

A – OTTO and LISE

- OTTO. ...and he kisses the godhead from his daughter's eyes and she falls into a deep sleep. He strikes the ground with his spear and from the center of the earth...
- LISE. ...from the innermost corner of his heart...
- OTTO. ...he brings forth a magic fire that surrounds her in a blazing ring and burns through the darkness into infinite space...
- LISE. Why does he do that?
- OTTO. To protect her from the dark forest.
- LISE. Aren't they on top of a mountain?
- OTTO. Yes, well, one finds dark forests everywhere. Now, this magic fire only a very great hero can cross.
- LISE. What's a hero?
- OTTO. A man who will go through the fire.
- LISE. How does he know she's in there, in the fire?
- OTTO. Who?
- LISE. The hero.
- OTTO. He doesn't.
- LISE. He just goes through fires looking for ladies?
- OTTO. Aaahhh...well, yes and no...
- LISE. Where do heroes live?
- OTTO. I don't know.
- LISE. Do I get to see one?

B – PAULA and CLARA

- PAULA. What people say about themselves is always truer than the truth, facts being, for the most part, completely unreliable. Of course, with us there is always the spectacular factor. Our poor cousin Leila always said she wouldn't live past twenty-five, and on her twenty-fifth birthday, she ate a bagful of arsenic...
- CLARA. My word...
- PAULA. Off to the apothecary she went, and bought herself a bag of arsenic—for the rats, she told poor Don Ramón who won't sell this family an aspirin since, and that was years ago—and swallowed it with her favorite Lapsang Souchong tea. I always preferred Oolong.
- CLARA. How...odd...
- PAULA. Not at all. The Windsors like it too.
- CLARA. No, I mean, your unfortunate cousin...
- PAULA. Ah, yes. Well, nobody ever knew why. She started off with those disappointed eyes people usually end up with, you see—some women know from the very beginning—and, of course, she had the family's penchant for extravagant behavior, but she was young, she was beautiful, she had—
- CLARA. Too much Flaubert, I imagine.
- PAULA. Oh, no, she only read comic books.
- PAULA. And there was my poor uncle Peruccio, too, you know. A heart surgeon. He turns fifty and he announces—with his last gasp of youth—that he's always wanted to be a painter. The wife and the sons become hysterical. Slits his own throat.
- CLARA. How sad for him to kill himself that way.
- PAULA. Oh, he didn't kill himself. He botched it, which was so clumsy. It made him very awkward to sit across from at the dinner table. One was always *looking*.
- CLARA. Goodness!

C – AMALIA and ROSA

AMALIA. What did they say about your brother?

ROSA. Nothing. They never heard of him. That kinda thing. One guy laughed, another one checked my papers... They asked me why I wasn't registered with the CGT. My name is on some list now.

AMALIA. A formality, I'm sure.

ROSA. Strikes are legal, aren't they?

AMALIA. I—not all of them, I hear.

ROSA. Always changin' the rules on you. It's hard to keep up, you know? I thought these guys was for the working man.

AMALIA. Maybe they just want to talk to him. Nothing serious.

ROSA. Why would they say they don't have him then?

AMALIA. People don't just—disappear, Rosa.

ROSA. I'm scared, Mrs. Berg.

AMALIA. Of what?

ROSA. That's the thing! I don't know! Everything. Little things: the telephone, the doorbell, a guy on the corner, the doorman... All these lists you gotta be on or not be on. Santo's not a criminal. He works hard all week, weekends he plays soccer. That's it. That's his life. Eddy, that's his buddy, he says to 'im, he says: "Santo, you gotta keep your eye on the ball, kid. You always thinkin' of somethin' else out there!" See that's what I'm worried about. Maybe...he thought himself into some kinda trouble? He's only twenty-four.

AMALIA. I'm sure he'll turn up, Rosa. Good night. Don't wait up.

ROSA. He had a mole on his left cheek.

AMALIA. Who?

ROSA. The guy that laughed at me. A reddish kind of mole. I'd recognize him anywhere. Years from now.

