

Origami

Carlos Be

Translation

Gwynneth Dowling

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Born Theatre Prize 2006

Published in Catalan by Arola Editors (2007)

Published in Spanish by *Primer Acto* (2007) and CELCIT (2010) – Translation by
the author

Published in Gallego by *Revista Galega de Teatro* (2007) – Translation by Afonso
Becerra

First Performed Thursday, 13 May, 2010 in the Ungelt Theatre in Prague,
directed by the author and with the following cast:

Pavel Batěk as Aldo
Vilma Cibulková as Claudia
Helena Dvořáková as Dora
Vojtěch Kotek as Lenzo

*To Fran and Jan
To Mariajosé, Teresa and my Mother*

ACT 1: ORIGAMI

1. *In which Aldo talks about what he feels when he creates, and in which Claudia cannot sleep. In which it seems like nothing happens, but nothing is what it seems.*
2. *In which the fridge, bad dreams and Dalia are mentioned for the first time. In which Aldo talks about the day of his funeral.*
3. *In which Claudia smokes, tries to put music on and reminisces about the night she ran in the rain.*
4. *In which Aldo minutely describes his meeting with some art dealers. And in which, with Claudia's help, he forges a letter.*
5. *In which Claudia makes her wish.*
6. *In which Claudia gives into temptation and steals. Warning about the white door.*
7. *In which Claudia and Dora share secrets and Aldo's name is said in a strange way. In which there are many clues about what is going to happen.*
8. *In which Dora talks to her mother and information is revealed that was no secret whatsoever. In which the thief is caught red-handed.*
9. *In which Dora looks into her own past, in which Claudia seems more lenient with Dora, and in which Aldo talks about foolproof plans.*
10. *In which a kind of understanding is established between Claudia and Dora. In which the book is discussed.*
11. *In which Dora resorts to everything she can to get Claudia to give in. In which injured knees, fake cats and even a doctor appear.*
12. *In which Aldo and Lenzo have a conversation and the theory of cause and effect is tested.*
13. *In which a wheelchair, a paper bird, a lot of pain, the enormous eyes of Mr Wind and two sleepflyers appear. And in which we learn who is burning Claudia.*
14. *In which Aldo makes a promise. And in which there is more discussion about the book.*
15. *In which Dora reproaches Aldo for a romantic kiss that was, in fact, a kiss of hate.*
16. *In which the white door opens.*

ACT II: IMAGIRO

1. *In which the human paper-folding begins. In which Dora asks Aldo to imagine for a moment. And in which Aldo wins a wish.*
2. *In which Dora croaks.*
3. *In which Claudia talks about the night she ran in the rain and met a soaked Dalia at the side of the pond, crying and half-naked, who told her that Theo did not exist. In which Aldo remembers being an involuntary accomplice to a crime. In which Lenzo talks on the phone while driving. In which Dora obeys Claudia and loves Aldo.*
4. *In which Dora reveals her multiple folds.*
5. *In which Claudia reveals her multiple folds.*
6. *In which the frogs fight.*

ACT I
ORIGAMI

One is not always mistress of one's thoughts.

HENRIK IBSEN, *HEDDA GABLER*

1

*In which Aldo talks about what he feels when he creates,
and in which Claudia cannot sleep.*

In which it seems like nothing happens, but nothing is what it seems.

Aldo, Claudia

ALDO

I close... My eyes... And the tunnels... Open... And my head explodes... In silence...
And I travel... Like shrapnel... Through the tunnels... Through all the tunnels... At
the same time... Like a dart... I'm a man, I'm a human being.

The rest... All the rest... Everything that I am not... A shapeless mass... Stays
behind... In an instant... That's how fast it is... And I accelerate... No delays...
There are no obstacles to thought. Claudia. Is there anything that can't cross our
mind? Anything that can't travel through it? Anything it can't reach?

CLAUDIA

I like that you call me Claudia.

ALDO

Your name. I've always called you by your name.

CLAUDIA

I'm not tired.

ALDO

Don't go. Stay in my arms.

CLAUDIA

Give me a drag.

ALDO

I don't want you smoking. When you smoke you get that look. Staring into space.
And you've still got that cough. You shouldn't have been running about in the
rain. You shouldn't be so careless, not at your age.

CLAUDIA

Don't remind me of my age. Not tonight.

ALDO

You won. Make a wish.

CLAUDIA

It scares me.

ALDO

Well don't let it. Short hair suits you.

CLAUDIA

I still brush my hair. I'm still so used to... This morning gave me a fright. In bed. When I woke up. I got scared. My long hair. I couldn't find it.

ALDO

Make a wish.

CLAUDIA

I'd ask you to...

What I wish is still really far away. It's like dreaming about the other side of the world.

I don't dare.

ALDO

Well, let the wishes make the travel arrangements.

CLAUDIA

You remind me so much of your father. I told you my wish the other day. I'm exhausted.

ALDO

You're eyes are closing.

CLAUDIA

Yes.

ALDO

Would you like a nursery rhyme?

Yes?

Lie back.

Let's see, which one...

“Five little speckled frogs
Sat on a speckled log
Eating some most delicious grubs. Yum! Yum!
One jumped into the pool
Where it was nice and cool
Then there were four green speckled frogs.”

Want me to keep going?

Claudia?

You're asleep.

Sleep well.

2

In which the fridge, bad dreams and Dalia are mentioned for the first time.

In which Aldo talks about the day of his funeral.

Claudia, Aldo

CLAUDIA

I need another coffee. Let me have another cup of coffee. Please.

ALDO

You don't look well.

CLAUDIA

Puffy? I think my face looks puffy.

ALDO

Not at all. Bad dreams?

CLAUDIA

If only. I woke as soon as you left, wandered round the house for a while. Couldn't sleep, couldn't sleep at all. I went up to the attic to get some work done. It was a really lovely night. I left the window open. The sky had cleared and you could see the stars. I can't feel the tips of my fingers and I'm not seeing very well. It's like my eyes are bulging out of my head. They're so dry. And my eyelids feel like sandpaper.

ALDO

What time did you go to bed?

CLAUDIA

I haven't been.

ALDO

I'd rather you worked during the day. In natural light. You'd get more done. At night you're sluggish after being up all day.

CLAUDIA

It won't happen again.

ALDO

I'm not sure I believe you. How many folds?

CLAUDIA

Thirty.

ALDO

That many?

CLAUDIA

I was wide awake. I've got much better at it.

ALDO

Great.

CLAUDIA

About last night...

ALDO

Your wish?

CLAUDIA

No. I wanted to say that... I liked it. I really liked that you stayed up with me so late, sang me a nursery rhyme. I felt like a little girl. I really did.

I love you.

Have you nothing to say?

ALDO

If you loved me so much, you wouldn't smoke. Four of my cigarettes are missing. I counted them. Four. Four are missing. You smoked four last night.

CLAUDIA

Sorry.

ALDO

Do your dressing gown up properly.

CLAUDIA

Sorry.

ALDO

Let's change the subject. I'm tired of always having to repeat myself.

CLAUDIA

Did you have that bad dream again last night?

ALDO

Yes, why do you ask?

CLAUDIA

Your mood.

ALDO

We need someone to take care of the house.

CLAUDIA

Dalia mentioned her little sister was looking for work.

ALDO

Her little sister. Someone who lives close by. And reliable. Good idea.

CLAUDIA

She's two other sisters, older, but I think they live far away. And they've got kids.

ALDO

We'll write a note. A letter. As if Dalia wrote it. We'll say we found it in her room. A letter for her family. I suppose they must worry about her from time to time.

CLAUDIA

What'll we write?

ALDO

The truth. That she's run off with that boy who used to come see her every night. He's taken her to the city. They want to live together. Or try, at least. That's enough. We don't know any more either. That's all we know. Short, but the truth. I'll give the letter to her sister and use it as an excuse to ask if she wants to work here. Do you remember her name?

CLAUDIA

Sara or Sandra, I'm not sure. I could do it.

ALDO

Go and see Sara or Sandra?

CLAUDIA

Take care of the house.

ALDO

It's not your job. I don't want you to have to start on the house after a day's work. My client meeting will be over in a couple of hours. When I get back, let's write the letter.

CLAUDIA

I like taking care of the house. It's relaxing.

ALDO

Taking care of the garden relaxes you. The rest is very tiring. You'd tire yourself out straight away. You're not twenty.

CLAUDIA

What if we looked for someone else? I'd prefer a boy.

ALDO

Why?

CLAUDIA

You wouldn't get attached to a boy. Like you did with Dalia.

ALDO

Wouldn't I?

CLAUDIA

No.

ALDO

Explain to me why not.

CLAUDIA

Because it would be a boy.

ALDO

I don't understand. What's the difference?

CLAUDIA

Aldo.

ALDO

I'm being serious. Also, let's get this straight – she was the one who got attached to me, not the other way round. And I'll remind you that you were the one who came up with the idea.

CLAUDIA

It was a spur of the moment thing. I didn't think.

ALDO

Well that's that then. I've got to go, I'm running late. Don't blame yourself for my bad mood. You know that bad dream always has an effect on me.

CLAUDIA

I might lie down for an hour after eating. Dalia left enough food in the fridge.

ALDO

Before I go, I want to say something.

CLAUDIA

Go ahead.

ALDO

The day I die, please don't pay me too much attention. You know how much I despise dead people.

3

In which Claudia smokes, tries to put music on and reminisces about the night she ran in the rain.

Claudia searches the record collection for one she's never heard before. She would love to find one she doesn't know. One, just one. No more than that. She needs a new record but can't find one because they're always the same ones with their same worn-out cardboard covers. So scratched, so tiringly familiar. The ones that pass, one after another, through her hands; the ones that mock her with their sounds, bitten like sneers into the vinyl grooves. She gives up, furious. One of the records comes out of its sleeve and falls to the ground.

Alarmed, Claudia bends, picks up the record, checks it's not broken and puts it back in its sleeve. She crosses the room and takes a crumpled cigarette packet out of her own private hiding place (hiding places, like secrets, must be private; as soon as you share them they stop being hiding places). She rifles through the packet with her fingers – not many cigarettes left – and stops in front of the white door that stands at the back of the large room. The only double door in the whole house.

This door conceals no hiding places and no secrets, absolutely not. She and Aldo know what lies behind that entrance, that exit: they share that knowledge. It contains no hiding places and no secrets. No. Hiding places, when shared, become collusions.

Claudia turns round and, with her back to the door, she lights the cigarette with the lighter she always keeps in the pocket of her dressing gown – another hiding place – another one of Claudia's secrets. She takes a long drag, puts the packet and lighter back in her pocket, captivated by the shapes the smoke makes in the air. And, for a moment, her gaze trails off, away from the present moment.

When she comes back to reality, Claudia sees that she's got the lit cigarette in one hand, the lighter in the other, and a second cigarette in her mouth. She was about to light it. With a puzzled shake of the head, she extinguishes the lit cigarette in an ashtray and puts the other one back in the packet. She returns to the record collection and picks up the first one that comes to hand. She puts it on the record player. Classical music, of course.

"We'll have no other music in this house", Aldo never tires of saying.

The first track on the record creaks along at 45rpm.

Claudia's gaze trails off again. Until a frog starts singing. Inaudible, at first. Then the croaking gets louder. Slowly. It expands outwards, parasitical, all-consuming, devouring the symphony with its eructations like spurts of tar being spat into the very depths of the ears. In anger. In disgust. In hate. A piercing, terrible tune.

And Claudia screams.

CLAUDIA

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!

4

In which Aldo minutely describes his meeting with some art dealers. And in which, with Claudia's help, he forges a letter.

Aldo, Claudia

ALDO

Ten! You heard me right! Ten!

CLAUDIA

Amazing!

ALDO

I took the case out of the bag and his neck went "crick"!

CLAUDIA

The room. Describe the room.

ALDO

White walls; black stone flooring; a huge window across an entire wall; vertical blinds – also black; halogen sunken ceiling lights; oval table.

CLAUDIA

What could you see from the window?

ALDO

The blinds were closed. They didn't let in much light. You couldn't see anything.

CLAUDIA

What floor were you on?

ALDO

The seventh.

CLAUDIA

Pity. I bet there's a nice view from there.

ALDO

We went straight up from the elevator in the parking lot. Landing, door, a lobby, the room with white walls, black floor. The man sat opposite me with the woman to his left. A classy woman, you could tell that a mile away. I took the case out of the bag and his neck just went "crick"!

CLAUDIA

His neck?

ALDO

Yes, the man's. You should have seen him. Tense from the neck up. And his expression. The ambition in his eyes. An art dealer: a eunuch making deals with artists' balls.

CLAUDIA

An art dealer?

ALDO

Wait. The woman, on the other hand, was obviously genuinely interested in the book. She didn't care about figures, she just wanted to see it. So I open the case in front of them to give them a good look. Oh, it was funny! It was so funny when...! The guy's jaw just dropped. His eyes sort of... crossed... then they jumped out of their sockets and rolled on the floor! He was the very picture of disappointment. Poor thing. I imagined him leaving the meeting furious and flinging the purple case in the first wastebasket he came to. So many '00s for that pile of paper! How on earth can a book cost so much when it doesn't even look like a book!? I imagined him calling his bodyguards – there were two waiting in the parking lot with the driver – and telling them to give me a good going over as soon as I left the building, "And make sure you get back the check! The check!"

Thank goodness for her. Her eyes. Her eyes knew what they were seeing. I opened the case and her eyes lit up like wasps.

CLAUDIA

Keep going. Tell me absolutely everything.

ALDO

She opens her briefcase and you'll never guess what she sets up – scales! That's right, a set of portable scales. He leans over the case and reads the title of the book out loud. His voice is so empty, and the way he says it...

“Origami.”

