as I run, give them a friendly wave as I run.

But this time, I couldn't, can't stop. And what's more, I can't turn left or right, I'm forced to run straight ahead.

Obviously, something's wrong. But what?

I'm approaching the outskirts of the town. People usually watch me pass with admiration, so Mr. Kuntz calls out:

"How's it going?"

I shout back: "Badly!" But I'm already far away, too far, and he can't hear me . . .

Oh, good God, won't they stop clapping me? And there's Mrs. Cantonelli exclaiming:

"How fast he runs! How supple! How graceful!"

"Enough, madam, enough!"

I start feeling dizzy. Evidently my body isn't listening to my brain.

"Help me!"

Just look at them all, lounging on their terraces and in the cafes. They have nothing else to do all day but sit back and sip beer and white wine—and watch me running.

Oh Christ, stop, stop saying that I'm disciplined, that I'm handsome, that I'm admirable, that I'm strong, that I'm bursting with willpower.

Stop it because I can't stop! "Stop me, please stop me!" Evidently, they can't hear me. "Mr. Pippidi! Mr. Pippidi!"

That's the baker . . . He blows me a kiss, the stupid bastard.

And here's the last cafe, the last houses, the end of the town.

I'm drenched in sweat.

For the first time in my life, I'm afraid.

Here comes the last street to the left, but I can't turn left.

Here comes the last street to the right, but I can't turn right.

I make a superhuman effort to stop myself at the town gates, but I can't. "Help me! Help me!" My final chance lies there—

there where the three old men who always sit on the bench in the sun in the same place where you enter the town. Whenever I pass them, the first one always says: "Very talented, that runner."

And the second one says:

"He's as handsome as an angel."

"He's definitely going to win."

In a way, I'm glad that it's all behind me. The town's now a fuzzy shape that gets smaller and smaller in the distance. Christ, what are these, tears? I'm crying?

Well, there you go, I run and I cry.

But I don't feel tired or scared. I simply cry. And I don't try to understand. I can only feel the tears running down my face. They're making me cold but I can't raise my arms to wipe them away.

My arms are frozen into a shape that offers me the best aerodynamic profile to help me run like a racing car. I charge ahead with my head bent forward, carving the optimum passage through the air.

The road is more or less deserted. From time to time, cars drive in the opposite direction. I don't call for help

any more but simply smile at the drivers who give me a friendly wave.

Now I'm running through a forest—I had to abandon the road because it curved and I can only go in a straight line.

I take a path.

I climb a hill.

I run down into a valley.

I don't have the energy to think any more. All I can do is watch the countryside go by. My main worry is avoiding the trees. When you run this fast, trees become dangerous.

Night falls, but I keep on running. I stumble across an unknown village and then a new town, also unknown to me.

Everyone is asleep at this late hour and no one knows I'm the only living thing running at night.

I'm running in the dark, in fact. The lights from the last village have disappeared. Now I can't see anything in front of me.

I barely miss the rocks and trees, following my instincts, but occasionally a night bird flies into me. I count my injuries.

I've already killed a fair number of birds and even a few animals which I've inadvertently trampled over.

More and more often, I hear wild cries and screams of sadness.

And now it's morning, and I'm nothing but a running wound. Behind me is a long trail of blood. Before me rise the mountains.

The air is cold. It's going to rain. That's good, the rain will cleanse my injuries.

The sea lies just beyond those mountains and, naturally, you should always be cleansed before you plunge into the sea.

All actors en in close-up shot; only their eyes are on screen

A 2.5 minute video plays of all actors pulling tights over their heads in reverse. At the end of the video the screen will B/O.

THE MAN IN THE CIRCLE & THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

MIRROR

JOE [PRE-RECORDED V/O] The audience will hear this in complete darkness.

A few days ago, I heard a noise behind my bathroom mirror. At first, I paid no attention. The mirror's always been there. I've always shaved in front of that mirror. But the noise hasn't gone away. It's a muted sound, not at all human. It's like a blind bird throwing itself against the wall.

I even checked to see if the other side of the bathroom wall had any marks on it. But no, on the other side, where the stairway is, the wall's untouched. But the noise continues. Every morning, when I wash my face and

look at myself in the mirror, the noise repeats itself.

Video End - Show Screens in Speaker View

Spotlight Nora

CIRCLE

NORA *[int. Empty white room standing by open door.]*

CAMERA 1: angled down - full body shot, blue filtered lens

Whenever I want to be by myself, I stop wherever I happen to be. I take a piece of black chalk out of my pocket and draw a circle around me on the ground. I step into the circle and there, I'm safe.

People can't talk to me while I'm in the circle. No one can enter it, touch me or even look at me. When I'm in my circle, I don't hear things like the traffic or the waves or birdsong. I can stay here, as peaceful as I like, as long as I like. I don't worry any more about what's happening around me out there. The circle cuts me off from the outside world and from myself as well. It's sheer bliss, complete peace.

Inside the circle, I don't feel cold, hunger, or pain. Time just stops. Like in a protective dream, I'm immersed in the abstract, I become the center of the circle. And whenever I want to leave the circle, I simply stretch out my hand and break the chalk line. I'm the only one who can do this. No one outside the circle can break it for me. The magic of the circle is that it provides complete security.

Ever since the circles were invented, the world has become a better place. We have no wars, famines or natural disasters. The crime rate has plummeted. If you're feeling sick, all you need to do is draw a circle around you. If there's someone who's getting on your nerves, just draw a circle. If a burglar breaks into your house during the night, you just jump into a circle.

REPLACE Spotlight Lyndsay Camera 1 & 2

MIRROR

LYNDSAY *[int. hallway with mirrored corner and ceiling mirror]*

Camera 1: shooting the ceiling mirror

Camera 2: Up shot into the mirrored corner.

I have the feeling it's a deliberately insistent noise, as if someone wants to tell me something. I can't help but wait for the noise now when I look in the mirror. Some days, it comes immediately. Some days, I have to look at myself for a long time before it comes. I haven't excluded the possibility that someone, hidden behind the wall in the stairway, is playing a practical joke on me.

I wake up several times during the night and look at myself in the mirror. Every time there's the noise. Even if there was someone behind the wall, how could they know when I'm looking at myself in the mirror?

Replace Spotlight Ben Camera 1 & 2

BEN [*int. living room and dining area]*

Camera 1: angled down onto dining area

Camera 2: angled up the ladder going to the mezzanine.

I wanted to tell my landlady, but decided not to. Why worry anyone? It would've been like an accusation really, as if I suspected the other tenants. I must admit that for a long time I thought it was Mr. Dupont, one of my neighbors. He lives alone and hasn't left his apartment in years. But he never makes a sound, and to say that he's hiding behind my mirror would be silly in the extreme.

So I settled for taking the mirror out of the bathroom and putting it on my bedroom wall. It now hangs between the two windows. It's like another window. My small apartment is on the fourth floor. So now I know that no one can climb the outside wall to make noises behind the mirror when I look at myself. I'm looking at myself more and more often in my mirror. I spend hours and hours in front of my mirror. The noise fascinates me, obsesses me. Sometimes it frightens me.

REMOVE Spotlight on Ben Camera 2

ADD Spotlight on Lyndsay Camera 1

LYNDSAY: And I am absolutely convinced that it comes from the mirror. There is someone there, who wants to communicate something to me. I click my fingers and I wait. After ten seconds or so, he repeats, nearly identically, the sound of my clicking. I clap my hands and he claps his hands. I knock on the mirror twice with my toothbrush. After a minute, he responds. If I knock three times, I wait a minute and a half for his response.

In any case, he's learning quickly. I say "aah" and, five minutes later, I hear a sort of moaning in the mirror. Even if my "aah" is not reproduced exactly.

BEN: I can tell he takes great joy in trying to answer me. When night falls, I don't turn the light on any more. I like to stay in the darkness with him on the other side. Sometimes we communicate in silence all night long.

LYNDSAY: Toward the morning, I fall asleep, exhausted but happy. My bed is positioned just in front of the mirror and I know he watches me while I sleep.

REPLACE Spotlight on Nora

CIRCLE

NORA *[int. Empty white room upper chest and head shot. She is closer to the camera]*

CAMERA 1: Eye level, Upper Body Shot, Yellow filtered lens

If you're on a long journey and you're getting tired, you can find the rest you need within a circle. If you have something on your mind, a circle is the best place to think about it. If you feel death approaching and you don't want to die, you can vegetate in a circle forever.

Interestingly, you can't put two people in the same circle at the same time. People who have tried it discover that nothing happens at all. A circle for two doesn't exist, and it will never do.

The town has changed completely since people started using the circles. And now, everywhere you turn you'll

see circles. Some people just park themselves on the pavement or the middle of the street, surrounded by their circles. Some don't leave them for days on end. As if they've been abandoned there. Things are much quieter and cleaner now.

In the beginning, you needed magnetic black chalk to be able to draw a circle. The chalk was expensive and most people couldn't afford it. But gradually the price dropped and new, colored chalks went on sale. In the end, chalk started to be handed out for free down at the town hall.

And then, someone worked out that you don't actually need chalk to draw a circle. You can do it with a pencil, the point of a knife, lipstick, a needle or even your own fingernail.

What everyone does agree on is that the circle is the answer. Here we all are, at the turn of the century, and no one's unhappy any more.

REPLACE Spotlight Ben: Camera 2

MIRROR

BEN *[int. Camera 2 angled down from mezzanine] Pre-recorded background of Ben running around the house.*

Sometimes, he's the one who wakes me up. I wait for either my "aah" or the clicking of fingers or my toothbrush knocking against the mirror. I love being woken up like that. The sounds that he emits are so soft, so personal . . . And I'm always teaching him new sounds. I say "ooh" to him, and he replies "ooh" to me. His "ooh" comes faster and faster and increasingly resembles my "ooh." I say, "yes" to him and he responds, almost ecstatically, "yes." All the noises in my room are already familiar to him. I eat in front of the mirror and he reproduces all the noises that I make as I eat. Most of all, he likes when my glass tinkles. I fill up a glass for him and toast his health. I laugh, and he's learned to laugh, as well.

REPLACE Spotlight Susan: Camera 1

SUSAN *[int. bathroom cupboard]*: Sometimes, the dialogue scares me.

He's learning too quickly. He captures the sounds of my life with far too much energy. He's like a black hole that sucks away my whole identity little by little. One night, I thought I had a nightmare. In my sleep, I heard a sort of monstrous tick tock, as if my room had become an enormous hydraulic machine. I was too tired to wake. My sleeping mind tried to forget, to smother this noise, repeated over and over again and growing louder and louder. But when the pulsing turned menacing, I woke with a start. He was repeating my heartbeat back to me, from the mirror!

REPLACE Spotlight Lyndsay Camera 1 & ADD Spotlight on Ben Camera 2

LYNDSAY *[int. Bathroom with mirrored corners. She sits on the sit. She has 4 reflections] Ben [int. bedroom w/ sofa*]: He has learned all the phonetics of speech but he doesn't speak yet. Clearly, he prefers vowels. He still has trouble repeating consonants. Sometimes I say "m" to him and he replies, a little mockingly, "i." I articulate a "z" to him and he sends me a "u" back. I say "zero" to him and he responds "eyes". For the most part, however, he will repeat words that I give him. I say "I am" and he responds, "I am." I say "you are" and he responds "you are." I realize that I am taking a huge risk in teaching him to speak, but it's the only way to get him to tell me who he is.

REPLACE Spotlight Joe

JOE *[int. bathroom. He runs through the door and stands in front of the mirror with a towel]:* Today, he understood the logic of spoken language and said "help!" to me. I'm at my wits' end. This has gone on for six months and sometimes it feels like I have slid into a parallel world that this is transforming me into a mirror. His cry is so desperate that I can't listen to it any more. I often leave the apartment and hide, to avoid him, to forget him, and to forget my helplessness. I wander, pacing the streets alone until dawn. When I return, he greets me straight away with his "help!" To sleep a little, I put earplugs in. I also cover the mirror with a cloth, but he continues to cry out "help! help!" and I hear it in my sleep. I don't speak to him anymore, because I have nothing to say. Perhaps I could kill him by breaking the mirror, but that would be a crime. Despite everything, I'm still searching for a solution.

REPLACE Spotlight Susan Camera 1

SUSAN *[int. corridor to bathroom. Audience sees her reflection in the bathroom mirror cupboard*]: He wants me to get him out of there. He no longer cries "help!" but "get me out of here!" Our conversation has broken off completely. We could have continued—he had a real gift for nuance, a real sense of humor. But no, he refuses to deepen our connection via the spoken word. He wants me to get him out of there at any cost, and ignores the fact that the deepening of our dialogue could perhaps have saved him in the end. His voice has become very clear now, almost human. It's almost my voice but far more trembling, far more tired.

REPLACE Spotlight Nora

CIRCLE

NORA *[int. Room]*

CAMERA 1: Close-up shot of her face and eye. The background isn't in view. Red filtered lens

Surveys indicate that people spend an average of a hundred days inside their circles every year. And, according to census figures, there are people who haven't stepped out of their circles for five, ten, or even twenty years. You can be sure they've had their taste of eternity.

The rumors running through town at the moment don't worry me. What people are saying is that there's a secret trap in the circles, meaning that you can get stuck in them forever.

There are whispers of people being locked in circles against their will. Some are even claiming that people who have lived in their circles for ten or twenty years are, in reality, prisoners.

I've also heard people saying that, for quite a while now, most of the circles have stopped obeying their makers. Once you're in, they won't let you out.

And, what's more, people are saying you'll never get out again.

Replace Spotlight Lyndsay Camera 1

MIRROR

LYNDSAY *[int. room of mirrors. Walking in circle filing from her phone*]: Since I can't actually get him out of the

mirror at the moment, I bring him with me on my walks. I go out every day. With the mirror under my arm, I roam the town for hours, and this seems to have a calming effect on him. He now knows all the streets, all the public gardens. We have our favorite cafe where we spend endless afternoons. Naturally, I don't speak to him when we're out and about. He also has the decency not to ask me to get him out any more. Like this, in silence, we have visited all the museums, all the churches, all the monuments.

REPLACE Spotlight Joe

JOE [*int. bathroom laying in the bath staring into cracked mirror*]: Back home, it starts all over again. I know that he understands my powerlessness and makes a real effort not to ask anything of me. But his silence tortures me all the more now that I hear him breathe. I don't ask myself if it's my breathing or his anymore. I feel him inside my mirror, just as alive as myself. When we're too tired from our walks, we read. I place the mirror on my chair, I sit in my armchair and I read short stories by Poe and Borges to him.

REPLACE Spotlight Susan Camera 1

SUSAN [*int. bathroom cupboard. She is inside the cupboard now, closer to the reflection*]: No, I could never throw him out and he understands it. For the moment, we talk of time, of rising prices, of work. I say "it's beautiful today" and he says "yes." I say "Mr. Bartolomeo was devoured by strange animals" and he says "really?" But, what he doesn't know is that in the meantime, I've handed in my notice and settled my debts. I can't leave him like this, and since I can't get him out here, I've decided to join him in there.

Farewell!

Bring up each actor's screen on at a time

Final close-up shot: the actors stare into the camera momentarily

B/O on time with music.

EPISODE 8. DIRECTED BY CATHERINE SULLIVAN, 4 FEBRUARY 2021

THE MAN WITH THE APPLE, THE VOICE IN THE BLIND LIGHT I, THE VOICE IN THE DARKNESS II AND III

Cast: Venice Averyheart, Cristina Pronzati, Bob Wilson

PERSON1: Venice

PERSON2: Cristina

PERSON3: Bob

GALLERY VIEW—AUDIO TRACK 1

ALL: lying in bed, showered in glorious daylight, expanding, noting borders between them

P1: Curious, the worm reflects.

P2: "Who am I? Where am I?"

P3: The worm smells only its own smell.

ALL: laughter or bemusement

P2: With the exception of the two questions just asked (who am I? where am I?), its memory is an empty void.

ALL: laughter, bemusement or relaxed enjoyment

P1: Well, let's get on with it.

P3: First, it tries to establish its whereabouts, but the substance surrounding it is yielding and pliant. That must be the outside world. It starts to nibble the sweet softness and discovers that its taste is not disagreeable.

ALL: laughter, bemusement or relaxed enjoyment

P2: The worm now engorges itself with intense pleasure until it has tripled in size and now, feeling painfully full, it tells itself:

P3: Enough, have a little common sense!

ALL: breathing a deep sigh of relief, start speaking in ASMR mode

P2: Troubled and excited in equal measure by these discoveries, the worm decides to take a nap. Its nap is brief but fruitful, like a session with the psychoanalyst.

P1: Slipping into sleep, a new revelation strikes the worm—namely, that the world revolves around the concept of time.

P3: And the worm has its first dream: it is floating among countless gigantic spheres that whirl around and threaten to collide with the worm and crush it at any moment.

P1: That's no laughing matter.

ALL: becoming alarmed

P1: Before it can grasp the meaning of life, its mouth floods with the bitter taste of tears.

P2: And then, pondering its size rendered so huge from eating, the worm is hit by the realization that infinity awaits on all sides.

ALL: begin thrashing about in bedding and pillows

P1: Now awake, the worm understands that it is merely an insignificant mote imprisoned in an ocean of food, that it must escape at all costs to give its life meaning. There is only one way to do this: to dig, by eating, a tunnel through its very own food. And so, the worm decides to escape through the soft surrounding substance.

P2: The challenge is a daunting one, but the worm has no intention of admitting defeat.

P3: Relentlessly, it burrows through the apple that I'm raising to my mouth. At that precise moment, when the worm bursts through the apple's skin, thus creating its first window revealing the universe and God, my teeth bite greedily into the fruit.

LIVE SOUND

ALL: are blinded by light and in need of a safe word

P3: Oh, no . . .

P1: Say string, please!

P2: Strange. Why won't he say it?

The group is still when speaking and moving when not speaking, trying desperately to communicate. Different things are happening: kitchen and bathroom drawers are being rifled through, things fly through the air, chase scenes unfold, neighbors are whispered at through walls, curtains are drawn, lights flicker on and off, cocktails are made, clothes are tried on, voices are impersonated and gestures are mimicked.

P3:

PERSON THREE. String.

P1:

PERSON1. I don't know. He doesn't give a shit.

P3:

PERSON ONE. Why won't you say string? How long do you think you can take me for a ride? How long do you think I'll put up with this?

PERSON THREE. String!

PERSON ONE. You'll regret this.

P2:

PERSON ONE. Everyone before has said string, you know.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. They said string and now they're safe and sound. Every single one of them.

PERSON ONE. Perhaps he's never said the word string before.

PERSON TWO. Possibly.

PERSON ONE. Perhaps he actually doesn't know how to say string.

PERSON THREE. String!

P1:

PERSON ONE. He's driving me crazy.

PERSON TWO. Say string, you wretch. Say string!

PERSON THREE. String!

PERSON ONE. String! Say string! What have you got against us that you won't say string?

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. Look at me. Are you looking at me?

P3:

PERSON THREE. Yes.

PERSON ONE. S-tring. Come on, say string and the whole ordeal will be over.

PERSON THREE. S-tring.

PERSON ONE. Come on, don't be so stupid. Say string.

PERSON TWO. Say string or I'll smash your head in.

P2:

PERSON THREE. String!

PERSON ONE. Come on, just be reasonable and say string.

PERSON TWO. It's better if we don't have to force you to say string.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. Do you want me to say something? String, there I've said it.

PERSON ONE. It's easy, say string while there's still time.

P3:

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON TWO. Is it so hard to say string? Say string, please!

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. String! String! String! Christ, just say the bloody word!

PERSON THREE. Yes, yes, yes.

P1:

PERSON ONE. Open your mouth and say it.

PERSON THREE. String!

PERSON ONE. Does saying string make you feel embarrassed?

PERSON THREE. No, no!

PERSON ONE. So say string!

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON TWO. Now don't think, sir, for a minute that you're not going to say it. Are you listening to me? Don't think you're going to get out without saying string! Get that straight out of your head! No one's got out of here without saying string!

P3: Get it, shithead, get it?

PERSON ONE. He said string.

PERSON TWO. That's right.

PERSON ONE. In fact, both of us said string.

PERSON TWO. That's right.

PERSON ONE. Look, it's as easy as falling off a wall.

P1:

PERSON TWO. Look, it's as easy as falling off a wall.

PERSON ONE. Say string. Please.

PERSON TWO. Please. Say string.

PERSON THREE. String! String! String!

P2:

PERSON ONE. Oh, sweet Jesus, I can't take any more of this.

PERSON TWO. This is going to be bad, bad, bad.

PERSON ONE. Say string and just get the hell out of here.

PERSON THREE. String!

PERSON ONE. Do you want us to beat the crap out of you?

P1:

PERSON THREE. String!

PERSON ONE. Or maybe you don't actually know how to say string.

PERSON TWO. I doubt he doesn't know.

P2:

PERSON ONE. Well, some people don't know what string means. How is it, sir, that you don't know what string means?

P3:

PERSON THREE. I know.

PERSON TWO. He knows.

P1:

PERSON ONE. Then why aren't you saying it?

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. Go on, with all your effort!

PERSON THREE. Strinnnnnggggg . . .

P3:

PERSON TWO. What a complete and utter balls-up.

P1:

PERSON ONE. Just say it, Jesus, what do you take us for?

PERSON TWO. No matter how much time, you'll say string, whatever happens.

P2:

PERSON ONE. There's people who say string after a week.

PERSON TWO. There's people who say string after a year.

PERSON ONE. Or after 10 years.

PERSON TWO. Or after 20 years.

PERSON TWO. I guarantee you'll say string one day.

PERSON THREE. String . . . string . . . string.

PERSON ONE. Such a shame for a guy as young as you . . .

P1:

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. It'll be such a shame for your mother.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON TWO. Have you got any brothers? A sister? It'd be such a shame for your sister.

P3:

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. You won't get a chance like this again.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. No one'll care about you.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. Meaningless existence. Pointless passage into the ground. Nothing. Zero. Nil. Dust. Void. Emptiness. Spirit dejected. There you have it!

PERSON THREE. String, string, string, string, string, string, string, string.

P1:

PERSON ONE. Do you seriously think this is easy for us?

PERSON ONE. Get it into your head that we all share the same goal.

PERSON TWO. Think whatever you want, but just say string.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON TWO. Close your eyes and say string.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. Breathe deeply, fill your lungs. Open your ears. Try to speak with a closed mouth. Can you?

P3:

PERSON THREE. I can.

P2:

PERSON ONE. Mouth closed, ears covered . . . Mmmm-SSSS . . .

PERSON THREE. Mouth closed, ears covered . . . string!

PERSON TWO. Look at me. Mouth closed, ears covered, eyes closed . . . Mmmm-SSSS . . .

P1:

PERSON ONE. Place your hands on your stomach and think string.

PERSON THREE. Yes, yes, yes.

PERSON TWO. Are you thinking it? Eh? Think! Go on, think it! Are you thinking it? Go on, think!

PERSON ONE. Think, think . . . String . . . Strinnng . . . Stri-iinng.

P3:

PERSON TWO. He isn't thinking.

PERSON ONE. He isn't thinking?

PERSON THREE *(sobbing)*. String! String! String!

PERSON ONE. Pile of shit!

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. What a nobody.

PERSON TWO. Son of a bitch!

PERSON ONE. What a worm! Piece of scum!

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON TWO. On your knees, you lazy scum.

P1:

PERSON ONE. Christ, say string! Don't you get it? That's what God's telling you in your rotten brain. String.

PERSON TWO. That's right.

PERSON ONE. Listen! Shut up and listen! What's God singing in your head? You're hearing him whisper string.

PERSON THREE. I'm hearing it.

PERSON ONE. So why don't you say string?

PERSON TWO. There's nothing nowhere that can't say string. All of God's creatures can say string.

PERSON THREE. String.

P2:

PERSON TWO. Besides, we know you've already said string.

PERSON TWO. I know someone who's heard him say string.

PERSON ONE. Ah, there, my colleague even knows someone who heard you say string.

PERSON TWO. And it was me!

PERSON ONE. There, and it was my colleague himself.

PERSON TWO. Yes, me, me personally, I heard it with my very own ears when he said string.

P1:

PERSON ONE. There you are! It's ridiculous, ridiculous, utterly ridicu- lous not to say string. Why don't you want to say what you've already said before?

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON TWO. Maybe you want to take our place? Go on, say string and you can take our place.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. Ask us to say string. Are you listening?

PERSON THREE. Yes.

PERSON ONE. Tell me to say string.

P3:

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON TWO. Me too. Tell me to say string.

PERSON THREE. String.

PERSON ONE. Order me to say string three times.

PERSON THREE. Say it, say it, say it!

P1:

PERSON ONE. String! String! String!

P2:

PERSON TWO. Me too! Me too! Me too! Three times, order me to say string three times!

P3:

PERSON THREE. Yes! Yes! Yes!

PERSON TWO. String! String! String!

P1:

PERSON ONE. And now all three of us! Let's all three say string! One, two, three!

ALL THREE: String! String! String!

BLACKOUT, then P2 runs outside.

AUDIO TRACK 2

We see P2's fallen view, we hear only the voices of P1 and P3.

P1: What are we going to do now?

P3: I have no idea.

P1: Can you see anything yet?

P3: Nothing.

P1: Can you hear anything?

P3: Nothing.

P1: Do you think it's still night?

P3: Possibly.

P1: I think we should stop.

P3: If we stop, we're lost.

GALLERY VIEW

We are outside. We see P2's fallen view, we see P3 standing over "it", while P1 searches for something in her yard.

P3: Disgusting!

P1: God, what is it?

P3: It looks a bit like a dog. Well, in any case, it has a dog's head. Maybe more like a stag's head than a dog's. But the eyes, those are definitely dog's eyes.

P1: It's not normal—the sun hasn't come up.

P3: Why's that important to you?

P1: But, God, what could have crushed it like that?

P3: Actually, it dropped out of the sky.

P1: Look, I've had enough. Can't you see we're going around in circles, like blind dogs?

P3: If we panic, we're screwed.

P1: Three days, I swear. And here we are, the sun hasn't risen and we're headed deeper and deeper into this mess. The important thing is that we're free.

P3: Yes, but don't you see we're going blind? In any case, I don't think it's a stag's head.

P1: It's more like a wild boar's.

P3: A wild boar, here in our town?

P1: Hey, does it look like it's still moving?

P3: Seems to me that it's dead but still staring at us. 8

P1: Look at its lips though. It's still breathing, isn't it.

P3: Looks like it has human lips. Well, I think it looks like a sphinx.

P1 moves back onto her porch, takes a wide panorama of the city

P1: We should have stopped when we heard the scream.

P3: What scream?

P1: There, where we heard the scream. We should have stopped there. Think about it. We shouldn't have gone any further after the scream.

P3: I heard no scream.

P1: You heard it because I told you we heard a scream, and you asked me what scream, so you heard.

P3: The scream's got nothing to do with it.

P1: We should have stopped after the scream.

P3: Scream, scream, you're driving me mad with your scream.

P3 goes inside leaving us with the view of "it". P1 goes inside leaving us on her porch. We see P2 inside, moving as if she's putting on stockings.

GALLERY VIEW—LIVE SOUND

P2: It was run over by a lunatic. It was a black car. It did it deliberately. It was flying through the air and all at once it just fell. Perhaps it was escaping. So, it's an angel. An angel with horse hooves. No, it has a horse's mane, but the hooves are more like a goat's. Looks as if there's tears in its eyes.

GALLERY VIEW - We see the hooved feet of the group as they slide back into bed. Now showered in glorious moonlight.

P3: We can go back if you want to.

P1: And if they spot we've come back?

P3: That's not the point. The important thing is to find the same hole, and the hole has to be the same one where we jump over the wall. Then we put everything back in its place, close the windows behind us, clean up, wipe everything, get rid of the filings, and make it look like we woke up with everyone else, and we turn up for breakfast.

P1: And the bars? It's obvious they're bent.

P3: Calm down, that's my worry. I'll bend them back just like before.

P1: So what on earth was it doing here in the first place?

P2: (*to himself*) It flew.

P3: It was obviously roaming the streets.

P1: Did anyone see this creature alive?

P3: No one did.

P1: It made a sound before it died.

P2: Did it moo, bellow, or roar before it died?

P1: I heard words.

P2: And what did it say?

P1: I think it whispered something . . .

P2/P3/P1: What? What?

P3/P2/P1: "I'm sorry . . ."

THE END

Liberto
By Gemma Brió Zamora
Translated by Sharon Feldman

Liberto (2013, titled "Llibert" in Catalan) is a text inspired by personal experience. With the support of two other performers (an actress and a musician/singer), a mother recounts the story of her infant son, Liberto, who died in the hospital after only 15 days of life, the result of cerebral complications at birth. Vacillating between elements of tragedy and surprising moments of humor, the three performers embody dozens of characters, culminating in a celebration of life and a defense of the idea of dying with dignity. Born of necessity, Brió's text is courageous in its recreation of the painful experience of loss, as well as its consideration of the ethical contradictions inherent in the practice of euthanasia.

This translation was made possible by a grant from the Sala Beckett, Barcelona.

Gemma Brió Zamora (Badalona, 1972) is a playwright and actress who holds a degree in theatre arts from the Institut del Teatre, the Barcelona conservatory of theatre and dance. In the theatre, she has worked alongside a long list of prominent directors, such as José Sanchís Sinisterra, Joan Castells, Sergi Belbel, and Xavier Albertí. She has also appeared in several Catalan and Spanish films and television series. *Liberto* is her first play. She played the leading role when it premiered in 2013, under the direction of Norbert Martínez, at the Almería Teatre (Barcelona) and again in 2014, when the production was transferred to the Biblioteca de Catalunya. She also played the same role in the Spanish version of the play, which ran for several months at the Teatro de la Abadía in Madrid in 2015. Barcelona spectators selected *Liberto* for two Butaca Prizes in 2014 ("best play text" and "best small-scale production") and nominated Brió for "best actress in a leading role." In 2015, *Liberto* was awarded the Serra d'Or Critics' Prize (one of Catalonia's most prestigious cultural awards) for "best theatre production" and was a finalist for a Premio Max (the Spanish equivalent of a Tony) in the categories of "new theatrical writing" and "debut production." The success of the play prompted Brió and her collaborators to form the company Les Libertàries, with which they continue to create and produce works of theatre, including a contemporary adaptation of Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*, which premiered at the Barcelona summer "Grec" festival in 2018.

Sharon G. Feldman is Professor of Spanish and Catalan Studies in the Department of Latin American, Latino & Iberian Studies at the University of Richmond, where she holds the William Judson Gaines Chair in Modern Foreign Languages. She has published widely on Spanish and Catalan theatre and has translated over twenty-five Catalan-language plays into English, which have been staged at venues that include the Abbey Theatre (National Theatre of Ireland), the Baryshnikov Arts Center (New York), the Theatre Passe Muraille (Toronto), the Tristan Bates Theatre (London), and the Melbourne Fringe Festival. She is currently writing a book entitled *Àngel Guimerà in America* on the work of one of Catalonia's most celebrated dramatists.

Liberto

By Gemma Brió Zamora
Translated by Sharon Feldman

A play for two actresses and a singer.

CHARACTERS

ME = ADDIE

YOU = EDNA

SCENE 1. WAITING ROOM

A waiting room

ME: I wait, to wait, I'm waiting, I wait, you wait, she waits, anticipation, a waiting room, wait, wait, wait… Waiting turns into despair. Wait, wait, wait, wait…. if you say the word wait several times, it loses all its meaning, wait, wait, wait, wait… if you see a waiting room enough times, it also loses all its meaning. It could be anything: a house, a green pasture… or… no… an old house, in rural Catalonia… with lots of sun, with a nice patch of grass, four children screaming in the inflatable pool, the trampoline from the sporting goods store, the little dog barking at the turtles, and silence in the background… waiting… and the song of the cicadas, waiting… Waiting room, waiting room, waiting room… Of course, the waiting room could also be a waiting room where there are people, lots of people, yes, more and more that's the case with our public health system, but let's go ahead and make it nice… they'll only be the people I want there… two people: One who sings, without whom I could never find the songs, and my friend, Edna, who's always been at my side and without whom I could never find the words. Oh! And you (*referring to a member of the audience*), who are listening to me.