D – HENRI and OTTO

OTTO. That was quick.

HENRI. It seems the man was involved in some kind of smuggling operation with Brazil...the usual stuff, proscribed goods, etc.

OTTO. I see. And the nun?

HENRI. Unfortunately, the woman was involved with him.

OTTO. A nun?

HENRI. It's simple enough. A young woman who happens to be a nun meets a young man and...naturally...

OTTO. What's going to happen to her?

HENRI. I couldn't tell you. I'm sure the sisters don't want her around the girls anymore. They'll probably send her away somewhere. To another convent.

OTTO. And the driver?

HENRI. Spend some time in jail, I hope.

OTTO. They were tearing medals and crosses off their necks, Henri. Little girls.

HENRI. Inexcusable. I've told them a thousand times not to use the army for standard police work. Clods!

OTTO. You've told them?

HENRI. I wouldn't worry too much, though. Far as I can tell these little girls chewed up, peed on, and got sick all over a platoon of large men in riot gear who seemed to be heavily on the losing side.

OTTO. It's...unsettling.

HENRI. Yes, well. That's what you get when you send your daughter to a school run by unmarried women. Chaos. Damn, look at the time. Angelica's expecting me. Don't worry. Really.

OTTO. Thank you.

HENRI. Not at all.

E – OTTO and ROSA

ROSA. Mr. Berg?

OTTO. Oh, Rosa, leave that. I'll take care of it.

ROSA. Sir...

OTTO. Yes?

ROSA. That nun? Sister Clotilde? She's not that kind.

OTTO. What kind?

ROSA. *That* kind. What he said. She's a plain little thing. Not likely to be—

OTTO. Now, Rosa, plainer women than that have—

ROSA. Not her. You can tell. Mr. Fontannes now—well, look at the way he finds out about things, so quick...You think he could find out about Santo? Maybe put in a word?

OTTO. Oh, I don't know, Rosa. It's—He—it's just a desk job, he has...

ROSA. But in the—with the government, right?

OTTO. Ah...yes, but I'm not sure exactly what—

ROSA. Could you ask him then? I'd be grateful.

OTTO. I'd have to find the right—I'll do my best.

ROSA. Thank you.

OTTO. Of course.

F – ALBERTO and JUAN

ALBERTO. “Nice art”! What’s “nice art”? Art’s life. “Nice” is entertainment.

JUAN. Nonsense. Life isn’t nice or not nice, it just is. You ask from it what it can give, and it’s all right. You ask for the moon, it’s a different story. But then it’s your fault. Measure is everything, no, Alberto?

ALBERTO. I don’t always know what that measure is.

JUAN. It’s what makes you get out of the way of a moving truck.

ALBERTO. No, that’s common sense.

JUAN. I’m talking about measure, knowing how far to go and when to stop. You understand me?

ALBERTO. Well now, that’s problematic. If Wagner had cared about “measure” he’d have never composed *The Ring*.

JUAN. Please. Sixteen ear-shattering hours about a one-eyed pyromaniac with family problems? I say “measure” would have been of use. Don’t change the subject. I have a right, you know. You’re my godson. I watched you grow up.

ALBERTO. Are you telling me to be careful, *padrino*?

JUAN. I’ve a right! I took you to your first soccer game, I taught you to shave, I taught you to fight, I taught you to—Look: I want for you to sit in the sun— not too long—have a little wine—not too much—a little music—not too sad, none of that German stuff—a good wife, a couple of nice fat children, and—

ALBERTO. —and keep away from moving trucks!

JUAN. ALL RIGHT! So I’m telling you to be careful! (*Silence.*) You’re a picture-straightener, Albertino. And an ashtray-emptier. And this worries me. You watch yourself. All the men in your family: your father, your grandfather— all dead, son. Rest in peace. So...now you got nothing to prove. Not to me, not to anybody.