He goes to pick it up. She stops him. She's put on a pair of latex gloves, asks my permission to take it out of the case. Yes. She puts it on the weighing pan. Remember I told you I'd heard rumors that they checked the authenticity of each item? The rumors about their weird and wonderful methods? Well they're true. She weighed the book. And she measured the sides and the spine with a ruler.

“Exact measurements”, she says to the man.

Such eyes! Absolutely needle sharp.

“It's an original.”

The man, true to form, comes out with the kind of joke you'd expect from a brainless cretin.

“An Orig-ami orig-inal.”

She smiles patronizingly, her eyes apologizing for the comment. So idiotic. She lights a cigarette – doesn't take her eyes off me for a second – then sits back in her chair, and says:

“Mr Wind, we want nine more.”

She's caught me off guard:

“Nine!?”

“As you well know, your book has aroused much interest within our commercial network, particularly in the East. We're working on an international scale.”

In the East, she said! They want to see my work in the East!

‘They want to own it,’ she clarifies, ‘Collectors don't love art so much as they love owning it. And that's what we offer them.’

CLAUDIA

They weren't customers.

ALDO

Art dealers! And they've offered me their services! To start with, they need ten copies of the book. Ten! And they've already got buyers lined up!

CLAUDIA

An order!

ALDO

We have an order!

CLAUDIA

It's what your father always dreamed of! Finally! I'll get to work right away. We'll have them all ready to go in just nine months' time.

ALDO

Three.

CLAUDIA

What?

ALDO

In three months. They want them in three months.

CLAUDIA

Impossible! Three months? Ninety days? That's only nine days per book!

ALDO

It's not ten books. They've already got one. It's nine. Ten days per book.

CLAUDIA

I'll...

ALDO

I got paid in advance. We need to make nine more books in three months.

CLAUDIA

I won't be able to...

ALDO

I'll call Sara or Sandra tonight without fail. If she's interested in the position, it's hers. We can't wait any longer for someone to start missing Dalia. She would have to leave us now, wouldn't she? What bad luck, she couldn't have picked a worse time. We need to write that letter.

CLAUDIA

Aldo, I won't be able to.

ALDO

You will. I'll help you.

CLAUDIA

You'll help me? Because of the money?

ALDO

The souls. Yours and mine. Remember that money buys souls. And as far as our souls are concerned, thankfully, we're the ones doing the selling.

~~~~~

**ALDO**

"Dear Sara".

**CLAUDIA**

"Sara"?

**ALDO**

Better just to begin with "Sister" or "Sara" on its own.

**CLAUDIA**

What if she's called Sandra?

**ALDO**

Good point. No greeting. We'll put her name on the envelope. You'll make up two envelopes, each with a different name. Then write another letter like this one, identical, and put it in the other envelope.

**CLAUDIA**

These lists of Dalia's are illegible. What messy writing.

**ALDO**

Don't worry, you don't need to recreate an exact copy of her handwriting. I wouldn't be surprised if this is the first letter her family ever gets from her.

**CLAUDIA**

She lived with them. But when you're in love, you write. I used to write love letters to your father. He'd answer with letters he'd folded himself. Letters folded in the shape of a heart. You'd pull open two of the flaps and inside would be a poem. Have I ever shown you them?

**ALDO**

Yes.

**CLAUDIA**

Only three months. I won't be able to do it. The concentration. No mistakes. The last folds of the book are so... Exhausting. I can't work with so little time. I need at least a month per book. They need to be perfect.

**ALDO**

If it isn't perfect, it's not my book. Shall we go on?

**CLAUDIA**

Aldo.

**ALDO**

Don't keep on about it. You're wasting time, there's no point complaining about it. End of subject.

No greeting. No "Sister" or "Sara" or "Sandra". Write.

"I've gone to the city with Theo (full stop, new paragraph) I haven't said anything until now because we only just decided (full stop) I'm leaving this small-town life behind to be with my love (full stop) or at least to try (full stop) I hope the Winds find this note quickly and give it to you (comma) everything's happened very fast (comma) I don't want you to worry about me (full stop, new paragraph)."

**CLAUDIA**

Maybe it should be addressed to the whole family. Or to her mother. We don't know which of them she got on best with. She talked a lot about her sister but...

**ALDO**

Let's leave it as it is. That way we can get on with this. I'll give the letter to her sister and offer her the job in passing. Saves time. Let's continue.

**CLAUDIA**

Then shall we write another letter to her boyfriend?

**ALDO**

To tell him she's run off with someone else? Do you think Dalia would be that cruel?

**CLAUDIA**

Yes.

**ALDO**

No.

“(Full stop new paragraph) I was seeing Theo in secret because I hadn't made up my mind whether to tell...” What was her boyfriend's name? The officer.

**CLAUDIA**

Bobby.

**ALDO**

Bobby. That's right. How awful.

“I hadn't made up my mind whether to tell Bobby that I'd stopped loving him (full stop) The child I'm expecting isn't his (exclamation mark!)”.

**CLAUDIA**

No!

**ALDO**

“I'm expecting triplets!”

**CLAUDIA**

Aldo!

**ALDO**

Of course not. I was joking.

“I’ve stopped loving him (full stop) Bobby has too much growing up to do (full stop).”

**CLAUDIA**

“To”, without an “o”.

**ALDO**

What?

**CLAUDIA**

Dalia makes some terrible spelling mistakes. Look at this list: two kilos of “carots”. Missing an “r”.

**ALDO**

And what’s that below? A couple of “oniuns”?

**CLAUDIA**

Enough! Go on, I really want to throw out these lists.

**ALDO**

“I’ve told the Winds that you might be interested in my position (comma) think about it (comma) you know they’re a little strange but they’re good people and they pay well”.

**CLAUDIA**

“Strange”?

**ALDO**

To make it believable.



**CLAUDIA**

You can't think of another way to describe us?

**ALDO**

Strange. Dalia told us once that we were strange.

**CLAUDIA**

Find another word, please.

**ALDO**

Strange. Eccentric. Peculiar. Particular. Put "particular".

**CLAUDIA**

Particular.

**ALDO**

"But they're good people and they pay well (comma) I'll call you when we've settled in (full stop) I'd love you to come visit one of these days (full stop) you know I love you all although I don't show it as much as I should (full stop) tell Bobby I'm sorry (comma) I don't dare tell him (full stop) I know he'll not understand and he'll hurt a lot but I'm young and I've my whole life ahead of me (full stop, new paragraph) Stay well (full stop) I'm very happy (full stop, new paragraph) I'm thinking of you".

**CLAUDIA**

I like it.

**ALDO**

Sign it as her.

**CLAUDIA**

Hang on, let's see if I can find her signature among all this scrawl. Here, a card transaction receipt.

Signed.

**ALDO**

“PS (two dots) Theo loves me very much (full stop) I’ll call as soon as I get a new mobile (full stop) the one I had broke two days ago (full stop, end)”.

5

*In which Claudia makes her wish.*

*Claudia, Aldo*

**CLAUDIA**

Look at that. Don't move. Just the way we are now, snuggled up together. Can you see it?

**ALDO**

What?

**CLAUDIA**

We've got four legs. I can't tell which are mine and which are yours. One, two, three, and the fourth. Four legs.

I'm sorry.

**ALDO**

Why?

**CLAUDIA**

I made a mistake. On fold thirty-eight.

**ALDO**

Have you been able to fix it?

**CLAUDIA**

Yes. But you need to get more paper. Just in case.

**ALDO**

You can't make mistakes. You look very nervous to me.

**CLAUDIA**

Yes. My hands shake when I start folding. I can't work in a hurry.

**ALDO**

Relax.

**CLAUDIA**

I don't know how to relax.

**ALDO**

Where has all this negativity come from?

**CLAUDIA**

Do you think we're strange?

**ALDO**

No, we're not strange. People think we're strange. They see us through their own lens. A very dirty lens. It's their subtle way of saying that they'd like to live like us but don't have the courage.

**CLAUDIA**

Why don't they have the courage?

**ALDO**

Don't ask stupid questions.

**CLAUDIA**

I'd like to understand how they think.

**ALDO**

They don't even try to understand how we do.

I met Sandra, not Sara. They live in a hovel. An apartment building, painted some non-descript color; dark dining room; little ventilation; three horrible paintings of fruit – dull fruit, really still. The kind of fruit that's so still and so dead it makes for an ideal painting. It never moves, never escapes. Wood laminated round table; greasy tablecloth under a yellowish crocheted cover; lots of seats – too many – all over the place, getting in the way more than being of any use. And her parents. They didn't believe me at first. But the letter convinced them. The handwriting. They recognized Dalia's handwriting. Sandra looked more concerned about how Bobby would take it than about the fact that her sister had taken off. She wasn't interested in the job, but a friend of hers is. Dora. Her name

is Dora. I left our house keys with Sandra and a note for Dora – the note which explains where everything is, you know the one. That way she won't bother you when she starts tomorrow. She starts tomorrow. I've asked her to come first thing. I've got another meeting with the dealers, I won't be here. To finalize details. They leave for the Far East tomorrow afternoon.

**CLAUDIA**

I managed to sleep a little last night, but I woke up startled. I dreamt. About you. I dreamt that...

**ALDO**

What?

**CLAUDIA**

That I was touching myself. I dreamt I was touching myself dreaming about you.

**ALDO**

And?

**CLAUDIA**

I woke up and... I masturbated.

**ALDO**

So? I always masturbate thinking of you.

**CLAUDIA**

I want to make my wish.

*Claudia opens up a silence. A long silence that Aldo carefully interprets, understands, and fills with the language of his skin.*

*His hands slide over her body. Like an expert musician, he touches her between her legs. A new silence attaches itself to the one before. The silence of two bodies quieted by surrender.*

*The suppleness of conspiring bodies.*

*The bright fizzle of sweat.*

*The silences mount, one on top of the other, occasionally interrupted by a moan from her. He doesn't know if it's a moan of pleasure or of pain. And the space, mute, pregnant with the need to cry out, shudders, trembles, disappears. And the bodies*

*inside it withdraw to dark places where, for a few tenths of a second, they look life directly in the eye. It blinds them. And then they are spat back into reality, which is beginning to stop shaking. And the silences are becalmed.*

*He separates himself from her and crosses the room. She asks him with a gesture where he is going. He puts a record on, lights a cigarette and returns to her side. Man and woman talk. And talk. And keep on talking.*

*Intimacy. That prized, slow delight. Outside of time.*

## 6

*In which Claudia gives into temptation and steals. Warning about the white door.*

*Darkness. Claudia stands absolutely still. She holds a lit cigarette in one hand. It is gradually burning itself out.*

*The minutes pass.*

*The muffled hum of a motorbike approaching. The vehicle parks in the yard outside the house. The front doorbell rings. Claudia does not move. The bell rings again. And a third time. Sound of keys and a door opening. It's Dora.*

**DORA**

Hello?

*A light goes on in some part of the house. Claudia's feet are bathed in the light.*

**DORA**

Is anyone here?

*The feet withdraw from the light.*

**DORA**

"In the pantry..." Now where is the pantry? "The pantry's in the kitchen". This man thinks of everything. Where's the kitchen?

*Dora feels along the wall for the light switch. The light goes on in the large room. There is no one there. She crosses the room. In one hand she carries a note and some keys. In the other she carries a bag.*

**DORA**

This doesn't look like a kitchen.

*She puts down the bag and keys.*

*She looks around the room. She goes towards the door at the back, a door so white that it seems to shine with its own light. It is locked. She goes to get the keys when she finds another exit, small and lackluster, that no doubt leads to the kitchen. Dora disappears through this exit.*

**DORA**

The kitchen. And here's the pantry. Excellent. So, where do I start?

*In the ashtray the last curls of smoke from a badly-extinguished cigarette weave together in the air.*

~~~~~

DORA

"Living room. Door lintels. Shelves. Don't forget table and chair legs."

Dora turns on her music player, puts on headphones and starts to clean. She cleans, sings and dances. She doesn't know the song lyrics so makes them up as she goes along, making random noises. In other words, Dora mangles the song.

Claudia enters without Dora noticing. She looks the girl over, fascinated, and then creeps up and takes the keys.

Dora turns round and screams when she sees the woman.

DORA

You made me jump!

CLAUDIA

Did you use the keys to get in?

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

Where did you get them from?

DORA

Sandra. Sandra gave me them.

CLAUDIA

Who's Sandra?

DORA

I'm Dalia's replacement. Sandra is Dalia's sister.

CLAUDIA

What are you looking at?

Dora averts her gaze. One breast pokes out from Claudia's open dressing gown.

DORA

The keys. The keys. Sandra gave me them last night. On the phone I talked to...

CLAUDIA

Are you going to be take care of cleaning the house?

DORA

Yes. And everything else. I'm Dora.

CLAUDIA

Is that your motorbike outside?

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

Park it somewhere else. I don't like seeing it from my window. What time did you get here?

DORA

A while ago.

CLAUDIA

Don't listen to music. Take that off.

Dora puts her music player in her bag.

CLAUDIA

Did you bring the newspaper?

DORA

No.

CLAUDIA

No? You need to bring the newspaper.

DORA

I didn't know. The note doesn't say anything about newspapers.

CLAUDIA

Is that your helmet in the hall as well?

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

Be a little tidier.

DORA

Sorry.

CLAUDIA

There's an empty cupboard in the kitchen, to the right of the stove. You can leave your things in there for now. I'll show you your room later.

Dora goes to fetch her helmet.

Claudia rushes over to Dora's bag and rummages through it. She takes out a mobile phone, inspects it, tests the weight of it in her hand, then puts it back in the bag. She finds the music player and puts it in the pocket of her dressing gown.

Dora returns with her helmet. She picks up the bag and goes into the kitchen.

CLAUDIA

Don't forget the keys.

Dora goes back and takes the keys Claudia is holding out to her.

CLAUDIA

The shopping list is on the door of the fridge. Remember that. Dalia used to go to the market first thing.