SCENE 2. VIDEO

(*Paradise for a father, pregnant mother and child: a positive pregnancy test. A growing tummy. Friends. Other tummies growing. Non-alcoholic beer. A large needle puncturing a fat tummy. Tense moments. Joy. Thinking about boys' names… A glamorous tummy. More friends and non-alcoholic beer. Thinking about boy names… Beach, summer, children, laughter, swimming pools, sun. Thinking about boys' names… Children's clothing and things, stuff. Stress. Autumn. French music. A very large tummy. Fatigue. More friends. A small child kissing the pregnant tummy. A very big tummy in the bathtub. Eating ravenously. Thinking about boys' names… we've got it! "I'll call you Liberto." A godfather and a godfather: Two godfathers. Swollen feet. A small child placing boots on the swollen feet. Joy and fatigue. A very large tummy and a child at the polling station, the Prado Museum, the theater, the Shakira concert, the circus. Contractions. Joy. Circus. Contractions. Joy. Circus. Contractions. Joy. Circus. Contractions. Fear. Contractions. Fear. Pain. Nausea. Heartbeat. Pain. Nausea. Heartbeat. Fear. Emergency cesarean section! Operating Room. Fear. The heartbeat stops. Caesarean. Extreme emergency! Extreme emergency! Weeping. Fear. Screams. Weeping. Fear. Screams…*)

SCENE 3. CONFUSING DIALOGUE

ME: Did you ask them or not? You didn't have the balls to ask, did you?… no… yes… yes, yes, yes you asked… how did it go? (*she is confused, she begins to become conscious of what has happened, she begins to remember*) is the baby alive?

YOU: Yes.

ME: Yes.

YOU: Addie, the pediatricians have him under observation, because they had to revive him.

ME: I'm not asking anything else about the baby. Why didn't you ask anything else about the baby? Did they fix the scar from my previous C-section?

YOU: Yes, Addie. We fixed it. It came out fine.

ME: But what do you mean? What the fuck are you asking? I'm not asking about anything else. They have him under observation, they can't tell you anything. When he was born, the pediatricians also had to have Cain under observation before I could see him…

YOU: Addie, you need to finish waking up…

ME: Cain's heartbeat also went down during birth. You don't think Liberto could die, do you…?

YOU: …

ME: No. I'm sure he didn't, they would've told you… I'm sure he's ok… Come on, stay calm, you have to be calm and wait! I'm on "stand-by," waiting, I'm not thinking about anything, I'm concentrating… You just have to be patient. That's what's best for the baby, and when he's ok, they'll bring him to you. (*pause*) I'm waiting… (*short pause*)

YOU: Addie, you had a uterine rupture.

ME: What?

YOU: Addie, the baby was without oxygen for a while…

ME: Who are you?

YOU: Montserrat, I think, the nurse who's been with you since you checked in.

ME: Montse…

YOU: They had to revive him. The pediatricians have him in observation. Are you ok?…

ME: Oh my god.

YOU: Calm down.

ME: Brain damage! I know what it means when the brain doesn't receive oxygen, I know!

YOU: Addie, stay calm. We need to wait.

ME: You can't jump to conclusions. I don't want to think the worst but not the best, either, because I know it

won't be… so I won't think about anything.

YOU: Hon, they're going to take Liberto to Hebron Valley, the teaching hospital, to treat him for hypothermia to minimize the brain damage.

ME: Treatment for hypothermia…

YOU: Yeah, Hon, it's a treatment they only do there.

ME: Right, right…

YOU: They won't be able to know what kind of damage he has or how he'll react to the treatment until a few days have passed…

ME: Who are you now?

YOU: I'm Vince, your sweetie.

ME: Right, right, right… let them take him where they can give him the best treatment. Wherever. Don't let them waste a single minute, please!

YOU: Right, my love!

ME: Hurry, hurry… Have you seen him? Is he handsome?

YOU: Yes, he's beautiful. Do you want to see him?

ME: …yeeeees… but who are you?

YOU: The pediatrician, do you want to see him?

ME: …yeeeees!… but let them take him… the treatment… hurry, love! They show him to me, he's in an open incubator, he's intubated, but I don't see the tubes. (*brief pause*) He's beautiful!

YOU: He's relaxed, he's very handsome, I take his hand for a few seconds, and they whisk him away.

ME: But who are you?

YOU: I'm you.

ME: Liberto is beautiful.

YOU: We hug each other and cry.

ME: Who are you?

YOU: Vince, your sweetie.

ME: He's very handsome, sweetie!

YOU: Addie, I'm the doctor.

ME: The doctor?

YOU: Yes, the attending physician during birth.

ME: Fuck, it took you a while to get here!

YOU: I stopped your bleeding, I cleaned up your entire abdominal cavity, and I reconstructed your uterus.

ME: Reconstructed my uter…

YOU: You lost a lot of blood, but you didn't need a transfusion. Hon… I'm going to Hebron Valley with Liberto.

ME: You? The gynecologist?

YOU: No, I'm Vince, your sweetie! I'm going to Hebron Valley with Liberto.

ME: Right, right, go, sweetie!

YOU: I love you, hon.

ME: I love you, sweetie.

YOU: Addie, Cain is staying at our house, Nuria is sitting for him.

ME: At your house?

YOU: We're your parents…

ME: It must be nighttime… How much time has gone by?

YOU: We hug you and cry. We take turns spending the night beside you.

ME: I wake up. Who am I with now?

YOU: I'm your father, Addie. Your phone is ringing!

ME: My heart jumps. Who is it?

YOU: Vince, sweetie, Liberto has been having convulsions, it's not a good sign. You want to scream and cry, but you don't, because you have to continue listening. You want to stay connected to the phone. If you cry too loud, you won't be able to hear him. You just close your eyes, you keep from breathing, and you make a grimace of intense pain. I look at you and imagine what Vince is saying.

ME: Who are you?

YOU: (*softly singing*) Vladimira…

ME: I already know; you're my mother.

YOU: Addie, your phone is ringing.

ME: My heart skips a beat. Who is it?

YOU: Vince, hon, the electroencephalogram doesn't look good, it's not a good sign, either…

ME: No…

YOU: …You want to scream and cry, but you don't, because you have to continue listening. You want to stay connected to the phone. If you cried too loud, you wouldn't be able to hear him. You just close your eyes, you keep from breathing, and you make a grimace of intense pain. I look at you and imagine what Vince is saying.

ME: Who are you?

YOU: (*wanting to answer but cannot*)

ME: Right, you're my father.

YOU: Hon, hon… I'm Vince.

ME: You're here?

YOU: No. I'm on the phone. We can't know the scope of the brain lesions, but they're certain they're there.

ME: But who are all of you, what's happening?

YOU: I'm your father, Addie. And I'm Vince, your sweetie, calling from Hebron Valley. I love you! I love you so much!

ME: I love you! I love you so much! The entire movie of my future life runs through my head. I know of so many cases with a son or a brother with cerebral palsy or something like that! I'll be just like them: sad, tired, bitter, traumatized…

YOU: I hug you and cry. I don't know what to say to you…

ME: Why? Why? Why? Dad, I can't believe this is happening to me. It's a dream. It can't be…

YOU: I don't know what to say…

ME: I'd never seen my father like that.

YOU: I love you!

ME: He says he loves me! In the midst of desperation, I begin constructing my future. I reflect. I go ahead and force myself be rational, to put my life in order, immediately!

YOU: But you continue crying and screaming.

ME: The one who doesn't fit in with all this is Cain…

YOU: You don't want to sacrifice his…

ME: I can't stand thinking about it…

YOU: It hurts really bad…

ME: What will Cain's life be like with a brother with cerebral palsy?

YOU: The pain of anesthesia.

ME: But who are you?

YOU: I'm you, dear!

ME: I'm falling asleep.

YOU: Wake up. Hey, I love you. If you want me to come, just let me know.

ME: Who are you?

YOU: It's me, Edna. I'm a text message from your friend Edna.

ME: Did you hear what happened?

YOU: You feel a huge pain in your chest…

ME: My head is burning up, and it hurts.

YOU: Here, take this.

ME: What is it?

YOU: Tylenol.

ME: The pain won't go away…

YOU: I'll give you some morphine…

ME: Who are you?

YOU: The nurse. It's morning.

ME: Oh, really?

YOU: I hug you, and we cry. I love you!

ME: Is that you, Vince, my sweetie?

YOU: Yes.

ME: What are you doing here?

YOU: I'm asking for you to be transferred so that you can be near Liberto, and I'm going back again. Addie, we don't know if your transfer will be today or tomorrow.

ME: Who are you?

YOU: The nurse.

ME: Then, hey, nurse, you know what? Either my transfer happens today, or I burn down the hospital.

YOU: It's true, you'll do it…

ME: If I don't see my son today, I'll do it…

YOU: Finally, the ambulance arrives, we both get in, and it takes us to the university hospital.

ME: And who are you?

YOU: I'm your father.

ME: And who are you? (*referring to a member of the audience*)

SCENE 4

4.1. Buzzkill

EDNA: Alex.

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Scene 1 Buzzkill.

ME: (*referring to a member of the audience*) This is Alexander Egea, Liberto's pediatrician… I've done all this for you, Alex… well, not exactly… for you.

EDNA: Alex is a very important person for her and for the story.

ME: Right …

EDNA: She needed to talk, to explain…

ME: Right. I thought you only knew pieces. I thought…

EDNA: Right…

ME: … and if he were to come? And if I were to explain everything to him, from the beginning?

EDNA: Yes, she means she'd like you to know all the details…

ME: Yes, because… just because… I mean… thank you, thank you for coming…

EDNA: Yes, thank you, thank you for coming, doctor.

ME: …doctor!… I once asked one of the nurses for Doctor Egea, and she didn't even know who I was talking about… Oh, Alex, she said… Although I must confess (*to Edna and to The One Who Sings*) I call him…, right!

EDNA and THE ONE WHO SINGS: Yes, yes…

ME: …we gave him a name, a nickname, we called him Buzzkill…

EDNA: It was David's idea. David, Liberto's godfather. And the truth is, all my friends thought he hit the nail on the head!

ME: Vince wants to know if you can go up to the room, because I still haven't been discharged, and you go up, even though you're under no obligation to do so. It's not like pediatricians receive overtime, either. It's part of a government plot against childhood. They've decided not to pay overtime for teachers or pediatricians. It's like the politics of only one child in China, but even more twisted…. the Catalan way. We wanted you to tell us what we'll be up against once the treatment for hypothermia is over. What kind of chance does Liberto have?

EDNA: She told me you were a man with crazy eyes, who came by to clear things up!

ME: I see he didn't spare a single detail. It was very scary, but he was very clear and wanted to be completely understood. Ok! That's what I needed. Vince and I listen attentively, but you look at me the entire time and paint a very odd picture for us. You say that Liberto, definitely –and you stress the word definitely– has brain lesions.

EDNA: "the possibilities range from a simple strabismus, to severe cerebral palsy. It's not an easy case, it's not clearly black or white, it's within a range of greys, and for now, because of the kind of asphyxia that Liberto

suffered…"

ME: The type of asphyxia that Alex is referring to is called acute asphyxia, meaning it's very strong and sudden and different from other kind of asphyxias…

EDNA: "…it's more likely a dark grey than a light grey" (*to the audience*), but she doesn't believe it.

ME: Because he doesn't know what he's talking about, Edna! Liberto will be cross-eyed! Vince and I will have a cross-eyed child, whatta ya gonna to do… And that's that.

EDNA: "Monday, when the treatment for hypothermia is over, we'll do an MRI and gather more information, and then we'll be able to decide what to do."

ME: He said "decide," although, at the time, we didn't realize what he meant.

EDNA: "Right now Liberto is stable, and his vitals are normal, because all his organs are functioning, but it's precisely the main one that's failing: the brain." She can't stop thinking about the cases of cerebral palsy that she knows of!

ME: Beth from elementary school; my grandparents' cousin…

EDNA: Dolores, from the apartment in the Born neighborhood… On Rec Street…

ME: That's right, Peter's daughter, our neighbor. Frank's brother, the brother of the hippiest hippie in the town, that tall guy's brother. It's not palsy but something's not right with him, Matilda's daughter, who died…. that's the life that awaits us, just like those mothers… they're all so ugly…

EDNA: Addie!

ME: I don't want to be ugly!

EDNA: But what are you talking about…

ME: I know, I know, it's not right… and Cain will be like one of those brothers… Will he be like that tall guy?

EDNA: No.

ME: It would have been better if Liberto had died, but no one says his life is in danger, and so we'll have to bring him home no matter what and move forward, and our lives will change radically…

EDNA: From now on I'll have a friend with a son with cerebral palsy! I'm also willing to change my life, radically. During the summer, I'll take him to the country for a few days, so they can take a break. He'll play with the little dog and the turtles, we'll bathe him in the pool, the children will perform circus acts for him on the trampoline… at the very least… and we'll go to Houston and… But we need to wait…

ME: Right, Buzzkill says we need to wait… We'll wait… We'll wait, you'll wait, they'll wait, waiting… Wait. The waiting room, the waiting room, the waiting room, the waiting room. If you see a waiting room enough times, it loses all its meaning, and it could be anything, it could also be a cemetery or a funeral home… or no… an airport…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Strangers in the night…!

ME: Right, an airport, where a young thirty-nine-year-old woman arrives with her dead baby in a rectangular

box, 50 centimeters long, made of Scots pine. An airport with police and a guard or whatever you call them… one of those security guards at the airport… who won't let the young woman go by with her box, the ones who make you adhere to the rules and remain firm in their obligation, unperturbed… fuckin' load of crap.

4.2. My child in my arms

ME: (*she sees somebody in the audience*) Damn, Judy! (*to Edna*) Judy, Judy's here, too, Edna! (*she discovers someone else among the audience members*) And Olga!

EDNA: Olga, the one from the night shift. The one who has I don't know what kind of thing with the Lliure Theatre "the Lliure." Does she go to the theatre a lot?

ME: (*to Edna*) Yes, and Judy, the day nurse! Thank you, Judy, thank you for breaking the rules and the protocol for my "vajajay."

THE ONE WHO SINGS: I think I love you!

ME: The protocol says I can't hold the baby in my arms until they've removed the breathing tube, but Liberto still can't breathe well enough on his own, and they can't "extubate" him.

EDNA: (*to Judy*) If they're not paying you overtime, that means you're on your own time! And on your own time you can totally fuck the protocol.

ME: Liberto is bed 1 of unit 21, and Judy and Olga are his nurses… He's fast asleep because, he's still under the effects of the sedatives, from the barbiturates and the treatment. But he's already opening his eyes ever so slightly! They're dark. He's moving, hey, he's a normal baby… He's so beautiful! Isn't he? He's handsome, isn't he!

EDNA and THE ONE WHO SINGS: Beautiful!

ME: Judy, you make miracles possible! You let me hold Liberto in my arms for the first time, even though he's intubated! The moment I should have experienced six days ago, the arrival into the world of my son, a mother's embrace, the warmth of her body… My baby has gone six days without the warmth of the one thing he needed, and I'm also a lost piece of a puzzle that has finally found its place… Even though, with my baby coupled to me, against my breast, both of us fused into a single being, I have to recognize I didn't want to love him so much. I was angry that he'd come to break up the peace and tranquility of our family: Vince, Cain and me.

4.3. "Stimulation Oh! Yeah!"

EDNA: (*looking at the members of the audience that have been named*) Now, we already have Buzzkill, Olga, Judy… who's missing?

ME: A doctor who's super interested in issues of hypothermia and all that stuff…

EDNA: Oh, right.

ME: (*she points to any member of the audience*) You, for example. You announce to Vince and me that the treatment for hypothermia is over. You're beginning to warm up Liberto.

EDNA: He says that for the moment it's good for all of you to stimulate him.

ME: "Ok, ok, ok, stimulation! Oh! Yeah!!!"

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*she performs a guitar solo*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: "Stimulation!"

ME: Infusion pump, bedside display, ventilator, monitor to measure spontaneous breathing… (*she points to different devices on the stage*)

EDNA: It's the one that measures when he breathes on his own and when they'll be able to "extubate" him.

ME: We touch him, we move his arms and legs, we kiss him, we sing to him… I sing to him, I sing to him a lot, I sing to him at all hours of the day before the treatment is over, I sing *coplas* to him (she sings a Spanish *copla*) but now I can't sing that… now we have to stimulate him (*she sings a happy song. Edna and the One Who Sings join in. There is an indicator that begins moving upward*) Good job, Liberto! Good! Up, up! (*the indicator begins going downward*) no, no Liberto, up! (*the indicator continues moving downward. She sings "The Internationale"*) Your name is Liberto and you've come into this world to be a fighter, to make it a better place! We're here for you! (*the indicator goes downward*) Today, it won't be possible, but, maybe tomorrow.

EDNA: We'll wait …

ME: We'll wait, you'll wait, they'll wait, waiting… Wait. Waiting room, waiting room, waiting room, waiting room. If you see a waiting room enough times, it loses all its meaning, and it could be anything, it could even be… an airport…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Strangers in the night…

ME: … the one with the girl with the dead baby in the 50 cm box and the security guard who remains unperturbed and who still doesn't fucking get it, but maybe he will finally get it: You want a fucking piece of paper to enter with the box, don't you? I need a fucking document for the remains… a fucking death certificate, don't I?… Well, I don't have the fucking piece of paper, ok? But I have a ticket to fly to an old house on a patch of grass with lots of sun, to bury my son there, so that four children, a little dog named Ganchito, and two earth turtles can walk on top of it and tickle him, ok? Look! You see? What does it say here? "Old house on a patch of grass with lots of sun," and I'm planning on flying no matter what you say and no matter what you do, just so you know, and you should also know that you're not the only one who busts peoples' balls, oh no… There have been many before you who've asked me for lots of fucking documents! I've had it up to here with fucking papers, because in life there are always forms to fill out, documents that you need, certificates to stamp… and in death, too… Look, I'm sure by now my baby boy must be at the gates of heaven, arguing with the fucking doorman, Saint Paul, or Saint Peter, I can't remember right now, for a fucking piece of paper he needs to enter the fucking Kingdom of Heaven. Because, that's right, my son is just like me, and he won't obey orders or bow his head. My son will enter heaven with both his balls! Sure, I'd like him to come back, but he won't!

EDNA / SAINT PETER: And the little guy comes up to me and says, "I'd like to enter Eternity!" Eternity, he says, for Jesus fucking Christ! like that, with such nerve! Hey, little one, what did you think? I tell him I'm Saint Peter, I swear to God! Let's see… passport! And he goes ahead, and the little guy doesn't even have the "stamp" of life, you know…! We'll see if we have to go on letting in just anyone who happens to show up without documentation…

4.4. The MRI

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Scene 4 The MRI!

EDNA: You and Vince wait while they do the MRI on Liberto (*she gives ME a sandwich while Edna and The One Who Sings eat some gummy candies. Long pause, ME voraciously eating the sandwich*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: You're hungry, aren't you?

ME: Yes. I always thought something like this would take away my appetite… but no…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Liberto Vargas Castelló!

EDNA: Buzzkill's already come out… and that other woman… what's her name?

ME: Patti LuPone.

EDNA: Patti LuPone? (*she lets out a laugh*)

ME: That's right, that's right, Patti LuPone, the neurologist, Dr. Patti LuPone, must be the one over in that dark corner (*she points to a corner of the theatre space*). The orderly is coming out now with Liberto! He looks good, doesn't he? Maybe it's true that it will be bright grey instead of the dark grey Buzzkill predicted. Buzzkill looks pleased!

EDNA: Patti LuPone and Buzzkill give us the results: "The MRI went well, given the circumstances. It will be somewhat difficult for Liberto, but he will be able to walk…

ME: Great!

EDNA: …he'll be able to talk…

ME: Great!

EDNA: …and he isn't affected cognitively!

ME: GREEEEEEAT!!!!!! (*all three sing "We are the champions"*) See, Buzzkill, it was a light grey!!! Look what a Buzzkill you are! The good news spreads like wildfire! We receive a thousand messages congratulating us! Happy days!

4.5. The Registry

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Scene 5 The Registry.

ME: Officially, he doesn't exist, and I would really like everyone to know that he's come into the world. He's in intensive care and all, but doesn't he have a right to be a citizen of this world just like anyone else… or even more… because this little boy won't leave anyone indifferent, just you wait and see!

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Oh! Explain what happened!

ME: What?

EDNA: What happened, you called, and…

ME: Oh, right! In the information for newborns from Hebron Valley Hospital, there's a phone number. It says it's the hospital registry. I call: "Good morning, listen, I need to register a child who's in intensive care, and I would like to know if I can do it here at the hospital, or if I have go down to City Hall," and the woman says: "excuse me, you have the wrong number, this is Adetca" Adetca? "The Association of Theatre Companies of Catalonia."

EDNA: There, on the sheet with information for newborns from Hebron Valley Hospital is the phone number, printed incorrectly, for the Association of Theatre Companies of Catalonia.

ME: Yes, yes, really! 933097900.

EDNA: It's a sign. Liberto will be an actor!

ME: Or maybe a theatre producer.

EDNA: Even better for us…

ME: In fact, it's more likely he'll end up as a theatre producer than a nuclear physicist… it's more likely that with half a brain…

EDNA: True.

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Now you've gone too far!

ME: Let's leave Liberto for a few hours to go down to City Hall. We can finally register him! Oh…

EDNA: A problem?

ME: A problem: we need paperwork from the hospital. We'll tell the person who works there that the baby is in intensive care, and we can't come back again another day; we have to get him registered today! The woman who works there says she can't do anything and that we should talk to the judge or his assistant or whomever…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Not the assistant! The judge, the judge…

ME: Whoever, a young guy with the face of a conservative politician who can't deal. You, for instance (*she points to someone in the audience*). I'll adopt the strategy of a woman in need –it works well with the right-wingers–, and I'll tell him our son is in the hospital dying, he's in the hospital dying!

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*to someone in the audience*) "But what's wrong with you? It's a goddamn piece of paper! A goddamn piece of paper!"

ME: That couldn't be farther from what I'm thinking about today! Liberto is fine, these are happy days! Finally, the conservative politician gives in and tells the woman who works there that she can register him!

THE ONE WHO SINGS: "Let's see now… Li… beeer… t… a….with a "t" or with a "d"?

ME: … the woman is very slow… and my breast milk is leaking, and she looks at my tits and says – "Oh, do you have the little girl here with you? Let me see her."

EDNA: "But she told you it's a boy and not a girl!"

ME: And I tell her: "no, he's in intensive care"; and she says: "Oh! Right… but he's ok, right?" "No, surely he won't make it beyond this week!," "Oooh!… By the way, you're the one on that soap opera, aren't you?" "Yes,"

"Oh! I knew it… I was just saying before to my colleague here, blah blah blah…"

THE ONE WHO SINGS: You see? Girl, she's the one from that soap!

EDNA: "Uh, uh, girl, no, she's not."

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Yes, she is, she's the one on TV, on that show, *Family Passions*. She definitely is!

EDNA: "No, she's not, how could she be the one from TV? No, she's not!"

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Yes, she is, she's on that soap, I'm telling you, she's Anna on that soap!

EDNA: "No, she's not! What are you talking about, girl! How can she be from *Family Passions*! No, she's not!"

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Stamp, girl, give it the official seal! Liberto Vargas Castelló! Registered!

EDNA: Registered!

ME: Even though it's a Friday and the thirteenth, today's our lucky day!

(*explosion of happiness*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Ladies and gentleman! Allow me to present to you an ordinary showman, not much of a humanitarian, not much of a friend of friends, acting on the great stage of the Kingdom of Heaven! You can applaud if you like. Introducing, the fucking gatekeeper! Saint Peter!

EDNA / SAINT PETER: And the kid comes up to me and says, "I have a right to be a citizen of heaven just like anyone else, or more, bro!" Bro? Go ahead, throw it down, kid, throw it down and let them put a stamp in your passport, goddamnit! And come back tomorrow; here, we close up at two. And the kid, unmoved, you know, because he said so! "We shall not be moved! We shall not be moved!" and "Yes we can," "We give birth, we decide!" and "End pork barrel spending!" Goddamnit! I phone up life: "Hello? Is this life?" Listen, I have a kid here who says he wants to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and he doesn't have a stamp… What stamp do you think? The stamp of Life! Here, not even God gets in without proper documentation! And they tell me, "he's not on the list" and "there doesn't appear to be anyone here by the name of Kid." Goddamnit! And what the fuck do I do now? I'll have to speak to the boss. Jesus fucking Christ. 9330979…. you've got to be kidding!… he's never even in his office! he spends the entire day "fucking around," burning abortionists, trafficking in drugs, beating up on gays and touching the asses of little choir boys… And now where the hell am I supposed to find him! Goddamnit!!! And I tell the kid, "Kid you're going to have to wait."

4.6. They're wrong

ME: They're wrong, they were wrong, you were wrong, right? (*she goes about pointing to each of the people in the audience who she names*) Dr. Patti LuPone… Buzzkill… Dr. Rose Lagos (*to the audience*) is Liberto's other pediatrician… The rest of the medical team that we've never seen… Everyone is wrong… ok, people make mistakes. LuPone… says that Liberto definitely won't be able to walk.

EDNA: Addie…

ME: She said it, yeah, she said it, and there's no doubt, she pronounced it clearly, there's no room to think we didn't hear her right, she said it, and she hasn't shut up, and she just keeps talking and talking and talking…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*with a distorted voice*) We expl… hosp… Liberrrrrrrrrto…

ME: …what is she saying?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: …swallowing…

ME: …what?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: …is not good… the MmmmmRRRRRiuoughsh…

ME: …the what?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: …has hidden… asssssspects that are reeeeeeally…

ME: …huh?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: …in a badddd mood…

ME: …what the fuck are you saying!

THE ONE WHO SINGS I EDNA: …he can't swallow…

ME: …I don't understand!!!

TOTES: …he's not swallowing… it's a bad sign…

ME: …what do you mean…!

TOTES: …he won't be able to talk…

ME: …shut up!

TOTES: …he can't swall…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: … cognistrict afectationblablablablablablablablabla…!!!

ME: I have the chills! We have another child, Cain. He's not even two! I can't speak. Vince can't. He's sunk in the chair. We touch Liberto, I can't imagine myself! I'm suffocating! I need air! The street.

THE ONE WHO SINGS: "¿What's going on with them?"

EDNA: Look, look…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Do you need help?

ME: (*shakes her head no*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Are you ok?

ME: (*she nods her head*) (*pause*) And now what? What should we do now?

4.7. Friends

ME: We must have called someone. If not, I can't explain it otherwise: at the Hebron Valley plaza, under the blinding sunlight and extreme cold, everyone is here. I can see Alvaro from afar, who's moving quickly with his

face contorted, and behind him, David, Edna, Sandra, Michele, Marta, Julio and Chris, Ivan, Sylvia, my parents, Sergio, Eva…

EDNA: (*to Me*) Vince's parents aren't here, because they're with Cain.

ME: We go from embrace to embrace, like two dolls without a soul. They hug us, they kiss us. I don't know how they all found out so quickly. I've found myself thinking a lot about Chris and Julio's daughter! They had huge problems when she was born, and then they didn't have any problems in the end! But now we know that Liberto's case is very different… When they all leave, I remain alone with Edna. "We'll go to Houston" she says, "we'll do whatever Liberto needs!" She already has everything in order. All she needs to do is pull the low-cost tickets out of a hat. "All together, you two, Cain, Liberto, me and the kids –like when we went camping on the Costa Brava– and on the way there, we'll learn English, and we'll go and visit museums and have a good time…" She always makes me laugh. "To Houston," supposedly, "they have the best doctors, and if Liberto has to be in a wheelchair or has to learn to talk or whatever, they'll find the best treatment, and we'll all help them and he'll be our spoiled little boy!…" And she compares me to Matilda, who had a son with cerebral palsy who died last year at the age of 20. But I don't want, I don't want to be like her! I adore the woman, she's never bitter, she's pretty, she hasn't left her job, she's a dancer, she's fun and cheerful, and, maybe, she's even happy, but I don't want her life, damn it! I don't want it!!!

EDNA: And me to Houston, right?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: We'll wait, you'll wait, they'll wait, waiting… Wait. Waiting room, waiting room, waiting room, waiting room. If you see a waiting room enough times, it loses all its meaning, and it could be anything, it could go back to being… the airport…

ME: Strangers in the night…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: …the one with the girl with the dead child in the 50 cm box and the goddamn security guard (*to ME*) Are you fucking going to give him hell or not? Come on, give him hell! Give him hell!!! (*THE ONE WHO SINGS and EDNA encourage ME to give the security guard hell*)

ME: All right, all right, all right! (*to the security guard*) Hey, you! Let me go through with this box, dude! We're all in the same boat here! Sooner or later, you'll find yourself there, you might as well know it! Because whether you let me through with my child without the fucking document or whether you remain firm in your fucking obligation, whether you feel free to interpret the rules in a fair and just way, or whether you're a fucking pig who doesn't have an ounce of compassion, what you have to look forward to in life, like everyone else, even though you're a fucking cop, is that they'll ask you for justifications, certificates, signatures, and papers and papers and papers and more papers until you die, and on into eternity!!!

THE ONE WHO SINGS and EDNA: What? (*pause*)

ME: And the guy goes ahead and tells me to wait, that he has to go speak to his boss!

(*Brief discussion between EDNA and THE ONE WHO SINGS about the advantages or not of giving the guard a fucking hard time*)

4.8. Considering the idea of death

ME: And if Liberto were to die? and if he died? Vince lowers his head and looks like he's in immense pain. I

don't know what's going on with him, but it could be anything; he could get right up and slap me in the face or faint right here. (*to the audience*) I don't want to tell you when it was that the possibility that Liberto might die began to set in, that he was being kept alive artificially and that he would otherwise die. I don't know… Would he die or wouldn't he die?… Is it ok to think about it? Is Liberto so bad off that I might wish it? Vince says we need to do everything possible for Liberto to get better. He doesn't understand… Or am I the one who doesn't understand? Could he get better? I want to believe it; I want to believe it!!! … (*with barely a voice*), but I can't. We need to talk again when Vince is ready. Maybe it will be too late… but I have to wait for him to be ready, right, I have to wait, I have to wait…

4.9. The two fairies

ME: Shall we go back to Liberto's unit?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Bed 1 Unit 21.

ME: There are two women performing some tests on him with some headphones.

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Scene 6. The Fairies

ME: They're cheerful and calm… I don't know who they are but they say he reacts very well to sound…

EDNA: "He reacts very well to sound!"

ME: And it seems like he can hear. They say we should try to give him a drop of formula to see if he can swallow!

EDNA: Now you'll freak! (*pause*)

ME and EDNA: Ooh!

ME: Liberto just took the biggest gulp of his life!

EDNA: Did the women see it or not? How do they look?

ME: Good! Yes, yes, yes, they saw it, too! It's just that when the doctors come by, he's always half asleep… it seems like he only does things when we're not around. Maybe he's doing better than they think, and they just haven't realized…

EDNA: The two fairies have examined him and even they've confirmed he can hear.

ME: Yeah! He can hear, and he also follows us with his gaze. They give us hope! "The plasticity of a child's brain is enormous…"

EDNA: "…the neurons don't regenerate, but often some parts of the brain can substitute for others."

ME: Are they confident in his rehabilitation!

EDNA: Yes.

ME: Right… but what are the limits of that rehabilitation?

EDNA: I don't know, they say there are no limits! "We have to grab onto these little things and go on pulling

the little thread of hope to wherever it might take us…"

ME: What does to wherever it might take us mean? That's of zero help to me! That's of zero help me! Let them give us some examples, come on! They should talk about the boy with half a brain!

EDNA: The boy with half a brain?

ME: Yes, a boy who only had half a brain and went through life as if nothing had ever happened! Please! The boy with half a brain is our only hope!

EDNA: But they don't.

4.10. Final diagnosis from Patti LuPone, the neurologist

ME: (*pointing to someone in the audience*) You're Dr. Rose Lagos, right?

EDNA: (*to the audience*) Liberto's other pediatrician.

ME: Thank you, Rose! Would you ask Dr. LuPone to come and give us a better explanation of the diagnosis? Don't you think one is in order?

EDNA: Of course, it's in order! She did a very poor job of explaining it before!

ME: Patti LuPone… (*she searches with her eyes*) she must be over there in that dark corner… she'll give us a better explanation.

EDNA: "Liberto is still lethargic, he has soft muscle tone. He doesn't manage his secretions well, and he can't swallow. The area of the brain that controls speech and the movement of his extremities has been affected, and once he grows, he'll have the typical rigidity associated with cerebral palsy… He has moderate to serious cerebral palsy."

ME: But what does that mean exactly? He swallowed before, and those women said there are no limits. Are there or aren't there? Where are the limits? What kind of future awaits Liberto?

EDNA: She knows but she hasn't said it.

ME: Go ahead! Say it! Damnit!

EDNA: "…a wheelchair…"

ME: "…an electric one…"

EDNA: "Maybe a walker…"

ME: "…around the house…" "Maybe he'll be able to say something… unintelligible. And cognitively… I can't be sure… but maybe… that too. He doesn't swallow, he'll have to go around with a tube in his stomach… maybe rehabilitation… we've seen a case… maybe with time… he'd be able to swallow some small pieces… All of this… in the best-case scenario!" My little one!!!!

(*Distorted guitar music*)

4.11. The question

ME: (*Addressing the audience*) I have to ask you something… something… something impossible… I think… something surely illegal, but necessary, just, and… vital, yes… yes, vital. Vince won't like me doing it, but I have to. We have to survive, even if it costs me my sweetie's love! Is there any possibility of Liberto avoiding having to live a life that he really doesn't deserve? Can you do it? Or will I have to do it?" (*Whispering*) I finally found the way to express it… an ethical way… I found the social expression for wishing that my son were dead. A dignified life for Liberto, a dignified death for Liberto.