G - NONNA and JUAN

- JUAN. And I am not “Gianni” anymore, I am “Juan,” *Mamma*. (*He pronounces it “Kuan”.*) How many times I have to tell you?
- NONNA. We not change name because we come to America! Your father said only for a little while. Then we go back. Instead he plop down dead. ON PURPOSE!
- JUAN. Here we go...
- NONNA. (*Pointing to her heart.*) *Il cuore*. Always let you down. Welcher.
- JUAN. Why you talk like that? You loved Papa.
- NONNA. I not remember love. I remember *steerage*.
- JUAN. Have a little Marsala, Mother.
- NONNA. No! And don’t touch alla time! I am not crippled! And you know what else? I not make arrangement for my funeral in this country. You not take me back to Piemonte, you have big problem! I ROT in your living room and nobody get my money!
- JUAN. Shoot me. Somebody shoot me.
- NONNA. To all the little white sheep coming home over the green fields of San Germano when the church bells call for the Angelus. *Salute!*
- JUAN. I’m not toasting any livestock at the dinner table! *Mamma*, please!
- NONNA. I am a mountain girl. This Pampas here...flat like a pancake.
- JUAN. There are huge gigantic mountains here. The Andes...
- NONNA. Too big. Everything in America. Too big. No heart. This country... They got the moon upside down! I’m dizzy alla time! Did you know I was *kidnappèd*?
- JUAN. Tell me what you want, *Mamma*. I never know what you want. Papa either.
- NONNA. Do I know your father?
- JUAN. Christ. (*Louder.*) What do you want?
- NONNA. I want to be sixteen again in San Germano.

H – AMALIA and ELENA

AMALIA. Do you have a new play, Elena?

ELENA. A new play!

AMALIA. You know, something new and exciting, to get back on the boards? Soon?

ELENA. What's the matter with you? Of course I don't have a new play. In fact not for quite some time now, which, if you took the slightest interest in my work, you might have noticed.

AMALIA. Well, bite my head off, why don't you. God.

ELENA. Don't you ever read the newspapers?

AMALIA. The newspapers?

ELENA. You know, large squares of white paper with little black marks all over? This family!

AMALIA. You've left the theatre, then?

ELENA. You now have to be a member of "the Party" to get a job in the National Theatre--and since all professional theatres have been "nationalized," I can't work.

AMALIA. You never said...

ELENA. You never asked...

AMALIA. Couldn't you, I don't know, lie a little? Where's the harm in that? Or you could get married!

ELENA. I'm not good in supporting roles.

AMALIA. So, what, you're going to stay home and take up knitting?

ELENA. I am not wearing any party badge and nobody tells me what I can and cannot play.

J – OTTO and CLARA

- CLARA. The rule at home also was: no religion or politics at the table.
- OTTO. Truth be told, Aunt Clara, we didn't spend much time on either.
- CLARA. Indeed. We were a *mischling* family, you see; a Viennese concoction of Catholics and Jews intermarried for generations. Nobody kept track and nobody cared. We had an uncle who kept saying he should have been bar mitvah'd in Notre Dame, kill two birds with one stone. They were forever careening between mass and the synagogue, atheists all, but unable to give it up. On purely aesthetic grounds, you understand. Come Rosh Hashanah, they would suddenly appear in a pack, lurching down the street towards temple wildly intent on "preserving tradition." It seldom mattered which tradition and they always got the dates wrong. "Who are those people?" would ask poor Rabbi Rosenthal. "Oh God, it's the Bergs, again," would say Rabbi Herzler. "The Bergs!" would say Rabbi Rosenthal, "Aren't they Catholics?" "Not this week," would moan Rabbi Herzler. And they would both run away. Mind you, dear Father Reinhardt didn't want them either because they were disorderly when mass was not well sung and rowdy when it was. No sense of occasion at all. And on top of everything else they were all Socialists, so they were completely unpresentable.
- OTTO. How could Uncle Freddy be a Socialist? He was a bank president
- CLARA. He had a deep sense of *noblesse oblige!* We had ideals, no matter what our station in life. People who wanted to count for something had ideals!
- OTTO. Somewhere along the line the politics has got to go along with the ideals.
- CLARA. Oh, but it did! Why, Freddy's most prized possession was a signed photo of FDR which he kept on his desk.
- OTTO. And then you converted. Who converts to Judaism in the middle of World War II?
- CLARA. People in our family. And your uncle was arrested during one of the university purges. He taught the Romantics. Who would have thought they were a problem?
- OTTO. Romantics are always a problem.