DORA

I didn't know that. It doesn't say that in the note either.

CLAUDIA

Does the note say anything?

DORA

Have a look. It doesn't say...

CLAUDIA

Alright. Okay then. We'll manage with what there is. For today. I think. Let's just say we're going to have an unusual day. You do know how to cook I hope.

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

I'll take a look, see if there's anything you could use to make something. If not, you'll have to go down to the market. Although you'll not find anything much at this time of day.

DORA

But it's still early.

CLAUDIA

It was even earlier before. Do you have a cigarette?

DORA

No.

CLAUDIA

Bring some tomorrow when you go to market. Lunch is at one o'clock. Dinner at seven. I'll be up in the attic if you need anything. Top of the stairs.

DORA

Excuse me, it's Claudia, isn't it? Am I right in thinking you're called Claudia?

CLAUDIA

Yes, and you don't need to be so polite.

DORA

Which brand...? Which brand do you smoke?

CLAUDIA

Any.

DORA

I'll bring cigarettes tomorrow.

CLAUDIA

Thank you. And don't worry. It's your first day. Did you tell me your name?

DORA

Dora.

CLAUDIA

Ah, Dora!

Claudia points to the white door.

CLAUDIA

You can't go into that room.

And she goes into the kitchen.

And she comes straight back.

CLAUDIA

Dora.

DORA

What?

CLAUDIA

There are no vegetables left. Go down to the market now. Take the list. Just buy the vegetables on it, I don't want you hanging around there. Just the vegetables, understand? And don't forget to ask for receipts. I think this will be enough. Use the trip to buy cigarettes. And also a paper. Any of them.

Dora takes the list, picks up her helmet and bag and goes shopping.

Claudia remains absolutely still until she hears the motorbike's engine. She takes the music player out of her pocket. She puts one of the headphones to her ear. Then the other one to her other ear. She is unsure about the buttons on the machine, not knowing which to press. Her fingers are shaking. She is very nervous. Strangely nervous. And she despairs to the point of crying.

Then she hears a car engine. Aldo arriving home. She hides the music player in her dressing gown. She remembers the cigarette butt she extinguished in the ashtray. The ashtray isn't there. Where is it? Dora moved it while she was cleaning. Has she emptied it? She trusts that she has.

Aldo enters.

ALDO

Morning. Have you been up long?

CLAUDIA

Good morning. Yes.

ALDO

Did you manage to get some rest?

CLAUDIA

The new girl's arrived. I've sent her to the market, there's nothing left even to make a salad.

ALDO

I emptied the fridge last night. I was really hungry.

Aldo finds the ashtray. With the cigarette butt.

ALDO

Have you been smoking?

CLAUDIA

The girl!

ALDO

Don't lie to me. You don't know how to lie.

I don't like you smoking.

CLAUDIA

I'm sorry.

ALDO

Not as sorry as I am.

CLAUDIA

I know.

ALDO

Give me a cigarette.

CLAUDIA

Yes.

Claudia instinctively goes to put her hand in her pocket.

“Aldo will find the music player!”, she suddenly thinks.

CLAUDIA

I don't have any more. That was the last one.

ALDO

I believe you.

CLAUDIA

It's true.

ALDO

Yes. I've told you, you don't know how to lie. I've a box in my briefcase.

Aldo leaves.

Claudia runs and conceals the music player in a hiding place in the room.

CLAUDIA

How was the meeting?

ALDO

I'll tell you in a minute.

Aldo enters with a box of cigarettes and a case. He fills the case with cigarettes and puts one to his lips.

ALDO

You must have a lighter. Or is that done, too?

Claudia takes her lighter from her dressing gown and lights the cigarette for him.

ALDO

Why do you have a lighter?

Claudia holds back a sob.

*In which Claudia and Dora share secrets and Aldo's name is said in a strange way.
In which many clues are given about what is going to happen.*

Dora, Claudia

DORA

I'm finished here. Shall I move on to the next room or will I make a start on lunch?

CLAUDIA

You're a really good dancer.

DORA

What?

CLAUDIA

I said you're a really good dancer.

DORA

When have you seen me dancing?

CLAUDIA

There now. You were dancing. And you were humming something. Did you buy cigarettes?

DORA

Yes. And the paper. In the bags.

CLAUDIA

The ones you've left lying any old how in the kitchen?

DORA

I haven't been able to put away the frozen stuff. The freezer's full of bags. I've had to leave food out on the counter and...

CLAUDIA

Didn't you notice the cold store?

DORA

Yes. It's full too. Right up to the brim.

CLAUDIA

I'll make a bit of room.

DORA

Shall I bring you the cigarettes and...? I didn't give you them before.

CLAUDIA

Don't worry, you can give me them later. I'd like to ask a favor.

DORA

A favor?

CLAUDIA

Yes.

DORA

If I'm able to.

CLAUDIA

A secret. Between you and me. I don't smoke. Understand?

DORA

I get it. They mustn't find out upstairs, right?

CLAUDIA

How do you know he's upstairs?

DORA

The floors in this house are shockingly loud. You can't walk two steps without them creaking. And his car. Outside.

CLAUDIA

I'm such an idiot. He's lying down. He always has a lie down before eating. He says it helps him think.

DORA

You scared me to death earlier.

CLAUDIA

I don't make any noise when I walk. I've gotten into the habit. My husband was a very light sleeper.

DORA

My parents don't let me smoke in the house either.

CLAUDIA

You smoke? Didn't you tell me you didn't?

DORA

Only at night. A cigarette before bed.

CLAUDIA

Tobacco keeps me awake. And what else can you do?

DORA

I don't understand.

CLAUDIA

You're a very good dancer. And you can sing. And you drive.

DORA

You don't know how to drive?

CLAUDIA

Should I?

DORA

You'd be able to go out.

CLAUDIA

Why would I need to go out?

DORA

I don't know. To go on a trip?

CLAUDIA

I took all the trips I needed to when I was young. Now I have to look after Aldo.

DORA

How old is he?

CLAUDIA

Aldo?

The phone rings.

Claudia does not move.

DORA

Shall I get it?

CLAUDIA

No. It's not for me. Business calls.

The phone stops ringing.

CLAUDIA

He's picked up.

DORA

I can't find my music.

CLAUDIA

What?

DORA

My music player. The one I was listening to this morning. While I was cleaning.

CLAUDIA

The one you put in your bag?

DORA

Yes. You didn't see it, by any chance?

CLAUDIA

You must have lost it at the market.

DORA

I don't think so.

CLAUDIA

Maybe someone stole it and you didn't even notice. There are a lot of thieves prowling around the market. I've never liked going. I used to go a lot, but one day my bag was snatched. I ended up on the ground. I chipped my ankle.

DORA

Did you go alone?

CLAUDIA

Yes.

DORA

Wow.

CLAUDIA

On a bike.

DORA

Ah.

CLAUDIA

But I'm too old now. I've been doubled up with pain for two years. My back. I gave up the bike. I'm too old for another snatched bag and I've no desire to be frightened. The market's full of crooks. Don't let it charm you. I'll help you make lunch. You don't know where anything is.

Aldo enters.

ALDO

You're Dora, right?

I'm Aldo. How's your first day going?

Can't you speak?

I spoke to you yesterday on the phone.

I think it was with you.

Has the cat got your tongue?

Or has Claudia cut it out? Claudia, have you cut out her tongue already?

I'm joking.

CLAUDIA

Dora?

ALDO

Dora? Can't you speak?

DORA

Aldo.

8

In which Dora talks to her mother and information is revealed that was no secret whatsoever. And in which the thief is caught red-handed.

Dora.

DORA

Hi Mom. How are you?

Yes, in the house. Where else would I be?

Sweating buckets, I haven't stopped. They made me go to the market. I wanted to pop home for a minute but in the end I thought I'd better not. I didn't want to be too long.

Yes, her. She told me to go.

To buy food of course, Mom!

Because no. Because it's the first day and guess what? There's a lot to do. I'm not surprised that Sandra didn't want the job, her sister must've been worn out in the end.

Yes I know. You were the first to find out. Yes, yes. But you got one thing wrong – she didn't go off with him.

Admit it.

No, I'm certain. Don't be a pain. He's right here.

With Theo, Mom!

What do I know!? Some guy called Theo.

M0m.

Yes, Theo. No, I said Theo. Yes, Theo. T, H, E, O.

I don't know. I know as much as you do. You were right there when Sandra told us the whole story.

It doesn't surprise me either.

Of course she'll come back. Dalia loves adventures like this. Remember the other time, with that foreign guy? That really ugly ginger guy, who took her off God knows where? Back to his country I suppose. Well, it'll be more of the same – when she gets bored she'll be back like nothing's happened.

She needs air, Mom. Space to breathe. That place is too small for us.

I've a lot to do. Will you let get a word in? I don't want to be caught talking on the mobile. I can't find my music, my music player, and I suspect it was her.

That she took it, Mom.

All the signs point to her.

No, she hasn't seen my mobile. She doesn't know I have one. Otherwise you can bet she'd have stolen it. Of course she's absolutely no need for a mobile, since there's a phone in the house. But they also have a record player, how weird is that?

No, she's not strange. The poor woman doesn't leave the house and hasn't seen a radio in her life, not to mention a TV.

I said a record player, Mom, not a radio.

It's him. It's definitely him. He's got her shut away in here. She must be very lonely, no visitors or anything. The phone rings and she knows it's for him, not for her. Just like Dalia told us, no one ever came to see her. And then I see her with one of her breasts hanging out. Her dressing gown wasn't done up properly and she didn't even notice. She was walking around with a breast hanging out of it.

Yes, I swear.

Her head's in the clouds, yes.

Well, she does read the paper. Or tries to at least! You couldn't make it up! She made me go for the paper and cigarettes – it said nothing about that on the task list. Aldo's list, yes! The one with his lovely handwriting. The one we read together last night, Mom! Sometimes you forget everything, stupid!

The list, yes. He's been pretty thorough. Everything's explained in great detail. But listen to this – first she makes me go for cigarettes and the paper, then he comes home and asks me how my first day's gone and tells me that on no account am I to buy cigarettes or newspapers – that there'll be no newspapers in his house and that he's the only one that smokes and you can't get the brand he smokes around here. I gave him such a look...

I know that, Mom. But I couldn't help it. It was such a sexist comment. The worst thing was that he noticed the look on my face and told me that she can't smoke. It doesn't agree with her but she always tries to get people to buy her cigarettes. Just to see if they'll do it. And I fell for it and bought them!

Her? She stood there with her mouth shut, while there I was pretending nothing was wrong! I think she's trying to act tough with me. She has to look like she's the one in control, but you can tell a mile away it's all an act. Her son's made her that way. He gets her to do whatever he wants, you only need to see them in action to work that out. If he finds out she took my music...

Yes, she did. I don't know where he was when I arrived. Of course it was her, and if I can I'm going to catch her red-handed.

Of course I'm fine. They're reasonable people. But I'm no fool. You're no fool either, Mom! He acts all nice but you can tell deep down he's rude. I like her better.

Yes, he's very attractive.

Terrible? Me? I'm not terrible. Why do you say that?

Me? Who would I run away with?

Mom! That's enough! Dalia had one of her turns, but I'm not like her.

She'll have had her reasons, Mom. People live differently these days. I'm not here to convince you that Dalia's behaved well, although knowing her there's no point even trying. I not making excuses for her. It's just the way it is. Did I ever criticize you for getting married so young to that idiot I've got for a father?

Okay, hundreds of times, okay, but as I was going to...

Okay, okay, but do you take any notice of me?

Of course I know you can't change him! Mom, we're going round in circles here.

Oh yes! The 'Mysterious Room'. It's right behind me here. Yes, she's told me. I mustn't even look at it. All that was missing was some horror music in the background while she told me. And to think I was just about to enter. If she'd turned up a bit later, she'd have found me inside.

Fire me? They wouldn't dare. For going into an empty room? Unless I stole the walls or something...

No, absolutely nothing. Completely empty. Dalia told us that. She entered it one day. She was crying with laughter. Of course they told her not to enter it, but there's nothing to do here! They just like to give orders, that's all.

Yes, that's pretty much how it is in in my bedroom, Mom. You don't have a choice, you've no say what goes on in there.

My job's one thing and my life's another, and here they pay me to be clean and tidy. If you want to pay me to tidy my bedroom...

Don't make me laugh! Of course I'll give you a discount for being my darling mother, but no more than 10%. Hey, I've got expenses!

Which ones? I have another bedroom now! Here!

Yes, in the same house on the ground floor. But with some beautiful views. A little forest of fir trees.

No.

Mom.

No.

He hasn't recognized me...

Yes, I'll tell him...

Yes.

No. I'm not crazy.

I'll... tell him. It'll not be too hard... to say... I love you.

Mom. I have to... To do it.

Mom, someone's coming. I'm hanging up!

Dora runs to her bag.

DORA

Mom, please stop talking! I'm hanging up, bye!

Dora quickly puts her phone in her bag. The zip won't close. She listens. Yes, someone's coming. Stealthily. But Dora has already learnt how to detect Claudia's presence. She goes to run from the room but her bag opens, scattering its contents on the ground. She picks up what she can and Claudia enters. Dora hides, fearing that her agitated breathing will give her away.

CLAUDIA

Dora?

She gets no answer.

CLAUDIA

Dora?

Dora stays hidden.

"They'll definitely fire me now", she thinks.

Claudia takes out the music player from its hiding place and connects it up. She puts the headphones on. She listens attentively. She tries, unsuccessfully, to hum along to the song. She stops with a shrug of annoyance. She tries to dance like Dora, but is unable to copy her steps. She gives up. She waits a few beats then goes back to mangle the song. She loses her place immediately.

Dora has seen everything. She will catch Claudia red-handed before she expected to. Ready to confront the woman, Dora stands before her. But when she sees the look on Claudia's face, she is disarmed.