5. DEATH

ME: (*reciting it as though it were a litany*) Alarm, 7 AM, I slept so well! Breast pump, expressway, not much traffic for a Friday, parking lot, down the stairs, locker with the little fish cartoon: anorak, scarf, bag… I wash my hands, oh, no! my cell! I place it in silent mode in my tights… better yet, in my bum, down my underwear, if not, I'll find it at my ankles mid-morning, ok now: hands, blue soap, up to my elbows, 3 minutes, the water is scalding!

EDNA: Good morning, good morning, there are some new parents here, what's the look on their faces? There's no paper, take some from the lactarium, there's always some in there. The mini fridge, three jars of milk and the frozen colostrum, will they be able to read my writing? Liberto, bed 1, unit 21. I say hello, they give me a strange look… do they need to tell me something? I see the little bed. I'm coming! Here I am! I can see him! Good morning Liberto, my love!

ME: (*she sings a lullaby*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Psst, psst… psst, psst…

ME: What?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Dr. LuPone.

ME: What?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: She's come out from that dark corner. Ask her.

ME: Oh! Right. Ok, ok… Doctor!

EDNA / DR. PATTI LUPONE: Yes?

ME: Is it possible that Liberto could avoid having to live such an undignified life?

EDNA / DR. PATTI LUPONE: He could asphyxiate!

ME: He could what? What? What?

EDNA / DR. PATTI LUPONE: There is a way! … he could suffer from asphyxiation; his condition could worsen… but it won't be easy…

ME: Asphyxiate how? I don't understand… But Liberto unfortunately doesn't suffer from asphyxiation! I mean he doesn't suffer from asphyxiation… I mean I don't want him to suffer from asphyxiation! I want him… I don't want him… I want… ughhh!…

EDNA / DR. PATTI LUPONE: I'll advise the pediatricians to talk with you (*she leaves*).

ME: So yes? It's possible? There is a possibility! I thought they would say there wasn't any, that he'll just live and be handicapped. And I would like them to say they're keeping him alive artificially and that, when they stop doing so, he'll die quickly and calmly, but "asphyxiation"??? that his condition may worsen??? that "It won't be easy"???

(*Moooo, Moooo… she is interrupted by the sound of cows and cowbells and shepherd's calls*)

ME: Time to milk me! …Goodbye my love. Let me take a good look at you, since I might not ever see you again.

(*She goes over to the lactarium, sits down, and begins to express the milk.*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Psst, psst…

ME: What?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Vince!

ME: Hi, sweetie.

EDNA / VINCE: Hi, hon.

ME: Patti LuPone says there's a possibility…

EDNA / VINCE: No…

ME: Yes, she said…

EDNA / VINCE: No…

ME: Right… but…

EDNA / VINCE: No, no, no…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*at the same time as Vince*) No, no, no…

EDNA / VINCE: I'm not ready for Liberto to die. We have to put up a fight

ME: No, sweetie, not anymore…

EDNA / VINCE: I need to hold on to something to be able to move forward. I don't want Liberto to die… I can't…

ME: I've opened up a can of worms…. Our family is going to hell!

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*singing*) Goodbye, Liberto, my love, see you tomorrow! Mini fridge, three empty jars, locker with Nemo: anorak, scarf, bag, take my cell out of my bum, hospital parking lot, a fortune! Privatize healthcare, for cryin' out loud! Expressway! Home! Cain, my little guy! Breast pump! To bed!

ME: I'm dreaming… Liberto can't live here, we have to avoid it… a vegetable… Vince says he'll get better… he doesn't understand, he doesn't want to understand, the diagnosis won't change, they've said it… He hates me! Everything is going to hell!!! I don't want, I love him… and Cain… (*she wakes up startled*) I can see it clearly now, Liberto shouldn't go on living, no matter what!

II

ME: (*reciting the litany*) Alarm, 7 AM, I slept so well! Breast pump, expressway, not much traffic for a Saturday shopping day, parking lot, isn't there a subscription? Down the stairs, locker with the little fish cartoon: anorak, scarf, bag… I wash my hands, oh, no! my cell! I place it in silent mode in my tights… better yet, in my bum, down my underwear, if not, I'll find it at my ankles mid-morning… ok now: hands, blue soap, up to my elbows, 3 minutes! The water is scalding!

EDNA: Good morning, good morning, there are some new parents here, what's the expression on their faces? There's no paper, take some from the lactarium, there's always some in there. The mini fridge, three jars of milk and the frozen colostrum, will they be able to read my writing? Liberto, bed 1, unit 21. I say hello to the nurses, they give me a strange look… Do they need to tell me something? I can see the little bed. I'm coming! I'm here! I can see him! Good morning Liberto, my love!

ME: (*she sings him a lullaby*) My love and if you don't die?… and if I didn't understand, and it's not possible for you to die, what will we do, my love? I can't stand having wished it… You have to help me convince your father, my love… tell him that you can't live this way, that he shouldn't be frightened, that we have to be brave, that nice little boys like you deserve a life filled with life and not death. That that's what it means to love!

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Psst, psst… The pediatrician… Dr. Lagos… Rose… Is making her rounds…

ME: Doctor… we need to speak to you about…

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Yes

ME: Is there any possibility of avoiding…

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Dr. LuPone already told me…

ME: Oh?

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Yes, yes.

ME: It's just that I'm afraid, because if he doesn't die…

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Yes, yes… I understand.

ME: You do?

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Yes, yes…

ME: Ok… I mean it's clear to me… but Vince…

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Yes, I understand…

ME: You do?

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Yes, yes…

ME: That rehabilitation… there are limits… but there is… right?

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: Yes…

ME: I understand… but Vince doesn't.

THE ONE WHO SINGS: We have to do an x-ray! Would you mind stepping out?

ME: (*talking at the same time*) No… ok…

EDNA / DR. LAGOS: (*talking at the same time*) Yes, just a minute, I'm leaving, don't do the x-ray yet… I'm pregnant!

ME: (*She looks at her*)

EDNA / DRA. LAGOS: We'll keep you well informed, not to worry, we'll explain to him how Liberto's doing, and we'll make him understand the seriousness of his condition… When I'm able to meet with the entire team…

ME: Thank you…

THE ONE WHO SINGS: X-ray! (*a flash of light*)

ME: (*attempting to sing*) "Once upon a time there were three little pigs, who had set out down the road…" (*she cannot continue*) What's the use…

(*Mooooo, Mooooo… she is interrupted by the sound of cows and cowbells and shepherd's calls*)

ME: Time to milk me! Goodbye my love. Let me take a good look at you, since I might not ever see you again.

(*She goes over to the lactarium, sits down, and begins to express the milk.*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: Psst, psst… Psst, pssst…

ME: What?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: LuPone, Rose and Buzzkill… are meeting… they want to see you two…

ME: Finally… Vince, they want to see us…

EDNA / BUZZKILL: Have a seat, have a seat… First, I want to ask for your apology for the sudden change in diagnosis! The result of the MRI, at first, seemed much better than we expected, and we jumped to conclusions. Right Dr. LuPone? (*she looks toward the dark corner*) Up until now the entire team without exception…

ME: Without exception…

EDNA / BUZZKILL: …it's clear to us, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Liberto has a serious condition of cerebral palsy! Dr. LuPone has already explained to you the long-term expectations, right, Dr. LuPone? (*she looks toward the dark corner*) Dr. LuPone also mentioned that you would like Liberto to lead a dignified life…

(*ME nods her head; she is unable to speak*)

EDNA / BUZZKILL: We, the entire team, also agree. As you know, euthanasia is illegal here…

ME: Euthanasia, euthanasia, euthanasia… the word hadn't yet occurred to me… euthanasia, euthanasia, euthanasia… it's only in the movies…

EDNA / BUZZKILL: We need to be very cautious and stay within the limits of the law, but it is clear to us that we won't go to great lengths with Liberto to keep him alive. We believe it would neither be just nor humane.

ME: Thank you, thank you…

EDNA / BUZZKILL: You already know that Liberto is unable to swallow his secretions on his own, which means his condition will worsen, and once we reach that point, if you decide to do so, we'll only apply measures of comfort…

ME: Comfort?

EDNA / BUZZKILL: We won't do anything to keep him alive artificially… But I need to warn you that it won't be quick or easy, because we'll have to wait for his condition to worsen…

ME: And what do we do in the meantime?

EDNA / BUZZKILL: We wait…

ME: Can you sedate him?

EDNA / BUZZKILL: We'll keep him from suffering, but if what you're asking is if we can be more proactive… I have to say no, we can't be more proactive… the law won't allow it… we have to wait…

ME: Proactive? More proactive? What do you mean by proactive?

EDNA / BUZZKILL: If you like, you can talk about it among yourselves, and let us know your decision.

ME: Vince, you see…?

EDNA / VINCE: Yes…

ME: Liberto needs to die, right?

EDNA / VINCE: Yes…

ME: Ok.

EDNA / VINCE: Ok. (*Cathartic screams*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*singing*) Goodbye, Liberto, my love, see you tomorrow! Mini fridge, three empty jars, locker with Nemo: anorak, scarf, bag, take my cell from my bum, hospital parking lot, a fortune! Privatize healthcare, for cryin' out loud! Expressway! Home! Cain, my little guy! Breast pump! To bed!

ME: I'm dreaming… Liberto is beautiful, more awake than ever! It's horrible! Before, it would have made me so very happy! Now it horrifies me! And if his condition doesn't worsen? And if he doesn't die? (*she wakes up startled*) Horrible mother! Any mother would be happy to see her son live!!!

III

ME: (*reciting it as though it were a litany*) Alarm, 7 AM, I slept so well! Breast pump, expressway, not much traffic for a Sunday, businesses open, parking lot, subscriptions? Quarterly, what the fuck! Fish cartoon: anorak, scarf, bag… hands… no! …cell! silent mode… down my underwear… ok now: hands, soap… elbows, 2 minutes, it's scalding!

EDNA: Good morning, good morning… new parents… What's the look on their faces? There's no paper…

take some from the lactarium… Mini fridge, three jars of milk… the frozen colostrum, will they understand…? Liberto, bed 1, unit 21. I say hello to the nurses, they give me a strange look… Do they need to tell me something? I can see the little bed. I'm coming! I'm here! I can see him! Good morning, Liberto, my love!

ME: (*she sings him a lullaby*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS / YOUNG NURSE: You sing so well! Look how handsome Liberto is, mommy! I bathed and aspirated him!

ME: You aspirated him?

THE ONE WHO SINGS / YOUNG NURSE: Yes, to keep him comfortable! (*she goes on working*)

ME: Comfort? He's not a sofa! I don't think dying is very comfortable…

THE ONE WHO SINGS / YOUNG NURSE: (*she continues working all the while*) Stimulate him, mommy! Stimulate him! He should wake up!

ME: No! Not anymore! We already decided… what do you call it… not… Not to resuscitate? Right? Don't you know? Do not resuscitate, understand? (*THE ONE WHO SINGS / YOUNG NURSE does not listen and continues to go about her work*) Vince, that's what they call it on *House*, right?

EDNA / VINCE: Yes, hon… I don't know… I don't know what it's called… What the fuck do you call the fact that we've decided that our son should die?

ME: (*To Liberto*) You want to live, don't you?… Of course… Even the most committedly suicidal people… There was a famous one, a quadriplegic named Sampedro, you know?

EDNA / VINCE: From the movie *The Sea Inside*. "The sea inside, The sea inside and my neck snaps…"

ME: Right. And even he surely fought to survive during the final moments.

(*Mooooo, Mooooo… she is interrupted by the sound of cows and cowbells and shepherd's cries*)

ME: Time to milk me! … Goodbye, my love. Let me take a good look at you, since I might not ever see you again.

(*She goes over to the lactarium, sits down, and begins to express the milk.*)

(*THE ONE WHO SINGS also sits down and begins expressing milk. EDNA / CLAIRE'S MOTHER enters, nods hello, and does the same… The sound of the squeezing is very loud. ME fills three jars of milk. The others only fill one. EDNA / CLAIRE'S MOTHER finishes and exits. ME calls out to her*)

ME: Hey! You're Claire's mother, right? How's your little girl doing? Is she on the wait list? Will they be able to do the transplant?

EDNA / CLAIRE'S MOTHER: Claire is doing ok, but they still won't take her out of the incubator. Yesterday, she had a fever again. The transplant is our last hope, but it could be… It's just that there are so few donations for such tiny babies… Anyway, I hope all goes well for you, girl! (*she exits*)

ME: I hope all goes well for you, girl! (*she continues looking toward the direction in which EDNA / CLAIRE'S MOTHER has exited*) Vince, Liberto's heart will save Claire!

(*Liberto cries*)

EDNA / VINCE: What's wrong, my love? What's wrong my little boy? Tell your daddy. Why are you crying like that?

ME: (*to THE ONE WHO SINGS*) Can't you give him something?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*she lowers her shoulders*) Would you like a Tylenol?

ME: What the fuck a Tylenol, something stronger so he can go to sleep.

EDNA / VINCE: So that he can remain in a coma until the moment arrives… so that he's not conscious of anything.

ME: Can't you see he knows what we're thinking?

EDNA / VINCE: Little ones understand everything.

ME: We've already decided.

EDNA / VINCE: That it breaks our hearts.

ME: Ok, how should we go about this?

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*she lowers her shoulders*) I don't know… the law won't allow it, right?

EDNA / VINCE: The law won't allow my son… we have to wait for his condition to worsen… wait until he's even more agitated… wait until what hurts you now makes you hurt even more.

ME: And you know why all this, my love? Because you're not a cat.

EDNA: Meoooow!

ME: Yes, darling, yes, because you were unlucky enough to be born a boy and not a cat… And not because cats have seven lives. No, that's the stuff of fairy tales, but it's not true.

EDNA: Meoooow!

ME: Cats really only have one life, like little boys, but they say they have seven, because their life is worth seven, because it's a dignified life, the life of a cat.

EDNA: Meoooow!

ME: You know what, my love? I once had kitty cat named Norrell; she was beautiful, a calico with yellow eyes. One day she became very sick, like you, and she cried a lot, too.

EDNA: Meoooow!

ME: I brought her to the vet, the doctor for little kitties, and she told me it would be better for her to die because the poor little thing was so sick that she would never be able to have a dignified life again. So, I gave her hugs, I gave her kisses, and I told her not to be afraid, that they wouldn't hurt her. Then the vet gave her an injection and, after five minutes, she died… But of course, she was lucky, because she was a cat.

(*The two of them remain quiet, and Liberto cries*)

ME: Vince, I'm Medea… I could kill him right now.

EDNA / VINCE: Yeah.

ME: Yeah?

EDNA / VINCE: It occurred to me, too.

ME: I could go like this and break his neck…

EDNA / VINCE: Yeah, I would do it, too…

THE ONE WHO SINGS / BUZZKILL: Hi… I'm Buzzkill…

ME and EDNA / VINCE: Buzzkill….

THE ONE WHO SINGS / BUZZKILL: (*it seems as though he is speaking, but, instead, he sings "Jingle bells."* EDNA / VINCE translate, with normal words, what he is saying.)

EDNA / VINCE: He says Liberto's condition is beginning to worsen and that they will try to make sure it doesn't go on for too long, because the date he's alluding to is approaching. He says that next week is Christmas, and there's a risk of always associating it with a bad experience, and it's better to avoid that…

ME: Oh! Right! The father, dressed as Santa, kills himself going down the chimney, and ever since then, the kids are traumatized about Christmas! *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Those TV specials caused so much damage.

EDNA / VINCE: Right, I think that's from *Gremlins*… I'm scared. I need this to end.

THE ONE WHO SINGS: (*singing*) Goodbye, Liberto, my love, see you tomorrow! Mini fridge, three empty jars, locker with Nemo: anorak, scarf, bag, take my cell out of my bum, hospital parking lot, a fortune! Privatize healthcare, for cryin' out loud! Go to hell! Expressway! Home! Cain, my little guy! Breast pump! To bed!

ME: I'm dreaming…. No, I'm not dreaming tonight…

IV

ME: (*as if she were about to recite the litany of every day, but she does not do it*) I'm not in the mood for that shit!

EDNA: Liberto, bed 1, unit 21[L SEP]

ME: (*she sings a happy song*)

THE ONE WHO SINGS (*dressed as Carmen Miranda*): The isolation ward! The isolation ward! There's an empty space in the isolation ward!

ME: Are they transferring him?

THE ONE WHO SINGS (*dressed as Carmen Miranda*): Yes, I'll take care of you now…

ME: Does this mean we're coming to the end?

THE ONE WHO SINGS (*dressed as Carmen Miranda*): Yes.

EDNA / VINCE: Is this the end?

THE ONE WHO SINGS (*dressed as Carmen Miranda*): Yes.

EDNA / VINCE: Hon, Dr. Lagos says they're beginning to sedate him now. She explained to me how the process of Liberto's death would work.

ME: Death? Did she say death? She finally said death! It turns out that the doctor who seemed so refined has balls! (*looking at THE ONE WHO SINGS / CARMEN MIRANDA*) Vince, we've got Carmen, what luck!

THE ONE WHO SINGS / CARMEN MIRANDA: Final Scene. Death.

ME: Vince, I thought he would remain sound asleep, in, what's it called, an artificial coma… or… an induced coma, that's it… but now… He doesn't want to die. Vince, he doesn't want to die!

EDNA / VINCE: It seems like he's begging us.

ME: It's horrible! I can't stand it! The agony needs to stop… it's existed for millennia, and it still hasn't occurred to anyone to extinguish it?… I'm really mad!

EDNA / VINCE: Liberto, my love! Free yourself! Fly, fly beautiful boy!

ME: Liberto, my love, fly! Go away!… Go away is an ugly expression, it's too minimal. No one tells a little baby to go away; little babies don't go anywhere; they don't know how to. (*To Vince*) Sweetie, I've never lost another person before. I've only seen deaths in the movies. I don't know how people die… I don't want to know… Will we know when he dies? Will he stick his tongue out like when we were little and pretended to be dead?

EDNA / VINCE: I always thought families experiencing death knew all about cremations, burials, tombstones, and bureaucratic paperwork. I never thought they could be as ignorant and alien to the concept of death as I am right now.

ME: And me.

EDNA / VINCE: Rose says he's now going to begin turning blue.

ME: Blue? That option didn't occur to me…But blue, blue? Smurf blue? or something human, similar to the color blue?

EDNA / VINCE: I'm guessing it would be the second one.

ME: And will we notice that he's blue? I'm afraid to be staring at him, wondering if he's alive or dead? And that, after a short time, they tell me he's already been dead for a while…

EDNA / VINCE: Rose says that after turning blue, Liberto, will finally pass.

ME: Vince, that will happen today, right? That will happen now… there it is… it's almost over… my little baby will die now, my second son, my little guy, fifteen days old. He'll have only lived fifteen days. He won't have anymore. What day is today?

EDNA / VINCE: Monday, December 19… It will be today, December 19.

ME and EDNA / VINCE (*at the same time*): A moment from now, a moment from now, I'll be an orphaned mother/father… orphaned of a son… orphaned of a little son… now… my little boy is going to die right now… my little one!!!!! My liiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiittle one!!!!

EDNA / VINCE: (*whispering to ME*) Hon, the doctors are back, they're right here, behind us…

ME: They're probably here to certify his death, like in the movies.

EDNA / VINCE: The machines no longer have alarms, and the screens are behind us. I can't bring myself to look at them. I'm afraid that, all of a sudden, the lines will be flat, and I imagine the beeeeeeep that will no longer sound.

ME: I'm very frightened to see him die, but I couldn't deal with not recognizing it.

EDNA / VINCE: The doctors are very still, behind us. When they move, it will mean that Liberto has died. I hold his little hand tightly.

ME and EDNA / VINCE: (*at the same time*) I'm waiting… and I don't want my liiiiiiiiiiiiiiiittle one… to die!!!

ME: Don't be afraid, my love, momma is here, momma is with you, and she loves you very much, more than anything in this world, my love, don't be afraid of anything.

EDNA / VINCE: Fly, fly, Liberto, fly, my beautiful boy! The skin on his cheeks is so beautiful, shiny and taught as though they just washed it with soap and water.

ME: He's blue!

EDNA / VINCE: He's no longer moving. He's still breathing.

ME: The doctors aren't moving.

EDNA / VINCE: Liberto, don't be afraid, don't be afraid my love!

ME: He's blue! He's blue! I've never seen him look so beautiful!

(*THE ONE WHO SINGS, still dressed as Carmen Miranda, sings a lullaby. When she is finished nobody moves. Absolute silence*)

FINAL TEXT: In a single instant, everything that a moment ago was life, the box that is a hospital, where they save lives –there is no place with more life in the world– has become a death vigil. All is silence, not a screen switched on, nor a sound, only our tears, which can be heard more than ever, and a child, blue, dead, immobile. He appears to be asleep, immensely relaxed, more handsome than ever, but no, it's perfectly evident, he's dead!!! There you have it. It's over. And what am I feeling inside? Well, nothing… nothing more than what I was already feeling. I was expecting a change, a final ending, something to bring it all to an end… but no, not even desperation can end my agony… I continue to wait.

But now, my son, my love, you're finally free! Fly, Liberto, fly.

Darkness.

Tomb Dwellers
By Hossein Kiyani
Translated by Fatemeh Madani Sarbarani

Tomb Dwellers was first staged after the contested presidential election in Iran in 2009 which brought Mahmoud Ahmadinejad into power for a second term. The play depicts the socioeconomic situation of Iran and its relation to other countries during Ahmadinejad's two terms of presidency. For a play to be staged in Iran, the director must get permission from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Hossein Kiyani, the playwright and director of the play, employed strategies to receive permission and circumvent the censorship at the time, given the play's pervasive critique of Iranian authority. In it, a family dig twenty thousand graves for the dead of the enemy who might attack the country in the future. After Me'mar and his family are done with the graves, they ask the contractor to pay them. The contractor refuses to pay, using the pretext that the enemy hasn't yet attacked them and therefore he cannot use the graves. After the contractor pays with a sack of rotten potatoes, Me'mar and his family begin to strategize different ways of initiating the war. When the enemy still does not attack them, Me'mar and his family lay down to sleep in the graves and after a while they disappear.

Rather than directly criticizing the government, Kiyani situates the play's action in an unknown time and place and various images to show the socioeconomic and political situation of Iran during Ahmadinejad or during the Islamic Republic in general. Images like the imaginary enemy and the sack of potatoes respectively imply the paranoia and pseudo-populism of Iranian government officials. The potatoes refer to Ahmadinejad's practice of giving out sacks of potatoes to his poor supporters before the election in 2009. Have been elected in 2005 on a platform of populist economic reform, he promised to put the rewards of the country's vast oil wealth on the dinner tables of its people and root out corruption. The Green Movement supporters ridiculed Ahmadinejad chanting by "Death to potatoes!" in their protests after the election of 2009.

Ahmadinejad also used to blame "the enemy" for the economic problems (or all problems) in Iran. For instance, on September 2012, Reuters reported that "Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has accused his country's enemies of enacting a sinister plan to create a drought by somehow destroying the rain clouds before they reach Iran." This vocabulary provokes the conspiracy theory that foreign powers control the local politicians, if not the weather itself. It is in light of these realities known to Iranians that the play gets its message across in Iran—and yet the symbolism apparently escaped the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Censorship in Today's Iran

Maria Tymoczko warns that a translator needs to select and interpret the text in a way that he/she does not jeopardize the life of the author. Given the high stakes I've sketched above, I had reason to take her warning seriously. When I was interviewing the directors and playwrights in Iran all of them asked me not to mention their names. One of them, who directed an adaptation of *Hamlet* in 2017, insisted that the work was not political and did not address contemporary Iran, though for me it strongly seemed to, as I describe below. He said that it was his own interpretation and he didn't intend

it to be political. That's why for Tymoczko the process of selectivity and interpretation is ideological. This makes my work difficult. On one hand, I'm writing about censorship in Iran, on the other hand, I am censoring my own work. If the playwrights I interviewed were living abroad it would be easier for me to analyze their works freely.

In "Post-revolutionary Theatre: Three Representative Iranian Plays in Translation with Critical Commentary," Lazgee asserts:

> However, within the Centre of Dramatic Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the responsibility for the control of theatre was given to a handful of people and those individuals with authority to censor have changed many times and each has judged from their personal tastes. Theatre censorship is in two parts, first of the text and then the performance, and usually these points are more important:
>
> For the text:
>
> - It must not be anti-Islam.
> - It must not be communistic.
> - It must not contain sexual relationships or indecent words
> - It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor.
>
> For the performance:
>
> - There must not be physical contact between men and women.
> - The body and the hair of the actresses must be concealed and no tight dresses are allowed.
> - There should be no dance or pop music.
> - It must satisfy the artistic judgment of the censor. (19)

On May 16th, 2017, I interviewed a director, who said that during one of his earlier productions, three men from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance came to the City Theatre and wanted to review the show before the public performance. It happened while the play had been staged before and they had already approved the text, after getting permission from the Centre of Dramatic Arts which is affiliated with Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. The play was partially about *Taʿziyeh* and there was a musician playing Sitar, the traditional Iranian instrument. The Ministry officials opposed using the Sitar in a religious play. Finally, an idea came to his mind and he put the Sitar player behind the curtain and the sound of Sitar was mixed with other instruments on stage.

In another play called *The Illusion of a Kiss*, one of the actors, a woman, shaved her hair. In the poster of the play, the bald woman was in the front and another woman was in the background. The composition was done in a way to suggest they were kissing each other. The image was published in the newspaper and it reached the parliament and the play was banned from going on stage anymore, even though the title of the play was *The Illusion of a Kiss*.

During the presidency of Muhammad Khatami (1997-2005), a reformist, censorship was based on the law and closing the theatres was not an easy job. During Ahmadinejad, the fundamentalist president, censorship was based on religion and it was more based on the personal attitudes of the censors. During the process of staging a play, sometimes directors give up and censor his/her own play and sometimes the censor officials do it. Because there are not any rules and regulation for censorship, it caused self-censorship among artists.

For this playwright/ director, in three ways we can escape censorship:

1. Using techniques that hide the main message for the censor officials and at the same time allow the audience to get the messages. For example, through dialogues and gestures, there are two kinds of signs: in one signified that is obvious to all and in the other signified that is known only for the audience. For example, the color green in Islam signifies purity and holy people and at the same it refers to the reformist candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi who is under house arrest.

2. The censor official happens to be a theatre practitioner and he does not believe in censorship over certain things, for example, using words that refers to sex and sexual activity.

3. Through symbolism, metaphor and allegory. Telling a story that in fact refers to the social situation through symbols (although sometimes the officials can figure it out and they stop the show or warn the director).

Critique of the organizations that people elect, like the government, is acceptable during reformist regimes. If the criticism attacks religious people like clergy, however, it is not acceptable.

At the end, he said as a director he knows what the red line (the borderline between acceptable and non-acceptable) is, and he avoids censorship by not talking about topics such as sex, religion and politics.

At first, the playwright/director of *Hamlet* was reluctant to give an interview. After I persisted he answered some questions which didn't make me happy. In his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* I noticed a lot of references to today's socio-political situation in Iran. For example, Polonius (Ophelia's father) was characterized as an official who spent his time censoring newspaper articles on history, art, and one in particular headlined "the way to reform." The playwright/director said he didn't intend to criticize the society, and besides, censorship existed during Queen Elizabeth's time in England too. He insisted that the setting was Denmark and the play had nothing to do with Iran and today's situations. According to him, the censorship officials asked him to omit the parts where Ophelia is singing because singing by women is forbidden in Islam. He had to ask other actors to sing along with Ophelia so that the song became homophonic. He said he resisted against censoring the second song because there was no way he could omit the scene.

He said in two ways the playwright can escape censorship:

1. Fantasy characters

2. Going back to the past, and old tales

At the end, he said "I know what is forbidden and I avoid it."

In his interview with the "Journalism is not a crime" website, Muhammad Rahmanian said in his play titled *To Smoke, or To Not Smoke* the censorship officials at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance cut 60 pages out of 100. He mentioned he proposed two screenplays to the Ministry of Culture but they rejected them. He said he wouldn't give up because the ministry's clerks always change and maybe one day he will get the permission. He asserted that he would never give up.

Muhammad Yaghoobi has recently emigrated to Canada; in his interview with BBC Persian he asserts that Iranian playwrights aim to write absurd plays in order not to show the place of the actions so that the officials couldn't guess that the play is about Iran. Another technique is to write about the past. In the *Dance of Torn Papers* and *Drought and Lies* instead of the problematic terms and actions (according to the officials) he makes a smart move and uses the number 25: instead of cursing or using words, such as "sex" or "girlfriend," because it is forbidden to have relationship outside of marriage, the characters say "25." Yaghoobi, who studied Law at the university, explains that according to Act 25 of the Iranian Law, censorship is forbidden; however, it still is practiced by the government.

These comments are excerpted from the author's 2019 dissertation, Translating Tomb Dwellers for USAmericans: What the Process of Translation Reveals About Counter-Censorship Strategies Among Theatre Artists in Iran*, from Arizona State University, pp. 21-27.*

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Hossein Kiyani was born in 1975 in the province of Lorestan, Iran. He is a PhD candidate in Drama Studies at the University of Tehran. Hossein Kiyani's plays deploy a comic tone in their portrayal of a variety of perspectives and explore traditional and religious values, as well as historical and social situations of Iran. *Tomb Dwellers* (2009)*, Neighbor of Agha (*2013)*, Mashrooteh Banoo* (2012)*, All Children of Khanom Agha* (2010)*, In the Salt-marsh* (2013), and *Waiting for the Executioner* (2019) are among his best plays being staged in Iran. His audience consists of all kinds of people. The dialects he uses vary from classical Persian to some dialects from the west

of Iran. His ideas are unique and exceptional. His language is symbolic, allegorical and metaphorical, allowing him to avoid censorship and to stage his plays in Iran.

Fatemeh Madani Sarbarani is an Iranian translator, playwright, and dramaturge. She holds a Ph.D. in Theatre and Performance of the Americas from Arizona States University. She translates dramatic texts from Persian into English and Middle Eastern, Latin American and English plays into Persians. In 2008, she translated two Argentinian plays *The Walls* and *Antigona Furiosa* by Griselda Gambaro into Persian. *The Walls* was banned from going on stage by the Iranian government for depicting the socio-political situation of Iran during Ahmadinejad. Fatemeh Madani translated and introduced a new Iranian play *Tomb Dwellers* by Hossein Kiani that was staged after the contested presidential election 2009 which brought Ahmadinejad into power. The play depicts the situation of Iran during Ahmadinejad's regime and its relation to other countries. She examined the challenges of translating a dramatic text from an Eastern culture for American audiences in her doctorate dissertation *Translating Tomb Dwellers for USAmericans: What the process of translation reveals about counter-censorship strategies among professional theatre artists in Iran*. In making this play available to English-speaking readers at a time of political tensions between Iran and the United States she offers to US American audiences a more nuanced perspective of the way Iranian people feel about their government and its relation to other countries.

Fatemeh received a literary translation certificate from ASU's School of International Letters and Cultures. She is fluent in Persian, English and speaks some Modern Standard Arabic and her plan is to translate Middle Eastern plays, stage and introduce them to the world.

TOMB DWELLERS

By Hussein Kiyani
Translated by Fatemeh Madani Sarbarani

CHARACTERS:

ME'MAR: Local Builder

VALISHAH: ME'MAR's brother

MOSLEM: ME'MAR's son

SAFDAR: ME'MAR's son

BIBI: ME'MAR's mother

SAMARGHAND: VALISHAH's wife

AYAT: VALISHAH's son

TOUTI: BIBI's adopted daughter

LATIF: The loan shark

PROLOGUE

It is morning. All the characters are sitting under a shelter. AYAT is reading a prayer from a book and others repeat after him.

AYAT

يا وجيها عندالله[10]
اشفعلنا عندالله

امن يجيب مضطره
اذا دعاه ويكشف السؤ[11]

[10] Oh, you intimate of Allah, stand by us in the Day of Judgment!(Doa Tawassul)

[11] (Who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him, and Who relieves its suffering, and makes you (mankind) inheritors of the earth?)…May your mercy be upon us, oh the most merciful (Quran, Surah Ant, 62).

ALL

اللهم صل على[12]
محمد و ال محمد

They all collect themselves, wiping their tears. TOUTI exits and comes back with a tray. She offers everybody tea. They take their cups and thank her. ME'MAR drinks his tea and picks up his notebooks and keys and gets up. SAMARGHAND grabs the prayer book, *Mafatih*[13], from AYAT and holds it for ME'MAR to pass under it.

ME'MAR

Yaa Ali[14], Bibi! Goodbye.

BIBI

Goodbye. God be with you. Come back with good news. *Inshallah*[15].

Following ME'MAR, VALISHAH, SAFDAR and MOSLEM get up.