K – HENRI and ALBERTO

HENRI. And how's the newspaper business, Alberto?

ALBERTO. Thriving. Like the broadcasting business.

The others react in shock.

HENRI. That's all right. Alberto and I go back a long way.

ALBERTO. That's...ancient history.

HENRI. You make us sound like a couple of decrepit old men.

ALBERTO. Yes, I imagine it's hard to feel grown-up in that fancy uniform.

HENRI. Ridiculous, isn't it? And hot. Had to attend a function. (*To the others.*) You won't believe this, but "old" Alberto here used to be a lot of fun in school.

ALBERTO. Yes, well...

HENRI. The physics lab blow-up...The whoopee cushions in second-year Latin...The goat in the women's gym...all your idea.

ALBERTO. My idea, your goat.

HENRI. And the ladies!

ALBERTO. A howling mob with hockey sticks and scary shoes. We had to hide out at your parents' for a week. Then we were suspended.

HENRI. We were young...

ALBERTO. We were very young...

L – JUAN, ALBERTO, and OTTO

ALBERTO. Awfully chummy with the general, weren't we?

JUAN. Son, I'd make friends with the devil were he to move in next door to my daughter.

ALBERTO. No, I mean, how do I end up in college-buddy, hail-fellow-well-met chit-chat with the guy—

JUAN. What's the problem here? We all like the man...

ALBERTO. That's the problem, don't you see?

OTTO. Is there another course of action you'd like to suggest.

ALBERTO. He goes in and out of here like—The man thinks this is—what, his family for God's sake! And we're still in school? What's that all about?

OTTO. He's trying very hard to stay within the marking posts, or he'll go all adrift. Like us.

ALBERTO. Yes, well. You don't get points for trying. As the catastrophe that was Europe has shown.

OTTO. You don't know. You weren't there.

ALBERTO. History doesn't have to repeat itself. It isn't an unstoppable machine.

OTTO. What do you know? You know nothing here in America.

ALBERTO. This house. Lines get crossed here. Before you know it you can't tell where you are anymore. I need air. Thank you for dinner. Good night.

OTTO. He said not to go out there.

ALBERTO. I am not going to sit here wallowing in Old World *schmaltz* while the country's going to hell. Europe was my parents' home, not mine. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a newspaper to run. (*He exits.*)

JUAN. (*Shouting after him.*) Dead people don't run anything! Damn!

M – AMALIA and OTTO

AMALIA. You've been out looking for him, haven't you?

OTTO. Who?

AMALIA. That boy, Santo. Is that what you've been doing all these nights you've been coming home so late? Looking for that boy?

OTTO. (*Pause.*) When I first saw him huddled in that kitchen chair—a month ago, is it?—I said to him: "Santo, my friend," I called him that, can you imagine? "I sympathize with your position, I even agree with it, but...you can't stay...I've got my family in there, you see...my wife, my children...you must go. I'm sorry." And I went back to the table and there we all were...eating cake...And I—I...just wanted to keep my family safe.

AMALIA. It was never safe.

OTTO. In Vienna too, we, all good people, thought we could sit it out—the advancing disaster, the "house painter"—playing Schubert and sipping *Kaffee mit Schlag*. Windows and doors locked airtight. And then the boogeyman came calling at the gate and nothing was ever familiar again.

AMALIA. That's not how you used to remember it.

OTTO. In the street tonight, elbow to elbow with the unfamiliar again, in the midst of all those candles—candles everywhere—fire in the rain...I tried very hard—I thought if at least I could understand this—this real or imaginary grief, I—

AMALIA. Leave it to you to romanticize mass hysteria.

OTTO. I don't know. They were united, "one," and look at me: a stranger everywhere...

AMALIA. What about your family?

OTTO. It's not enough.