On Claudia's face, Dora finds the look of a fascinated child.

9

In which Dora looks into her own past, in which Claudia seems more lenient with Dora, and in which Aldo talks about foolproof plans.

Aldo, Dora.

ALDO

What are you doing?

DORA

A fruit bowl. Claudia told me I could take it from this cupboard.

ALDO

Good sign.

DORA

Good sign?

ALDO

You've made a good impression on Claudia. Why do you make that face? You're so transparent.

DORA

It surprises me. The fact that you call her by her name.

ALDO

She's called Claudia.

DORA

It's not that common. Between a mother and son.

ALDO

I know. I didn't expect you to understand.

DORA

Don't treat me like a child. You can tell me things. We're the same age.

ALDO

Really?

Claudia enters.

DORA

Exactly the same. We went to school together.

CLAUDIA

Did you find the fruit bowl?

DORA

Yes.

ALDO

I never went to school.

DORA

We were very young.

ALDO

I don't remember any Dora.

CLAUDIA

Were you in the same class?

DORA

What about Dorita? A girl always attached to her white hanky. A white hanky. Linen.

ALDO

Dorita?

DORA

If I lost the hanky, I'd cry. Or if they snatched it from me. Everyone loved snatching it. You used to fight them. You used to give it back to me.

ALDO

You're Dorita.

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

You never told me about her.

ALDO

We were very, very young. At that age kids don't realize anything. Hearts riddled with complete and utter thoughtlessness.

CLAUDIA

Did my husband teach you?

DORA

Yes. Mr Wind. I still have some of his paper figurines. He used to teach us how to make them on rainy days when we couldn't go out to play. During recess.

CLAUDIA

I sat in on his classes once. I don't remember you. I liked his classes. He had a captivating voice. I loved him very much.

DORA

Don't laugh, Claudia, but Aldo was my first kiss.

ALDO

I don't remember that.

CLAUDIA

I didn't laugh.

Shall we have a cup of tea? I like talking about my husband.

DORA

I'll make it now.

CLAUDIA

Leave it. I'll do it.

Claudia leaves.

ALDO

What age are we talking about?

DORA

Five, maybe six years old. Then you left. We missed you both. You and your father.

ALDO

Do you still have the hanky?

DORA

No.

ALDO

That was emphatic.

DORA

I burnt it.

ALDO

Because?

DORA

The way you just moved there... Yes, like that – that's just like you. You used to do that as a boy.

ALDO

Why did you burn it?

DORA

Are you really that interested?

ALDO

Yes.

DORA

You won't like the answer.

ALDO

Thanks for the warning.

DORA

You really like to provoke people.

ALDO

Who doesn't? Go on, try me.

DORA

Someone raped me.

ALDO

And?

DORA

Imperturbable.

Hard to surprise.

ALDO

Were you trying to surprise me?

DORA

No. I don't like to beat about the bush. I prefer to speak up. Clearly. It helped me at the time... Scared away the ghosts. I got over it by saying it out loud... By telling people about it. I got over it. The truth is it wasn't even that terrible or tragic. I was too... Drunk... Drunk enough for the whole world to come crashing down on me. Too drunk to consent. Son of a bitch.

ALDO

Did you learn anything?

DORA

What?

ALDO

From the experience.

From the rape.

No one's ever raped me. I'd like to know what you learn from it.

DORA

Nothing.

ALDO

Think about it. Take your time. Did you learn anything?

DORA

That pain...

What really hurts...

Isn't physical pain.

That a bullet isn't harmful because of the damage it does, but because someone has actually gone and shot you.

That you can cry over a piece of torn skin.

That fears and taboos meant I was holding on to something that, when it was lost...

I discovered was worthless.
That nothing really mattered.
Childhood is a waste of time.
I cried because they destroyed my dreams.
Smashed them to smithereens.
My head turned away from reality.
I was different from the others.
My hanky fell on the ground and I couldn't take my eyes off it.
Off the hanky.
The whole time it lasted.
Him on top.
A long time.
How strange.

"Your head."

That's what he said to me.

"Don't turn you head", he kept saying. "Look at me."

I didn't want to. I was quite alright the way I was. Staring into myself. He insulted me.

"Whore. You're a little whore."

He said he could see in my eyes...
What a little whore I was. All I saw was my hanky.
Burning in blood...
He'd split my lip.

ALDO

Were your eyes like wasps?

DORA

Like what?

ALDO

What else?

DORA

You're a writer. You'll write about all of this. I know. I know you write. In some ways, that's why it was easy to tell you. I know you won't keep it to yourself, that it'll end up somewhere else that isn't you. That you'll let it out.

ALDO

I don't write about people. Not my thing. Where did you go to before?

DORA

There.

ALDO

Stay there.

DORA

It's unpleasant.

ALDO

Please.

DORA

The little whore smiled at him.

She was drunk.

Excuse my tone, I've told it so many times and it still hurts. Want to know who it was?

ALDO

No.

DORA

He was in our class. You fought him once. Over my hanky. You should have killed him. Before he grew up. Before he made me grow up. All of a sudden.

ALDO

I kissed you. You said I kissed you. Did I ask permission to kiss you?

DORA

No.

ALDO

And isn't that another kind of rape?

DORA

Kids don't rape. Like animals. They don't think, just like you said before. It was Gavin.

ALDO

I don't remember him.

DORA

He called you the monster. We all called you the monster. He said it first. It all started one day when we were playing outside. His knees were always cut to shreds from fighting with the other boys. You were both shouting. You'd just rescued my hanky. And you tore the scabs on his knees right off. Gavin started snivelling. You licked the blood pouring from his knees. And he called you monster. The monster. And it stuck.

ALDO

I remember. He wanted to hit me. And I did the first thing that came into my head. To confuse him. A foolproof plan, just like my father taught me. Think faster, differently, and you'll stop them in their tracks. Surprise them with the unexpected and you'll get the opposite of a reaction. I could've chosen to kiss him. Like I kissed you. Maybe I hated you like the other boys and you misinterpreted my kiss.

DORA

You hated me?

ALDO

Maybe I was playing with you.

DORA

Why did you kiss me?

ALDO

Maybe not to hit you, like the other boys...

In which a kind of understanding is established between Claudia and Dora.

In which the book is discussed.

Claudia, Dora.

CLAUDIA

Do you like them?

DORA

Are these bedsheets?

CLAUDIA

For your bedroom. The ones there are very old. Take these. I've also been looking for some curtains but can't find them. They were put away in a trunk, but I don't know which one.

DORA

Thanks a lot. They're beautiful.

CLAUDIA

From my trousseau. I don't think I've ever used them.

DORA

You look tired.

CLAUDIA

It's the book. Exhausting.

DORA

Are you binding it?

CLAUDIA

I'm writing it.

DORA

What?

CLAUDIA

By hand. A handcrafted book.

DORA

How many pages?

CLAUDIA

Pages, none. Faces. It's got faces instead of pages. It's not bound. It's got folds. I fold the paper to make the book. A triangular book. A book in the shape of an equilateral triangle. Ten by ten by ten centimeters.

DORA

It sounds very complicated.

CLAUDIA

More like laborious. And ingenious. Very ingenious.

DORA

And what's it about?

CLAUDIA

The reader.

DORA

I don't get it.

CLAUDIA

Has he gone?

DORA

Aldo? Half an hour ago.

CLAUDIA

Do you have the...?

DORA

Of course. You'll like this CD better than yesterday's. I called into my parent's after the market.

Dora connects her CD-player to the sound system speakers.

DORA

Ready?

Claudia nods. Dora presses a button. And the music plays. Contemporary music. And Claudia and Dora dance. Frenetically. They dance and sing and laugh and embrace.

Dora stops abruptly.

She opens Claudia's dressing gown.

And looks her in the face.

DORA

What's this?

CLAUDIA

Cigarette burns.

11

In which Dora resorts to everything she can to get Claudia to give in. In which injured knees, fake cats and even a doctor appear.

Lenzo, Claudia, Dora.

LENZO

Have you got a temperature?

CLAUDIA

Let go of me!

LENZO

Alright, alright.

Claudia, listen to me. You have to get out of this house.

CLAUDIA

No.

DORA

Claudia.

CLAUDIA

Everything I do is for my son. His life is my life. He gave it to me when his father died. I held it in my hands. His life. Have you ever felt a life here, in your lap, against your chest? It's a very.... Strange feeling. You see its fragility. Every single part of it. I felt his life. I held his life. And now I must give mine to him.

DORA

Claudia, please.

LENZO

This is clearly a case of Stockholm syndrome.

CLAUDIA

Don't talk nonsense! This isn't any syndrome! This is my son!

LENZO

Your son stops being your son when he doesn't respect you as a person.

DORA

Your son is a monster.

CLAUDIA

I never said he burnt me!

DORA

He's a monster!

LENZO

If you'd prefer, we'll file a complaint against him.

CLAUDIA

You don't understand. I've told you both – I had his life. And I made a decision. Everything that's happened to me has been my decision. I'm a human being. I'm free to make my own choices. I go along with everything that happens to me.

LENZO

No one in their right mind lets themselves be burnt with cigarettes.

CLAUDIA

In their right mind? And who dictates what's a 'right mind'? You two? Them out there? I haven't stepped outside for years. I think if I did go outside I'd catch so many diseases I'd die before I got enough air in my lungs to scream. Have you ever taken the time to actually look at what's going on around you?

DORA

You wanted me to bring music from outside!

CLAUDIA

And is that the only thing going on around you? Music? I wish it was only music.

DORA

You're talking like your son.

CLAUDIA

No, my son would say it much better than me. Anyway, he doesn't burn me.

LENZO

Who is it, then?

CLAUDIA

I can't tell you.

LENZO

He's brainwashed you. You're in no position to...

CLAUDIA

You can tell you're a doctor. Although you seem very young to be a doctor.

LENZO

I'm young but I've got experience. Experience of cases like yours. And your reaction is completely normal. All I ask is that you understand what we're saying. That you're wrong. You don't deserve this punishment. Your son is abusing you.

CLAUDIA

It isn't a punishment.

LENZO

What is it, then?

CLAUDIA

My son worries about me. He doesn't want me to smoke. My husband died from smoking. Cancer. Very quick. His time was gone.

LENZO

Does Aldo smoke as well?

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

It's in our blood. We can't help it. I try to avoid it, to set an example. I can't, it's an addiction. It's like music – yes, that's it. Contact with the outside world. I need it, very much in spite of myself. So I get the contact I need by listening to the music you bring me, Dora, and reading the receipts from the market, and listening to the sounds of cars going down the road, and smoking. As much as we want to be alone together, we aren't enough for one another. We feel my husband's absence. His imagination, which seeped through everything.

LENZO

Imagination?

CLAUDIA

Yes....

LENZO

You're very intelligent. I don't understand how you can stay by your son's side.

CLAUDIA

Don't push me. I've never been violent and I'm not about to start today.

DORA

Aldo must be almost home.

LENZO

I wasn't able to come earlier.

DORA

We've got to take her with us.

CLAUDIA

No!

LENZO

You have to come with us.

CLAUDIA

Leave! If Aldo finds out that someone came... I can't lie to him.

LENZO

We can't leave you alone with him.

DORA

I'll look out for her.

LENZO

This isn't a game of tag, Dora. This isn't a game at all. We're talking about something very serious here.

DORA

If something happens, I'll call you, and you'll come with the police.

CLAUDIA

No! No you won't!

DORA

If you refuse, I'll tell Aldo you stole my music player.

CLAUDIA

You wouldn't dream of it!

DORA

I just have.

Go, Lenzo.

LENZO

I don't like anything...

CLAUDIA

I'll be with her at all times! Let her look out for me! If she wants to keep a watch on me, okay then, I'll agree! But you must go!

LENZO

We've got to get her out of here, even if it's by force.

DORA

If he tries to hurt her again, I'll call you.

LENZO

You'll call me.

DORA

I'll call you.

CLAUDIA

It won't happen again! I promise you!

Aldo's car.

CLAUDIA

Leave!

DORA

Lenzo's car is in the drive. We have to think.

CLAUDIA

You hurt your knee. You called a doctor. I'm going to attic. I need space to calm down. He'll get angry. He'll fire you.

DORA

He won't dare.

CLAUDIA

He'll do it.

DORA

We'll see.

CLAUDIA

Please! Please! He needs to leave quickly.

DORA

Okay.

Claudia leaves.

LENZO

Dora!

DORA

Put your arms around me.

LENZO

You're shaking.

DORA

Kiss me, darling. Kiss me before that monster...

They kiss.

Aldo comes into the house.

DORA

Make it look like... It was a big knock...

I fell off the bike, a... A cat. A cat or something... It crossed the road. No idea how I got back to the house. Claudia will shout at me, most of the shopping's ruined...

Aldo enters.

ALDO

Have we a visitor?

DORA

I fell and...

ALDO

I hope it isn't serious. Let me introduce myself. I'm Aldo.

LENZO

Lenzo. Just a scratch.

ALDO

Doctor?

DORA

Yes.

ALDO

A doctor.

Will you be staying for dinner?

12

In which Aldo and Lenzo have a conversation and the theory of cause and effect is tested.

Aldo, Lenzo, Dora.

ALDO

I love the patellar reflex. I find it really amusing. It's so ridiculous. Just like doctors.

LENZO

Have you had a bad experience with doctors?

ALDO

I can see I'm dealing with someone who stays calm. What area have you specialized in?

LENZO

I graduated a short while ago. I'm preparing to go into...

ALDO

What would you like to practice?

LENZO

Local medicine. It would allow me to work in the area. All my family live here.

ALDO

Dora, will you let me examine your patellar reflex?

DORA

I'm not sure.

LENZO

There won't be a reflex. The muscles of her leg are very contracted.

Indeed, Dora's knee doesn't respond to the blow Aldo strikes on her kneecap. The other knee, in contrast, rocks lightly when it gets struck.