VALISHAH

Goodbye everybody.

BIBI

Goodbye. God be with you. Come back with good news. *Inshallah.*

MOSLEM

Goodbye everybody.

BIBI

Goodbye. God be with you. Come back with good news. *Inshallah.*

ALL

Inshallah! Inshallah!

---

[12] Allah bless Muhammad and his progeny and grant them peace.

[13] A prayer's book for Shias

[14] Shias call their first Imam, Ali, when they want to do something that needs strength and power.

[15] God willing

ME'MAR, VALISHAH, SAFDAR and MOSLEM exit. TOUTI takes the cups to the kitchen and comes back. She takes BIBI to bed. SAMARGHAND is standing by the gate and watches men leave. She cheers up. We can hear ME'MAR starting the van and driving away. SAFDAR is singing and VALISHAH, MOSLEM, and SAMARGHAND are clapping happily. AYAT exits. He seems pissed off.

AYAT (complaining)

At least let all these prayers and praises move a little above the earth before you begin your vulgar rejoicing. This is why God locks his blessing away from you, making bread winning such a hardship.

SAMARGHAND

(stops clapping as the van moves farther away and the sounds become less audible.)

Take it easy, son! Clapping isn't a sin. On the contrary, it brings them good luck.

AYAT rushes in.

SAMARGHAND

What's wrong?

AYAT

Then, why don't you have a celebration instead of praying?

SAMARGHAND

We will when they come back with good news. *Inshallah.*

AYAT

Mother, I'm saying the way you are doing things just causes yourself harm and makes all your efforts in vain. I'm just working *ghorbatan indallah*[16].

AYAT takes his shovel and pick and exits.

SAMARGHAND

You have your own thoughts! I have counted everything. Listen! How about taking a break today? Let's wait for them to return and see what we're supposed to do.

AYAT'S VOICE

What we are supposed to do is finish the work. That's all!

[16] To get closer to God.

SAMARGHAND goes to bed and sleeps. Light fades.

SCENE ONE

BIBI KHAGHAN, an old absent-minded lady, wearing a pair of glasses with no temples which are tied around her head with rubber band, is matching nuts and bolts and putting them in a separate sack. SAMARGHAND is sleeping, having covered herself with a blanket, at times moves around.

BIBI (anxiously)

Touti! Touti! Where are we?

TOUTI enters with a s*ofreh*[17] and sits next to BIBI.

TOUTI

We've been living in this desert for almost a year: you and me, this Samarghand and her husband and son, and Me'mar Hani and his two sons.

BIBI

What are we doing here?

TOUTI

We're working, Bibi. Me'mar Hani's got a contract for some work.

BIBI

Who is Me'mar Hani?

TOUTI

Me'mar Hani is your oldest son from your first husband, late Mash Jabrail, God bless him.

BIBI calms down.

BIBI

What was the contract for?

TOUTI

Fifteen to twenty thousand graves.

[17] A piece of cloth that Iranian traditional families use to put their food and plates on it. It functions as a table linen. This particular *sofreh* has images of food on it.

BIBI (surprises)

Fifteen to twenty thousand eternal homes? Has there been a flood, a famine, or an earthquake? Why do we need that many graves?

TOUTI

No, Bibi. Thank God. None of these disasters has fallen yet.

BIBI

Then what? Has he been that miserable that he is digging so many graves?

TOUTI

No, Bibi. If you are patient and don't make a scandal, I will tell you. Isn't that what I do every day?

TOUTI gets up and starts putting food on *Sofreh*. She goes to the kitchen several times and comes back, ignoring BIBI.

BIBI

If somebody wants to talk to someone, she comes and sits next to her, looks into her eyes, holds her hands, and gives her heart to her. She doesn't run around like a collared dove whose chick the crows have taken, doing a million other things.

TOUTI

What else can I do, Bibi? Shouldn't I cook for your children? They'll be here any minute.

BIBI

To hell with my children when I want you to sit next to me.

SAMARGHAND

(from under the blanket)

You are making her stop cooking the little thing she cooks every day. Leave her alone! Let her do her work!

TOUTI sits by the water barrel.

BIBI

Who is this lazy bear under the blanket?

TOUTI

You daughter-in-law, Samarghand. Valishah's wife.

BIBI

Has she just delivered a baby?

TOUTI

No.

BIBI

Is she sick?

TOUTI

No.

BIBI

Is she dying?

TOUTI

No.

BIBI

Is she mad at us?

TOUTI

No.

BIBI

Is she crippled? Does she have a fever?

TOUTI

No.

BIBI

Why is she sleeping, then? It's time for the noon prayer.

TOUTI

(being playful says softly)

How am I supposed to know, Bibi? Ask her yourself?

BIBI goes toward SAMARGHAND.

BIBI

(to Samarghand)

Did you just have a baby? Is noon prayer time a good time to have a baby? If you just gave birth, then where's the baby? How could you find a midwife in this desert?

SAMARGHAND

(to Touti:)

Are you happy now that again you brought her to hover over me and disturb my sleep?

BIBI

Oh, no! It seems that it's a human being not a bear!

TOUTI

Mrs. Samarghand, now go back to sleep if you can.

SAMARGHAND

I will! If it's just to show you, I will sleep. I will very well sleep.

She goes back to sleep.

TOUTI

Who cares. Sleep till you get rotten.

SAMARGHAND

Don't worry! I'll move around.

BIBI

(trying to sit down)

How did this sleepy head become my daughter-in-law? How could I let that happen?

TOUTI

Go and sit down! I'll come and explain everything to you.

BIBI

Who cares about this sleeping broth? Tell me about Me'mar Hani. Where is he now and what does he do?

TOUTI

All right. Only if you don't interrupt me with your questions.

(she dries her hands and sits next to BIBI KHAGHAN.)

TOUTI

Me'mar Hani is the apple of your eyes from your first husband, late Mash Jabrail. Me'mar is a mason and a man of God. He has put brick on top of brick and made a lot of houses all around the country. Bibi, Me'mar Hani is very smart. He can design houses that no architect can beat. But the more he has worked, the more trouble and debt he has found himself in. That's why after working for thirty five years he has no money, nor does he have even a small house. Instead he has given a lot of checks and promissory notes to all kinds of people. That's why he has come on this contract to dig thousands of graves in this desert.

BIBI

For whom?

TOUTI

For the enemy's soldiers in case, God forbid, they attack the country and get killed, *inshallah,* their bodies won't remain on the ground, get rotten; and their graves will be known.

BIBI (surprised)

So that's what we were praying for this morning? For killing the enemy?

TOUTI

That prayer was for getting money from the contractor. He hasn't paid us anything yet.

BIBI

Strange!

SAMARGHAND

He deserves it. He deserves it.

SAMARGHAND picks up the *aftabeh*[18] and goes to the bathroom.

[18] A bucket for washing your private parts after urination and defecation.

BIBI

What's her problem with Me'mar Hani?

SAMARGHAND

For thirty-five years, Me'mar Hani has dragged that miserable Valishah like an orphan child from one city to another and has made him work like a workhorse and has never paid him a penny.

TOUTI brings tea for BIBI.

Not even once has Me'mar Hani acted like a brother to give Valishah the chance to pick up the trowel or put bricks on top of bricks to let him learn some masonry, so he could get out of working in the mud, and all the hard labor, and to make a bit of money. He has stuck himself to Valishah like a thorn and doesn't let him go and be able to provide for himself. Once you get stuck in your brother's mud, you have no way out. You have to wait there until the doomsday.

(She exits the bathroom and goes toward the water barrel.)

SAMARGHAND

Aren't you tired of telling her story of Me'mar Hani and Mash Jabrail every day and leaving Valishah out?

TOUTI

I do that because her doctor asked us to remind her everything so that her memory gets better. Why do you do that?

SAMARGHAND

(matching nuts and bolts together)

Nothing. We're both beating a dead horse. Her memory will go away and never come back. My cries will go nowhere but return to me. The miserable Me'mar Hani and the stubborn Valishah will be like this forever, a slap on the face. That's all. I smell something burning.

TOUTI

It's burning. Bibi.

TOUTI starts to get up. BIBI grabs her skirt.

BIBI

For God's sake, Touti! Don't go!

TOUTI

I'm not going anywhere.

BIBI

Yes. You'll go. Tomorrow, if not today.

TOUTI

I won't leave you until your death, God forbid.

BIBI

You swear? Will you give me your word?

TOUTI

How many times do I need to swear? Let go of me, Bibi. My food is burning.

BIBI

To hell with food. Is it more important than me?

SAMARGHAND

Leave her, woman! Leave her, woman! Of course, food is more important. You are sticking to her as if you have caught the thief of your properties!

BIBI grabs SAMARGHAND as if she has captured the thief of her belongings.

BIBI

(to SAMARGHAND:)

I swear to God you'll be the one who separates her from me.

SAMARGHAND

What do we have to do with you and this girl? You be hers and she be yours. Let her go and do her work.

(Greedily)

The food is burning.

BIBI

I don't care. Let it burn and you starve to death, so that we can have peace.

TOUTI

Bibi, I don't care if she's hungry. It's a waste of God's blessing.

BIBI

(looks at SAMARGHAND)

OK! Only for God's sake, I'll let you go.

Touti rushes toward the kitchen and Samarghand starts unscrewing nuts and bolts she has just matched.

SAMARGHAND

God, save me from everybody! From Bibi, from Touti, from Valishah and from yourself and myself.

SAMARGHAND gets up and sits next to the bed. She starts making clay beads.

TOUTI

Thank God, it wasn't that bad. Bibi, enough with working. Let's go wash your hands and face. It's almost noon.

AYAT enters holding a pick. His clothes are dusty.

AYAT

It's prayer time. They called it already. *Salam alaykom,*[19] mother.

SAMARGHAND

Alaykom salam. How many?[20]

AYAT

One and a half.

TOUTI

Oh, my Goodness! I was so busy that I forgot to turn the radio on to let everyone know of the *azaan.*[21]

AYAT rolls up his sleeves and takes off his shoes.

AYAT

That's fine Ms. Touti. When in this whole year haven't you forgotten to listen to the radio and inform others of the *azaan*?

---

[19] Hello

[20] Referring to the graves

[20] Call for prayer.

BIBI

Who are you anyway?

AYAT

This's Ayat, Bibi Khaghan. Ayat.

BIBI

Ayat who? Seyed Abbas's Ayat?

AYAT

No. Valishah's Ayat.

SAMARGHAND

You're Samarghand's Ayat. Reminding you of this for a thousand times.

BIBI

Is this girl your *Moazen?*[22]

AYAT

No Bibi. What are you saying?

AYAT approaches the water barrel.

BIBI

Hey, where are you going? It's our turn.

AYAT

Sure! Please, go ahead! Please!

AYAT sits down. TOUTI takes BIBI to the water barrel and washes her face and hands. She gives her a mirror and combs her hair. SAMARGHAND brings her head out of the blanket and looks at them.

SAMARGHAND

You're not doing a bride make over. That's enough! My son needs to make his ablutions.

AYAT

I will mom. Don't show temper mom. I'm not in a hurry. See how sweet they are!

[22] A person who calls for prayer.

SAMARGHAND

(with a lump in her throat)

But they're sitting like one is the bride and the other one the beautician.

TOUTI ignores SAMARGHAND and gives BIBI a towel. AYAT approaches them slowly and apologizes.

TOUTI

Excuse me Mr. Ayat. Are you fasting today?

AYAT doesn't want to say anything in front of her mother and appear pretentious and dishonest.

SAMARGHAND

La ilaha Ella allah![23]

TOUTI

I'm asking to see if I need to add more water to the food.

AYAT walks toward to the water barrel.

SAMARGHAND

You add your water! I will eat it! What do you want from my son. Why is everybody asking him this question? (To AYAT) I hope you're not fasting, son.

AYAT

I am, if God accepts it.

SAMARGHAND

OK! Fast then, until you become like a kite and the wind takes you away.

AYAT (to TOUTI)

But if it is too much trouble please add a bowl of water I'll eat that for my *iftar.*[24]

SAMARGHAND

No, son! She'll cook something else for your *iftar.*

[23] There is no god but Allah (Allah is an Arabic word for God).

[24] Breaking one's fast

BIBI

She will not! She's not your or your son's servant.

SAMARGHAND

Are you saying that she's only your and your son's servant?

BIBI lashes out at SAMARGHAND.

BIBI

What did you just say, lazy bear?

SAMARGHAND

What's your problem, old woman?

AYAT

Mother, that's enough!

SAMARGHAND

No! the thing is that she acts as if nobody knows how much work she and her sons are making this poor girl do for them and how much trouble they drag her in. She has been working like a newly-bought ass since morning.

TOUTI becomes upset and leaves. AYAT chases her for a while and stops.

AYAT

(to TOUTI:)

I apologize for what my mother just said and I appreciate what you do for this family.

BIBI

Thank you, son!

SAMARGHAND

Shut up! What are you saying?

AYAT

I'm thanking Ms. Touti like a human being. What's wrong with that?

TOUTI

(comes back from the kitchen)

Mr. Ayat, I don't expect anything from you and your family.

She goes back to the kitchen.

SAMARGHAND

See!

AYAT

That's why they think it's your duty to wash and cook and scrub and do everything for them.

TOUTI

It's OK. I'm living in this house too. It's not fair that everybody works in this family and

(points to SAMARGHAND)

I just relax and fan myself.

SAMARGHAND

What a sharp-tongued woman!

(To AYAT:)

Did you bring some clay for my beads?

AYAT

No, mother. I forgot.

SAMARGHAND

If Touti had asked you, you would have brought six carts of clay.

She exits. AYAT is making his ablutions. TOUTI enters with some potatoes. AYAT lets her wash the potatoes.

AYAT

You're working more than others. I wonder why they don't appreciate it. You know what hurts me? That we're not supposed to fight with our parents and our family. I think this is your fault too. You shouldn't let them treat you like that.

TOUTI leaves, ignoring AYAT. BIBI walks toward AYAT.

BIBI

Let's see if you can make her run away from us. Finish your ablution and say your prayers. What do you want from her?

AYAT

(shows his hands)

I will, Bibi. After my hands get dry.

BIBI

Go! They'll get dry on the way. Don't be such a Muslim.

AYAT enters the tent and starts praying. BIBI KHAGHAN stares at the bird net on top of the water barrel and sits.

AYAT

Allahu Akbar[25]…

(He starts praying.)

BIBI

I wish I had a cage and locked you inside. You'll betray me one day. I swear the moment I finish these nuts and bolts you're gone.

TOUTI leaves the kitchen carrying a piece of food. BIBI starts matching nuts and bolts.

TOUTI

Bibi, I just washed your hands. Come on! Eat this food. They're late this time. They usually come back before noon every time they go to talk to the contractor.

SAMARGHAND enters with some clay.

SAMARGHAND

Does it hurt you to bring me some food?

TOUTI

I thought it's bad if a mother eats in front of her fasting son.

SAMARGHAND

How shameless! Like she's a clergy!

We hear the sound of van and SAFDAR is singing. Others clapping. SAMARGHAND exits. The van brakes. Silence.

[25] God is great.

MOSLEM'S VOICE

What happened, Me'mar? Again, you braked before you clutched?

ME'MAR'S VOICE

No! It stopped suddenly. Dammit!

SAFDAR'S VOICE

Get off! Let's push it!

ME'MAR'S VOICE

Let's park it here and walk. It's close.

MOSLEM'S VOICE

Here? In this slope? With that brake and gear?

ME'MAR'S VOICE

God is great.

(He pulls the hand brake.)

SAMARGHAND'S VOICE

What happened, Valishah? Did you get the money? How much? Why aren't you getting off?

VALISHAH'S VOICE

Are you blind? Both my door and Me'mar's are stuck.

MOSLEM'S VOICE

Both doors?

SAMARGHAND'S VOICE

Hurry up! Come on open their doors!

They open the doors.

ME'MAR'S VOICE

You broke my door.

VALISHAH'S VOICE

It's so hot.

SAMARGHAND screams.

VALISHAH'S VOICE

The van's running away. Watch out, brother!

TOUTI is watching them from behind the fences. AYAT is praying.

AYAT

Allahu Akbar?[26]

(With the gesture of his hand he asks what is going on.)

TOUTI

The van moved.

AYAT

Allahu Akbar…

(He shows pulling the hand brake with the gesture of his hands.)

TOUTI

Maybe it's not working.

BIBI

(to TOUTI:)

Do they only have this son?

TOUTI

Yes. They couldn't make any after him.

BIBI watches AYAT with enthusiasm.

BIBI

Just look at him! He's a handsome and religious guy. He prays and fasts.

(Softly)

And I think he likes you.

[26] Ayat is going through all the motions of the ritual prayer and saying what he needs to say out loud but he is also interacting with those around him (which completely negates the prayer).

TOUTI

Don't tease me, Bibi! What does he have to do with me? What do I have to do with him? What do we have to do with each other?

BIBI

He should wish it. Who better than you? You're beautiful, smart, and a good housekeeper. What else does he want?

TOUTI

I want to go and check on them.

BIBI

Don't change the subject, Touti. Do you like him?

TOUTI

I am going to go help them.

She is leaving.

BIBI

Wait! Answer me!

TOUTI

What should I say?

BIBI

What do you mean? Do you like him or not?

She exits. BIBI, gets up and goes stands next to AYAT who is praying.

BIBI (threatening)

I'll curse you a thousand times every day, if you marry her before I die. Beware of an old woman's curse! Don't try to make her fall in love with you as long as I am alive. I'll haunt you both in this world and in the other one.

AYAT

Allahu akbar!

BIBI

What does Allahu Akbar mean? Do you mean Okay, Bibi or not?

AYAT

Allahu Akbar!

BIBI

Marhaba![27] May Allah split you in half, if you break your promise!

Light fades.

SCENE TWO

All characters are sitting around a rectangular *sofreh* which has images of expensive luxury food. TOUTI collects the dirty dishes and walks toward the water barrel. AYAT wants to help her but TOUTI refuses. VALISHAH shakes his legs on *sofreh*.

SAMARGHAND

I asked you a thousand times not to shake your fucking legs on *sofreh*.

VALISHAH

Thank God! This was the best dinner I have ever had.

SAMARGHAND

Are you talking about that "half a loaf which is better than none[28]?"

VALISHAH

Half a loaf plus this fancy food is the best food ever.

(He points to the images.)

Right, Me'mar? Right, Moslem? Right, Safdar? Right, Bibi?

SAMARGHAND

Don't even think of luxury food because I'm going to save this money for Ayat's wedding. We can spend some for going to Haj, Karbala or Syria, God willing. We'll put the rest in the bank and just use the interest till the end of our life.

SAFDAR

Enjoy it if you think we're getting that much money!

---

[27] Bravo! Good job!

[28] Persian expression is "sweet paste is better than nothing!"

SAMARGHAND

Safdar, everybody's share is mentioned in the book. I also wrote the numbers of the graves Valishah and Ayat have dug so far in my notebooks.

(She shows her neck wallet).

They won't be ripped off. Touti, why don't you bring the watermelon?

AYAT

(gets up)

I will!

AYAT brings the watermelon and starts cutting it.

VALISHAH

I hope this watermelon turns out as ripe and sweet as our one-year project in this desert was.

AYAT is cutting the watermelon and handing it to others.

SAFDAR

First, we must pay our creditors to get rid of them.

MOSLEM

Get rid of them? We've already gotten rid of them for eleven months and two days.

SAFDAR

They'll find us finally. A debtor is like a murderer. He overthinks about his debt and the creditors until he betrays himself.

MOSLEM

(hits SAFDAR in the head)

Shut the fuck up, brother! What will remain for us if you pay the creditors? We have to buy a van and work. In two months we can pay them back, no matter if you drive it or have it rented.

SAFDAR

What if in the first trip you have a car accident with your beautiful driver's license and kill like ten people? I say, buying a car, any kind of car, is a waste of money. Even if nothing happens to it, the price goes down every day. That's it. We have to pay the creditors and then we'll see what we can do with the rest of our money.

(to AYAT)

Thank God that you and your miserable fucked up father haven't borrowed any money.

MOSLEM and SAFDAR chuckles. AYAT turns his face.

VALISHAH (embarrassed)

What do you want to do with your cut, Me'mar?

ME'MAR

I'd let the elderly talk first.

VALISHAH

Sorry, brother! Please, go ahead!

ME'MAR

Bibi Khaghan, what do you wish to do with this money?

BIBI

What?

VALISHAH

He's asking what you want to do with your cut.

BIBI

What?

Everybody tries to explain to BIBI what they want to do with their shares so that she will understand them.

AYAT

Leave her alone! You're scaring her. Bibi Jaan[29] what do you want to do with the money Me'mar got from the contractor?

BIBI

What?

TOUTI explains to her.

[29] Dear

BIBI

What money? Mine or yours?

TOUTI

She's asking hers or yours.

ME'MAR

Damn! I totally forgot.

He grabs his jacket and goes toward Bibi and Tout

VALISHAH

You might want to leave your coat here. It seems heavy.

MOSLEM and SAFDAR stretch their hands to grab the coat. ME'MAR sits next to BIBI and gives her a little money.

ME'MAR

Here, Bibi! It's your money for matching bolts and nuts.

BIBI

Give it to Touti!

TOUTI takes the money and counts it. SAFDAR and MOSLEM are playing cards. VALISHAH and SAMARGHAND are talking.

TOUTI

It's more than what we used to get.

ME'MAR

I bargained. Before it was 6.5 *tomans* per each nut and bolt. This time he gave us 7.

BIBI

Was he OK with that or did you force him?

ME'MAR

What force? Me'mar Hani never forces anybody. He was so satisfied with you that he sent three five-kilo-sacks more. He promised to give you eight this time. they're in the truck.

BIBI

How much is three five-kilo-sacks?

TOUTI

Almost 2.3 stones.

BIBI

2.3 stones? I won't be alive that long.

ME'MAR

God forbid!

VALISHAH

(notices that ME'MAR is upset)

What happened, brother?

ME'MAR

She's saying she won't be alive that long to do three sacks.

VALISHAH

Why not, Bibi? It's the beginning of our pleasure. We're getting rich. You didn't answer my question. What do you want to do with the money?

BIBI

What should I say? I wish I could save some money for this girl.

AYAT

Afarin![30] That's it.

MOSLEM

Do you want us to find you a little dowry, and an old religious man and throw you a wedding party?

MOSLEM sits next to VALISHAH. He grabs VALISHAH's hat and *tasbih*[31]. VALISHAH puts on SAMARGHAND's *chador*. They both get up and dance although VALISHAH seems reluctant in the beginning. VALISHAH imitates a pregnant lady as if he is pregnant and then carrying baby.

[30] *Bravo!*

[31] Prayer beads. Rosary.

SAFDAR

(picks a bucket and plays drum and sings)

What night is tonight? It's the wedding night…

AYAT

(grumpily and softly)

Shame on you!

MOSLEM

What do you say? Don't you want to get married?

BIBI

What's marriage? Damn it!

MOSLEM and VALISHAH sit down.

SAFDAR

Marriage is what you did five times and enjoyed.

BIBI

Me marrying five times was not because I enjoyed being with different men. I needed to do that because I was poor. Tell them Touti!

TOUTI

(while collecting the dishes)

When Mash Jabrael, her first husband and Me'mar Hani's father died, he didn't leave them any money. That's why Bibi had to get married to the first person who proposed to her. He was a man of God, named Ali Hasan Hamoomchi. He raised Hani.

ME'MAR

He wasn't a good man of God. God bless him! He was all the time cursing and beating me up for seven years. Once he was trying to choke me in the basement.

VALISHAH

I was so lucky being raised by you after my father died, then.

ME'MAR

Of course!

SAMARGHAND

At least if he had left you something you didn't need to get married again and let Me'mar Hani raise Valishah.

TOUTI

At the time there wasn't enough bread for people. It was famine and drought all the time. Poor peasants couldn't fill their…what was that? *Tapo*s?[32]

VALISHAH

Yes, *tapo*.

(He shows a big *tapo* with his hand.)

Yes. There was *tapo* but no flour.

ME'MAR

Or when there was flour, there wasn't any *tapos*.

TOUTI

Exactly! They couldn't fill their *tapos* with flour. For the same reason a woman whose husband was crushed or collapsed or died because of the illness, didn't have any choice rather than getting married to the first suitor— single, married, old, widow didn't make any difference. For example, after that building fell on Me'mar Hani's father… is that right?

VALISHAH

My brother's father was a local builder in Ahwaz. The building fell on him. My father was crushed under the stable ceiling. We were trying to save the sheep and the cows when my father passed away. It was too late to save him. Let's not open the old graveyard! Me'mar, what do you want to do with your money?

ME'MAR

After I give you your share…

(he shows a big share with a gesture of his hand and throws it toward VALISHAH and he grabs it.)

and we separate

(VALISHAH returns the imaginary money back to ME'MAR.)

[32] Big jug for saving flour.

VALISHAH

Don't say that, brother! We've been inseparable for forty years. Don't think that I was your orphan son only when I was a kid. I swear to God I'm still your son. If you leave me, God knows what will happen to me.

SAMARGHAND

How pathetic! You have a wife and –observe and enjoy- a grown up son, *Mashallah.*[33] Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

VALISHAH

No! Me'mar and I had an agreement that we wouldn't separate until we die. Even after that we're going to lay in a double-decker grave.

ME'MAR

Yes, our double-decker grave. But she's right too.

SAMARGHAND

What a surprise!

VALISHAH

She's got no right to say that! Only you have the right because you raised me. I owe you for that. Only the angel of death can separate us. No! Even he can't do that.

He put his head on ME'MAR's lap. SAMARGHAND turns her back to them.

SAMARGHAND

I hope you die and Ayat and I carry your body out of this desert!

VALISHAH

I won't even give you my dead body.

ME'MAR, MOSLEM and SAFDAR encourage him to go on.

SAMARGHAND

Even if you give it to me, I throw it in front of the desert dogs and wolves.

VALISHAH

I swear to God even dogs and wolves are better than you.

[33] How awesome! Iranians also say *Mashallah* to protect oneself form the evil eyes and jealousy

SAMARGHAND

I hope all I've done for you and all the years I've wasted with you becomes an infected blister and kills you.

VALISHAH

First of all, you sleepy bear haven't done anything for me. Second of all, black dog's barking brings no rain![34]

SAMARGHAND

God! Send a sudden flood and wash him away from the earth!

VALISHAH

Come on, Me'mar! Punch me in the face for not listening to you and marrying this two-headed serpent instead of Looch Ali Ghadam's daughter.

SAMARGHAND gets up. VALISHAH stands up facing her.

SAMARGHAND

Why Me'mar? I myself will punch you so that you shit from your mouth instead of eating with it!

VALISHAH

Go ahead! Beat me if you've got any balls!

TOUTI enters with some cups of tea.

SAMARGHAND

Who asked for tea?

ME'MAR

Me! Fatherless me!

SAMARGHAND goes toward barrel and washes her face and hands. TOUTI offers everyone tea.

VALISHAH (frustrated)

You didn't let Me'mar say what he wants to do with his money!

ME'MAR

I want to do two things. First, I want to buy dowries for my daughters!

[34] Cattle don't die from the crow's cursing!

SAFDAR and **MOSLEM**

Ya Abulfazl![35]

They sit on their knees and listen carefully to what they had already ignored.

ME'MAR

Maryam, Rezvan, Somayeh, Atefeh, Sedighe, and Masoomeh.

VALISHAH

Poor Hagar!

ME'MAR

Oh, yeah. And Hagar!

SAFDAR

You're taking all the money, then.

MOSLEM

He's not. His stupid flunky sons-in-law are, only if I let them. After you give their dowries, what will you do with the rest of the money?

ME'MAR

I want to save some money for Bibi's funeral and have a respectful ceremony for her as she wishes.

MOSLEM

(hold ME'MAR's hand and turns to BIBI:)

Bibi, did you ask him such a thing?

BIBI

What? Who you?

MOSLEM

Why are you putting words in her mouth, Me'mar Hani? If she wanted, she would tell us.

VALISHAH is getting mad that MOSLEM is holding ME'MAR's hand.

[35] A holy character in Shia. My goodness!

VALISHAH

Let go of my brother's hand!

MOSLEM

What's your problem?

VALISHAH

Are you saying that my brother is a liar? That Bibi didn't ask for that?

MOSLEM and VALISHAH start fighting.

ME'MAR

Stop! My hand is not broken.

They stop.

TOUTI

Me'mar Hani isn't making it up. Bibi wishes that.

VALISHAH

(to MOSLEM)

There you go! Did you hear that?

(to ME'MAR:)

Sorry brother.

(to MOSLEM:)

Son of a bitch!

MOSLEM

Well, she's not dead yet. We'll figure it out after she dies.

SAFDAR

She won't die until she kills three more husbands.

BIBI cries.

TOUTI

Let's go for a walk, Bibi! It's good for you.

(To others:)

Tea is ready. The Samovar[36] is still on. Grab more tea if you want.

TOUTI help BIBI to get up. They exit.

MOSLEM

I don't understand why she's standing up for Bibi this much. She isn't even family.

SAMARGHAND

Lucky her!

ME'MAR

She may be a stranger to us but to Bibi she's like a daughter.

(VALISHAH and SAMARGHAND are talking.)

Bibi was like her mother and now she's returning her favor.

AYAT

No children do that these days. Excuse me, mother. Excuse me, father. Excuse me, uncle. I'm younger than you and shouldn't say this but weren't you ashamed of talking about the money and your dreams and not asking her if she needed anything? She has feelings too! It's so brutal that nobody is giving her anything. After all, she has been working here, cleaning up, cooking food for us all these years. That's why God sent you to this desert to dig graves and beg for a penny!

ME'MAR

Don't make me say something that makes both of us say nothing!

Everybody looks at ME'MAR shocked.

SAFDAR

(to AYAT:)

Why didn't you ask her what she needs?

MOSLEM

He couldn't because he's shy.

SAFDAR

If you couldn't do that, your mother and father could. If you've asked me I could do that too. Why are so mad at us? Just go ahead and propose to her and leave us alone!

[36] Traditional tea maker.

ME'MAR grabs his bag and goes toward the barrel. He picks up the *aftabeh* and enters the bathroom.

VALISHAH

I'll go talk to her.

SAMARGHAND

Sit down! If you go and say anything to this girl, I'll choke you.

VALISHAH

Why? What's wrong with her? And how do you want to choke me?

SAMARGHAND

I'll put a pillow on your face and sit on it.

SAFDAR

A terrible way to die!

MOSLEM

Why, auntie? You really hate Touti that much?

SAFDAR

Auntie is looking for an excuse to kill uncle and take all his money.

SAMARGHAND

Don't talk nonsense! What money? Me'mar hasn't told us yet how much he got from the contractor. Valishah, has he told you? Huh? You were with him today. Moslem! Do you know, Moslem?

SAFDAR

Of course we know. It's obvious that he got three payments from the previous contract and one payment from the new one. Right, Me'mar?

ME'MAR laughed. SAMARGHAND and MOSLEM go toward the bathroom.

MOSLEM

Did he pay you more? Maybe, he gave you all the payments in advance.

(He turns to other)

Sometimes they do.

ME'MAR laughs. SAFDAR joins SAMARGHAND and MOSLEM.

VALISHAH

How lovely! I know why you're laughing.

ME'MAR laughs.

SAMARGHAND

Why is he laughing? Did he lose all the money or give it up?

SAFDAR

We were together all the time except in the contractor's office.

MOSLEM

I can't interpret his laughter. He laughs a lot.

VALISHAH

But I can, Moslem. I have lived with his laughters for forty years.

MOSLEM

(to SAFDAR:)

What's he talking about, Safdar?

SAFDAR

Nonsense! Laughter is laughter. They all mean the same.

VALISHAH

They're different.

SAFDAR

OK! What is the difference between his laughter this morning and this one?

VALISHAH gets up and joins the others.

VALISHAH

Should I tell them, Me'mar?

(ME'MAR laughs.)

Here you go! He said tell them but slowly. He doesn't want you to be surprised. His laughter this morning meant that he was very happy to go get the money and this laughter means that this contractor didn't pay him a penny like the others and asked for something new. Am I right, Me'mar?

ME'MAR exits the bathroom.

ME'MAR

The new contractor said he won't pay us until we finish the work entirely.

ME'MAR goes toward the barrel. He throws his bag. MOSLEM and SAFDAR open it and look for the money. AYAT joins them.

Light fades.

SCENE THREE

Near sunrise. Everybody is sleeping in the tent. The tent is open. Dogs are barking in distance. Night birds are singing. SAFDAR gets up slowly and picks up a small bag. He grabs ME'MAR's jacket form under his head and takes the van keys out of it. He leaves the tent slowly. MOSLEM is watching him. He puts on his shoes and get ready to leave. Suddenly, he feels thirsty and goes toward the barrel. When he gets up he sees MOSLEM standing behind him.

MOSLEM

God damn you coward sneak! Safdar!

SAFDAR

I was going to beat up the contractor. If this is coward, what the brave people do, then? Tell me and I'll do that.