AMALIA. What are we supposed to do? We're not—we're just—we're common, ordinary people! What do you expect us to do?

N – OTTO and HENRI

HENRI. Uruguay? That tiny little country? What on earth for?

OTTO. Easier to keep an eye on the borders. (*They laugh.*) No, I've been offered an excellent job in a new engineering firm.

HENRI. Why not stay and build us a few bridges? We need men like you.

OTTO. "Men like me"?

HENRI. Good men. (*Overlapping.*) You'd be part of a nation reinventing itself.

OTTO. (*Overlapping*) Ah... "good"... yes...I never quite got the knack of being a part of anything, I'm afraid.

HENRI. The right people would make a difference. The problem is always in the beginning. Beginnings are—awkward.

OTTO. Beginning...what...exactly?

HENRI. To catch up with the rest of the world. With history.

OTTO. Heady stuff, history. Alberto says Argentines don't love Argentina, but you do.

HENRI. Yes.

OTTO. More than people?

HENRI. More than individuals, yes.

OTTO. Buenos Aires has the widest avenues in the world, did you know?

HENRI. Do we really? Who will I visit on evenings like this?

OTTO. You have many friends.

HENRI. I know many people.

OTTO. Is Angelica still at her parents?

HENRI. Men with—"causes" shouldn't have families. They should borrow them. Like me.

OTTO. Can you get us the passports?

HENRI. Of course.

OTTO. When?

HENRI. In a hurry? Sorry, I don't mean to pry.

OTTO. It's always hard to leave. Best do it quickly.

HENRI. You're afraid of something.

OTTO. No...

HENRI. Nothing would ever happen to you. You know that, don't you? You would always be—safe.

OTTO. Safe?

P – HENRI and ALBERTO

HENRI. I heard about the newspaper. I'm sorry. If you need—

ALBERTO. Are you? I didn't require the personnel to go to "The Funeral" and the fuckers shut me down!

HENRI. I understand it's temporary. It'll be printing again next month.

ALBERTO. Under whose direction?

HENRI. This is not a discussion we need to have here, Alberto.

ALBERTO. Why? Afraid to pop the bubble?

HENRI. The activities of your paper have been temporarily suspended because of irresponsible journalism on your part. Until the Labor situation is stabilized—

ALBERTO. My paper was shut down because it reported extensively on strikes initiated by non-state-approved unions and on the police action which put a stop to them.

HENRI. Let's not talk politics here.

ALBERTO. Why? What's so special about this house that you can't bring politics into it? What's wrong, the house or the politics?

HENRI. I don't like making scenes in other people's homes.

ALBERTO. Especially this one, right? Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Here one talks only of the diminished seventh and the iambic pentameter! You feel like a decent man here, don't you?

HENRI. You've put over three hundred people out of work! Do you want to take everyone else down with you? Is that what you came here to do?

ALBERTO. I came because I can't use my phone anymore. I don't remember what it's like to walk around, or to stop for coffee somewhere, without being followed. Look out the window. I'm sure you'll recognize the two goons from your department pretending to wait for the bus at the corner.

HENRI. I warned you a long time ago. We're trying to rebuild a nation, not a boys' club!

Q – HENRI and OTTO

- OTTO. You arrested a man leaving my house?
- HENRI. I had nothing to do with it and it has nothing to do with you. You don't even know him.
- OTTO. But I do. I do know him. He's Rosa's brother.
- HENRI. That won't be a problem. It was your daughter's birthday, and—
- OTTO. You're wrong. I would have helped him if...if only...
- HENRI. Do you think you would have gotten very far?
- OTTO. Why, are you having me watched too?
- OTTO. What happened to Santo Arrúa, Henri?
- HENRI. I thought you weren't interested in politics.
- OTTO. What happened to Santo Arrúa?!
- HENRI. I don't know. You'll have your passports tomorrow. (*He starts off. Stops.*) I am not a violent man. I have honestly, passionately wanted to—serve—to be of public service. To help change—The crime rate has dropped by forty percent. Women can walk out at night along with...without...Jesus...
- OTTO. ...and all the trains run on time...?
- HENRI. (*Silence.*) Surely there will be—understanding for mistakes made in good faith... (*Silence.*) I thank you for the time you've lavished on me all these years.
- OTTO. It's we who—
- HENRI. No, no. It was easy. A word. Really. Not for you, I imagine. Were you afraid all the time?
- OTTO. No. Yes. But there's been no pretense. Ever.
- HENRI. And now you find you...can't anymore. (*Silence.*) Good night.