ALDO

Highly amusing.

LENZO

I don't see what's funny about it. And I don't exactly see you laughing your head off.

ALDO

I can be dying with laughter inside without losing my composure on the outside. In fact, I'm doing that at this precise moment. Feigning a little extra sanity is never a bad thing, especially in front of recent unknowns. Any detail, no matter how insignificant it seems, can make me laugh. Or not. In any case, I'm in control. I choose. The trick is to always keep the door between sanity and madness open. Wide open. Also to avoid drafts.

As I was saying. The patellar reflex – reflexes in general, all of them – I find them very amusing. They're a prime example of human weakness. A hammer hits you in a certain spot, and the corresponding reflex starts working. There's no room for any choice in the matter.

LENZO

Reflexes can contain themselves. There's nothing extraordinary about getting them to do so.

ALDO

I'm happy to see you're listening. I like talking so much that I sometimes forget somebody else is even there.

Aldo picks something up and throws it at Lenzo, who catches it mid-flight.

ALDO

Yes. Extraordinary and virtuosic. When I was small, my father once took me to the circus. Let me tell you this story. A Sunday – I haven't digressed – conversations never lose their way. They do dawdle, that's natural. Out of all the acts we saw, I only remember one – the hypnotizer, the Hypnotizer of Chickens. He was carrying a huge red box, metal, painted with yellow stars. Inside, chickens, suffocating. He took the poor apneic animals from the box, one by one, set them in front of himself and, after uttering the magic words – a tongue

twister – he left them paralyzed on a table with a table cloth. A row of frozen chickens. What an absurd image. To say nothing of my idiotically overjoyed face. Afterwards, with my father – we were sitting together on the grass around the big top, out in the open ground – I remember the grass caressing the palm of my hand – my father explained that with certain animals – chickens being one of them – if you press down on their neck, you can immobilize them. Cause and effect; the essence of manipulation.

People act like chickens. They put pressure on us here and we cry, they put pressure on us there and we laugh, we react in one way or another. It's sickening how unstable we are. Reflexes! Balduzzi's reflex, Barkman's, Barraquer's, Bekhterev's four reflexes as well as the Bekhterev-Mendel and the Bekhterev-Jacobsohn, Bing's, Brissaud's, Buzzard's – better known as the patellar reflex – Cacciapuoti, Chodźko, Erb, Escherich, Balant, Haab, Kisch, Kocher – that Kocher one's also very funny – Marie...

LENZO

You're going through them in alphabetical order.

ALDO

Rossolimo, Smirnoff, Sterling, etcetera, etcetera... Yes, in alphabetical order. I learnt them by heart. I unlearnt them in reverse order.

I'm boring you.

LENZO

Not at all. It's just that I don't agree with you.

ALDO

I thought that. What do you think of suicide?

LENZO

Sorry?

ALDO

Suicide. Autolysis.

LENZO

I think it's an abomination.

ALDO

Yes, there've been some really terrible cases. There's a lot of incompetence on all sides.

And dreams?

LENZO

I'm lost.

ALDO

Do you believe in the interpretation of dreams?

LENZO

If I'm not mistaken, you're testing me.

ALDO

You're not mistaken. Dreams.

LENZO

The psychology taught on the degree course is based on behaviorist theories. Mainly.

ALDO

Of course. And when you're asleep, there's not much behavior going on, correct? Except for sleepwalkers. The only people who've managed to fly – sleepwalkers. Sleepflying, a term of my own making, if you'll allow me to grant myself that honor. I have a recurring dream, a nightmare. More of a nightmare before – the first few nights, the first few years... – now I've got used to it. My father used to say that dreams were like moving house during the night and thinking that you've never lived anywhere else.

DORA

That's really lovely.

ALDO

Very sensitive, my father. I also had to unlearn how to be sensitive. It came down to either me, or the sensitivity. I stopped being sensitive and buried my fears in writing. A foolproof escape plan..

LENZO

What do you dream?

ALDO

I thought you'd ask about my writing. Are you interested?

LENZO

Yes. In what you dream.

ALDO

I come home, to this house, and I don't know where I'm coming home from because it's like I've never come from anywhere. I call at the door. I ask if anyone's there. No one answers. No one answers because they're all hiding. I go into the house – the door's open – and I find it empty, unoccupied, unfurnished. Just holes in the ground, rectangular holes dug in the ground, with a ladder to climb down to the depths.

LENZO

Are they empty?

ALDO

I don't know, I've never climbed down.

DORA

You're obsessed with death.

ALDO

Yes.

Right, let's get to the point. I'd like a competent doctor to visit my mother. She suffers hemorrhages.

LENZO

Hemorrhages?

ALDO

Yes. Flows. Down below.

LENZO

Since when?

DORA

Lenzo, what...?

ALDO

I found out last week. She's very reserved about her health. I found her underwear stained in blood. I asked her and she said she didn't know anything. We argued. She realized she couldn't lie to me and told me she hadn't attached any importance to it, that it had been happening for around three months.

DORA

Is it serious?

LENZO

She should be seen by a gynecologist.

ALDO

She's never needed one.

DORA

Maybe she does now. It could be...

LENZO

It could.

ALDO

I don't know what the necessary steps are to... Would you mind getting us that visit, please?

LENZO

I'll do it. Tomorrow without fail. I'll see what I can do at the hospital.

ALDO

Thank you. Dora, do you feel okay to make dinner?

LENZO

She should rest. A few days.

ALDO

We can't do without her for that long. We need someone to take care of the house.

LENZO

Today she needs rest. We'll see about tomorrow.

ALDO

Oh well. I'm sure my mother can get herself together and make us something for dinner. You're staying, right?

LENZO

No. I have to go. Dora, remember what I've told you, what you need to do.

ALDO

Are you a couple?

DORA

Yes.

ALDO

You can tell. Six months?

LENZO

Six months?

ALDO

The time you've been together.

DORA

Seven

ALDO

Almost right. Can't push my luck twice in a row.

Come tomorrow, Lenzo. I'd like to talk to you. There isn't an abundance of doctors around these parts. I frighten them. I promise not to talk so much. You've made a good impression on me. And when you're here tomorrow you'll be able to make sure Dora hasn't fled with some hitherto unknown lover, unlike Dalia. With her it happened overnight... Volatilization!

LENZO

That's hard to believe.

ALDO

Really? Perhaps it's more believable to say we've killed her and are eating her. Dora, haven't you seen all those bags in the cold store?

LENZO

I'll come back tomorrow.

ALDO

Dora, stay there and rest, I'm going upstairs for a minute to talk to Claudia and see if she can make something for the three of us. A pleasure, Lenzo, until tomorrow. I'll leave you to say goodbye to each other, and don't worry about Dora, we'll not make her work today. We'll have dinner and we'll bring her to her room. The wheelchair my father used for a while before his death must be somewhere in the garage. He died in that chair.

Aldo leaves.

LENZO

God, he's a bore!

Dora, complain about your knee tonight. A lot. I'll come and see you tomorrow.

DORA

When he mentioned the blood loss... Your face changed.

LENZO

Before, when I was examining her, I found swollen glands. In her neck and under her arms. And she's very warm.

DORA

I'd noticed that.

LENZO

At the time I didn't know, I didn't realize, but...

DORA

Cancer? Claudia has cancer?

LENZO

It's very likely. And very advanced. So advanced that I don't think it's even worth trying to... I'm thinking out loud. Don't pay any attention to me. Did you notice Aldo? While we were talking?

DORA

What?

LENZO

He loves her. You can tell. His eyes filled with tears when cancer was brought up. His voice trembled.

DORA

He's a monster.

LENZO

Does he seem like that to you?

DORA

Yes.

LENZO

I see you don't trust him. I believe him. I'd be more suspicious of her. Very reserved. Claudia hasn't told us everything. The burns. Are you sure that no one came to the house on those days? Or that she didn't go out?

DORA

She can't drive. And by bike... It's been two or three years since she rode a bike. She told me, because of her back.

LENZO

Back pain?

DORA

Yes. For two or three years.

LENZO

That long? Serious. Very serious. A cancer that's been developing for that long... I'll go before Aldo comes back. I love you, Dora. Keep your mobile with you at all times, especially when you're with her. He's an artist. I knew lots of people like him at university. So egocentric, so... But completely harmless. But as for her. Her we know nothing about. Until tomorrow, darling.

DORA

Bye.

Lenzo leaves.

Aldo and Claudia enter. Dragging a wheelchair.

ALDO

Voilà!

13

*In which a wheelchair, a paper bird, a lot of pain, the enormous eyes of Mr
Wind and two sleepflyers appear.*

And in which we learn who is burning Claudia.

Aldo, Dora, Claudia.

ALDO

I'm going to bed. Claudia, even if you're not sleepy, go to bed. I would ask Dora to make sure you obey, but I get the impression that stairs aren't her strong point today. Good night.

DORA

I'm not an invalid.

ALDO

No, but you must feel like one.

Aldo takes a fork and throws it to the other side of the room. He looks at Dora. Dora doesn't understand the meaning of the gesture. Aldo laughs.

ALDO

Good night.

Aldo exits.

DORA

I'm sick of this seat. I need to stretch my legs.

Claudia picks up the fork and puts it in the pocket of her dressing gown.

DORA

You looked very calm during dinner.

CLAUDIA

What were you talking about before?

DORA

About my knee. And reflexes. The patellar reflex.

CLAUDIA

His speech on the patellar reflex?

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

And me? Did you talk about me?

DORA

No.

CLAUDIA

Don't lie to me. While we were having dinner... how to put it... I felt... Uncomfortable. In my own home. In my own landscape. Words can create, inhabit places, landscapes...

DORA

I'm not lying to you. Aldo talked a lot, and the whole time it was about himself.

CLAUDIA

That's normal. He likes to analyze people while setting out his theories. I've seen him do it sometimes, with people he's just met. It can be annoying. And it's tiring. He's constantly weighing up the qualities of his opponent. For him, any conversation becomes a challenge. And then he stops. Stops talking and leaves. Grants a moment of respite. He allows his opponent to think calmly, assess what's just happened, and if they decide to carry on with the conversation, Aldo welcomes them with open arms. And it's very strange, but he can show affection, just through talking. When you meet him for the second time, Aldo never dominates... on the whole.

DORA

I've already endured one meeting with him. And I doubt he could actually be any more domineering on a second occasion.

CLAUDIA

I like talking too. Talking relaxes me. I've never been able to talk to myself. Even with how easy I have it... So many hours in this huge house... sometimes overwhelming, no one else here but me... I've never talked to myself. I don't like my voice.

DORA

Well you're a very good singer.

CLAUDIA

The things you say!

DORA

It's true. Mr Wind, your husband, used to entertain us with... I've just remembered. Does it bother you?

CLAUDIA

Not at all.

DORA

On rainy days, he used to keep us entertained with paper-folding exercises. We would make gondolas, peacocks, a kind of really strange cube that you opened at one end, moving your fingers – like this.

CLAUDIA

A Heaven and Hell.

DORA

Really?

CLAUDIA

Yes.

DORA

That's what it's called?

CLAUDIA

Yes.

DORA

And paper birds. Each one bigger than the last. Or else even smaller.

CLAUDIA

Did he teach you to make frogs?

DORA

No. You can make frogs?

CLAUDIA

Jumping frogs. I've interrupted you.

DORA

Yes. The paper birds used to take me somewhere else. I loved to fold the paper, one side, then the other... just a simple piece of paper, and then magic! A paper bird would appear in your hands! I didn't understand how – where something so beautiful could come from. The first times it didn't work for me. One day Mr Wind came up to me – I remember it perfectly – he stood beside me, watching me with those eyes. He had enormous eyes...

CLAUDIA

Wonderful.

DORA

Blue. And he said:

“Let go of the handkerchief.”

And he took it out of my hand so gently and left it on the desk and said:

“It'll be okay here.”

And my first paper bird appeared.

Are you crying?

CLAUDIA

I loved my husband more than anything in this world. More than myself. More than my son.

But that was before.

What were you going to say?

DORA

They relaxed me so much, the paper birds. Why don't you try?

CLAUDIA

Me? Making paper birds?

DORA

Yes.

CLAUDIA

Bring me a page.

DORA

Here.

Claudia.

CLAUDIA

What?

DORA

Who's burning you?

CLAUDIA

Don't separate me from my son.

DORA

It's for your own good.

CLAUDIA

Never.

DORA

Tell me the truth. Did Aldo give you these burns?

CLAUDIA

No.

DORA

Who was it?

CLAUDIA

Paper bird. Here you are.

DORA

I don't want to think you're mad.

CLAUDIA

You wouldn't understand.

DORA

Do you burn yourself? With cigarettes?

CLAUDIA

It hurts a lot, Dora.

Everything hurts a lot.

Inside.

Cigarettes keep me alert. The burn of them... It distracts me... Eases the other pain... For a while.

DORA

You've got to let a doctor see you. You can get drugs for the pain, dammit!

CLAUDIA

No drug will take away this pain. My soul hurts.

Dora jumps. Her mobile rings in her pocket.

CLAUDIA

Is that a mobile phone? Aren't you going to answer it?

DORA

No!

CLAUDIA

Who is it?

DORA

None of your business.

Claudia slaps Dora.

CLAUDIA

I'm sorry.

DORA

Forget about it.

CLAUDIA

What are you doing?

DORA

Putting some music on.

CLAUDIA

Now?

DORA

Now.

CLAUDIA

Don't do it. If Aldo wakes and sees you standing up, he'll get angry. Very. And even more so with me. Because of the music.

DORA

Music can inhabit landscapes too. And make them more beautiful.

CLAUDIA

Dora, please.

Dora connects her music player to the hi-fi system.

A slow ballad plays.

Dora takes hold of Claudia.

DORA

Where does it hurt?

Claudia points to a spot on her body.