MOSLEM

Why are you taking this bag with you, then?

SAFDAR (cries)

I'm taking my stuff in case he gets killed and the police send me to jail.

MOSLEM (cries)

Are you saying that after you kill him you're going to turn yourself in to be executed?

SAFDAR

I'm not that stupid. But you know how unlucky I am. They'll find me immediately.

MOSLEM hits SAFDAR on the head and SAFDAR kicks him.

MOSLEM

Stop this nonsense, Safdar! A person full of rage who wants to murder doesn't think about the consequences.

SAFDAR

To hell with the consequences. I just wanted to leave this desert forever. If you're in, *Bismillah.*[37] If not, hit the sack!!

MOSLEM

Go if you want to. But you can't take Me'mar's van.

SAFDAR

Why not? Do you think it's your father inheritance? He doesn't even own this broken van.

MOSLEM

I know he doesn't own anything but his birth certificate. Although, I'm not sure about that either. But, that's not a good excuse.

SAFDAR

I'll take this van and leave this graveyard and nobody can stop me.

MOSLEM

I can!

SAFDAR

How?

MOSLEM

(searches for something in his pocket. SAFDAR thinks he's looking for a knife but MOSLEM takes out a joint)

With this!

SAFDAR

You asshole! Have you robbed the factory? I thought we smoked all of them last night. How many are left?

MOSLEM

Enough to keep you here.

[37] Meaning in the name of Allah. It is used when someone wants to start doing something.

SAFDAR

(while sitting down)

You know that there is nothing in this job.

MOSLEM

What job?

(while sitting next to him)

If we listen to the contractors who are being switched and saying different things every day, we won't get anything. But if we put our brains together, we'll succeed.

SAFDAR

If we had any brains, we would have left a long time ago.

MOSLEM

To where? Nowhere is better than here. Coming here was a smart move. At least, the creditors can't find us and they let us go eventually.

SAFDAR

You wish! How naive!

MOSLEM

The creditor is always hopeful and the debtor is fearful. As long this hope and fear exist, there is a risk. If you're that afraid of the creditors, why did you borrow that much money and give everyone promissory notes?

SAFDAR

I didn't have a divine knowledge! I didn't know I ended up being like Me'mar. But your situation isn't any better.

MOSLEM

But between you and me, you're a copy of Me'mar.

SAFDAR

You're his certified copy, and you're not aware of that. You know what? Misery and poverty are genetic. Children inherit that from their fathers. Nobody can stop this chain.

MOSLEM

Bullshit! If we were smart enough, we could have saved ourselves.

SAFDAR

As Me'mar always says "what you're saying makes an ass laugh and a camel dance." How?

MOSLEM

Right now we have twenty thousand graves which are ready for accepting bodies.

SAFDAR laughs.

MOSLEM

Why are you laughing?

SAFDAR

Ready for what?

MOSLEM

Accepting the bodies! That means we can find a buyer soon.

SAFDAR

What buyer? Who wants to buy twenty thousand graves from us? Those who requested the graves in the first place all escaped.

MOSLEM

You're right. They escaped and didn't give us any money. So, we own the graves now.

SAFDAR

(hits his forehead with his hand as if he has signed and sealed a document)

OK! They're all yours. Enjoy them!

(He gets up. MOSLEM stops him.)

MOSLEM

Safdar, do you know that there is a town in thirty, thirty five kilometers whose graveyard is getting full and they haven't made a new one yet.

SAFDAR

None of my business!

He wants to leave but MOSLEM stops him.

MOSLEM

I've asked around. There are thirty or forty thousand people in this town. Among them are two families, who hate each other and fight all the time.

SAFDAR

What families?

MOSLEM

They used to be together. But now they can't get along simply because both of them want to have the last word.[38]

SAFDAR

Are you thinking of sparking a fire and making them kill each other to fill the graves?

MOSLEM

Yes! Yes! But I'm afraid.

SAFDAR

You're afraid! Huh! Let's have another joint maybe the fear goes away.

MOSLEM wants to light another one.

VALISHAH

(in sleep:)

Don't!

MOSLEM stops. He wants to light it again.

VALISHAH

(in sleep:)

Don't! Don't pull my blanket, brother!

Light fades.

SCENE FOUR

It's morning and the tent is open. BIBI KHAGHAN is still sleeping. AYAT rushes in.

[38] Upper hand

AYAT

Yallah![39]

TOUTI

Come in, Mr. Ayat. Is it noon already?

AYAT

Bibi Khaghan is still asleep. Strange!

TOUTI

She doesn't feel well when she can't remember. Even my stories can't help. Then, she gets nervous and becomes senseless for a couple of hours. "As if the darkness surrounds me" she says.

AYAT

I had no idea she was that sick.

TOUTI

You never asked, Mr. Ayat. How Samarghand is doing? Is she really working or pretending that. Or maybe you've come to bring her some sugar-water.

AYAT

She's fine, thank God. She used to work hard but since the contractors started breaking the deal and didn't give us any money, she became depressed. She sleeps a lot because she doesn't want to overthink.

TOUTI

I wonder how they still trust the contractors and dig graves after what they went through.

AYAT

The human being is the only creature of God who has so much hope and patience. Besides, when someone starts a project he doesn't want to stop it without being paid.

TOUTI

Like you.

[39] A warning that says someone is entering.

AYAT

I'm working *ghorbatan elallah.*[40]

TOUTI

What does it mean?

AYAT

It means to please God. To get closer to God.

(He gets closer to TOUTI.)

TOUTI

I know the definition. Someone works *ghorbatan elallah*, who isn't poor. You, by God's grace, are living in extreme poverty.

AYAT

Poverty isn't a flaw. Sin is.

TOUTI

Of course, it's not a flaw. But you have to think about the future. You've been digging graves in this desert for a year and you haven't been paid yet. Maybe you're confident that your mom has your back and will give you money.

AYAT

I swear to God I don't want money.

TOUTI

Why not? Do you think it'll spoil the reward? Like there is any reward in this job.

AYAT

There will be, *Inshallah.*

TOUTI

I don't think so.

AYAT

Why are you saying that, Ms. Touti, after all the conversations and meetings we've had and all the washing, cooking and cleaning you've done?

[40] To please God or to get closer to God

TOUTI

When did you have any conversations and meetings with me? You did that between yourselves.

(Enters the kitchen.)

I just did washing, cooking and cleaning. Yes. That's what I do here.

TOUTI sits by barrel and AYAT joins her.

AYAT

I'm still mad at them because of what happened yesterday. If they're ignoring you, you shouldn't lose faith in the reward and repayment.

TOUTI

I don't know, Mr. Ayat. You're wiser than the rest of us. But the more I think, the less I find any relationships between digging graves for the enemy who hasn't attacked us and getting a reward from God.

AYAT

If that's the issue, I can explain more. But if you don't believe in reward and repayment, I can't change your mind.

TOUTI

OK! Explain it! Maybe I understand. If not, at least we had a topic to talk about and be entertained.

AYAT

I'm so disappointed with you, Ms. Touti.

TOUTI

What for?

AYAT

For… Forget it! I thought you were different. I counted on you.

TOUTI

Why?

AYAT

Because…*Astaghfirullah.*[41] Cut it out, Ms. Touti! Everybody knows…

TOUTI

What does everybody know?

AYAT

Nothing!

He starts to leave.

TOUTI

Tea is ready. Would you like some?

AYAT exits.

AYAT'S VOICE

Thanks. We have tea in the graveyard.

TOUTI enters the kitchen and comes out carrying a tray with a cup of tea.

TOUTI

Mr. Ayat!

AYAT gets back quickly.

TOUTI

You certainly didn't come to get annoyed with me and go back.

AYAT

No! I just came to let you know that my parents are arguing because of you.

TOUTI

Why because of me?

AYAT

Don't be upset if they argue and if, God forbid, they disrespect you. And accept my apologies in advance.

We can hear SAMARGHAND and VALISHAH arguing.

[41] May Allah forgive me.

SAMARGHAND

Valishah, I swear to God if you say a word to this girl, I'll cement your lips together.

VALISHAH

Fine! Even if you cement all my nine holes, I won't let you ruin his life like you did mine.

SAMARGHAND

Ruin his life? She'll ruin it, if they get married.

VALISHAH

What's wrong with her? Give me one reason he shouldn't marry her.

SAMARGHAND

You beast! She doesn't have a family, a dowry or a wealth. What other reasons do you want?

VALISHAH

Her family is Bibi Khaghan and she can buy dowry for her. We'll help her as much as we can. What else do you want?

SAMARGHAND

You, pathetic loser! How can Bibi Khaghan pay for her dowry? From matching nuts and bolts? Or when this cursed Me'mar Hani is going to get money from the contractor so that you can pay for your son's wedding?

VALISHAH

You can blame whoever you want. But never talk behind my brother's back or I'll go crazy on you!

SAMARGHAND

Drop dead! Other men are hen-pecked, you're brother-pecked!

SAMARGHAND and VALISHAH enter. They become shocked when they see AYAT and TOUTI.

VALISHAH

Thank God, you got here before me, son, to talk to Touti.

VALISHAH kisses AYAT and he is going to kiss TOUTI.

SAMARGHAND

Valishah!

(To AYAT:)

If you have talked to this girl and promised her anything, I'll grab a knife and rip my stomach and be done!

SAMARGHAND is going to grab a knife by the barrel.

TOUTI

Keep it down, Samarghand! Bibi is asleep.

SAMARGHAND grabs TOUTI's hand and brings her closer to herself.

SAMARGHAND

What did he tell you? What did you tell him, you menace!

VALISHAH

After we're done with the graves, I'm going to have such a big wedding for my son that no princes have ever had! I have a dream to see your wedding!

SAMARGHAND

(holding the knife behind VALISHAH's back)

Shut up, you miserable wimp! I won't let you do that with the graves' money as long as I'm alive.

VALISHAH

How do you want to do that? With your salary, doctor? I swear to God, Samarghand if you don't knock it off right now, I'll kill you and I'll pay your blood money myself.

SAMARGHAND

Don't bother! I'll kill myself.

SAMARGHAND lays down on the floor pretending she wants to kill herself. TOUTI and AYAT are trying to stop her.

TOUTI

Samarghand! Stop braying in front of the poor old woman. If you want to make a fuss, get out! Scream as much as you want in the desert!

SAMARGHAND

Drop dead! It's all your fault, shrew!

VALISHAH

Get off her! Let her kill herself! Kill!

(to TOUTI:)

I hope you become my daughter-in-law. Don't listen to her. After all, she's a mother-in-law. She has to do that, or people might wonder! Me'mar and I will go to town tomorrow and will bring a kind and handsome *mullah*[42] to marry you two.

(To AYAT:)

What do you say?

(To TOUTI:)

Is that fine with you?

BIBI KHAGHAN wakes up. She is nervous, breathing fast.

BIBI

Touti! Touti!

SAMARGHAND and TOUTI sit next to BIBI. TOUTI hugs BIBI.

TOUTI

What is it, Bibi?

BIBI

Thank God you're here. I had a dream that some people covering their faces kidnapped you. Thank God you're here.

TOUTI

I'm here.

(She hugs BIBI. Light fades.)

SCENE FIVE

It's daytime. TOUTI is reading prayer from a small book (*Mafatih*). BIBI is repeating after her while she's matching bolts and nuts. TOUTI's voice becomes softer as the stage lights go on. We can hear the van getting closer and then it stops. MOSLEM and SAFDAR get off and close the van's door. Both are exhausted. They enter and go toward the barrel and wash their hands and faces. BIBI and TOUTI look at them and then continue what they were doing. ME'MAR HANI rushes in and looks at MOSLEM and SAFDAR.

[42] Clergy

ME'MAR (furious)

Why did you leave work without telling us? What are they offering in that wrecked town which makes you two wanderlust freaks go gadding about in there all the time?

MOSLEM

They're offering efficiency and courage. You're welcome to join us if you want. You might like their offers and take some. Maybe your life ends well.

ME'MAR

My life ends well if I do not see yours end wrong.

MOSLEM

Why would you care about our misery? Go and die happy whenever you want.

He throws the key.

ME'MAR

I never saw my father. But I swear to Prophet Muhammad if he was alive I wouldn't talk to him like that.

SAFDAR

(to MOSLEM:)

He's right. Don't talk to him like that! Do you want him to curse us and our life becomes worse than what it is now?

MOSLEM

You shut up! Our life won't get any worse. Because this is the worst situation ever: living at the end of the world for a year. Digging thousands of graves for free and having no money in your pocket. And like wretched dogs looking for buyers. None of those motherfuckers willing to buy the graves and pay. And hearing your coward father nagging you all the time. Could it get any worse?

ME'MAR

It could. When one loses hope in God and instead expects his people to show mercy on him.

MOSLEM

What else should we have done? Have we not prayed and cried enough every Friday night, Thursday morning, Monday evening, Wednesday sunset after your bastard nephew? Have we not prayed to be able to pay back our loans and success in work,

all the while ignoring the blisters on our hands? Have we not asked this poor old woman to pray for us day and night and nothing happened?

(He points at TOUTI and BIBI.)

Look! Obviously, they're still praying for our happiness and no God is listening to them….

ME'MAR

I don't have anything to say to you. You're not a Muslim anymore, Moslem. Even looking at your face is a sin!

ME'MAR covers his face with hands.

MOSLEM

Don't take your hands off your face, then! I don't want to ruin heaven for you and I don't want to see you in hell with us. They might send you there, unluckily for us.

MOSLEM enters the kitchen. ME'MAR grabs SAFDAR's hand and drags him toward the barrel.

ME'MAR

Did you have a car accident? Did he hit his head on something?

SAFDAR

He's right, Me'mar. I think the same but he's got the courage to talk about it.

ME'MAR

Talking nonsense doesn't need courage. Everybody can talk like this. God gave us tongues and the ability to talk but one should think about the consequences. You're the one who is afraid of God. Tell me why are you going to town every day while you know there is a lack of gas in the town. What's in it for you? Why don't you talk to me?

SAFDAR

We're looking for buyers for this useless graveyard.

Silence.

ME'MAR

Buyers?

SAFDAR

Yes!

MOSLEM enters with two cups of tea. He gives one to SAFDAR.

MOSLEM

(to ME'MAR:)

If this graveyard has any owners, why is nobody coming to pay us so that we can leave this hell that is surrounded by dogs and wolves? Why are we begging for money?

ME'MAR

I swear to God if you weren't my son, I would report you to be sent to jail and be hung!

MOSLEM

Why? For working in this graveyard for a year and not getting paid?

ME'MAR

No! Because you're becoming a *kafir*[43] for not being paid. I'll go to town and sell the van and pay you. Maybe you'll leave us alone and believe in God again.

SAFDAR

No idiot will buy a van with no title. Besides, who's going to buy this crap.

ME'MAR

I'll find someone. You don't need to worry about that.

MOSLEM

OK! Do whatever you want. Now, leave us alone.

ME'MAR

To do whatever you want?

MOSLEM

Yeah. Like you.

ME'MAR

I'm not my father's son, if I don't punch you in the face.

ME'MAR wants to attack MOSLEM. SAFDAR holds him.

[43] Someone who doesn't believe in God. A pagan.

MOSLEM

Don't let him come closer or I'll kill him and you would be responsible for that.

SAFDAR

Why me?

MOSLEM

Because from the moment we got here you stayed there and didn't say a word. Tell him that this is not only my problem.

SAFDAR

Me'mar, please, don't do that! We haven't done anything yet. We haven't found any buyers yet.

MOSLEM

We will, *inshallah*.

ME'MAR

Over my dead body!

MOSLEM

Your dead or alive doesn't make any difference.

He grabs the tea tray and enters the kitchen.

ME'MAR

Bring him, Safdar! We should give him the sacred soil and water. Maybe he won't die a kafir.

SAFDAR enters the kitchen. ME'MAR fills a bottle with water.

Light fades.

SCENE SIX

Day time. ME'MAR HANI is sitting next to BIBI and helping her with the nuts and bolts. Suddenly, BIBI looks at him surprised.

BIBI

Who are you?

ME'MAR (smiles)

Your oldest son.

BIBI

How are your children?

ME'MAR

They're fine. They ask about you all the time.

BIBI

Do they bother you, or you are the one to order?

ME'MAR

They don't bother me, and I do not order too.

BIBI

OK! Thank God. How about your wife? Is she caring or does she neglect you?

ME'MAR

God bless her. She died eight or nine years ago.

BIBI

Oh! You've been single for eight years? How could you tolerate that?

ME'MAR

To be honest, I wanted to remarry but it never happened.

BIBI

It'll happen one day. *Inshallah.*

ME'MAR

Inshallah. Pray for that, **BIBI**.

BIBI

Inshallah. It will.

ME'MAR

Inshallah.

BIBI

Inshallah.

ME'MAR

Inshallah.

BIBI

Inshallah.

ME'MAR

Inshallah.

BIBI looks at ME'MAR as if she is not sure what ME'MAR means.

ME'MAR

I'm tired, Bibi.

BIBI

Of what?

ME'MAR

Of being alone. When Hava[44] was alive I didn't know how important that woman was to me. I found it out after she was gone. Too late! Nobody can be Hava for Adam.[45] Neither mother, nor brother and children… Because these people are from your blood. They're too close to you and you can't tell them what's going on in your heart. You can't even distance yourself from them and talk about your feelings. Because kinship makes you timid and uncomfortable. I want such a woman, Bibi.

BIBI

I hear you. You need someone to be your friend.

ME'MAR

Exactly! You're very smart.

[44] Hava in Persian means both the Eve character from the Adam and Eve story, and air.

[45] Adam in Persian means both the Adam character from the Adam and Eve story and the human being. Here, the playwright is playing with the words Hava (Eve and air) and Adam (Adam and the human being).

BIBI

But you can't find her, even if you spend your whole life looking for her. These kinds of women are rare.

They look at each other.

ME'MAR

What should I do, then? What on earth should I do?

BIBI

If you want a woman who could be your friend and fellow in life, you need to be as patient as Jacob. But if you're just looking for a wife, you can find seven or eight women, like catching tadpoles from a puddle.

ME'MAR

Seven or eight? If I mention that to Moslem, Safdar and my daughters, they'll drag my father out of his tomb and burn him in front of me. Do you think I want to buy dowries for my daughters with the grave money? No! I want to get married. I want a young and beautiful woman.

BIBI

With that money you can't even find an eighty-year-old whore!

ME'MAR

Well! How about I stay here and match nuts and bolts with you?

BIBI

Good idea! I swear to God, it's better than digging graves. It brings bad omen and curse. I said that before and I'm saying it again.

ME'MAR

What can I say, Bibi? What can I say…

Both continue matching nuts and bolts. TOUTI enters with a tray. On the tray there is a cup of tea and some money. TOUTI put the tray in front of ME'MAR. ME'MAR takes the money and starts counting. He drinks the tea very quickly.

TOUTI

If you continue doing that, she'll be out of money soon.

ME'MAR

God is great. Bibi is working well, *Mashallah!*

He puts the money in his pocket. TOUTI brings a notebook. She seems embarrassed.

TOUTI

Let me write it down!

ME'MAR

I'll write it down in my notebook.

TOUTI

No, Me'mar! I have my own book.

ME'MAR (gets up)

Go ahead!

TOUTI (reads)

So far, you've borrowed three hundred twenty-five thousand two hundred sixty *tomans* from Bibi. Plus fourteen thousand which I just gave you…

(She is calculating.)

ME'MAR

(looks at his notebook)

How much did I borrow?

TOUTI

Three hundred twenty-five thousand two hundred sixty *tomans* plus fourteen thousand equals three hundred thirty-nine thousand two hundred sixty *tomans*.

ME'MAR

I think it's less. How did you calculate it?

TOUTI

How did you calculate it?

ME'MAR

I've been working with numbers all my life, girl. I know how to count.

TOUTI

No wonder you're broke!

ME'MAR

You were the only one in this house who didn't ridicule me. Thank you, Ms. Touti! Thank you very much!

TOUTI

Don't bargain with me, if you don't want to be ridiculed!

ME'MAR

I'm not bargaining. I'm saying the truth.

TOUTI

Well! Show me your book, if you're not lying! I even mentioned the exact date and time. The only thing I needed was your signature.

ME'MAR

(gets mad)

Are you listening to this girl, Bibi? God be my witness. I never heard such an insulting thing even from a man. let alone a woman…

BIBI

What?

(Looks at ME'MAR:)

Touti is right.

TOUTI

(to ME'MAR:)

If you don't want to pay her back, then don't! Why are you making such a fuss for such a little sum of money?

She closes the notebook, grabs the tray very quickly and leaves. ME'MAR is watching her desperate.

ME'MAR

Oh, God! There're a lot of graves here. Just send your angel of death and kill me so that I gain peace.

VALISHAH who just heard ME'MAR enters excited.

VALISHAH

God forbid! Don't say that, Me'mar! Now that our dream's coming true. Hi, Bibi. This is Valishah.

ME'MAR

What are you so chipper about? Is Samarghand dead?

VALISHAH

God forbid! If it wasn't for her, we still would have been digging graves like idiots.

ME'MAR

Has she found gold?

VALISHAH

No! How could she? Even Moslem and Safdar couldn't find anything with that machine.

ME'MAR

Then what?

VALISHAH

Don't you want to guess more?

ME'MAR

Yeah. Maybe she is OK with Ayat and Touti getting married.

VALISHAH

She'll be. But wrong guess.

ME'MAR

Then what?

VALISHAH

This morning when we went to the graveyard, Samarghand and I started fighting as usual. Then she said I'm an idiot and I can only count till fifteen and I don't even know how to write my name and this and that.

ME'MAR

Get out of here!

VALISHAH

What she said pissed me off so much

(ME'MAR looks at him surprised.)

and I decided to count all the graves in front of her.

ME'MAR

Did you?

VALISHAH

Of course! I was counting graves all day. Didn't do any work.

ME'MAR

Were you out of your mind?

VALISHAH

No, I wasn't. I was inside my mind. I kept counting and counting until I found out I was close to twenty thousand…

ME'MAR

So what, then? We're almost done.

VALISHAH

No! We've been done for a long time ago but we forgot to keep track of it.

Silence.

ME'MAR

Are you sure, Valishah?

VALISHAH

God be my witness! I counted to twenty thousand. Samarghand and Ayat are still counting the rest which might be two or three thousand, I believe.

ME'MAR

Pretends that he is holding a glass of vodka with a gesture of his hand.

You mean we've done one too many?

VALISHAH

(does the same thing)

Yes! *Be salaamati!*[46]

[46] To your health! Cheers!

The talk like two drunkards.

ME'MAR

Let's go and tell the contractor we're done before the deadline. He might pay us more for being early.

VALISHAH

Let's go! Let's go!

TOUTI

Bibi, pray for them to get their money. Don't you see how desperate they are?

BIBI

Don't feel bad for them, Touti. This is what they get for digging graves.

TOUTI

I haven't seen you this hard-hearted before.

BIBI

You expect me to show mercy for them. Have they done that for themselves? How many times have I asked them not to dig graves because it makes people heartless and miserable.

(Angry)

Couldn't they just match nuts and bolts like me?

TOUTI

What can I say, Bibi. What can I say.

SCENE SEVEN

SAFDAR, MOSLEM, ME'MAR and SAMARGHAND are sitting on the floor around *sofreh*, waiting for dinner. AYAT is asleep. SAFDAR is reading MOSLEM's cards. BIBI is matching nuts and bolts. TOUTI enters with a knife in her hand. Everybody asks TOUTI why dinner is not ready yet.

TOUTI

They look like stones. This knife can't even go through their skins, and they've been boiling for an hour. You should have asked for something else from the new contractor instead of these rotten potatoes.

TOUTI joins BIBI and helps her.

SAMARGHAND

I wouldn't doubt it from a contractor who asks us such a thing. I swear to God if it was someone else instead of me, she would have killed herself a thousand times over. I wish I could burn myself alive!

VALISHAH

What makes you think he'll give us money if you kill yourself? We have to put our heads together to see how we can do what he's asked us, and get our money.

SAMARGHAND

You, deadbeat loser! Didn't you say if we don't bury the enemies in the graves, we won't get any money?

VALISHAH

I did! But honestly, it's not that bad. The poor guy didn't even mention how many. I think four or five sluggish soldiers would be enough.

MOSLEM

What if he asks us to fill all twenty thousand graves?

SAMARGHAND

Do you have that many soldiers? Let's say he agrees with four or five, how do you want to find four or five soldiers?

MOSLEM

Or even one? It's not that easy. How long do we need to wait for the war to begin, God forbid, and for the enemy to attack us and then get killed? What if nobody attacks us, let's say, in the next twenty years or maybe never and unfortunately peace spreads all around the world. Don't you see how unlucky we are?

SAFDAR

Even if the war happens, unluckily nobody will die!

BIBI

Inshallah, may there be no war and may people live in peace!

VALISHAH

Don't pray that, Bibi! Without war we can't get any money for the graves.

BIBI

Inshallah, Inshallah!

VALISHAH

You want us to die because we did not listen to you and dug graves? We are starving to death.

BIBI

A mother never wants her children to die. But what can a mother do, if the children themselves want to die?

MOSLEM

If you don't like war and you don't want your children to die, pray that twenty thousand soldiers come and sleep in the graves voluntarily. *Astaghfirullah*! Let's go Safdar! Talking to these people is a waste of breath.

MOSLEM and SAFDAR get up.

ME'MAR

I talked to the contractor about selling the graves and he said this property has a deed and you cannot sell it, regardless of what you have made on it.

MOSLEM

They own the land and we own the graves. They need to pay us for the graves and take their land back otherwise we will sell the graves and won't give them shit! Let's go, Safdar!

ME'MAR

Where are you going? Sit down, I need to talk to you!

MOSLEM

I want to go and hunt some rabbits or partridges. It seems that your potatoes are not cooking.

ME'MAR

They will, God willing, by the time I am done talking. Maybe, they're cooked by now. Touti, can you go and check on them?

TOUTI gets up holding the knife and enters the kitchen.

ME'MAR

(to MOSLEM and SAFDAR, furious:)

Sit down! Sit down!

(Begging them)

Please, sit down!

They sit down.

ME'MAR

Ayat, come and join us!

SAMARGHAND

Leave my son alone! He needs to sleep.

ME'MAR sits on his knees and so does VALISHAH.

ME'MAR

It's no time for sleep. We have important work to do and we can only do that if we are together.

VALISHAH

What work?

ME'MAR

War!

Everybody looks at ME'MAR surprised. AYAT sits and looks at him. Long silence.

ME'MAR

Not in a bad way. We just need to initiate the war.

(Silence. They are watching ME'MAR.)

Not in a bad way. God forbid, we're not traitors or anti-revolutionary or anything like that. We are one hundred percent sure that we can beat the enemy. We only need to send the rat in to their midst and when they shoot us, our soldiers will attack and destroy them.

(Everybody is silent.)

Or we first make sure our soldiers are equipped enough and then send the rat. How does that sound?

(Everybody is silent.)

Or we will first get permission from whoever is on top and then send it. What do you think?

(Everybody is silent.)

Or… Or… Touti, can you check on the potatoes!

ME'MAR sits back as does VALISHAH. TOUTI exits. AYAT is thinking. TOUTI enters.

ALL

What happened? Is it ready?

TOUTI

No! It's like they're made of steel or iron. Even this sharp knife can't cut them.

AYAT

Maybe we can do something about it.

TOUTI

I don't think so, Mr. Ayat. The flame is high and the water is boiling fast.

AYAT

I'm not talking about the potatoes. The war!

(Everybody looks at him surprised.)

First, we need to find the enemy's nearest headquarters. I just so happened to know exactly where it is.

(He points to the *sofreh*.)

We are here…

VALISHAH

(points to the *sofreh*)

You mean on top of this sumac shaker.

AYAT

If we go fifteen kilometers this way, we reach this hill, exactly where this tomato is. And here is the border.

(He points to the border with a skewer.)

Then, if we go on top of this hill that belongs to us, we can monitor the important parts of their headquarters with binoculars. Then, if we shoot one bullet, only one, they will definitely send their troops toward the hill we are standing on.

They all look at each other with wonder.

MOSLEM

They'll kill us all.

AYAT

Of course, they will. That's why we need to find a brave person to shoot that bullet. He might get killed but the important thing is that we can fill the graves. That's important!

TOUTI

Why not go to the top of that hill and just swear instead of shooting?

AYAT

I never expected that from you!

MOSLEM

Why not? Ayat used to go there every day and swear but nothing has happened yet.

AYAT (angry)

Shut up non-Moslem!

MOSLEM

Fuck off! You can't even do such a simple thing.

AYAT

You do it if you can!

SAFDAR

Why not? I've seen him several times there giving the enemy the finger.

ME'MAR

Shame on you Safdar! Ladies are sitting here.

SAFDAR

He gives the finger and I have to be ashamed?

AYAT

Now you're itching for a fight![47]

[47] The Persian expression is "your body is itchy!"

SAFDAR

(moves his hands.)

I'd love wrestling with you like we used to do in the past.

SAFDAR gets up, ready to attack. MOSLEM is chanting and making mouth war noises. VALISHAH gets up to separate them but falls on his back.

VALISHAH

Save your energy for the enemy. Don't waste it like this!

TOUTI

These potatoes are more important than the enemy. If you have any strength come and beat these potatoes. We're starving.

SAMARGHAND

Good job, Touti! Come on, Ayat! Come on! What are you waiting for?

AYAT

OK, mother!

AYAT enters the kitchen and starts beating the potatoes.

SAFDAR

Your mother has always saved you, ever since you were a kid. You never finished wrestling, sissy!

TOUTI

Mr. Safdar, you better go and help, instead of taunting him. We don't have anything else at home to eat. We're young and strong but Bibi might faint.

SAFDAR enters the kitchen and starts beating potatoes.

AYAT's voice

We need help, these are very hard.

SAFDAR's voice

What? Are you already tired? How do you want to fight with the enemy, then? Potato!

SAMARGHAND

Don't mess with my son, Safdar! Or I'll come ruin you!

TOUTI

You don't need to beat up Safdar! If you've got any energy left, you better beat some potatoes.

VALISHAH

She's right, woman! Get up!

SAMARGHAND

Why don't you?

VALISHAH

Will you get up, if I get up?

SAMARGHAND

Yes!

VALISHAH

(gets up)

With your permission, brother!

ME'MAR

Please! Please!

VALISHAH and SAMARGHAND enter the kitchen. Beating gets louder.

ME'MAR

(to MOSLEM:)

Go and give them a hand! Sounds like those potatoes are really hard!

MOSLEM

What war you've started, Me'mar. Potato war!

He starts to exit.

ME'MAR

Where are you heading now?

MOSLEM

I don't eat potatoes. Going to hunt something and make *kabob*. Even *haram*[48] meat is better than this contractor's potatoes.

He exits.

ME'MAR

This boy got nothing from me. He is as stubborn as his mom, Hava, God bless her. I'm afraid he might get into trouble, God forbid!

TOUTI

What is the end of this story, Bibi?

BIBI

You're asking me, Touti!

TOUTI

I'm not sure whether I should laugh at them or cry.

BIBI

Laugh, Touti! If you cry they'll be stuck here forever!

Light fades.

SCENE EIGHT

SAMARGHAND is putting some stuff in a sack. There are one or two filled sacks on the stage. TOUTI opens the tent flap with her sleeves pulled up. She gets out. She seems busy, walking around.

TOUTI

That's fine if you want to leave but you should know where you're heading.

SAMARGHAND

Are you saying that living in this graveyard is a better option. We dug graves, we counted them, looked at them until we looked like the dead ourselves. We're surrounded by graves. Don't you see that? The more we stay here, the more people forget about us. I wish we could plant some trees in those graves. At least our hard

[48] Forbidden food in Islam.

work would have paid off. I was raised in a farm and I know how calming trees and plants can be.

TOUTI

Now that we're leaving? Why didn't you do that before?

SAMARGHAND

I guess I never thought of that and now it's too late! If I was that smart, I wouldn't be here in the first place. What a shame!

TOUTI brings tea from the kitchen.

SAMARGHAND

Touti! You and me never had a chance to talk since we got here.

TOUTI

Because you don't consider me a human.

SAMARGHAND

Feeling's mutual. But it's not true. Let's forget about the past and have a heart-to-heart chat… Listen, Touti!…I love you so much, I swear to God! You're a good girl. You've got all the good things a woman should have and everyman would love to marry you. You're amazing, beautiful, sincere… A great housekeeper. I really mean it. But I wish you had a family or someone too. Someone who could support you and give you some dowry or money. In that case, I'd have been the first one who asked you to marry my son. But right now I don't think you and Ayat are good for each other. You should marry someone who has money and Ayat should marry someone who has a dowry. What I am trying to say is that, please, leave Ayat alone. Don't pay attention to him. Let him forget you.

TOUTI is shocked.

SAMARGHAND

Are you listening? Are you listening? Seems like you are too much in love that you do not hear me bark!

TOUTI put the tray on the bed and helps SAMARGHAND to pack.