R – PAULA and NONNA

PAULA. Fifty years ago she told me she'd see me dead in a coffin rather than on a stage!

NONNA. People change.

PAULA. NOT GODDAMN FAST ENOUGH!

NONNA. Don't be silly.

PAULA. Don't you tell me—Fifty years I—I couldn't even take dance lessons—

NONNA. See? A lunatic. Carry on like that all day. About nothing.

PAULA. Nothing? Nothing?! I saw Pavlova when I was a little girl. She's not dancing, she's dreaming up there, I thought. And right away I wanted—After all, there isn't all that much to be said for being relentlessly awake, now is there...Ha-ha! But Mother...Anna Pavlova, silent and white, rose *en pointe* towards the night and vanquished it. The best memory of my youth is that of a performance. I'm sure there's something very wrong with that.

NONNA. She was always crazy.

PAULA. You thought I had no talent! Was that it?

NONNA. I'm your mother. I protect you.

PAULA. You thought I'd make a fool of myself! I've thrown my life away on a woman who's always thought me ridiculous.

NONNA. See? Crazy! La Pavlova, she never see her! She have the measles when we go, she stay home! She never see her! Not once!

PAULA. I saw her! I saw her! I saw her!

NONNA. End up in a madhouse, girl.

S – ELENA and AMALIA

- ELENA. Hello darlings! The front door's open. You'll be murdered in your sleep.
- AMALIA. There's only the Fontannes across the hall. They're taking us to the opera. Rosa's out and the doorbell's not working again.
- ELENA. Alberto here yet?
- AMALIA. No, is he coming over?
- ELENA. He's picking me up here. We're going to the fights.
- AMALIA. Since when do you go to the fights?
- ELENA. He's hoping I'll find them inspiring. He says I'm dull as a spoon since I've been out of work. Actually I can't wait to see a couple of Perónist sons-of-bitches kick the shit out of each other?
- AMALIA. Shhhhh!
- ELENA. Is the Black Widow going with you?
- AMALIA. Lena! Your own grandmother. No wonder people talk about us.
- ELENA. (*Opening the paper.*) I brought you Alberto's editorial tonight.
- AMALIA. Not about the strikes again.
- ELENA. About me!
- ELENA. Here it is. (*Reading.*) Well, he says a lot of nice things, but here's the finish: "Elena Guarneri was spectacular in the inexplicably short run of *The House of Bernardo Alba* as the crippled Martirio. That was three years ago. Surely her absence from our national theatre is her choice, but couldn't someone persuade her to return? We seem to be misplacing all our important artists." Isn't that sweet?
- AMALIA. I don't see why of all the parts you had to pick the hunchback.
- ELENA. Because it's the best one.

T – LISE

LISE. I'm an immigrant in a country of immigrants. My family were immigrants in a country of immigrants. Home, private and politic, is shifting ground under our feet with the heart looking forever back towards a vanishing point. And inevitably, halfway, "in the middle of the road," as they say, it suddenly becomes imperative to remember and we fumble in the dark for that switch that could make all the difference: But the source of light is long gone. I am an American now. Argentina drifts in and out of shadows through my mindlike the ghost ship of *The Flying Dutchman*. The only certainty is the sudden bump inside the chest recalling with cutting clarity my mother's great beauty and my father's all-consuming passion for music. And that's no longer memory but a movement of the heart warming to the glow of what we first loved. A flash: Coming home from school on wet winter afternoons to the comforting hiss of the wall radiators that never quite kept the house warm and a bowl of steaming *caffé latte* and bread and butter in the kitchen, where Rosa listened to her radio soaps.