Dora embraces her and caresses the skin where it hurts.

Claudia points somewhere else.

Dora caresses her again.

Claudia...

Dora...

They dance together.

Until sleep overcomes them.

But they continue, together.

Sleepflying.

14

In which Aldo makes a promise.

And in which there is more discussion about the book.

Lenzo, Aldo.

LENZO

And what about all these paper birds? There must be hundreds.

ALDO

What if I told you I haven't got a clue?

LENZO

I wasn't able to get a hold of my superior at the hospital. I'm going back this afternoon, hoping to catch him. How's Dora?

ALDO

I haven't seen her today. I'm surprised she didn't answer the door. Maybe she's in the garden. When it's weather like this Claudia likes to putter round the garden. She must be helping her with the parterres. It's restful work, although in a wheelchair it could be quite the adventure.

LENZO

In a wheelchair?

ALDO

My father's.

LENZO

I thought you were joking last night.

ALDO

No.

LENZO

Shall we go fetch them?

ALDO

Leave them to it. Claudia needs a distraction. She's been working hard recently.

LENZO

Is she a writer?

ALDO

No. I'm the writer.

LENZO

But she also writes?

ALDO

No. She's writing my book. The manuscript, so to speak. I'm the one who came up with it and who wrote it. Claudia's reproducing it. She's my editor. She's 100% artisan.

LENZO

Your editor?

ALDO

She's reproducing the copies. By hand. One by one.

LENZO

Why don't you go to a professional publishers? You'd save time and effort and I don't think cost would be a problem...

ALDO

Impossible. It's not a conventional book. It's origami, a paper construction with two hundred and forty-two sides. You don't bind it. How to explain it to you... You start with a single square sheet of paper and fold it until you get the two hundred and forty-two sides. There's not a machine in the world that could make this book.

LENZO

I can't imagine it.

ALDO

Try. Close your eyes. Let's see. It's shaped like a triangle and, like all books, you start reading from the first side, the front cover. As you read it, it unfolds into one or more sides, one or more reading pathways. And when you get to the last page, the book closes. By itself. It then regains its original shape, its triangle shape. And you get the back cover, without ever having to turn it over. You can open your eyes now. It's complicated to picture, I know that.

LENZO

Will you show me a copy?

ALDO

No.

LENZO

Claudia folds the paper.

ALDO

And she writes.

LENZO

And what's it about?

ALDO

Have you ever woken up and thought about not going into work?

LENZO

Constantly. Every day.

ALDO

And have you ever thought about not obeying your boss because he's told you to do something you didn't feel like doing, or that you didn't think you should do?

LENZO

When the circumstances have arisen, yes, I've thought about it. But I always end up obeying orders.

ALDO

And have you ever thought about throwing yourself on the tracks just as a train's about to go by?

LENZO

Never.

ALDO

Of sleeping with your girlfriend's best friend or with you sister?

You've never dreamt of doing that?

Of not making your bed one day? Of drinking one too many? Jumping a red light? Going faster instead of braking? Changing career? Buying a woman's body or selling yours? Have you always made the right choice?

I'm talking about fleeting thoughts, lasting tenths, thousandths of a second. Of possibilities. Choices.

When you're born, your life is a blank page. The clock starts ticking. And you fold, you bend, you crease, you twist, one way, the other, inside, outside. Everything can happen. The possibilities are immeasurable.

LENZO

I don't think you answered my question. I like what you're saying but...

ALDO

The book has no story. It has millions of them. As many as there are possible readers. The book's origami, just like life. And the story read by the reader contains the creases of his past, the lines of his present, the open plains of his future. The book speaks to us about our own freedom to choose. It replicates the ability to think which each one of us has. You read your life and your choices.

LENZO

Cause and effect?

ALDO

Yes, but never in a predictable way. At this precise moment we're talking, but I've a hundred different subjects running through my head, none of them directly related to our conversation. Allowing myself to be swept along by just one of them and changing the subject depends exclusively on whether I allow my thoughts to fold this way or that. On whether I allow them to surface or not. We're pieces of paper, sometimes too crumpled, sometimes with folds that mark

us for life. But there's always a new fold. Whether to take it or not depends on our individual level of freedom.

Let me illustrate: in your opinion, what am I not capable of doing right now? Go.

LENZO

Killing me.

ALDO

Too easy. Another.

You can't think of one.

LENZO

Killing me seems quite improbable.

ALDO

It would be more improbable if you managed to humiliate me, to give you one example.

LENZO

I wouldn't know where to start.

ALDO

Exactly. Well, it's not that hard to do. You just need to put it to yourself as a possibility. Discover that fold in yourself. Rush towards it, push against the wall of paper until it gives way, and then you'll have new alternatives. It requires certain training. Look. You see me right here, and I'll carry on talking, but just to demonstrate, I've already launched myself towards a fold which will irremissibly lead to suicide. Can't you see me crying? Can't you see that I find myself on the brink of death? It would be so easy, right now, to end it... but no, I must stop it, enough, I've stopped crying... You see? And I carried on talking all the way through.

LENZO

You're mad.

ALDO

You're scared. That's why you control your freedom. You don't want to do too much living. You prefer your way to be adequately lit. Origami increases freedom.

Dora enters in the wheelchair, and Claudia.

ALDO

We didn't hear you coming. Were you in the garden?

CLAUDIA

Have you been crying?

ALDO

It's nothing. A demonstration.

LENZO

Dora, you shouldn't be working. I told you. I'm going to take you home.

DORA

No.

LENZO

I need to examine your wound.

ALDO

Go ahead.

LENZO

Let's see... Does it hurt if I press here?

DORA

No.

LENZO

Dora, I need to talk to you.

DORA

Me too. Call me later.

LENZO

Come with me.

DORA

No.

CLAUDIA

Aldo, what's the doctor doing here again?

ALDO

Leaving us with no help for another day?

CLAUDIA

Aldo, I don't want anyone to tell me I'm going to die.

ALDO

Where's this coming from?

CLAUDIA

Promise me. I don't want anyone to ever tell me I'm dying.

ALDO

I promise.

CLAUDIA

I'd die if they took me away from you.

In which Dora reproaches Aldo for a romantic kiss that was, in fact, a kiss of hate.

Dora, Aldo.

DORA

I could have gone back to my parents'. Allowed Lenzo to take me. So my parents could look after me. I don't feel like it. With my family, the feeling, with my family... The waiting room of an STD clinic... Sexually transmitted diseases. Have you ever been in one? In any waiting room? Waiting, confined, worrying? You can catch a disease off anyone... That's what my parents' house is like. A waiting room. Riddled with diseases.

I feel good in this house. At ease.

Don't let me talk any more.

ALDO

Why are you dating Lenzo?

DORA

You're impertinent.

ALDO

And you're a liar. You don't love him. No more than you love Claudia or me. You can tell by your expression. You despise him.

DORA

He's a really good fuck.

ALDO

Why do you think you can hurt me by saying things like that? Is he your first boyfriend?

DORA

Absolutely not.

ALDO

How many?

DORA

Those I think of as boyfriends... I've lost count. What do you mean when you say boyfriend?

ALDO

Something more than a good fuck.

DORA

You're trying to get me to open up.

ALDO

Yes. I want to get to know you. Sometimes you watch us, Claudia and me. I've noticed. What's going on that we don't know about?

DORA

Nothing. I just find you both interesting.

Did Dalia fall in love with you?

ALDO

Yes.

DORA

How do you know?

ALDO

She told me she loved me.

How many boyfriends have you had?

DORA

Four. No, five. It's none of your business.

ALDO

I want to ask you something.

DORA

Ask whatever you like.

ALDO

You'll let me?

DORA

I get the impression that people feel they can share their secrets with you.

ALDO

Secrets aren't shared. They stop being secrets. It comes from the Latin, 'secretus'. It means withdrawn, apart, separate. Within yourself. Never share a secret with me.

Just be my accomplice.

How come you've had so many boyfriends?

DORA

I needed to remove the stain of Gavin from my body.

ALDO

Did you ever manage to forget me?

No answer.

Wrong question. Correction. Were you looking for a hero?

DORA

I looked for so many wrong heroes.

ALDO

Why didn't you date Gavin?

DORA

After raping me?

I can't imagine.... Drunk... So long ago.

ALDO

Do you prefer Lenzo, who provides all the sobriety, security, comfort, sex, and patellar reflexes you need?

DORA

He would have turned me into a monster.

ALDO

You'd be different.

DORA

Children don't want to be different.

ALDO

Then I was never a child.

DORA

Did you fall in love with Dalia?

ALDO

Yes.

DORA

I thought so. And Theo. Did he fall in love with her?

ALDO

Theo never existed. Why did you think so?

DORA

Dalia and I always fought over the same guys. We had similar tastes.

ALDO

Was Dalia in our class, too?

DORA

No. She was a class ahead. Then she repeated.
Tell me what's happened to Dalia.

ALDO

We're eating her. I told you, the bags in the fridge.

DORA

Seriously.

ALDO

She left.

DORA

Is she okay?

ALDO

No.

DORA

Did you sleep with her?

ALDO

She asked me if I loved her.

DORA

She wanted to sleep with you.

ALDO

Like you do.

DORA

No. I want you...

To kiss me.

To work against...

To scrub out your kiss. Your first kiss. Scrub it from my lips.

To kill childhood. Feel nothing. Forget you. Kill the little girl inside of me. To stop dreaming... wanting. To get better so I can relive, remember, recreate, invoke a lost world... And behead it immediately.

I don't need to scrub out the rape. It didn't mean anything. It didn't imprison me anywhere. But you did. Your kiss did. I need to scrub away your kiss. Scrub you out. You.

ALDO

You ask for a kiss, but you're really asking to sleep with me. I don't get it. You remind me of Dalia. You'll leave this house tomorrow.

DORA

I just wanted to tell you that... I hate you. For deceiving me all these years. For not helping me forget a false kiss.

ALDO

I'm sorry. Truly. I'm sorry.

DORA

I need the job. And you both need me. Because of the books. Claudia's told me about that.

ALDO

I can replace you.

DORA

You won't find anybody.

ALDO

It's strange to see you sitting in my father's wheelchair.

DORA

You'll be alone.

ALDO

No.

DORA

We'll see. I'll leave tomorrow.

Dora exits.

ALDO

No. Stay.

16

In which the white door opens.

Claudia, Dora.

CLAUDIA

What are you doing?

DORA

I'm going. I've been fired.

CLAUDIA

What? Get back in the chair! If Aldo sees you standing!

DORA

Let Aldo see what he likes. I no longer... I haven't lost anything in this house.

CLAUDIA

What do you mean?

DORA

Will you come with me? A doctor needs to see you.

CLAUDIA

No! I told you I wouldn't burn myself again and I haven't.

DORA

You're dying, Claudia.

CLAUDIA

He promised me.

DORA

What?

CLAUDIA

He promised that no one would ever tell me I'm going to die.

DORA

You're sick. Really sick.

CLAUDIA

I can't leave Aldo. And the book! The book's more important to him than his own life!

DORA

If you don't come with me, I'll get them to forcibly remove you. I wouldn't like to have to go that far. The blood.

CLAUDIA

No. What blood?

DORA

Let's go.

CLAUDIA

You can't go.

DORA

I can. And so can you.

CLAUDIA

Please.

DORA

If you don't, I'll be forced to tell him you've listened to music with me. That my knee is fine. That you knew everything. That you lied to him. Don't make me blackmail you, please, it's not your fault I'm so angry.

Dora's mobile phone rings.

Dora takes it out of her pocket.

Claudia takes it off her and throws it on the ground.

DORA

What are you doing!

The phone keeps ringing.

CLAUDIA

Stay! If you won't do it for me, do it for...

DORA

For Aldo? Never! End of story!

CLAUDIA

For her.

DORA

What are you talking about?

CLAUDIA

She's there.

Claudia approaches the white door and opens it a tiny fraction.

DORA

You're going to die! Don't you get it?

Dora seizes the moment to rush forward and grab her mobile.

Claudia takes out the fork and drives it into Dora's knee.

Dora writhes in pain.

Claudia throws the mobile. It stops ringing.

DORA

The only hope you have is coming with me!

Claudia swings open the white door.

For a second, she stands frozen to the spot.

A second that becomes an eternity.

She could cry. Run away. Sing. Kill. No. Too easy. Another. Another fold. A fold. An unexpected fold. Claudia slams herself into another fold. Her whole body leans against the fold until it gives way. Now giving way, it tilts, lists, turns over 180 degrees and Claudia falls into the void. A piece of paper has two faces. Truth is double. She falls endlessly. And a frog croaks. A frog starts to croak. And Claudia listens to it and Dora listens to it. And the second ends.

Claudia runs towards Dora, takes her by the arms and pulls her towards the white door. Dora still doesn't scream. They go through the door. Dora still doesn't scream. They disappear behind the door. And then, yes, Dora screams. She screams. She screams. And it seems she'll never stop screaming.

The human paper-folding begins.

ACT II
IMAGIRO

Poetry of my heart: imagination.

FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA

1.

In which the human paper-folding begins.

In which Dora asks Aldo to imagine for a moment.

And in which Aldo wins a wish.

Sitting in the wheelchair, Dora does her best to pick up the hundreds of paper birds scattered on the floor. One of them seems to have something written on it. She unfolds the paper bird and reads: 'Origami'. Claudia wrote it the night they danced together. Dora had lost it.

She turns the page over and discovers that the word has been written in reverse: 'Imagiro'.

Aldo enters.

ALDO

Thank you for staying.

DORA

I... love you.

ALDO

Don't say that. That's not how you feel. You said you hated me.

DORA

It is how I feel.

ALDO

Where do you feel it?

DORA

Every... Everywhere.

ALDO

I don't believe you. Your hand. Your hand, for example. Does your hand love me?

DORA

Yes. It burns... for your touch.