TOUTI

What made you think that I'm in love with Ayat? What's he got?

SAMARGHAND

Ayat … Ayat… he's perfect. Where can you find a more decent person than my son?

TOUTI

And by decent, do you mean someone who doesn't drink, smoke, or steal or someone who seizes the opportunity and takes charge of his life and tries to make a better future for himself?

SAMARGHAND (hesitates)

You're right, Touti. Why isn't he thinking about his future?

TOUTI gives her a meaningful look.

SAMARGHAND

Of course, one takes after his parents. Touti!

SAMARGHAND sits next to her.

TOUTI

Huh?

SAMARGHAND

Those things you said about the future and seizing the opportunity…Where did you learn it? You've been in this family all your life like the rest of us.

We hear sound of a motorcycle.

TOUTI

It doesn't sound like Me'mar's van!

SAMARGHAND

Who comes here except us?

They both go to the back of the stage and look outside the fence. The sound gets closer and closer and stops. After a while, LATIF enters. He has dusty clothes. His face is covered with a chafieh[49]. He looks at the women from behind the fence.

LATIF

Yallah! Salaam Alaikum.

TOUTI and SAMARGHAND cover their faces.

[49] A specific kind of scarf that is associated with Hizbollah in Palestine and Basij in Iran.

TOUTI

Alaike Salaam, brother. Who are you looking for?

LATIF

The man of the family.

SAMARGHAND

The man of our family is in the graveyard with my husband. What's it about?

LATIF

Safdar and Moslem sent me. They'll be here soon. I had a motorcycle and got here before them.

SAMARGHAND (happy)

Are you the buyer? Please, come on in! Make yourself at home. Touti bring some tea. Will you?

TOUTI enters the kitchen. LATIF looks at her and then goes toward the barrel to wash his face and hands.

SAMARGHAND

Say something, brother! I think I'm having a heart attack. Is this real? I can't believe it. Is it possible that all the prayers are paying off and I'm becoming rich?

LATIF

Nothing is impossible. How long have you been here, sister?

SAMARGHAND

Ask how many graves we have?

LATIF

Many. Indeed!

SAMARGHAND

Too many, brother! Too many! Twenty-three thousand five hundred seventy-five graves. Now, tell me! How do you want to pay? Do you need all the graves or just some? Are you giving us a cheque or cash? You know. It doesn't matter. Just buy this graveyard and pay us with whatever you can. Where is tea, Touti?

TOUTI brings tea. LATIF wants to take the cup from her hand but she puts it on the ground. LATIF picks up the cup and drinks.

LATIF

Thank you!

BIBI'S VOICE

I can hear a stranger's voice. Who is it, Touti?

TOUTI

I don't know, Bibi. A stranger.

BIBI'S VOICE

Oh, my Goodness! Scream! Ask for help!

SAMARGHAND

He's not a stranger. He's going to buy the graveyard. Moslem and Safdar sent him.

BIBI'S VOICE

Whatever! He's not supposed to talk to you when there's no man here. Go, brother! Go and talk the man of the house. We women don't know what you're talking about.

LATIF

OK, Bibi! After I drink my tea.

SAMARGHAND

That's fine. They'll be here any minute.

BIBI KHAGHAN gets out of the bathroom.

LATIF (gets up)

Yallah, Bibi Khanum!

BIBI

Who are you?

SAMARGHAND

He's the buyer Moslem and Safdar sent.

(Softly to BIBI)

Don't say anything that upsets him or I swear to God I'll kill myself. He's got money.

BIBI

Please, leave! You can come back whenever our men get home.

BIBI points to the door. LATIF drinks his tea and passes the cup to TOUTI. He puts a cigarette between his lips and exits.

Light fades.

SCENE NINE

LATIF is sitting on the bed. VALISHAH, ME'MAR, SAMARGHAND, MOSLEM and SAFDAR are sitting around him.

ME'MAR

Well. *Bismillah,*[50] Latif khan! Tell me how much do you pay for the whole graveyard?

SAMARGHAND

You can sell your share. I want to sell our share separately. After all, whoever did a better job should get more money.

VALISHAH

I do apologize for her behavior, brother.

ME'MAR

She's right. I can't compare what you and Ayat did to Moslem and Safdar's work.

SAMARGHAND

God bless your parents!

(To LATIF:)

Well, brother. How much do you want to pay for each grave?

MOSLEM

Aunt, don't you want to let us go first? Although you're older and greedier than we are, but we're the ones who found him.

SAMARGHAND

I swear, you two have already sold yours and got your money.

[50] Meaning in the name of God. Here means come on!

SAFDAR

Not that we didn't think of that. But he wouldn't agree. He said first he wanted to see all twenty thousand graves with his own eyes.

(To LATIF:)

Right?

LATIF nods.

SAMARGHAND

Is that right? What do you want to do with these many graves?

LATIF doesn't show any reaction. Silence.

SAMARGHAND

Why would I care? Just buy them from us and do whatever you want with them. You can fill them if you want.

LATIF

With what?

SAMARGHAND

With dirt.

LATIF

I'm here to fill the graves but not with the dirt.

ME'MAR

You fill them with whatever you want. It's none of our business.

(All agree.)

We've dug twenty-three thousand two hundred and fifty.

SAMARGHAND

Twenty-three thousand five hundred and seventy five.

ME'MAR

What are you insinuating? That I don't know math?

SAMARGHAND

If you knew, you wouldn't dig extra graves.

ME'MAR

It's math. Sometimes people screw it up. Haven't you done that before? At least, we only screwed up a few graves, some people screw up things that…

SAMARGHAND

I don't care what people screw up. Let's discuss our deal! Valishah, come here!

(She switches her place with VALISHAH. To LATIF.)

Our family have twelve thousand seven hundred and twenty seven graves.

SAFDAR

What the hell? You mean you own more than half of the graveyard?

MOSLEM

Even a lot more!

SAMARGHAND

How many have you dug?

MOSLEM

I did six thousand three hundred and forty two. It's all in here.

Takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and show it to them.

SAFDAR

As far as I remember you dug four thousand one hundred and eleven graves. See!

Shows them a paper.

MOSLEM

You know mine too!

SAFDAR

Of course. One should keep an eye on what others are doing first

(He takes more papers out of his pocket.)

Me'mar didn't dig anything. He just observed us. Uncle Valishah's family all together have nine thousand and forty one

(to MOSLEM:)

and you have four thousand one hundred and eleven.

MOSLEM

Well, how many do you have?

SAFDAR

I've dug seven thousand five hundred and thirty four full graves. And five thousand three hundred and twelve and half. I helped all of you with your graves too. It's all in my accounts.

MOSLEM and SAFDAR fight. VALISHAH tries to stop them.

VALISHAH

Now that everybody is talking about his account, let me show you what I have. I have officially registered it, too.

He shows them a paper. Everybody is shocked.

LATIF

What's in that paper that shook you up?

ME'MAR

According to his document, he's done all the digging and you need to talk to him if you want to buy the graves.

SAMARGHAND (surprised)

Valishah!

VALISHAH

Yes, darling!

SAMARGHAND

(looks at him surprised and admiring)

My Goodness! How could I be so blind? You're right. You did all the work. I wouldn't doubt it.

She brings tea for VALISHAH and tries to help him drink. VALISHAH reclines in the corner.

MOSLEM

It doesn't sound like auntie Samarghand. Samarghand, this is Valishah…

SAFDAR

She wouldn't care even if he were a black dog. As long as he's got twenty three thousand graves she loves him. I myself would fall in love with him.

MOSLEM

Me'mar, do you have any document to show him and kick his ass?

ME'MAR

If I was that kind of person, I wouldn't be in this situation.

MOSLEM

Nothing?

ME'MAR

I might have something.

Everybody is waiting. ME'MAR takes some pieces of cigarette pack out of his pocket.

LATIF

Do you write your debt on the cigarette packs too?

ME'MAR

Why are you asking that?

LATIF

Because if you do, you would need to smoke a box every day!

Silence.

MOSLEM

Even this stranger knows about your debt.

LATIF

Valishah, where do you write your debt?

MOSLEM

On ice…

VALISHAH (embarrassed)

I… I… I don't have any debt!

LATIF

Not less than Me'mar…

SAMARGHAND

Brother, let's not joke about that right now… We have a business to take care of…

LATIF

Of course! That's why I'm here.

SAFDAR

Why are you talking nonsense, then? Tell us how much you want! Let's haggle!

LATIF

I don't know about the grave market and I don't haggle.

SAFDAR

Well, I ask six thousand for each grave. OK?

LATIF

Yeah. But even with that money you can't pay your debt.

SAFDAR

I can, *Inshallah*. How do you know how much is my debt?

LATIF

I can tell from your face that you've given people a lot of promissory notes, as much as your weight.

SAFDAR

Dammit! Even my face shows it.

LATIF

Well. It seems that you haven't seen a bad creditor yet.

SAFDAR

Not yet. Thank God. At least Me'mar's new job brought us here to hide.

Everybody confirms.

LATIF

Fair enough! Do you have any idea how much interest you have to pay?

ME'MAR (joking)

Too much. We can't even count it.

LATIF

You can pay your debt, then.

MOSLEM

You're asking too many questions. What's in it for you?

LATIF

But it concerns your creditors who paid me to find you and get their money out of you.

(Silence. He holds SAFDAR's neck and pulls a gun out of his own pocket.)

I'm Latif Kharshotor. I get money and find debtors. I'm impatient, crazy, and I kill. I'm here to fill your graves. And if you don't give me fifty seven million seven hundred and fifty thousand, I'll do that.

ME'MAR

Do whatever you want. We don't have that much money.

LATIF

We don't know yet.

He throws SAFDAR.

SAFDAR

Are you blind? Don't you see that we're living here like dogs?

LATIF

That's your plan. Because you don't want people to be suspicious that you're searching for treasures. I've seen that a lot. You people prefer to live in misery and poverty for a couple of years and afterwards line your pocket. What are you looking for? Mummies, jewelry, bronze statutes, or pottery?

ME'MAR

You're asking for too much in order to get enough! Huh?

LATIF

And I will!

MOSLEM

You wish! Safdar, go get a sack! Let's tie him up and put him in the sack and send him to where we found him.

MOSLEM wants to attack LATIF. LATIF kicks him in the stomach.

LATIF

You didn't find me. I found you. Fill this *aftabeh* and put it by the bathroom.

MOSLEM does the same. LATIF enters the bathroom.

ME'MAR

(to MOSLEM and SAFDAR)

How many times did I tell you not to go to town and talk to everybody about the graves? Are you happy now?

MOSLEM

Don't worry, Me'mar! I'll send him back. It was our fault and we'll fix it ourselves.

SAFDAR

How about killing him and throwing him in one of the graves. We can tell them he's the enemy and get our money. God sent him to help us.

VALISHAH

This could be a blessing in disguise. That's not a bad idea. This idiot is right. We would benefit twice from killing him.

ME'MAR

Sure! But who is going to do that? It's not easy. We've got to be together.

Light fades.

SCENE TEN

The stage is disordered. MOSLEM, SAFDAR and VALISHAH are sitting in the corner with their hands tied from behind. LATIF holds the end of the rope. SAMARGHAND has fainted. ME'MAR and BIBI are sitting next to each other and looking at LATIF terrified. AYAT is sitting with tied hands. He is furious. LATIF is tying the rope.

LATIF

Hurry up! We've got to get there before the night falls.

ME'MAR

(points to SAMARGHAND)

She's still unconscious. Bibi's still speechless. Besides, I'm not feeling well enough to ride the van. You don't want to give them our dead bodies. Do you?

LATIF

I will if I need to. Get up!

LATIF pulls the rope and they fall. TOUTI enters with a glass of juice/sherbet.

TOUTI

What are you waiting for, then? Pull the trigger and kill us all. Start with that old woman. Maybe you get more reward.

She helps BIBI to drink the juice.

ME'MAR

Don't provoke him, Touti! He's mad. He'll kill and bury us right here and leave.

TOUTI

Where to? This miserable guy needs the little money he gets from finding you.

(To LATIF:)

Isn't this why they hire you? Isn't this how you make money? God damn the money you get from scaring poor debtors to death and ripping them off!

AYAT

Don't talk to him, Ms. Touti! The law will support us. I'm sure the police will arrest him as soon as they get to the town.

TOUTI

I'm sure he's already thought of everything and knows how to get away from the law.

(To BIBI:)

Feeling better?

(BIBI nods.)

I'll take you to the hill to get some fresh air when you feel good.

TOUTI sits next to SAMARGHAND and gives her juice with spoons. SAMARGHAND regains her conscience little by little.

SAMARGHAND

(notices LATIF and gets scared)

Is he still here?

LATIF

I'm heading out, sister. Get ready!

VALISHAH (begging)

Ayat…

AYAT gets up and LATIF points his gun at him.

LATIF

If you do that again, I'll knock you off in front of your parents! Sit down!

LATIF pulls the men out of the stage. AYAT, TOUTI, and SAMARGHAND watch them leaving from behind the net. The sound of van starting.

LATIF'S VOICE

What are you waiting for, Me'mar?

ME'MAR'S VOICE

I want to make a deal with you!

Light fades.

SCENE ELEVEN

LATIF is standing behind the net with a suitcase next to him. TOUTI is standing next to BIBI KHAGHAN. She's wearing a white *chador*. ME'MAR, VALISHAH, SAMARGHAND, MOSLEM and SAFDAR are sitting.

TOUTI

(to BIBI:)

They're forcing me to marry someone I don't know. They're saying that I'm the only one who can save their lives and stop this disgrace. This stranger isn't going to turn them in and he'll pay the creditors some extra money.

(BIBI shakes as if she is having a bad dream.)

I haven't accepted it yet. I promised you I'd never leave you. But they're saying stuff that scares me to death. They're saying that if I don't marry Latif, they'll kill you and

he can take me with him. What should I do? They're saying if I agree to go with Latif willingly and don't tell you, he'll marry me legally and they won't hurt you. Me? Honestly, I'm more worried about you otherwise I prefer to go with this stranger rather than staying with Me'mar and his family. At least, this guy is man enough to kill someone he doesn't like rather than selling her. I told him if he doesn't marry me legally, I'll kill myself. We'll see how much honor he's got. With your permission, Bibi!

She kisses BIBI and hugs SAMARGHAND.

TOUTI

(to SAMARGHAND:)

I trust her to you. Please, don't forget her pills. Tell her stories whenever she wants…

TOUTI Fixes her white *chador* and picks up her bag and without paying any attention to ME'MAR and others who want to say goodbye to her, exits. LATIF follows her. We can hear the sound of LATIF's motorcycle. Sound of thunder. BIBI wakes up suddenly and asks for TOUTI. She runs toward the net and calls TOUTI. ME'MAR HANI gets close to BIBI and wants to talk to her. BIBI looks at him and others with anger that makes him change his mind. BIBI is panting. She sits back in her place.

ME'MAR

He…He might be a good man for Touti. Isn't it what you always wanted?

BIBI gives him a look. ME'MAR is quiet. BIBI goes back to sleep. Suddenly she shakes as if she is dying.

Light fades.

SCENE TWELVE

ME'MAR, VALISHAH, SAFDAR, and MOSLEM are carrying BIBI's coffin behind the fence. SAMARGHAND is following them crying. Light fades.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Light on. Nobody is on stage. We can hear ME'MAR's van getting close. The van stops. AYAT enters. He has some grocery bags and seems happy.

AYAT

Yallah. Anybody home?

(Facing the kitchen:)

Ms. Touti!

(Facing the bathroom:)

Bibi Khaghan! Where is everybody? I fixed the van. It's as good as new. I had the engine be dismounted and the tires be changed. Not to mention the brake, gas pedal, and the clutch. It took the whole day to do all the work. Anyway, you should give it a try. It's like a brand new model.

(He put the bags down.)

Where have you gone all the sudden?

AYAT wants to leave. He sees ME'MAR in a black shirt.

AYAT (surprised)

What happened, uncle?

ME'MAR

My condolences!

He wants to hug AYAT but AYAT steps back.

AYAT

Who's gone, uncle? Why are you wearing black?

SAMARGHAND and VALISHAH enter crying.

VALISHAH

Bibi Khaghan. Your grandma is gone.

AYAT

Why? She was fine.

SAMARGHAND

When death comes, he doesn't ask anything. He just takes anyone he sees on his way.

VALISHAH

Bibi Khaghan wasn't happy with this job. Like she knew something. I wish we'd never come here in the first place.

ME'MAR

Ah! Ah!

SAMARGHAND

We shouldn't stay here any longer.

VALISHAH

Yeah. We should leave as soon as possible.

AYAT

Mother, how did Touti take it?

SAMARGHAND

Touti? Touti…

AYAT

I'm sure she's devastated. Where is she? Is she still mourning over Bibi's grave? Why did you leave her alone? Mother, is that how much you hate her?

(He wants to exit.)

SAMARGHAND

Ayat!

AYAT

I've got nothing to do with you, mother. I want Touti.

(SAMARGHAND and VALISHAH cry.)

If I've waited that long, it's because of the promise I made to that old woman.

(He exists.)

Ms. Touti! Ms. Touti!

MOSLEM and SAFDAR see AYAT outside. They bring him inside and sit him on the bed.

MOSLEM

Touti flew, man!

AYAT becomes nervous.

SAFDAR

Don't scare him!

(To AYAT:)

It's nothing just…

AYAT

Just what?

Grabs his shirt.

SAMARGHAND

Don't say anything, Safdar. I'll tell him.

AYAT

Tell me what, mother? What have you done to her? I swear to God, if you said anything that upset her…

SAFDAR

Upset? They married her to that guy!

AYAT is shocked. He wants to get up but MOSLEM and SAFDAR hold him.

AYAT

Who?

SAFDAR

To that guy Latif.

AYAT

Why?

SAMARGHAND

We had to. He wanted to turn in your father and uncle to the creditors.

VALISHAH

Do you know what would have happened, if they found us? They would kill us before we got to the court.

ME'MAR

It was a legal marriage. She seemed happy too. It's fate…You can find somebody else.

MOSLEM

I know it's hard. But it's all your fault. After all you loved Touti for a long time but you didn't do anything. If you had the courage to propose to her, this would never have happened. If you don't catch the bird who sits on your roof, your neighbors will.

SAMARGHAND

Touti didn't love you enough otherwise she could have been waiting for you. If she told me that she wanted you too, I would have been happy for you guys to get married. But she didn't say a word. She didn't even say goodbye to you.

VALISHAH

She didn't say goodbye to anyone except Bibi and Samarghand. She didn't even look at us!

AYAT

You sold her and expected her to say goodbye. How brutal!

(He wants to leave.)

SAMARGHAND

Where are you going?

AYAT

I have to find her.

SAMARGHAND

That monster will kill you.

AYAT

I only have two options. To find Touti or to kill myself.

ME'MAR

I agree!

VALISHAH

With what? With killing himself?

ME'MAR

No! With killing myself. I've been thinking about it for a long time but I haven't been this willing before. I feel I'm stuck in the bottom of an endless well. Only death can free me!

MOSLEM

Is it you, Me'mar Hani? A man who used to talk about destiny and believing in God in the hard times?

ME'MAR

Living in misery like dogs, trying hard and not getting anywhere, isn't what God wants. It's what his cruel oppressive people want. I'm tired of these people. I want to leave this world and seek refuge in God. Is that wrong?

VALISHAH

No! Do we have another choice?

(To others:)

Huh? Do we have another choice? If so, let's try it! Bibi was a blessing to all of us. Now that she's gone our life will get worse.

(ME'MAR gets up. VALISHAH after him.)

Let's go, brother! We don't need any knifes, or poison or rope. We'll lay down in the graves we dug until we die from hunger and thirst and heat!

VALISHAH and ME'MAR exit.

SAFDAR

We were digging our own graves and we didn't know.

MOSLEM

Did you really think that we were digging for the enemy. Huh? The enemy who has terrified us so much and made us dig graves for them before even they attacked us? Of course such an enemy never existed! And as far as there's no enemy, there's no money. When there's no money it means that we'll die from hunger and end up laying down in their graves. But Safdar, I'll never lay down. I'll sell all these graves at any cost!

MOSLEM exits. SAFDAR follows him.

SAMARGHAND

(to AYAT:)

Ayat, don't follow us! We don't have any choices left except death. It's over for us. We don't care if we go to hell. Hell isn't any worse than here. When you're drowning the depth of the water doesn't matter.

SAMARGHAND exits.

SCENE FOURTEEN

As the stage light is going on, we see LATIF and TOUTI sitting. AYAT brings tea for LATIF. He is in black. LATIF grabs the cup.

LATIF

What are you doing here all by yourself? Digging more graves?

AYAT

No, Mr. Latif. I'm filling them.

LATIF

That's good. You spend one year to dig graves and another year to fill them. Maybe next year you dig them and a year after that fill them again. What an idle person!

TOUTI

At least he admits what they did was useless. Isn't that enough, Latif?

LATIF

Of course! But how is he going to make you happy? That was a mistake to bring her back. At least, I could make enough money to feed her. But I didn't know what to do with her heart. I know how to get money from people not heart! Although, it's not been forty days since Bibi died, but I congratulate you.

LATIF passes the cup to TOUTI. He gets up and takes a bag out of his coat and gives it to TOUTI. He wants to leave.

AYAT

Mr. Latif! You did something for me that my parents never…

LATIF

Where are they?

AYAT

God knows. They slept in the graves for a couple of days with Me'mar. After they didn't die they packed their stuff and left. They insisted that I go with them. But I didn't. When you bury your dear one in a place, you belong to that place.

LATIF

Like something was telling you Touti will be back. No?

AYAT

Yeah. And your heart was telling you to bring Touti back.

LATIF

Latif doesn't have any heart. Only if I could talk beautifully like you…Two youngsters…With empty hands[51]… among these graves…May God himself show mercy on you! Bibi, God bless her, who was kind to anyone and was making *halal*[52] money, not from digging graves, left you. What are these people, who are making the earth a graveyard and who are humiliating you, going to give you? May God himself show mercy on you! Two Youngsters…Alone…without anything…In a graveyard…

LATIF exits. TOUTI opens the bag that LATIF gave her. Inside the bag are some golden bracelets, a necklace, and a ring. light fades.

THE END

© *Translated by Fatemeh Madani Sarbarani, January 2017*

[51] Meaning nothing.

[52] Opposite of *haram*. Religiously allowed.

The Wetsuitman
By Freek Mariën
Translated by David McKay

The playwright, Freek Mariën, writes, "A few years ago I read 'The Wetsuitman,' an article by the Norwegian journalist Anders Fjellberg about two refugees who tried to swim from Calais to England and were washed ashore in Norway and the Netherlands. I couldn't get the article out of my head, where it got tangled up with other stories, frustrations, and observations about identity, all of which resulted in this play. Several people I met also had a crucial influence: I'm thinking in particular of the young Afghan Nazilla and her father, the Syrian author Maria, and many others I met while writing in Calais, Dover, or right here in Belgium. This is not documentary theater. I took the liberty of combining stories, departing from true events, and making some things up entirely. None of that makes the issues raised in this play any less real."

The Wetsuitman premiered in the Dutch language on March 22, 2019, in DE Studio in Antwerp, with a cast of three. Robbert Vervloet (a Jewish Belgian with a Near Eastern appearance) played Magnussen, the coroner/forensic pathologist, a salesperson, the lifeguard, the policeman, the hacker, the customs official, the interpreter, and the brother. Maxime Waladi (a tall, half-Moroccan Belgian) played a Norwegian police inspector, the mother of a French diver, the beachcomber, another salesperson, the researcher, the spokesperson, the aid worker, and the father. Yinka Kuitenbrouwer (a blond Dutchwoman with a Belgian passport) played an architect, Hustvedt, the French diver, the beach bar proprietor, the young woman from the tourist office, yet another salesperson, the shop manager, Nadine, a refugee, and a mother. The playwright, Freek Mariën, was also the director; Ruth Mariën was the dramaturg, and Carl von Winckelmann acted as coach; all three play central roles in Freek Mariën's Mechelen-based theater company Het Kwartier, which co-produced *The Wetsuitman* with the Mechelen Cultural Center. A video recording of this production informed my English translation, but the play also lends itself to very different interpretations—for instance, a much larger cast is possible.

I first approached Freek in the summer of 2020 about translating one of his earlier plays, *Waiting and Other Heroic Acts*. What fascinated me about Freek's writing was his ability to use formal playfulness, memorable characters, and linguistic ingenuity to shed new light on complex social issues. Freek asked me to consider translating *The Wetsuitman*, and I soon saw that it combined the strengths of the earlier play with a remarkably compelling story and a unique narrative structure in which successive layers peel away like an onion, bringing us ever closer to the emotional core. Not only were Freek and I fortunate to receive financial support from Flanders Literature, but in an incredible stroke of luck, I also had the chance to participate in the first online edition of the Foreign Affairs Theatre Translation mentorship, organized by the Foreign Affairs theatre company in London. This translation is deeply indebted to the inspiration provided by the company's founders, Camila França and Trine Garrett, as well as the feedback and input from the mentors, Paul Garrett, William Gregory, and Charis Ainslie, and the support and enthusiasm of my fellow participants.

Two English-language productions of *The Wetsuitman* are planned for 2022, one by Foreign Affairs and the other by the Cherry Arts in Ithaca, New York.

Freek Mariën is an author and playwright and the artistic director of the Belgian theatre company Het Kwartier. His plays are read and performed in Flanders and the Netherlands, and his work is published in the German-speaking world by Verlag der Autoren. His productions are characterized by socially relevant themes, compelling narratives, distinctive voices, and unexpected forms. His awards for his playwriting include the international Kaas&Kappes prize, the East Flanders Literary Prize and the Toneelschrijfprijs for the best Dutch-language play. His recent plays include two 2021 Dutch-language premieres: *Een of andere Rus* ("Some Russian or Other") and *De gemoederen* ("Uproar"). Dramaturg Peter Anthonissen writes, "Mariën is the embodiment of what a contemporary playwright in Flanders can be. … His plays display an extraordinary sensitivity to language and form, while expressing a profound connection to human beings and our world and an ever-growing sense of engagement."

David McKay translates plays, novels, short stories, a wide range of non-fiction, and poetry. His work has been described as "dazzlingly lyrical" (Neel Mukherjee, *The Guardian*). He is the ALTA Dutch-English mentor for 2021. He received the Vondel Prize for his translation of *War and Turpentine* by Stefan Hertmans, which was also nominated for the Man Booker Prize International and shortlisted for the Best Translated Book Award. His co-translation of the Dutch anti-colonialist classic *Max Havelaar* was shortlisted for the Oxford Weidenfeld Prize 2020, and in 2021 he received one of Cornell University's inaugural ICM Global South Translation Fellowships for his translation of Anton de Kom's classic anti-colonial manifesto *We Slaves of Suriname*, to be published by Polity Press in 2022. In 2020 and 2021, he translated the Flemish plays *The Wetsuitman*, *HIDE*, *Platina*, and *Antigone in Molenbeek* and the Dutch play *The Polish Bride*. He has just completed his translation of a second play by Freek Mariën.

The Wetsuitman

By Freek Mariën

Translated by David McKay

This play was inspired by actual events. Characters have been merged, timelines streamlined, names changed, and gaps filled. For three to twenty-eight performers.

1. THE INVESTIGATION

norway

architect
westerman
magnussen
pathologist
medical examiner
hustvedt
mother
french diver

ARCHITECT

i'm an elderly architect
i live near the edge of the village
on the coast
there's a fjord
or that's how I picture it anyway
we're in norway
it's morning
i can picture the morning light
low sun
mist
and i'm walking the dog
i have a dog
a labrador
a terrier
not really sure
doesn't really matter
i'm an old man with a dog
and I'm walking the dog on the coast
that much I know
i'm walking the dog
and my dog is barking
there's no leash
there's big rocks
a cliff

and a black spot
out there in the distance
not normally there
at first I think
it's oil
I think
I think the first thing I think of is oil
it happens now and then
with all the ships here
drilling platforms
birds get stuck
and I keep walking
my dog's still barking
he's near the black spot
heading straight for the oil
so i leave the path
if there's a path
if there is a path
I leave the path
and i get closer
and see that the black spot's
a wetsuit
so I think
could come in handy
not that I dive
i have gone diving
i think
otherwise I wouldn't think
could come in handy
i've reached the wetsuit now
there's a flipper next to it
my dog barks
and snaps at the flipper
and I pull him away
and the flipper comes with him
he's got the flipper with him
in his teeth
and he drops it
and I flinch
and he barks
and I stop him

cause he's straining forward
and I kneel
and sticking out of it
are bones

WESTERMAN

inspector westerman
pleased to meet you
you called

ARCHITECT

that's inspector westerman

WESTERMAN

i'm inspector westerman
fifty years old
still fit as a fiddle
married
two children
one all grown up
the other still at home
sons
anthropology
and criminology
in the old man's footsteps
that's how I see it
I have a case
that won't let go of me
a missing girl
ten years ago
or eleven
nine maybe
not a round number
dumped on the beach
not far from here
raped
barbed wire around her neck
never found a suspect
no one saw a thing
just a black car
with an open trunk
and the engine running
and no plates

and it keeps me awake nights
the drinking
the case
and I see her face in front of me
and I feel that barbed wire
and a moustache
I may have a moustache
yeah
I'll have a moustache
that's how it's done
the inspector has a moustache

ARCHITECT

follow me

WESTERMAN

so I follow him

ARCHITECT

we go down the path

WESTERMAN

if there is a path

ARCHITECT

and we reach the wetsuit

WESTERMAN

i look around
the wetsuit's in a kind of bay
a cove
let's say a cove
takes an awfully high tide
to rise this far
high winds yesterday
did the water reach this high?
the fin's lying next to the wetsuit
must have come off
can't see the face
just a wisp of dark hair
or is it seaweed?
i call the medical examiner
the diver is dead
that couldn't be more obvious
but rules are rules
only a doctor can make it official
i put on my plastic gloves

do i take photos?

ARCHITECT

you take photos

MAGNUSSEN

how about me?

ARCHITECT

later for you

MAGNUSSEN

maybe i'm already here
maybe i'm the one taking the photos
i'm magnussen
pleased to meet you
i'm the intern
criminology
i remind you of your son
i mostly just follow you around
work through some files
and this is my first case
my first body
stay professional
I think
I think that's what I think

WESTERMAN

so you take the photos

MAGNUSSEN

with numbers
i put those little numbers next to them
they use those numbers right?

WESTERMAN

right

MAGNUSSEN

and i'm nervous about getting up close
excited but scared
one leg is missing
i wander away from the body
westerman!

WESTERMAN

what is it uh

searches for the name

MAGNUSSEN

magnussen

WESTERMAN
magnussen yeah
MAGNUSSEN
there are bones here too
WESTERMAN
i join him
little bones
like shards of bone
a few meters away
MAGNUSSEN
here too
those little numbers
plastic baggies
plastic gloves
ARCHITECT
and i'm right here with you
WESTERMAN
or maybe over there
this is a crime scene
MAGNUSSEN
i've roped it off
WESTERMAN
with crime scene tape
red and white
or blue and white
yellow and black
police line it says
do not cross
or crime scene
or something norwegian
ARCHITECT
and i'm right behind you
WESTERMAN
or maybe back at home
nice house you got
architect
ARCHITECT
i make tea
i'm trembling
and someone takes my statement

WESTERMAN

here comes the medical examiner

MEDICAL EXAMINER/PATHOLOGIST

norway is a country made for
accidents
we have cliffs
storms
big ships
big rocks
all those people
on drilling platforms
and god-knows-where up in the arctic
we freeze to death
we've got train crashes
plane crashes
shipwrecks
terrorists
and remember half the time
this is in total darkness
so whatever can break down
will break down
and if no one else does it to us
we do it to ourselves
norway
land of alcoholism and suicide
it's not what the brochures say
but it's true
we beat the world in drinking and depression
we beat each other to pulp in the darkness
drunk and depressed
we fall off cliffs
that's if we don't get blown up
flattened
sucked into a propeller
which is all just to say
we're the best at identifying bodies
got it down to a science
give me a body
i'll give you a name
i'm the medical examiner

and also the pathologist
i smell like formaldehyde
and have a hard time getting into relationships
because women seem to think
those hands of his
were just inside a corpse

WESTERMAN
what was the cause of death?
PATHOLOGIST
no signs of injury
from propeller blades
no stab wounds
no gunshots
WESTERMAN
so he drowned
PATHOLOGIST
no
WESTERMAN
he didn't drown
PATHOLOGIST
no
maybe
WESTERMAN
did he drown or not?
PATHOLOGIST
there are no visible injuries
on the remains that were found
WESTERMAN
oh come on
give me something solid
PATHOLOGIST
the body was lying in the water
cold salt water
in a wetsuit
at this point my friend
solid is not the word for it
WESTERMAN
but can you rule out foul play?
PATHOLOGIST
no

i couldn't even tell you
if he's been dead three days or three weeks

WESTERMAN

so i have to try to figure out who did this?