ALDO

Your knee?

Your knee?

DORA

No. My knee... Hurts.

Aldo checks the patellar reflex of Dora's knee.

The girl cries out in pain.

ALDO

It's got worse. You're a burden. You're no help to us.

DORA

No.

ALDO

You're doing the bare minimum.

DORA

I can... Do... More.

ALDO

I can't think how. You push yourself until the pain gets too much. I don't know if you're doing it out of hate. Or love. But, no matter how much you love me, you're not fulfilling your duties.

DORA

Your... Father.

ALDO

My father?

DORA

Your father... Taught me... To make paper birds.

ALDO

What are you getting at?

DORA

My hands. My hands love... They work... They fold... Paper.

ALDO

Would you be able to?

DORA

Yes. I'll become two hands... More. For Claudia. For you. Claudia, as my legs. I can learn.

ALDO

Because of love? Just love?

DORA

I'll prove it to you. My legs will recover. You'll have... Two women. Six hands. Six legs.

ALDO

Love can't fill more than one body.

DORA

I would... I would fold... For... You.

ALDO

Who taught you to care so much about on love? Think carefully about what you're saying. You're wrong.

And you can't see it.

If I asked you to stay here and live with me, would you?

DORA

If you wanted... Yes.

With you.

ALDO

You're very like Dalia. Not totally. But a lot. She used to surrender completely. There's something about you makes me suspicious. What is it?

DORA

Truth... Is double.

ALDO

Like two sides of the same page. What else did my father teach you?

Tell me about him. I only have my memories. My truth. And the truth Claudia tells me. What's yours?

DORA

His eyes. Blue. In his expression... Swimming dolphins.

ALDO

Stop talking in that syncopated way.

DORA

Everything I say... I'm saying for you. For me it's... A huge... Effort.

ALDO

Tell me about my father.

DORA

You... You have... His same expression. He took away my hanky... Graceful... The same hanky you rescued. Which was stained with blood. Which I burned. He touched my hanky. When it was still pure.

You... You have... His same expression... Without dolphins. Would you be able to treat me like your father?

ALDO

Maybe. You do have his wheelchair, after all..

DORA

Kiss me.

ALDO

I never kissed my father. He always kissed me.

DORA

I feel... Very sad.

Aldo. Imagine.

Imagire.

I will too.

Imagiuro.

And turn around.

Origami.

Kiss me honestly.

It's easy.

One second. Of your life.

Do it. For me. For you. And then for you again. You.

ALDO

You're asking too much.

DORA

Then... Ask me what you want.

ALDO

Whatever I wish?

DORA

Any... Wish

But to begin with... To forget you... Since you're not... I need... You to kiss me.

Aldo kisses Dora.

DORA

Thank you.

ALDO

Walk.

Dora gets up from the chair. She collapses and cries out in pain.

ALDO

You owe me a wish.

2.

In which Dora croaks.

Dora, Claudia.

DORA

I can't get it to work.

CLAUDIA

You've made a mistake on the fold before the last one.

DORA

Show me it again.

CLAUDIA

Get another piece of paper.

How did you manage it?

DORA

I asked him. I want to be useful. I can help you. I'm ready.

Shall we begin? Don't you want to show me?

CLAUDIA

No.

DORA

Show me.

CLAUDIA

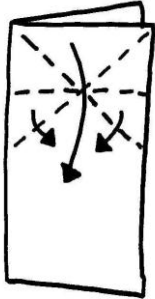
I'm not doing it for you. Let's be clear on that. I'm doing it for him. I can't go against him. I don't want to. Is it a square page? Yes? Fold it in half.

DORA

I remember that part.

CLAUDIA

Treat the folded page like it's a single sheet of paper. Stand it upright and make three creases, one horizontal and two others, making an X shape. The three creases should cross in the middle. Then fold them to get the the mouth.



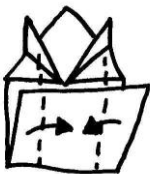
Make a crease in the bottom part and then fold that in half.



Fold the bottom edges of the top part outwards to get the legs.



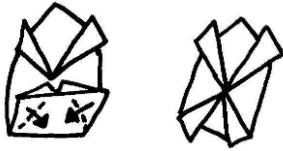
Make two vertical folds and close them over to meet in the center.



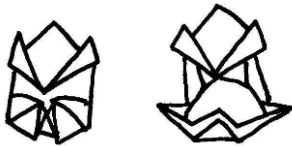
Another horizontal fold in the bottom part and fold it over.



The back legs. Mark out two triangles and fold to the center and outwards.



From the point where the back legs meet, pull out towards the sides.

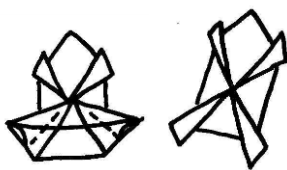


DORA

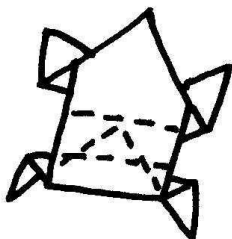
It's so hard.

CLAUDIA

Laborious. Mark out two more triangles in the back legs and fold outwards, and that's how we get the stomach.



We turn it over. Mark out two parallel creases on the torso and fold them so they form a little step.



And the jumping frog appears.



DORA

Did Dalia learn to fold paper too?

CLAUDIA

You want to follow in Dalia's footsteps?

Yes, she learnt.

DORA

Did you teach her?

CLAUDIA

She taught herself. Using the attic library. She was smarter than you. She spied on me while I worked. Stole books from me. She practiced secretly in her bedroom. She wanted to outdo me. Be better than me. Better for Aldo. She didn't succeed.

DORA

I can't go up to the attic. Otherwise, I'd have spied on you too. And stolen books.

CLAUDIA

You couldn't even if you tried. I destroyed the library. Everything I know. So no one will ever be hot on my heels ever again.

DORA

I don't want to be hot on your heels.

CLAUDIA

No, you'd love mine to burn out of their own accord. But it'll never happen. A student never outdoes their teacher. Aldo's the exception.

DORA

Here you go, a jumping frog. I didn't take that long to do it.

CLAUDIA

Paint some eyes and a mouth.

DORA

That's ridiculous.

CLAUDIA

You've got to learn the basics. Practice. The jumping frog needs eyes and a mouth. Paint them on. Then, you can unlearn whatever you like. Skip whatever steps you like. I can make a jumping frog in only four steps. All it takes is knowing where to place your fingertips, where to press down. I'll do it in four moves.

DORA

Let's see.

CLAUDIA

Not yet. Paint it some eyes and a mouth.



Now make it jump.

DORA

It jumps well.

CLAUDIA

When it jumps you have to croak.

DORA

No.

CLAUDIA

Croak.

DORA

No.

CLAUDIA

Croak.

Dora croaks.

3.

In which Claudia talks about the night she ran in the rain and met a soaked Dalia at the side of the pond, crying and half-naked, who told her that Theo didn't exist.

In which Aldo remembers being an involuntary accomplice to a crime.

In which Lenzo talks on the phone while driving.

In which Dora obeys Claudia and loves Aldo.

Claudia, Aldo.

CLAUDIA

I'm really struggling, you know?

ALDO

I know. That's why I want Dora to help you with the most basic tasks. You don't want us to replace her and she wants to make your work easier. I don't see where the problem is. We can't be late on the books. I need to meet the deadline. Put up with it for me. Or would you rather I was the one struggling?

Who was it tattooed the word 'Live' on my stomach?

CLAUDIA

No.

ALDO

Mother.

CLAUDIA

Don't call me mother. I can feel the distance you're putting between us. I'm more than just 'mother'. I'm a person. And I want you to love me completely. I'll take no excuses for any lack of passion. My name is Claudia.

ALDO

I never asked. Claudia. Have you ever tried to kill yourself?

CLAUDIA

Never. I never allowed myself the privilege. I've devoted my whole life to others. To my family. To you and your father. I stayed in the background.

ALDO

If Dora heard you, she'd ask why you don't call father by his name.

CLAUDIA

Why did you think of her just now?

ALDO

How would you answer her?

CLAUDIA

You have to stop loving the dead. They're deplorable.

ALDO

Yes. Deplorable. They don't let you live.

Did my father kill himself?

CLAUDIA

No. It was a slow death.

ALDO

And any of the family? A grandfather?

CLAUDIA

No. Only I've thought about it many times. But I've never dared.

ALDO

How?

CLAUDIA

Hanging. From a beam. In the attic. The beam just above the worktable. Sometimes, when I'm working, I can see my own feet hanging, I can feel my toenails brushing against my hair.

ALDO

Why would you do it?

CLAUDIA

I have no reasons.

ALDO

I've just remembered. I was very young, one weekend, a Saturday morning, one of Dad's dogs gave birth.

CLAUDIA

Luna.

ALDO

Hang on – I was the first to realize that the dog... Luna. Yes, she was called Luna.

CLAUDIA

I thought you'd forgotten.

ALDO

She was giving birth. She came to the door of my bedroom, it was very early, her whines woke me, I got up and there was Luna, with a shapeless mass writhing around on the floor. The dog saw me, turned and went back to the kitchen to go on giving birth. I ran to tell you. Nobody else was home. We were alone.

CLAUDIA

Your father was there too. But it was as if he wasn't. In the wheelchair. Upstairs.

ALDO

More than two hours of labor, I remember it like it's happening right now, right in front of me. Me ripping open the fetal sacks, Luna eating the umbilical cord and the placenta. You watched us, sitting on the stool. You never took your eyes off the dog's skull. You intervened only once, to stop Luna eating too many placentas.

"They could make her sick", you told me.

Eleven pups in total. A litter of eleven pups. Black ones, brown, and white. With their eyes closed. Soaked in mucus.

CLAUDIA

You weren't talking then, remember?

ALDO

You put them in a plastic bag. A black one. The eleven of them. In one hand, the bag. In the other, me. And we went off into the country. Where there used to be a field of fruit trees. Where the fir trees are now.

CLAUDIA

All the fruit trees died. That same year.

ALDO

The pups' heads were squashed against the plastic. They were suffocating. Eleven mouths, inhaling the bag, like it was breathing, a lung with eleven mouths, whining, me looking at the bag between your legs, I remember your legs, in black pants, like scissors walking really fast, trampling the ploughed earth. I was dragging a rake. Dragging it along, zigzagging over the earth, suddenly the rake would jump. A stone.

CLAUDIA

You scratched all my tiles when you were little. You were obsessed with dragging things along the ground.

ALDO

You asked for the rake, we were far from the house, you stuck it into the earth, lifted the earth and buried the bag in the hole. After lunch you lay in bed for a while. And I ran to the field of fruit trees. I found the pile of upturned earth and dug it up. Nothing. The field was full of piles of upturned earth. But I was sure it had to be that pile. I dug up two, three, five, ten more piles. Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. The bag didn't turn up.

CLAUDIA

You wouldn't have got there on time, anyway. You would have found them dead.

ALDO

I reacted too late. I should have done something earlier. Or stopped it.

CLAUDIA

You were a child.

ALDO

You don't give a child a big rake. And you gave me one. You don't turn a child into an accomplice.

CLAUDIA

Blame spreads so easily. And it spreads better to a mute child than to anyone else. Blame is for sharing.

ALDO

And for spreading. Like secrets. And when it's shared, it's no longer blame. It becomes a crime.

Why did you take me with you?

CLAUDIA

I didn't want to leave you home alone. No. It wasn't that. You were all I had.

ALDO

Were you... what they would call evil?

CLAUDIA

No.

ALDO

It hurt. But I got over it. And my father's death hurt more. And I got over it. And then my life hurt. And I got over it. Thanks to you. I don't understand how a person's knee can hurt.

Claudia, why has she stayed?

CLAUDIA

For Dalia.

ALDO

Dalia left. With Theo.

CLAUDIA

Theo doesn't exist. I ran in the rain. I could smell her. Her scent. I arrived at the pond. And there she was. At the side of the pond. Soaked. On the ground. Covered in mud. Almost as naked as I was. She looked at me and sobbed and told me that Theo didn't exist.

ALDO

Lies. Theo exists. You've got to believe that. I believe it. Believe it too. If we both believe it, nobody can contradict us.

CLAUDIA

You told Dora that Theo didn't exist.

ALDO

I also told her that we eat Dalia for dinner every day. I lied to her. I've lied to her constantly. Theo exists. You know that.

CLAUDIA

I took Dora to the white room.

ALDO

You put the idea into her head. That room is empty.

CLAUDIA

Really?

ALDO

Yes.

CLAUDIA

And the croaking?

ALDO

That's all in your head. I can't hear it. Why do you insist on suffering? Why don't you want her to learn Origami?

CLAUDIA

Dalia learnt.

ALDO

Dalia left. With Theo.

CLAUDIA

Dora told me I'm going to die.

ALDO

Why?

CLAUDIA

I'm wasting a lot of time teaching her. I'm behind on the work.

ALDO

The two of you will make up the lost time in a week. Teach her well.

CLAUDIA

She's a fast learner.

Then Dalia lied to me. When she told me at the side of the pond, in the rain, looking me in the eye, crying, defeated, that Theo didn't exist. That you were Theo. And that she loved you. More than anyone. More than I do.

Dora enters.

DORA

Excuse me. I didn't mean to... Interrupt. Someone's at the door.

ALDO

We didn't hear it.

DORA

I think... It's Lenzo.

The doorbell rings for a second time. This time they do hear it.

ALDO

I'm going to my room. I don't feel like talking to anyone. Please don't disturb me.

Aldo leaves.

DORA

Will I open it?

CLAUDIA

Wait. Remember the rules.

DORA

I remember.

CLAUDIA

I'll go.

Claudia heads towards the hall.

It is indeed Lenzo, who bursts in looking for Dora.

LENZO

Dora!

DORA

Hi, Lenzo.