PATHOLOGIST

i don't even have the whole body
the salt's eaten into everything
i can't take fingerprints
can't even use the teeth
for identification I mean

WESTERMAN

so you found nothing?

PATHOLOGIST

tell you what
i'll leave my lunchbox
underwater
in a bathtub
chuck in a couple of sacks of salt
and after a week you can tell me
what I was going to have for lunch

WESTERMAN

I get it
I get it

PATHOLOGIST

DNA
that's all we have
DNA
and that wetsuit

HUSTVEDT

what can we tell
from the wetsuit?
i'm on the case now
hustvedt
head of missing persons
i'm taking over the investigation
bald spot
big mustache
clenching a cigarette in my gold teeth

WESTERMAN

isn't that kind of

over the top?

HUSTVEDT

no seriously
the whole top row
don't know about the bottom

MAGNUSSEN

but why?

HUSTVEDT

don't know
maybe I was on duty
shadowing someone
someone who knocked out my teeth
I was on the ground
bleeding
just had time to shoot him in the legs
or maybe my mother
used to smoke
and fed me candy and lemonade
all day long
if she fed me at all
and drank too much
she drank too much
and come to think of it
maybe she didn't smoke
but she neglected me
and I grew up
with gangs
and small-time crooks
but I pulled myself up
out of that world
and now I chase the criminals
and I went to the dentist
for the very first time
and said
do the whole thing in gold
so they can see
so they see
that I'm out
that I'm flush
or something

WESTERMAN

ok

HUSTVEDT

and maybe i visit my mother
once in a while
and i think she's not proud of me
but disappointed
and i don't know why
or maybe i do
maybe it feels to her like betrayal
my gold teeth
and every smile
reminds her of her failings
did i have to cover the rotting stumps
with all that flashy gold?

MAGNUSSEN

so what does this have to do with the case?

HUSTVEDT

oh
you know
I thought
backstory

beat

so what can we tell
from the wetsuit?

WESTERMAN

it's a dark gray wetsuit
five millimeters thick
neo... (*searching for the word*)

MAGNUSSEN

neoprene

WESTERMAN

with a hood
or whatever they call it on a wetsuit
size medium
sold for around eighty euros
tribord
that's the brand name
a men's wetsuit
almost forgot to mention
it's the model for men

HUSTVEDT

so what we have here is probably a man

WESTERMAN

good reviews
value for money
but never mind that
a few logos on the label
all washed off in the salt water
it says
tribord
laundering instructions
do not launder under any circumstances
a square with some wifi symbol
scissors with a dotted line
made in thailand
designed for diving and snorkeling

HUSTVEDT

a male diver
good
anything else?

WESTERMAN

yeah uh

nods at magnussen

MAGNUSSEN

magnussen

WESTERMAN

yeah

MAGNUSSEN

yeah
i got in touch with the manufacturer
they've been making this model since 2012
size medium means the chest size
from ninety-two to ninety-five centimeters

HUSTVEDT

male diver
on the slender side
who bought the wetsuit some time since 2012

WESTERMAN

or maybe
it was a gift

beat

HUSTVEDT

right...
any other leads anyone?

MAGNUSSEN

i looked into those bones
i found nearby

HUSTVEDT

and?

MAGNUSSEN

still waiting
for the lab results

WESTERMAN

we spoke to the neighbors
most never went to the place
or rarely
the last time anyone had been there
was two days before he was found
a young woman
says she went walking there
and didn't see anything

HUSTVEDT

so we have a time frame

MAGNUSSEN

another neighbor
the day before he was found
saw a black car
with its engine running
as close to that spot
as a person can drive
and it didn't have plates
an older model of SUV
she didn't see anyone around
no one coming or going

HUSTVEDT

magnussen
tell the pathologist
to hurry up
with those bones
and ask the neighbors
about black suvs
in the area

westerman
get a list of missing persons
see if that leads anywhere

WESTERMAN

to the audience

that must be more or less what happened

HUSTVEDT

something's wrong

WESTERMAN

what?

HUSTVEDT

that diving suit
it's all wrong

MAGNUSSEN

what's wrong with it?

HUSTVEDT

you two ever gone diving?

MAGNUSSEN

together?

WESTERMAN

no

HUSTVEDT

ever wear a wetsuit like that?

MAGNUSSEN

once
or twice
on vacation
rafting
surfing
last time i went to portugal

HUSTVEDT

it's too thin

MAGNUSSEN

i didn't notice

HUSTVEDT

good enough for portugal
but the north sea?
five millimeters
it's five millimeters thick

WESTERMAN

help me out here

HUSTVEDT

five millimeters
so thin you can almost see the goosebumps
that's fine
when the water's sixteen degrees
but i've lived on the coast a long time here
and the water hardly ever
hits fifteen degrees
when you found him
that day
it was ten degrees

silence

MAGNUSSEN

maybe a day or two earlier

HUSTVEDT

the day the sea reaches sixteen degrees here
is the day you stop going to portugal
for your beach vacation
our guy knew nothing about the north sea
our guy was an amateur
you cannot dive in that wetsuit
not around here

WESTERMAN

the dna came in

HUSTVEDT

and?

WESTERMAN

it got here last night
i ran it through the database right away
stayed up all night waiting
but
nothing

HUSTVEDT

not a single match?

WESTERMAN

no
i guess no one reported him missing

HUSTVEDT

no one?

WESTERMAN

i checked the neighboring countries too

silence

HUSTVEDT

we'll send out a black notice

WESTERMAN

interpol?

HUSTVEDT

the whole world will see it
send some photos along
a description
somebody must know who the diver was

WESTERMAN

yeah
maybe

MAGNUSSEN

here's something
a frenchman
just reported as missing
by his mother
lost at sea
young
slender
male

HUSTVEDT

get the dna and compare

MAGNUSSEN

already did

WESTERMAN

and?

MAGNUSSEN

waiting for the lab

HUSTVEDT

did you talk to the mother?

MAGNUSSEN

even better

HUSTVEDT

the mother?

MOTHER

one sec
yeah
he's always pulling crazy stunts
hitchhiking with truckers
throwing darts with a blindfold
jumping off cliffs
i always tell him
you'll get yourself in trouble one day
good head of dark hair
like me
i'll send you a photo
anyway
he always looks
as if he just came out of the thrift shop
but i guess that's hip these days
he goes away a lot
but he always lets me know where he is
or at least
if i call and ask him where he is
he tells me
but now he's not even getting my messages
otherwise he'd let me know
"this place is amazing
i'm sleeping on the beach"
doesn't scare him
every summer
right out on the beach
oh yeah
something else
he had his diving suit with him
in his backpack
he planned to go diving

MAGNUSSEN

commander

HUSTVEDT

commissioner

MAGNUSSEN

commissioner

HUSTVEDT

yes

MAGNUSSEN

that wetsuit keeps getting weirder
i got in touch with the manufacturer
about the socks he had on

HUSTVEDT

what about his socks?

MAGNUSSEN

they told me they're for synchronized swimming

HUSTVEDT

for what?

the telephone rings

HUSTVEDT

hustvedt
luster police station
no
no comment
ms nilsen
the investigation's in progress
and as long as it's in progress
my lips are sealed
and so should yours be
what do you mean already online?

he hangs up

MAGNUSSEN

what?

HUSTVEDT

who leaked?

WESTERMAN

nobody

MAGNUSSEN

i didn't do anything

HUSTVEDT

how else could they know all this?

westerman looks at hustvedt's phone

WESTERMAN

french diver washes up on norwegian coast

HUSTVEDT

what must his poor mother be thinking?
what kind of person would inform the press?
amateurs

just suppose
you're a family member
and you read in the paper
that he was found dead
washed up in some norwegian backwater
it'll make people furious
at us
at the police

MAGNUSSEN

and well they should be

HUSTVEDT

sometimes
sometimes we don't move fast enough
but sometimes the papers are a little too fast
they jump to conclusions
we can't be sure about

WESTERMAN

who's going to call the mother?

MAGNUSSEN

what'll we tell her?

HUSTVEDT

that we're on the case
too early to say
that we're still waiting
for DNA

WESTERMAN

and sorry
tell her sorry

MAGNUSSEN

so I—
OK
fine

magnussen calls

FRENCH DIVER

bonjour

MAGNUSSEN

good afternoon
this is magnussen
of the norwegian police
is mrs—

FRENCH DIVER

i heard you were looking for me

MAGNUSSEN

excuse me?

FRENCH DIVER

i was just about to call

MAGNUSSEN

who is this?

FRENCH DIVER

so i get home
and the newspapers
tell me i'm dead

MAGNUSSEN

i don't follow

FRENCH DIVER

i ran into some norwegians
we went out in their boat
and my phone fell in the water
i was doing this trick I know
but the boat was too wobbly
anyway
went away for one week
never thought there would be such a panic
i'm always pulling crazy stunts

hangs up

MAGNUSSEN

it was the french diver

silence

westerman throws the file to the ground

HUSTVEDT

it's just another case

WESTERMAN

right

HUSTVEDT

westerman
go home

PATHOLOGIST

westerman
about those bones near the body

WESTERMAN

finally
come on
something solid?

PATHOLOGIST

you bet
a fox
and a few small rodents

WESTERMAN

you call that solid?

PATHOLOGIST

the lemmus lemmus
the vulpes vulpes
and the rattus rattus
to be exact

westerman is drinking
magnussen enters
westerman hides the bottle

WESTERMAN

still at work uh...

MAGNUSSEN

magnussen

WESTERMAN

right

MAGNUSSEN

the forms for my internship
I'm almost done

silence

could i have a sip?

the bottle comes back out
they drink

everything OK?

WESTERMAN

the bones led nowhere
the frenchman led nowhere
and that dna won't get us anywhere either
i don't even know what we're looking for anymore
a wetsuit that's too thin
socks for synchronized swimming
one leg

gone
and no one even bothered
to report him missing

MAGNUSSEN

i was thinking
we may be overlooking things
cause we keep calling him a diver

WESTERMAN

what?

MAGNUSSEN

we have no idea
what he was doing in the water
surfing diving jet skiing rafting
for all we know the guy was playing polo

WESTERMAN

so what do you want us to call him?

MAGNUSSEN

the wetsuitman

WESTERMAN

laughs
the wetsuitman

MAGNUSSEN

what's so funny?

WESTERMAN

sounds like a superhero

MAGNUSSEN

whose special power is synchronized swimming

WESTERMAN

right
they laugh
the wetsuitman

MAGNUSSEN

and whenever there's trouble
he changes into his wetsuit

WESTERMAN

and it takes forever
with that fucking neo-whatever

MAGNUSSEN

neoprene

WESTERMAN

so he's always too late

maybe that's why he drowned
he was there on the beach
putting on his wetsuit
to save the world
when the tide came in

MAGNUSSEN

or maybe he had a sidekick
to help him with his wetsuit

WESTERMAN

say that again

MAGNUSSEN

maybe he didn't put it on himself
maybe someone else—

WESTERMAN

interrupting
shhhhh
silence
what if he didn't drown

MAGNUSSEN

what do you mean?

WESTERMAN

we have to find that black SUV

hustvedt joins them

WESTERMAN

hustvedt
it's about time

HUSTVEDT

so what's the big deal
at this time of the morning?

WESTERMAN

listen
magnussen?

MAGNUSSEN

so
nine years ago
there was a big black car
with the trunk open
and the engine running

WESTERMAN
my old case
MAGNUSSEN
his old case
and now the neighbors
see a black SUV
in the same spot
WESTERMAN
two sightings
two bodies
HUSTVEDT
you think it was murder
MAGNUSSEN
we can't rule it out
HUSTVEDT
so what about the diving suit?
WESTERMAN
doesn't make much sense does it
too thin
the wrong socks
it's a put-up job
maybe they even put him in the wetsuit afterwards
MAGNUSSEN
just like the barbed wire
HUSTVEDT
what?
WESTERMAN
my old case
she wasn't strangled with barbed wire
they wound it around her neck
afterwards
silence
HUSTVEDT
ok westerman
put in a request for those old files
and see what else matches
magnussen
get a list of norwegians
with a criminal record
and a black SUV
everyone leaps into action

the telephone rings
magnussen picks up

MAGNUSSEN
yes?
hello?
what?
magnussen hangs up
interpol
WESTERMAN
our black notice?
HUSTVEDT
a dna match after all?
MAGNUSSEN
no
HUSTVEDT
what is it then?
MAGNUSSEN
forget that black car
it was the netherlands
they found another guy in a wetsuit

2. THE INTERVIEW
the netherlands and france

beach bar owner (a woman)
salesperson
beachcomber
police officer
tourism officer (a young woman)
scientist
lifeguard
second salesperson
corporate spokesperson
hacker
third salesperson
branch manager
customs officer
nadine

BEACH BAR OWNER
you're not recording yet

are you?
oh
yeah
OK
well
right
go ahead

SALESPERSON

what?
uh
no I'd rather not
uh yeah
yes
but
thing is
ma'am
we've been told
not to talk to journalists
but i'm happy to answer all your questions
about clothes and sports equipment
i can't comment on that
i'd like to comment
but my only comment
is that right now i have no comment
wish i could comment

BEACH BAR OWNER

so i was out running
like i do every morning
i have a bar here on the beach
lots of deep fried stuff
but i watch my figure
you know
so i was out running
you see
and um
i go out early
we serve breakfast right
so i have to be back in time
but that morning

i didn't even open the bar
the diving suit was half inside out
you could still see some hair
dark hair
and the skin
well um
did you see the photos of that
bridget jones woman
renée
renée zellweger?
that facelift that went wrong
or botox
or whatever it was
like a swelled-up chicken breast
sort of
so i live above the bar
and from the window I could see the police
they took photos
put a tent over it
made it look kind of
romantic all of a sudden
like a camping trip
but
they had to work fast
cause the tide was rising
they had a stretcher
so i'm watching the whole thing
and the whole time
i'm saying to myself
i found a body
i found a body
when my girlfriend gets home
i hadn't warned her or anything
just didn't think of it
just wasn't thinking
that day
so anyway
she couldn't help laughing
cause there's me sitting
squatting really
in my running shorts

and sneakers
and um
you know
glued to the window
my head under the curtain
i'll take that glass of water now please
can't even believe i was the first one there
it was well after high tide
and the beachcombers
they're always right on it
to see what got washed up
whoever gets there first
finds the most stuff
they've got their metal detectors
those bags on their belts
for their finds
they find nice things sometimes
i don't know why they hadn't got there yet
or didn't call or whatever
ever since then
when i go running
i take a detour
crazy i know
but what it does to you
it's so real
you have no idea
cause there's death
all up in your face
right where you sell french fries

BEACHCOMBER

we don't steal from the dead
ms nilsen
not unless they've been dead
for a couple of centuries
i have a case in the museum here
where we display our finds
they go back to 1146
part of a crossbow
the only one in the netherlands
with its trigger still intact

not everything comes from the beach
but even so
i asked willy
he's a lawyer
another member of our association
we're exploring our options
legal options
treating us like suspects
because that's how it feels
when so often we can
we've been known to help
it makes me sick
everything we do
we do out of respect for history
you write that down
we shed light on history
we bring it to life
we have our own fucking spot
in the museum
so why would we ever
falsify history?
but that's what this is
these accusations
the police showing up to talk to me
me!
the police!
asking all kinds of questions
about my profession
about my friends
about my colleagues
embarrassing
that's what it is
embarrassing
so that's what i told them
and then i told them
our conversation was over
we have an association here
we have principles
and new things
are the least important things of all to us
that's all i have to say

POLICE OFFICER

annette right?
thing is
annette
in my long career
been around for a while now
dead people
'kay?
they wash up
from all over the channel
from england scotland belgium
france germany
you name it
from here in holland
holland of course
what caught my eye
annette
was the hair
most people round here
don't have such dark hair
so we thought tourists
spain portugal
that direction
that could explain the wetsuit
the water's warmer there

TOURISM OFFICER

we've observed that the netherlands
continues to grow in popularity
as a tourist destination
the largest numbers of tourists come from germany
great britain
belgium
and the united states of america
but recently we've observed a sharp rise
in southern european visitors
spain portugal and italy
have discovered the netherlands
and especially
the dutch coast

now of course
this hasn't just come out of nowhere
for a number of years now
we've been investing in training programs
so we can now offer
professional instruction
so say for example you'd like to learn to sail
this place is a paradise
and we have so much more to offer
like our Frisian islands
and some top international museums
a few real gems believe me
and completely aside from that
when we ask
people tell us
that our image as a tolerant country
in other words our laws on
drug use
prostitution
and homosexuality
are the decisive factor
for certain demographics
to choose the netherlands for their getaway

SCIENTIST

well
here's how it works
you're recording now right?
a body in open water can drift
a long long way
first the body sinks
then it starts to decompose
gas builds up
and it rises again
and once it's on the surface
all sorts of factors come into play
wind
the currents
nearby vessels
now
here in the north sea

as a general rule
a deceased individual would tend to move
in a northwesterly direction
now of course
all i can tell you is
how bodies move
i can't begin to tell you
what moves people
who dies at sea
or who goes to sea
to die

LIFEGUARD

more and more people do it
drinking and diving
like drinking and driving
and just as dangerous
especially in weather like this
you don't feel the cold
and of course
you think you're up to it
Dutch courage
you know that expression?
"i'll just swim out to that island there"
"i'll just swim down to the ocean floor"
and before you know it
you're on a one-way dive
a lot of times
i pull people out of the water
with hypothermia
and i can't even tell
if they're talking that way
because their teeth are chattering
or because they've been drinking
and they stumble around
so we wrap them up
in a shiny blanket
and tell them to keep the blanket on
keep moving
if they can
you don't really want to have to

pull anyone out of the water
what you'd really like
is for everyone
to make it to shore on their own
grab a towel
dry themselves off
and if they're in no condition
what I mean is
there must have been people
who could have told them not to
who could have stopped them
who could have said
bad idea
don't do it
too cold
too deep
too far
yes it looks so close
but you'll never make it

ANOTHER SALESPERSON

oh
no
i uh
i'm not supposed to
no

POLICE OFFICER

no fingerprints
no papers
no signs of past injuries
the teeth were useless
that wetsuit was all we had
nothing else
so we retraced our steps
and then suddenly
annette
suddenly we couldn't help thinking
about one of those logos
on the wetsuit
a square with little squiggles on the top

like a wifi symbol

CORPORATE SPOKESPERSON

ever since the roll-out earlier this year
eighty-five percent of our products
have been equipped with an rfid tag
this is how our company
is staying at the forefront
of digital evolution
these chips will facilitate distribution
with what we call a shower scan
we can check the whole warehouse inventory
in minutes
and unlike
the previous generation of anti-theft chips
these rfid tags don't have to be removed
so our customers can enjoy
a speedier check-out

responding to a question

yes?
the tag never has to be deactivated
as soon as the system has registered your item
as sold
you can walk straight out the door with it
no one will stop you
the tag requires no electrical supply or batteries
so we can assure concerned customers
that it's washing machine safe
yes that's right
but we don't see any cause for concern
about customer privacy
i'm afraid i'm unable
to go into technical details
i don't think it's helpful for anyone
to be speculating about hypotheticals
and furthermore i can't speak for other companies
but on behalf of our company i can tell you
that our security gates do not read tags at this time
at this time
as i said before i cannot respond
to technical or hypothetical questions

our company has no plans
to track our customers' locations

HACKER

blur out my face
ok?
no face
a give me like a distorted voice
ok?
no seriously
ok?
cause i know how that shit goes down
ok
ready?
action!
so
when the police came to me
wifi
the guy called it
well i knew i could hack it
those chips are everywhere these days
in your bank card
your id
your dvds
so there's one in that wetsuit
ok?
in the label
as soon as i saw it
i knew i could read it
where and when it was sold
the serial number
and
best of all
if there was a credit card number
on the receipt
i could see who had bought it

YET ANOTHER SALESPERSON

what day of the week?
oh
then it must have been nadine

yeah no i do work tuesdays
but i'm usually over by the bicycles
she does the register
but it could be
maybe she said something about it

POLICE OFFICER

tuesday the thirteenth of october
the branch had just opened
and someone went to the register
with a tribord subsea five millimeter
wetsuit
medium
he also bought hand paddles
a snorkel
a diving mask
swimfins
water socks
and a waterproof A4 document holder
paid cash
no video
no witnesses
in a decathlon in calais

BRANCH MANAGER

excuse me
could i ask you not
to ask my employees any more questions
that's right
no all the security footage has been erased
i'm not just saying that to you
i also had to say it to the police
after a week the recording
is wiped automatically
we had no way of knowing
that anything special had happened that day
i can't answer that
no
i can't—
i can refer you to our spokesperson

CORPORATE SPOKESPERSON

we see no need
for either the company name
or that of the brand in question
to be made public
the name of the place where the product was sold
adds nothing to your story
so it's really no use to you
whereas
being associated with this event
would put our company in a bad light
and we've done nothing to deserve that
yes i'm aware
i'm aware of that
but it's a question of perception
if our customers associate our products
or our shopping experience
with that kind of person
it's bound to have an impact
on sales
we offered our fullest cooperation
to the police
but we're under no obligation
to offer you anything
it's not that we don't want to help
we just don't really see the point
when the case has been solved
oh yes it has
the police have stopped investigating
so the case is closed

POLICE OFFICER

now the funny thing was
annette
was that that receipt
was for two of everything
i could account for one wetsuit
because we had it in storage
but just when we started to think
we'd cracked the whole thing
not only did we have a missing person on our hands

but also a missing wetsuit
so when we saw the alert from norway
we sent the other serial number
from the receipt
and bingo
then we pooled our information
no dna match
either here or in norway
and that store in calais
it's near the jungle
that camp they have there
so we started to think
about refugees
annette
that maybe that camp had something to do with it
but they don't talk to the police
and how can you be a missing person
when officially you're not even here?

CORPORATE SPOKESPERSON

look annette
just between you and me
no one wants to have anything to do
with illegal immigrants
and if we start to look like immigrant lovers
handing out diving suits boats submarines
god knows what else
to those poor bastards
then here's what happens
one
our own little wave of refugees
right here in the store
and two
no more real customers ever again
there's not a company in the world
would want to be associated with that
donate a bunch of crocs to orphans
no problem
buy a backpack
and we plant a tree somewhere
heartwarming right?

soft drinks for kids in Africa
whatever
but you don't do a PR stunt
in a prison
refugees aren't sexy
didn't anyone tell you that
before you started poking your nose around?
this story of yours
who wants to hear it?
if you really can't leave it alone
then make sure you hook them
before you tell them
what it's really about
cause no one wants to know
so tell them it's a murder mystery or something

CUSTOMS OFFICER

my little booth
i work for customs here in calais
walls covered with posters of missing people
so that we can all keep an eye out
all white
caucasian
whatever
every one of them
hits me every time
you got a few thousand people there
refugees
and a lot of them just disappear
lots of missing kids
it's a real problem
and then the posters here
all white
or caucasian
whatever
anyway
never reported missing
that's what our friends down at the station tell us
and I'm sure they're right
because who would ever report them?
and maybe for those people there

a disappearance is good news
cause it means you made it
you're in england
or something

NADINE

you have to understand
they cause trouble sometimes
those—
that kind of people
coming in here
no money
helping themselves to the merchandise
think about it
after a while
it's more than enough
to make anyone a racist
but now that they know
that we call the police here
and stealing means handcuffs
and handcuffs means bye bye france
our lives are a whole lot easier
some stick around because
it's warm here
i think
nothing wrong with that of course
except we notice that other people
are scared to come in
i swear
with all those sketchy types around
it's sad really
how little we sell these days
mostly professional diving equipment
the regular customers keep coming back
it's the tourists who keep their distance
and that's where the money is
couple of chocolate bars at the counter
a ball
a kid who wants rackets for beach tennis
and keeps whining until he gets them
we hardly see them here anymore

and even the kids
—and don't tell me it's all our in our heads—
even the kids keep quiet
and don't ask for candy anymore
when they see those men hanging around
they cling to their parents' legs
and they're out of here in no time
sometimes even before their parents
it's psychology right?
the tourists see those people
and they feel for their wallets
—not saying anything bad
that's just how it is—
and they don't want to buy anything
"have to watch out for my money"
that's in their heads
that's psychology
they think those men...
but then they think
the same thing goes for us
"keep a close eye on your money"
if we made it our slogan
a big sign over the entrance
it would have just the same effect
as those men
but what I'm trying to say is
yes i remember
that two of those men came in
to buy stuff
two hundred and sixty euros worth
they paid for it
cash in hand
where'd they get it?
don't ask
you run it through the scanner
you check if it's real
and you say
thanks for shopping with us merci
merci
they know what that means
then they leave

au revoir
they don't know that one

POLICE OFFICER

keep looking?
what do you mean?
the case was closed
it was a refugee
yeah sure
but we could keep looking
the rest of our lives
if we had to look into
every dead refugee
no time for any other cases
no one there has papers
no one wants to talk to us
and after all
it's obvious what happened
ms nilsen
you try looking for one refugee
among seven thousand

3. ON THE SCENE

france

refugee
interpreter

we generally hear the characters as they hear themselves, speaking fluently and without accents beyond those of the actors

the characters often address the audience, narrating events in different parts of the camp
when two or three characters are in the same place, interacting, there is no space on the page between their lines

morning

REFUGEE

i am mouaz
i am a man
i am a refugee
i want to go to london
and i am stuck in calais

INTERPRETER

i am youssef
also a man
once a refugee
i now live in london
but i used to be stuck in calais

AID WORKER

i am luc
not a refugee
i was born in calais
i live in calais
and i plan to stick around

INTERPRETER

why have i come back here?

REFUGEE

it's morning

AID WORKER

early

INTERPRETER

far too early
i step off the ferry
the man next to me
whose cap says kentucky
asks me "where you from?"
at first I'm not sure
if i should say london
london or syria
what do you mean exactly?
he's as mixed up as I am
we stutter
and stammer

REFUGEE

i wake up to a voice shouting

INTERPRETER
nice warm sun here

AID WORKER
there's no a/c
in my white toyota

REFUGEE
i get on my feet
or try to

AID WORKER
i get out
oof this heat
say hi to the volunteers
we shake hands
sticky
isn't there a window we can open?
fluorescent light on a summer day
dusty old supplies
didn't we have a fan here?
we open the hatch
and load up the car

REFUGEE
i can't move my foot

AID WORKER
sheets

REFUGEE
why can't I move my foot

AID WORKER
tarps

REFUGEE
I push myself upright

AID WORKER
water

and canned food

REFUGEE

test my foot

AID WORKER

and i drive on

REFUGEE

wouldn't say it's sleeping
i'm limping
it's throbbing

INTERPRETER

the fence is higher now
i walk to the parking lot

AID WORKER

stuck in traffic
I hit the brakes
check my messages
six hundred re-shares
six hundred people shared my post
i smile
i'm glad
to see people still get angry
still care about something

REFUGEE

what happened yesterday?
the dark
the lights
the doors
the doors swung open
shoving and shouting
"out of there you
get out of there"
batons
the hood of a car
did I run for it?
yes, and then

pepper spray
that's why my eyes
are crusted over
dried-up tears
how did I end up back here?

INTERPRETER

how would she dress
a journalist?
i see someone waving
could it be her?
i give it a try
hi
i'm youssef
your interpreter for today?
she nods
"annette nilsen"
and holds out her hand
"you know your way around here?"

AID WORKER

this is the city
that people pass through

REFUGEE

where everybody stops

INTERPRETER

but no one stays

REFUGEE

a lot of us get stuck

INTERPRETER

where boats and trains
and cars and trucks
go back and forth
from there to here
and here to there

REFUGEE

crossing the channel
without a care

INTERPRETER

where the fences keep growing

REFUGEE

they're fifteen feet high now
i'm just five foot eleven
maybe six if I stand on my toes
they stretch on and on
more than seven miles long

AID WORKER

where they spend more
on guards and fences
than on food and shelter
where I do what I can
and don't know if it helps

INTERPRETER

where sensors
look straight through plastic sheeting
straight through clothes
and find the warm hearts beating

REFUGEE

so they pull us over
open the doors
and it's out of the truck for us
back to the camp

INTERPRETER

why have i come back here?

AID WORKER

passport check
they pull me aside again
"papers"
i show them

they let the other cars drive on
they hold my photo
up to the light
"is that your real name?"

INTERPRETER

why have i come back here?
i remember clinging
to the bottom of a moving truck
all my muscles cramped
bound for death or the far side
and here I am again
because somebody asked me

AID WORKER

"where'd you get that car?"

INTERPRETER

did i want to interpret for a journalist
did i want to help her find out who he was
the wetsuitman
"you'll be paid"

AID WORKER

"luc
that's your real name
luc?"

INTERPRETER

we walk into the camp
annette pulls out her camera
and takes a quick photo
bad idea
should i warn her
or just translate?

AID WORKER

i work in the camp
i'm bringing supplies
water
it's hot and sticky

i show them my badge
they say to each other
“does that look like a luc to you?”
“is that your real name?”

INTERPRETER

winding our way between the tents
me here with a white woman
how does this look to them?

AID WORKER

i know
i don’t look french
mais luc
c’est mon nom
et j’aime bien le vin

INTERPRETER

this place is bigger than ever
and more crowded than ever

AID WORKER

they laugh
“go ahead
drive on
sorry bout that”

INTERPRETER

i ask everyone the same question
annette shows them a photo
well, actually
a sketch
she says
they need to know that
not a photo
a sketch
the idea of a person
amazing
what those experts can do
you give them a skull
they give him a face

the wetsuitman
that's what he looked like
i nod and translate
have you seen him?

REFUGEE

i see a man in a safety vest
sir
excuse me sir

AID WORKER

someone's calling me
he's limping

INTERPRETER

have you seen him?

REFUGEE

i go up to him
he's an arab
one of us
i say to him
my foot
look at my foot
it's throbbing
they hit me
and I twisted it

INTERPRETER

have any of you
seen him?

REFUGEE

help me fix my foot
i have to get out of here
tonight I have to

AID WORKER

"I don't speak arabic"
are the only words of arabic
I know
he looks confused
then switches

to a kind of english

REFUGEE

look at my foot

INTERPRETER

did you ever hear about a man
who tried to swim across?

REFUGEE

he wraps my foot in gauze
it should be tighter
firm around the ankle

AID WORKER

he takes over

REFUGEE

doctor

AID WORKER

i don't know who he means
him or me
you're a doctor?

REFUGEE

a nurse
but i don't know how to say that
so i nod
doctor yes doctor
but my foot
will my foot be ok?

AID WORKER

he's speaking arabic again

REFUGEE

can I walk tonight?
run
if i have to?
jump
if i can't reach high enough?
can I land without shouting in pain?
can I slip away?

AID WORKER

sorry i don't know what you're saying

REFUGEE

with this foot

can I go
to the land of paddington?

AID WORKER

peddipong?

REFUGEE

paddington
rowr!

he imitates a bear

AID WORKER

oh paddington
right

REFUGEE

i go there?

AID WORKER

paddington bear yes

REFUGEE

thank you
thank you very much

AID WORKER

he kisses my hand
searches his pocket
shows me a photo

REFUGEE

my daughter
she can talk now
three years old
here she's just a baby

the aid worker searches his pockets
and produces another photo

AID WORKER

my baby girl
look
the same age

afternoon

INTERPRETER

it's afternoon
a beautiful sunny day

AID WORKER

sweltering

REFUGEE

dust and sweat

INTERPRETER

i see someone in a safety vest
one of the aid workers
maybe he knows something
they've been here longer
they're the ones who stay
i go up to him
his face looks familiar
was he here before
when i was stuck here?
annette catches up to me
and pulls out her press card
"may i ask you something?"

AID WORKER

talk to them
not to me

INTERPRETER

i show him the sketch
it's me
youssef
any chance you've seen—

AID WORKER

is it my uniform?
a safety vest
so I must be safe to talk to?

INTERPRETER

i don't understand
it's me
youssef

AID WORKER

about himself

"at least this one has a job"

INTERPRETER

nothing for me to translate

i wave the sketch at him
annette's as bewildered as I am

AID WORKER

i take the videos here
that she should be taking
and you
her little helper
her walking excuse

INTERPRETER

i try to calm him down
with a few words of arabic

AID WORKER

oh great that again

REFUGEE

i know sweetheart
you'll see daddy soon
daddy—
soon—
first i'm going to england
then you can come too

AID WORKER

what do i know
i just hand out blankets

REFUGEE

yes i miss you too

AID WORKER

patch up injured feet

REFUGEE

what?

AID WORKER

offer advice
and a listening ear

REFUGEE

sweetheart?

AID WORKER

but every night i go home to my own bed

REFUGEE

you're breaking up
sweetheart
I'm losing you

AID WORKER

to my own daughter
to my own house

REFUGEE

fuck
fuck
this fucking connection
no no not you
there you are again sweetheart
could i talk to grandma?
no no story today
phone calls cost money
grandma
give me grandma
later
when you're here with me
there'll be stories
about england
about driving on the left
about paddington bear
because he's here at the camp
on a poster
a brown bear
with a red hat
and a blue jacket
and a suitcase in his paw
and he says "migration is not a crime"
that means it's not naughty
to look for a new place to live
and he knows all the questions
they might ask

if I
when I get to england
they printed them out
and hung them up for us
under his paws
if I
when I get there
it'll be because paddington bear helped daddy
now can I speak to grandma?
yeah
thank you, sweetheart

INTERPRETER

i spent a long time this morning
thinking about what to wear
it's dirty over there
you get dirty over there
i have to show them i'm one of them
that they can trust me
i have to show them i'm not one of them anymore
that you can get out of this place
so i shaved
dash of cologne
now here I am
in a filthy stall
dabbing my chin with wet toilet paper
to get rid of that musky odor
pulling off my shirt
wadding it up
and putting it back on
rolling up my sleeves
leaving half my buttons undone
my belt in my bag
behold: a rumpled man
with mussed-up hair
have you seen him?

the interpreter shows the refugee the sketch

INTERPRETER

to the audience

annette takes a picture

REFUGEE

no camera

INTERPRETER

he covers his face with his hands
annette freezes
she thrusts the camera
back in the bag
and shouts
"no camera"
her hands in the air

REFUGEE

no camera

INTERPRETER

they shout back and forth
a few times
"no camera"

REFUGEE

i move on
limp away
no police today

INTERPRETER

no no police

REFUGEE

not that on top of everything
not now

INTERPRETER

she's a journalist

REFUGEE

i stop
shouldn't walk now
have to rest my foot
for tonight
the white woman with him
nods
and asks questions
he translates

INTERPRETER

does he look familiar?

REFUGEE

for the first time
I take a good look at the photo

INTERPRETER
sketch
REFUGEE
studies it for a while
hazara
INTERPRETER
annette nods
she's excited
it sounds like a name
REFUGEE
he looks like a hazara
INTERPRETER
it's not a name
it's a people
REFUGEE
those eyes
that nose
INTERPRETER
afghans descended from the mongols
REFUGEE
why not ask the hazaras
INTERPRETER
are the afghans still along the roadside?
REFUGEE
you two have been here before?
INTERPRETER
i was stuck here for a while
REFUGEE
and now...
again?
INTERPRETER
oh no
i live in england now
the refugee smiles
and shakes his hand
REFUGEE
mouaz
INTERPRETER
youssef
REFUGEE
that's a really nice shirt

AID WORKER

ghettos
in this place
what does that say about people?
when even here
in a camp
that nobody planned
each group has its separate
patch of land

the interpreter points

INTERPRETER

sudan
nigeria
and over there's iraq

REFUGEE

iran
you were close

INTERPRETER

everything is so different now
so much bigger

REFUGEE

we'll pass iraq later
you don't want to stop there
does she follow you everywhere?

INTERPRETER

or the other way around
i don't know
i'm here to translate

REFUGEE

i used to have a little white cat myself

the refugee laughs

the interpreter laughs half-heartedly

INTERPRETER

that church there is new

REFUGEE

we built it ourselves
are you staying till sunday?
we sing on sundays
are you a good singer?

INTERPRETER

i've already lost track of where we are

REFUGEE

near the toilets
we started over there

INTERPRETER

so over there by the flag
is where you eat?
do they still serve meals?

REFUGEE

just one
at five pm
if you want more
you can get it
in afghanistan

INTERPRETER

that's where the market is

REFUGEE

that's where the market is

INTERPRETER

what are those fences for?
they were just starting to put them up
when I left

REFUGEE

that's where they stick the women and children
we can't go there
are you spending the night here?

INTERPRETER

looks like these days
the night club is in eritrea

REFUGEE

and you
where do you come from?

AID WORKER

i'm an aid worker
i'm french
i studied law
i'm a man
i'm a father
and yes

i have dark skin
my grandparents
came to this country long ago
and even now
the first question is never
who i am
or what i do
but always
where i come from
so i feel brown
i'm supposed to be lebanese
never been to lebanon

REFUGEE

turn left here
cigarettes?
you want cigarettes?
you can buy cigarettes here
welcome to afghanistan

INTERPRETER

to the audience

now he's asking for my number

AID WORKER

parallel monologue, not in the same place as the interpreter

i give out my number sometimes

INTERPRETER

i'm not sure

AID WORKER

so sometimes they let me know
how it's going in england

INTERPRETER

i give it to him

AID WORKER

and then they ask me
to say hi to *so and so*
have i heard from *such and such*

can i tell them where to find—

INTERPRETER
there he goes

AID WORKER
better not to get started
so many names

INTERPRETER
bye mouaz

AID WORKER
so many faces

REFUGEE
bye youssef

INTERPRETER
so we look around
and ask around

AID WORKER
there you sit
on your birthday
and you've just unwrapped
just that very minute
your new mobile
when a message comes in
it's mahmoud
in england
"haven't heard from my nephew recently
something wrong with his phone?
i'll send money for a new one"
funny coincidence
you say to yourself
and you laugh and think
if i find my old phone
i'll give it to his nephew
but the whole thing slips your mind
till the uncle

mahmoud
his name was
sends another text
"still no news?"
so you tell him you'll keep looking
and he keeps texting
and you think to yourself
you should stop giving out
your number all the time

INTERPRETER

"would you like some tea?"
some hazaras take us
to a tent where tea is served
i'm her smuggler
her ticket inside
they speak pashto
one says he speaks english
"little bit"
turns out to be
a very little bit
"i've been stuck here longest
and never heard anything
about wetsuits or swimming"
they pass around the sketch
"so sad no one knows who he was
but that's how it goes
no one cares
about some dead immigrant"

night

REFUGEE

the sun is going down

INTERPRETER

we hurry back to the ferry
annette at my side
she's quiet
we never got any closer
than "hazara"

REFUGEE

i'm searching
my bags
looking for black things to wear

INTERPRETER

i'm going back to england
where i'll always be the foreigner
they cross the street
so their paths won't cross mine

REFUGEE

all around me
a whole jungle dressed in black

INTERPRETER

why am I here?
why am I there?

REFUGEE

we stand for a moment
spread out

INTERPRETER

i carried my mother
my handicapped mother
across the desert on my back
my children behind me
the youngest in a sling on my belly
one and a half
was his age when we got to england
one and a half
and now he's going on six

REFUGEE

the last light from our mobiles

INTERPRETER

they shout the same things at him

REFUGEE

see you on the other side

INTERPRETER

go back to your own country

REFUGEE

then we have to leave
we put the phones away

INTERPRETER

you want us to go back?

REFUGEE

we start walking

INTERPRETER

you want them to go back
to some strange country
they hardly know a thing about
except what they've seen on the news?

REFUGEE

no one says a word

INTERPRETER

the images of war
people dying
people blowing themselves up
women can't go to school

REFUGEE

in a large procession
like mourners
we leave the camp

INTERPRETER

the only thing they know about it
is why we left

REFUGEE

we break up
into small groups

INTERPRETER

because I found my eldest daughter
twelve years old
in a well
violated
shot dead
by our country's soldiers
that's the country
you want us to go back to?

REFUGEE

we walk through the darkness
keeping away from the road

INTERPRETER

and yes
lots more men than women here

REFUGEE

have to watch the foot

INTERPRETER

if i hadn't left
i'd be in the same army now
that raped my daughter

REFUGEE

not bang it into anything

INTERPRETER

i'd have to kill civilians too
so I'm a deserter?

REFUGEE

i have to get out of here

INTERPRETER

i left
so i wouldn't have to fight
wouldn't have to be cruel
and now all of a sudden
i'm a terrorist
they shout it straight in my face
right in front of my children
"terrorist"

AID WORKER

police at my doorstep
what's wrong?
they say my name
what's wrong?
"get out of the car"
they say
"c'mon move"
so I do
and I tell them
I don't have much time
I have to pick up my daughter –
is my daughter okay?
but they're already turning me around
putting on the handcuffs
what's going on here?
have I done something wrong?

INTERPRETER

a decathlon ad is playing
while we wait for the ferry
i take my phone out of my pocket
and turn it back on
mouaz has been texting me
the whole time
what questions did they ask
when i made it
across the water?
was i in a truck?
could you take the train
in those days?

the messages just keep coming
it's bleeping again

REFUGEE

maybe your journalist could do something with this?

INTERPRETER

there's a link to a facebook group
where they keep in touch with family members
who've already made it to england
annette's already on her way home
should i follow up on this?
another bleep
his last one

REFUGEE

see you on the other side!

INTERPRETER

and then nothing

REFUGEE

we're in a group
four or five of us
most of us have tried this
many times before
night after night
the procession
through the dark

AID WORKER

they play the video
and glare at me
as if I've done something wrong
while I watch
the things they do
see them hitting
see them kicking
and then
right here
see them dragging

one onto the hood
and then the way they laugh
i don't get it
what did i do?

REFUGEE

there's the parking lot
a truck pulls up
look
someone gets out in front
his jeans already half open
he heads for the bushes
someone gives the signal
we run for it
the truck opens up
and we crawl inside
now the curtain is closed
his fly's zipped up again

AID WORKER

"you can't just go filming the police like that sir"
what do you mean just go filming?
the woman beside him
wears a business suit
instead of a baton.
"at seventy-two seconds
you hear one of us
ask you to stop filming
yet you kept filming
that's a violation of privacy"
it was a public road
"you're not a journalist"
i'm a citizen
a concerned citizen
"a citizen must always obtain consent
prior to making
audio or video recordings
and must obtain consent once again
before sharing the material
did you obtain consent?"

INTERPRETER

i click on the link
and ask to become a member
a moment later i'm accepted
i post a message to the group
"does anyone know who this is?"
then all the facts
the sketch
the story of the wetsuit
the date of purchase
thirteenth of october
and the disappearance afterwards

REFUGEE

we're stopping
we're hoping
please no inspection
give us a chance
we're burrowing
deeper and deeper
behind the boxes
voices outside
footsteps in back
a tube sticks through the curtain
those tubes can see carbon dioxide
so hold your breath
and don't get too warm

AID WORKER

they have me log in
on their laptop
to "delete the video at once"
lots of people have shared it
all those groups
there's a message on my timeline
that photo
or sketch
or whatever it is
the wetsuitman
it's from that interpreter

INTERPRETER

youssef

AID WORKER

i recognize his profile photo

INTERPRETER

it's me
youssef

AID WORKER

and i see the date
thirteenth of october
"sir"
that's my birthday
the day i got the phone
the day mahmoud asked me
if i'd heard from his nephew
"sir"
i look at the sketch
he looks just like mahmoud
a dead ringer
"sir
delete the video now sir"
i click
and it's gone

REFUGEE

we drive on
how is it possible?
we drive on

INTERPRETER

i get in line
passport control

REFUGEE

they didn't even open the rear doors

INTERPRETER

i see heads turning

people frowning and then
they pretend they weren't looking

REFUGEE
are we past the police?
INTERPRETER
will they stop him?
is he allowed to board?
he looks suspicious

REFUGEE
first the french

INTERPRETER
votre papiers

REFUGEE
then the british

INTERPRETER
papers please, sir

REFUGEE
and then those scanners

INTERPRETER
i nod at the staring faces
they turn away fast

REFUGEE
another stop
we hide again
someone opens the curtain
takes out a box
cuts it open
or that's how it sounds
don't look
don't say a word
most of all don't move

AID WORKER

i step outside
have to turn my phone back on
my code
her date
the day the month the year
and she was born
i call

REFUGEE

a walkie-talkie makes a noise

AID WORKER

is she still there
can you put her on?

REFUGEE

an englishman sighs
curses
and leaves us alone

AID WORKER

i'll be right there

REFUGEE

the curtain is closed again
we're huddled together
where no eyes can find us
holding our breath for the scanners
but they can see you
through iron walls
through plastic sheets

AID WORKER

my daughter
my arms

REFUGEE

we've stopped again

AID WORKER

and sorry
really sorry

INTERPRETER

i join the crowd
on the gangplank
below us trucks roll by
once i was down there
cramped and desperate
the ferry a parking lot the tunnel
i tried everything

REFUGEE

nothing happens
then we're on the move
slow and bumpy
going inside somewhere
the floor is moving

INTERPRETER

i get on the boat

REFUGEE

are we boarding the ferry?

AID WORKER

home at last
my daughter's in bed
my phone is bleeping
almost out of juice
back to facebook anyway
there's that message again
that interpreter and the wetsuitman
staring out from my timeline

REFUGEE

the cabin door opens
and falls shut again
lots of voices around us
murmuring

making phone calls
and then it's quiet

INTERPRETER

the sea stretches out ahead
the crowd stretches out on deck
people from cars
school groups from buses
men dressed as nuns
and one as the pope
downing pints of beer
teenagers whooping
and throwing bottles

AID WORKER

i make an international call
mahmoud
it's been a long time
fine fine
i have a question
your cousin who was here
do you have a photo of him?

REFUGEE

the gate closing
faint honking

AID WORKER

mahmoud sends a photo
could be him
i text:
was he a good swimmer?
instant reply
a screenshot
messages
in arabic
a mystery to me
i click on youssef's profile
and send it on
with my number at the bottom

INTERPRETER

a bleep
a message

AID WORKER

i think i have a lead
can you translate this?

INTERPRETER

i open the screenshot
“hey mahmoud
just got to calais
i can see england
it doesn’t look far
maybe i should swim for it?”
the reply is a smiley
“i mean it”
then mahmoud
“bad idea
don’t do it
it’s too cold
it’s too deep
it’s too far
i know it looks so close
but you’ll never make it”
“i’ll try today”
and then nothing else
questions without answers
and again and again
“this message could not be delivered”

REFUGEE

we’re on our way

INTERPRETER

i call

AID WORKER

i pick up

INTERPRETER
and tell him the translation

REFUGEE
we made it

INTERPRETER
ask him
who sent that
who is the wetsuitman

4. THE MEETING
syria

mother
brother
father

MOTHER
when you called
it was the first time
we'd heard anything
we couldn't usually reach him
from here in yarmouk
and ever since october thirteenth
whenever we call
we always hear that same song
even now
if we call
I'll call him
ahmed!
ahmed!

BROTHER
yeah

MOTHER
it's the journalist
she wants us to call
call neimat

BROTHER
what?
why—

MOTHER
for the voicemail

can't you call neimat?
this lady's asking us to call neimat

BROTHER

i'm calling now

MOTHER

put it on speaker

a song plays

his voice mail

they listen

that's my husband
he sings at weddings
such a beautiful voice

FATHER

yeah right

MOTHER

no really

FATHER

hmph

MOTHER

it's his job

MOTHER

it is
he was a good boy
always wanting to be friends with everyone
imagine that in this country
where everyone is fighting everyone else
looking for reasons
to bash each others brains in
there are shias here
sunnis
christians jews alawis
and they all loved god
and they all loved him
that's how he was
you saw him
and you wanted the best for him
you could never be angry at him
any argument
he'd put himself in the middle
so many times i told him not to

sometimes on the street
when two people
went at each other
like they do
he would put himself in the middle
yeah
but his brother's no different

BROTHER

what?

MOTHER

you can't stand injustice
i'm telling the lady
you won't stand for it
and a real sense of responsibility
neimat i mean
as a student for instance
even when all his friends
started leaving the country
he stayed
he wanted to earn his degree
he was studying to be an industrial engineer
electromechanics
at the university here

BROTHER

he was constantly being stopped
by the police
or anyway
by assad's troops
rebel or student
we all look the same to them
they arrested him once

MOTHER

and he was such a good boy

BROTHER

took him down to the station
"to confirm his identity"
hard to put yourself in the middle
when you're the one
taking the beating

MOTHER

now make no mistake

he could take care of himself
but that was a dangerous road
neimat couldn't go on with his studies here
so he went to jordan
the university of jordan
that was the plan
but they have no eye for talent there
or they were too full
i don't know
so he tried turkey
but couldn't enroll there either

BROTHER

we welcome refugees with open arms
says the university there
we've reserved so many places
just for them
it's the other way round
only so many refugees allowed
turkish students?
sure, no limit
and they count the refugees on their fingers
and then it's full

MOTHER

they do their best
we all do our best

BROTHER

we didn't hear much from him

MOTHER

i blame us
he got in touch as often as he could
but our reception is not so

BROTHER

i don't blame us
i blame our own country's army
which has us under siege

FATHER

shhhh

BROTHER

which shot my knees to pieces

MOTHER

he was such a fast runner

BROTHER

which is starving this city
and then stops us from even
calling for help
no communications
we have no idea
how often he tried to call us
but if you call
no connection
leave a message
no response

MOTHER

we always tried to call him back

BROTHER

you can see why you might get discouraged

MOTHER

the last time we heard from him
he called us
you talked to him
didn't you darling?

FATHER

it was all too much

BROTHER

he was living on the street

MOTHER

always cheerful
and then suddenly
it's all too much

FATHER

it's all too much

BROTHER

he couldn't pay the travel agents

MOTHER

he was somewhere in france
"i'm in the land of the eiffel tower"
that's the text he sent
he sent us that
i wrote back to him

FATHER

it's all too much

MOTHER

he wanted to buy a wetsuit
and swim to someplace
so we scrimped and saved
went around to the family
and there was another wedding

BROTHER

people still get married
can you believe it

MOTHER

so beautiful to see
i was invited along
and when he's on stage
my husband
it's a real celebration
i married a firework display
and you sang that song
the one
that's on his voicemail
sing it again
he has such a beautiful voice

the father is silent

but we had a lovely evening
and we raised some money
and ahmed figured out
how to send that money
to him

BROTHER

that sounds more straightforward
than it is
when you live here

MOTHER

the sixth of october was the wedding
the seventh of october he had the money

FATHER

he was a good swimmer
always used to go swimming

silence

until the swimming pool

silence

things get smashed up
in the end
it all gets smashed

FATHER

i was the the one
who asked him to leave

MOTHER

he had talent
you always said

FATHER

someplace where he could find a job

MOTHER

two peas in a pod those two
when i fell in love with him
he looked just like neimat
but such different talents
neimat couldn't sing

BROER

metal

MOTHER

that's not singing

BROTHER

he had a band

MOTHER

like your father always says
that's not singing

BROTHER

he was the singer
in a metal band

MOTHER

but his real talent
lay in his hands

BROTHER

the sniper slumpark correctional

MOTHER

he had a garage here
where he worked as a student
he tinkered with cars

he was good at that
popular garage
always friendly too
and then the war came
and lots of things got smashed
including cars
but still he had to go

BROTHER

you try getting by
as an auto mechanic
in a city under siege
where no one can drive in or out
where they've cut off the fuel supply
there's no money here
no jobs here

MOTHER

but we're here

BROTHER

my father was right
you want your child to have a future

FATHER

and now he's dead

MOTHER

you couldn't have known

BROTHER

we hadn't heard from my brother
for a week
a whole week
and even mahmoud
our uncle in england
had no news

MOTHER

they were normally in touch every day

BROTHER

good reception in england

MOTHER

you just don't know what might have happened

BROTHER

we thought he'd been mugged

MOTHER

"no need to worry about me"
that's what he always said
when I asked him if he was keeping warm
if he had enough to eat
"no need to worry"

BROTHER

or maybe his stuff had been stolen
or he'd been beaten up
and was in the hospital

MOTHER

he had money all of a sudden
maybe they noticed

BROTHER

near the university
there's always good reception
we went over there
to call our uncle

MOTHER

to tell him not to worry
but maybe he could go to france
ask around at hospitals

BROTHER

our uncle thought neimat had been arrested
and that was why he couldn't call us
"i'll ask the police"
so he went over
we should tell you
our uncle's a big guy
beard
looks like dad
right?
him and you and neimat
they're like triplets

MOTHER

you take more after me

BROTHER

so he gets there
walks in through the front door
"where's my nephew?"

MOTHER

"we can't help you"
he's a good storyteller
our uncle
"this police officer
he has a mustache
and a kind of a club in his hand
just the club in his hand
not the mustache"

BROTHER

that's what he said

MOTHER

good storyteller
"may I see your papers?"

BROTHER

"of course of course"

MOTHER

"what was his name?"

BROTHER

"neimat"

silence

MOTHER

"that name's not in our system
did he apply for asylum here?"

BROTHER

"he was waiting to apply in england"

MOTHER

"if he's not in our system
he wasn't here
so he can't be missing
so we can't help you"

BROTHER

right
that's when he said
"we can't help you"

MOTHER

right
so he
mahmoud
such a dear sweet man
brings a photo of neimat

to calais
to the jungle

BROTHER

"has anyone seen this man?"

MOTHER

no luck at the hospitals

BROTHER

not even at the morgue

MOTHER

that dear sweet man

BROTHER

"has anyone seen him?"

MOTHER

he never gives up
we're all like that
we're not giver-uppers
are we, darling?
not him
not you
and not neimat
with your smashed-up knee
you just keep on going don't you

BROTHER

i just keep on going
don't have to join the army now
can't run away

MOTHER

i called mahmoud every day
to find out if there was any news
when i had no reception
i went to the university
along the same road
neimat used to take

BROTHER

i told you not to

MOTHER

he wound up in libya at first
and traveled on from there

BROTHER

it's dangerous there
people get bought and sold

like mopeds

MOTHER

he found a job in a print shop
not a university
not a garage
but at least they had machines
and his boss taught him how to dive
got him certified and everything
he always loved being in the water
when he went to italy
on the rubber boat
with the travel agents
it felt so good to know
that he knew how to swim
when he got to italy
he planned to open a garage
or become a diving instructor
or both
or an underwater welder
always full of plans

FATHER

i couldn't do a thing for him
and the one thing I did
was the death of him
i can just see myself there
singing
for a little cash
so he could swim

BROTHER

they say he met someone there
in france
another refugee
that was all the police knew
and all they wanted to know
they must have found each other
then they bought the equipment
without much money
or much idea
what they were doing

MOTHER

he was a good diver

BROTHER

how should he know
the water's too cold there
and those flippers don't help

MOTHER

he was an instructor

BROTHER

no
he wanted to be an instructor
just like he wanted to go to england
wanted to work
wanted to help us
a swimming certificate
and some diving lessons
that's the best he ever did

FATHER

ahmed

BROTHER

we sent him money
he bought diving gear
and he swam
not because he loved swimming
but because
he had no other choice

MOTHER

you don't know what to hope for
when you haven't heard from your son for such a long time
no news
is good news
you can only tell yourself that so many times
and at the same time you don't want to know
then along comes a journalist
with a story
and you send her your dna
to see if it's him
and meanwhile you keep hoping
"no
it's not him
he's still out there somewhere
without his phone

and he never learned
my number by heart
neimat and numbers"
naive
i know

BROTHER

it was morning
a scorching hot day
i had to walk halfway across the fucking city
on this fucking knee
to find food
when there's practically no food to be found
but practically nothing feels like a lot
now that the siege is over
no more trouble with the army
or a little less anyway
and food coming in again
a little more
hungry?
sure we're still hungry
but that's not how it feels now
when you've seen your neighbors eat grass
cactus leaves
and eventually
even the cats disappear
being hungry doesn't mean much
strange how fast you get used to things
shrinking portions
shrinking stomachs
so I'm wandering the streets
no cats
no air raid warnings
or maybe it's just
that they turned off the sound
the noise was so constant
that maybe they just stopped

MOTHER

i write children's books
we sit at home
my husband and i
and i read to him

what i wrote the day before
i can see from the look on his face
when my writing is working
he laughs at the least little thing
such a gorgeous generous smile
with those dimples of his
i fell in love with those dimples

silence

he's the best listener a person could ask for

BROTHER

i cut through the crowd
jostling for the packets
that the army hands out
they intercept the deliveries
they play the good guys for once
they negotiate
with other countries
we're the bargaining chips
"drop the sanctions
and they get fed"
and what do you know
they drop the sanctions
so i have food
i have meat
i got my hands on some meat
a leg of lamb

FATHER

mutton

MOTHER

sheep

BROTHER

it's been years since we had
sheep
like a feast
that's how it feels
to find some meat
in this day and age

MOTHER

it's the story of a bear
looking for a place
to sleep for the winter

he goes from one animal to the next
"can I stay with you"
squirrel's den
too small
rabbit's den
too full
white fox's den
too cold
porcupine is too prickly
and the mice are too tickly
they panic
and run all over him
when he rolls over in his sleep
so he wanders around
and the snow starts to fall
and there's no one to see him die
because the others are all fast asleep
in their own safe little hollows

BROTHER

strange how happy you can be
with what you used to take for granted
i run home
as fast as my smashed-up knee will carry me

MOTHER

you shouldn't run

BROTHER

she always says that
"you shouldn't run"

MOTHER

and my husband says
i need a happier ending
who wants a book that ends
with someone freezing to death
so we start talking
about all the animals
who see him shivering
and get together to dig a big hole for him
the sheep gives him a blanket
the glowworm a night light
and they read him a bedtime story
"the very same story

you're reading now"

BROTHER

then my phone rings
it's you
and you tell me it's him
neimat's dead
he got as far as norway
i'm standing outside our house
i can see my mother inside
reading to my father

MOTHER

i see him through the window
his phone in his hand
and what is that
part of a sheep?
i jump up
he has meat with him

FATHER

i jump up too

MOTHER

we rush to the window
and i see
that sheep's leg
fall
thud
into the dust
and i see his face
and i know
and i fall down too
and you're still standing
the only one still standing
ahmed comes inside
into my arms
and you're still standing
and you walk outside
and you pick up that piece of sheep

SELECTED READING

ARTICLES

– Salma Abdelaziz, CNN, "Our terrifying swim: Two Syrians' journey through dark waters to Greece"

– Rami Alhames. globalvoices.org, "Syria's Yarmouk Camp Between the Hammer of Hunger and the Anvil of Extremism"

– Rutger Bregman, *De Correspondent*, "Empathie is niet de oplossing, maar de oorzaak van onze grootste problemen" [Empathy is not the solution, but the cause of our biggest problems]

– Yves Delepeleire & Jef Poppelmonde, *De Standaard*, "UK? OK!"

– Anders Fjellberg, *Dagbladet*, "The Wetsuitman"

– Toine Heijmans, *de Volkskrant*, "Twintig jaar zoeken naar een naam bij een lichaam" [The twenty-year search for a name to go with a body]

– Isabel Hunter, *Daily Mail*, "Swimming to a new life: Incredible story of Syrian refugee who left his home in Damascus after it was bombed then swam for seven hours across the Aegean desperate for a safer future in Europe"

– Jan-Cor Jacobs, *Algemeen Dagblad*, "Vluchtelingenkamp Yarmouk: Overleven in het hart van de hel" [Yarmouk refugee camp: surviving in the heart of Hell]

– Florent Maillet, lsa-conso.fr, "Decathlon prépare son « big bang » mondial de la RFID" [Decathlon prepares for its worlwide RFID rollout]

– Paddy O'Connell, BBC, "Desperate migrants try to swim to Britain from France"

– Maite Vermeulen, *De Correspondent*, "Wat voor de één een mensensmokkelaar is, is voor de ander een reisagent (en nog 10 begrippen die je anders doen kijken naar migratie)" [One person's human trafficker is another's travel agent (and 10 more terms that will make you look at migration differently)]

– Vice News, Vice, "We gingen langs bij het vluchtelingenkamp in Calais" [We stopped by the refugee camp in Calais]

BOOKS

– Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy*

– Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

– Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends*

– Nicolaas Matsier, *Het achtenveertigste uur* [The forty-eighth hour]

– Patrick Ouredník, *Case Closed*

– Maxime Waladi, *Eeuwig anders. Mijn identiteit op scène* [Forever different: my identity on stage]

OTHER SOURCES

– Surprising Europe, "Border Control Calais," YouTube video

– Farah van Valkenburg, *Het 'kamp' in Calais: Een onderzoek naar de 'morele economie' van de Franse overheid en een humanitaire hulporganisatie in Calais* [The "camp" in Calais: a study of the "moral economy" of the French government and a humanitarian aid organization in Calais], master's thesis

– Henk Wildschut, *Ville de Calais* [City of Calais], visual art

Alexa Alice Joubin. *Shakespeare and East Asia*. Oxford University Press, 2021. 272pp.

Astutely charting shared and unique patterns in post-1950s East Asian adaptations and interpretations of Shakespeare across a range of contexts, genres and media—theatrical and cinematic—Alexa Alice Joubin eschews the prevailing (and potentially harmful) approach to "Global Shakespeare" that anchors performances in their perceived cultural roots and values them more for their political rather than their aesthetic qualities. Joubin also pushes back against the utilization of "Asian Shakespeares" for the purposes of diversifying scholarship and curricula in the Anglo-American academy, as well as the exoticization of these adaptations, in particular, the tendency to over-emphasize how much they deviate from Anglophone practices. Both trends, she argues, have resulted in critical blind-spots in our understanding of the meaning and significance of "Asian Shakespeares," and the overlooking of the multifarious structural and thematic connections between productions from diverse locales. In response, Joubin boldly deterritorializes stage and film versions of Shakespeare, situating them in a postnational space of exchange and focuses on their aesthetic and social (as opposed to political) functions. This is a radical and refreshing move, and Joubin casts new light on familiar, now-canonical works such as Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), Yukio Ninagawa's *Macbeth* (1980) and Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet* (2006) through placing them in dialogue with Western favorites like Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) and examining them in respect to style and technique, the concept of polyphony, gender and cross-gender identities and other Asian and global concerns.

Organizing her cutting-edge book thematically—rather than chronologically or geopolitically—Joubin identifies four themes in particular that distinguish East Asian Shakespeares in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: 1) formalistic innovations in sound and spectacle, 2) the remedial uses of Shakespeare's plays, 3) conflicting and polity-driven production and reception and 4) multilingualism in diasporic adaptations. These four themes, she argues, produce a series of "concentric circles of analysis" that move from form to ideology, local to global contexts, and from production to reception. Thus, she offers a multitude of approaches of Shakespeare in China, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong and encourages readers—set free from the limitations of realpolitik and national traditions—to explore connections between works across different temporal-spatial boundaries and modes of representation. There is something truly liberating about this fluid and holistic approach, an approach that "lead us away from an overdetermined concept of the canon" (21). Highlights of the book include Joubin's discussion of Shakespeare's (limited) reparative function in East Asia and East Asia's reparative role in Anglophone Shakespeares (chapter 2); her examination of feminism, gender identities and cross-gender performance practices in East Asian adaptations of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* (chapter 3); and her survey of intercultural and polyphonic productions created for the global festival circuit that refuse to fit into the postcolonial model (chapter 4).

On the downside, and through absolutely no fault of Joubin, most of the writers and directors featured in *Shakespeare in East Asia* are male, which, as she says herself in a thoughtful *caveat lector*, "has long been a function of the setup of Asian theatre and film industries, particularly when it comes to adaptations of Shakespeare" (19). The inequality is especially striking in the theatre industry, though there are some prominent female artists, such as the avant-garde Japanese playwright Kishida Rio,

who collaborated with Ong Keng-sen on both *Lear* (1997) and *Desdemona* (2000), and the Chinese American Tisa Chang, director of a bilingual Mandarin-English *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1983). Wherever possible, Joubin makes a concerted effort to draw attention to these and other women and gender minorities, such as Komaki Kurihara's iconic turn as Lady Macbeth (Lady Asaji) in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (chapter 1) and Lee Joon-gi's embodiment of Gong-gil, a transgender Ophelia character in the film *The King and the Clown* (2005)(chapter 3). She also includes discussion of ethnic minorities within East Asia (every region has its order, complete with its center and margins, after all) as well as offers a critique of class privilege and other forms of social inequality. One of the many other strengths of *Shakespeare in East Asia* is its reflections on the politics of multilingualism, the diasporic condition and intercultural performance which, Joubin suggests, serves important sociocultural and aesthetic functions. In particular, instead of viewing such (usually touring) productions as pandering to Western fantasies of an exotic East or as reflecting colonial/postcolonial power configurations, Joubin posits that intercultural productions such as Ong Keng Sen and David Tse Ka-shing's acclaimed versions of *King Lear* (1997 and 2006, respectively) produce an alienating effect that "help[s] us move from narratives driven by political geographies to histories informed by theatrical localities—the varied locations embodied by touring performances" (134-35).

In this respect and others, Alexa Alice Joubin's book ushers in and lays the theoretical groundwork for the next phase of scholarship on "Asian Shakespeares," a subject area she has spearheaded since the publication of her now-seminal monograph, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (Columbia University Press, 2009). And even though many of the films and stage adaptations she explores have (to varying degrees) received critical attention elsewhere, her critical approach and methodology is innovative and exciting and, moreover, offers others in the field directives for future research. The glossary, detailed suggestions for further reading, and annotated chronology of Shakespeare and East Asia will definitely be tremendously useful to scholars in this specialist yet burgeoning field of study, a field that, like the theatre and film artists Joubin focuses on, challenges fixed notions of tradition and narrow definitions of cultural authenticity. As the author puts it herself, "Asian Shakespeares" are much more than "curiosities or colonial remnants," but matter to Western readers because of their impact on American and European performance cultures and their significance to global culture studies (6).

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