LENZO

I called you! Why weren't you answering your phone?

DORA

It broke. It....

LENZO

And you couldn't call me from here!?! Let's go!

DORA

Why?

LENZO

I was worried!

CLAUDIA

She's perfectly all right.

LENZO

I'm taking her.

CLAUDIA

What do you mean you're taking her? She isn't a suitcase!

LENZO

Dora, get your things and let's go.

DORA

No, Lenzo.

LENZO

I see. Could Dora and I have a moment?

DORA

There's no reason to leave. And also, we were about to start work. If you like, I'll call you tonight.

LENZO

Dora?

DORA

What?

LENZO

Please get up from that chair. It's making me nervous. I managed to arrange a doctor's visit.

DORA

Cancel it.

LENZO

What?

DORA

The thing about the burns is settled. A misunderstanding. You're not going to believe this – it turns out that...

LENZO

Dora, I want to talk to you. In private.

CLAUDIA

We've got a lot of work to do, Lenzo. You're disturbing us. Would you please leave.

DORA

How about we see each other tomorrow? I wanted to ask you to bring something from my parents' house. Music. My music collection.

LENZO

I can't believe it. Come here.

Lenzo takes Dora by the arm and pulls her up. Dora falls to the floor with a loud thump.

LENZO

Dora?

CLAUDIA

Get out of this house.

LENZO

Dora.

DORA

Go! It hurts! Go!

CLAUDIA

Get out!

Lenzo leaves.

Claudia helps Dora into the wheelchair.

Call him. Tell him everything. And get him to bring music.

DORA

It hurts.

CLAUDIA

You'll get over it.

DORA

What'll I tell him?

CLAUDIA

The truth.

DORA

Lenzo?

Can you hear me? Are you driving?

Lenzo?

CLAUDIA

Give me a cigarette.

DORA

What?

I couldn't get up. You've no idea what it's like to spend all damn day in this wheelchair.

CLAUDIA

The smoke never moves in the same direction. Like life. Although some trick themselves into thinking it does.

DORA

He hasn't left the house in days.

CLAUDIA

Tell him you're really sorry.

DORA

I'm sorry. Really. But he mustn't find out about anything. He'd get angry with Claudia.

CLAUDIA

He spies on us.

DORA

He never take his eyes off us. He spies on us.

No idea! One of his obsessions, I guess. He's probably jealous that his mother's talking to someone who isn't him. I'm fine, which is what you must be worried about.

Don't get on like that either! Didn't you see how you came in? The only thing you didn't do was cover the walls in spit!

No, I wasn't able to call you. The mobile. I told you before. You've gone too far.

Just for that? That's why you were worried? What did you think, that I'd run away like Dalia? With a gamekeeper or whatever the hell...?

What? Dalia's lover, a gamekeeper? Where did you get that from?

What do you mean I just said it? I made it up, Lenzo, for goodness' sake. Hey, are you driving?

Please pull over.

It was embarrassing to have to ask them if they'd let me call you from here. They're complete Scrooges.

No, not strange. Scrooges. But they also didn't deserve that scene you made.

Would you calm down? I don't need rescuing. I can look after myself.

CLAUDIA

A young man who likes to play the hero.

DORA

Of course I care that you're angry with me.

Yes, I... Love you.

CLAUDIA

With honorable tendencies.

DORA

Seriously, would you please pull over!?

CLAUDIA

Misguided affections. Make sure he remembers the music. That, if nothing else.

DORA

No.

No.

That's my business.

CLAUDIA

What's he saying?

DORA

I'm helping them with the book.

Of course they've given me a raise. I've more responsibility.

What's what I said about you 'not going to believe' something? What are you talking about?

Oh yes! A doctor came. It's true! He brought him. He saw her. It's all in hand. She'll have tests done next week. The cigarette thing wasn't true. She likes lying. You know, joking around...

Yes, they are quite annoying jokes. She gets outbreaks on her skin. Some sort of plant allergy. She comes out in blisters, scratches them. She bursts them and gets those scars. The doctor will look into that.

Yes, they were scars from blisters. I've seen them. After working in the garden.

I'm fine. Really. Trust me.

CLAUDIA

Trust her. And bring the music.

DORA

Want to come tomorrow?

In a calmer mood, right?

My motorbike? What's happened with my motorbike?

CLAUDIA

I put it in the garage.

DORA

In the garage? Why?

Gas on the floor?

CLAUDIA

It fell over. It was really heavy. The cap came off and...

DORA

I don't know. Probably from his car. Will you come tomorrow?

Whatever time you want.

In the evening, if you can't come earlier.

You'll see. Really fine. Are you feeling a little calmer?

My parents? Talk to them.

What? It won't be the first time you've talked to them. Call them. When you're feeling calmer. I don't want to spend too long on this phone.

Yes, you can get me at this number if you want. I don't suppose they'll be rigging the phone up to any explosives.

Okay then. Until tomorrow. And don't talk on the phone while driving. You know I don't like that.

Yes. Me too.

Yes.

Claudia's coming. Hanging up now. Bye.

CLAUDIA

You didn't ask him to bring any music.

DORA

I didn't need to. He's got a good memory. He'll bring it tomorrow.

Aldo.

Claudia waves her arms and legs to scatter the cigarette smoke.

Aldo enters.

ALDO

He left very suddenly. Looking really determined, too. I saw him crossing the drive, heading for the road.

DORA

We had... An argument. I spoke to him... On the phone.

ALDO

I know. I listened to the conversation. On the extension upstairs. Claudia, I want to talk to Dora. Please give us half an hour. Leave us.

4.

In which Dora reveals her multiple folds.

Aldo, Dora.

ALDO

The only thing I didn't understand was the bit about the doctor. That I'd brought a doctor to the house. I understand the rest. Because you love me, you lie to him. I hope there isn't a more complicated explanation. You tell me. Our imagination tends to work in our favor. Reality doesn't. Am I wrong?

DORA

You're not... Wrong.

ALDO

I have my doubts. Sometimes we lie to those we love to keep them close.

I'm giving you another chance, Dora. I asked you if there was another explanation.

DORA

Is this an interrogation?

ALDO

I'll let you choose. Interrogation or torture.

Okay.

Did you tell Claudia she might have cancer?

DORA

No.

ALDO

You told her she was going to die.

DORA

She burns herself. With the cigarettes she smokes. To forget the pain... In her body.

ALDO

I suspected as much. Or rather, I knew it but I didn't want to believe it.

DORA

She's in pain. Has been for a long time. Yes, it's cancer... Whatever kind it is... It must be very advanced. Years. Two. Maybe three.

ALDO

I want a doctor to see her, too. She's the one who doesn't. She doesn't want to be parted from me.

DORA

She might... Die.

ALDO

Calling me strange. No, you didn't say strange. Lenzo said it. You called me a Scrooge, a spy, a gossip – a gossip's better – and jealous, jealous of sharing my mother. Oedipal. A Scrooge, a gossip and Oedipal. I'd rather stick with strange. If my mother wants to stay put in this house, I can't object.

DORA

She'll suffer.

ALDO

She'll suffer more if she leaves.

DORA

Don't you care if she dies?

ALDO

Her body. Her body wants to die. Who are we to prevent it? Gods? She can choose death. The way she dies. All her life she's had to put up with everyone else's choices, everyone else's whims. Her husband's, her son's. It wouldn't be a bad thing if just for once we let her choose. Lenzo asked you if it was worth your while living in this house. You told him that was your business. My mother has decided the same thing. And she pays the price for that in any way she can. Burning herself with cigarettes, if that helps relieve the pain.

What mustn't I find out?

DORA

I don't know what you're...

ALDO

I don't like people who assume that it's okay to lie when they do it out of love. At the start of your conversation with Lenzo – what mustn't Aldo find out?

I'll refresh your memory. You told him you spend all day in the wheelchair.

By the way, what happened to your mobile?

DORA

Claudia... Broke it on me.

ALDO

She'll have had her reasons.

DORA

No. None.

ALDO

You're making this harder and harder for me. Now, let's work this out – the motorbike... Your motorbike was intact. I didn't find a scratch on it. You didn't fall off it. You didn't have an accident at all. Why can't you walk? Is that another lie?

DORA

It was... A lie. Before. Not now. Now it's true. Claudia hurt me. My knee. With a fork. I told her she was going to die.

ALDO

For her dying means being parted from me. It's an inevitable syllogism for her.

Was Claudia beside you while you were talking to Lenzo?

DORA

Yes.

ALDO

Did you enter the white room?

DORA

Yes.

ALDO

What are you plotting? What are you plotting?

DORA

Both of us.

Yes.

We danced together.

ALDO

You need to make more of an effort. Such a string of lies. Nauseating.

DORA

It's true. We danced. Together. My music.

ALDO

Nothing's come into this house since the death of my father. Not one new record, not one book that wasn't already there. My father didn't need them. My father was beauty itself. I can't put it any other way. My mother doesn't need it either.

DORA

We danced.

Together.

ALDO

Prove it to me.

That you're not plotting.

That you're not lying to me.

That you love me.

Aldo picks something up and throws it across the room.

ALDO

Go get it.

Dora hesitates.

ALDO

Without the wheelchair.

Dora throws herself to the ground. She drags herself across the floor, concealing just how much it hurts. She reaches the object, her face contorted in pain.

ALDO

Bring it to me.

Dora drags herself to Aldo's feet and holds the object out to him. Aldo takes it and immediately drops it.

DORA

Your mother... She doesn't want to live. Make it happen. Take her away... From here. For her own sake. You'll suffer.

ALDO

I've only one choice left.

If she wants to die, all I can do is stop loving her.

That's the only freedom I have.

And remembering the reason why I kissed you. Believing it was for love. Not hate. Or if not for love, then complicity. Because my mother made me believe that I'd been bad in that field of fruit trees. That I'd committed a crime. And after two days, in the schoolyard, when I saw you crying like eleven newborn pups, I wanted to do something, to be good, for the first time in my life, to feel that I could be good. And I got your hanky back. And I kissed you. I kissed you and it wasn't because of love. Or hate. Or to avoid hitting you. I kissed you because you gave me the chance to be good. And my goodness took shelter in your kiss. All my goodness. All that goodness running screaming from me. You were my hiding place.

DORA

You made me complicit in your goodness.

I knew that that kiss...

ALDO

I hid myself in your lips. What little good still remained in that boy, hidden. A fold from the past now opening. Stupid. I'd forgotten that.

5.

In which Claudia reveals her multiple folds.

Aldo, Claudia.

ALDO

And the light goes out... And all the eyelids close, thousands of eyelids, on top of one another, piled on top of my eyes, I try to open them but they get heavier and heavier... And my thoughts race, they slip away, drag themselves towards the darkness... So quickly... Speeding... Out of control... The moment of creation comes... I am nothing and at the same time I am everything... I can be everything... And I believe.

That's the moment I'm looking for... A moment lost somewhere within the infinite, where every single thing can be examined... And I start folding and my life turns over and lies down and twists and turns and takes shape... It's like folding paper... It's like folding people.

CLAUDIA

Don't talk so quietly. You talked like that as a boy, too.

ALDO

I was thinking aloud.

CLAUDIA

You used to talk so quietly no one could hear you. You were scared of leaving your own head. In case of rejection. Not being loved.

ALDO

Nobody has ever loved me as I am.

CLAUDIA

We created a world just for you. Your father and I. School wasn't your world. You felt so low. Misunderstood.

ALDO

I don't remember.

CLAUDIA

You thought we took you out of school because your father wanted to teach you himself.

ALDO

He was wasting his time on me.

CLAUDIA

That's not true.

ALDO

No word of a lie. I wasn't progressing in my studies. He put up with me in front of my classmates, but he did it to save me from them. You explained all that to me.

CLAUDIA

The day came when you stopped crying. One day, while you were getting ready for school, you stopped crying. Your face turned gray. A quiet child. There's nothing worse than a quiet child. In all respects. We drove you to loneliness. Your father would tell me about it at night, crying. As soon as he stepped back into the role as teacher and entered the classroom he would see you, in the corner, alone, dead at your desk, and he would crumble. The day we took you out of school your father gave you all a surprise test.

ALDO

A blank page.

CLAUDIA

You remember?

ALDO

Remember what? No. I just got an image of a blank page. A Wednesday.

CLAUDIA

At the end of the test he collected in all the pages and found one of them blank. He asked the class whose it was. He ordered you all to get up. He began to read the names on the tests. The pupils sat when they heard their name. He got to the blank page and looked at the class. Only one pupil was still standing. He wasn't surprised. He knew who it was long before he got to the blank page. He knew he wouldn't find his son's name. He went up to you and said:

"At least write your name on the test."

You couldn't do it. You felt nothing. So much so that you didn't even believe you had a name. He gave you the page. The pencil shook in your hand. You drove the point into the paper, pressing the pencil against the page. You couldn't even write your initials.

At home, you got better. Your thinking developed. It flowed. You felt comfortable. And then your father had to die.

You thought your father had left school because of his illness. That's not true. He left it for you.

ALDO

Why are you telling me all this?

CLAUDIA

I'm telling you because you're loving me less and less.

As a mother, as a woman. You're treating me like a child.

Your father died and you wanted to follow him. End it all, too. You were six when you wanted to go.

I was able to prevent it. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't got there on time.

ALDO

What did I try to do?

CLAUDIA

You tried to set fire to yourself.

I put you out. I saved you. I couldn't leave your side for days. I wouldn't let you out of my arms. I didn't want to leave you on your own. I didn't want you to feel alone. And when you took that one first step away from me, I had decided – I didn't want you to forget any more than you had already. Until then, you'd forgotten your whole childhood. With that first step, you were reborn. You lived. And I wanted you to remember.

Your tattoo, "Live".

I was your mother when you needed a mother. The best way I could keep you at my side as my son was to make you believe you needed me. That's why you loved me.

When you needed a woman, I was a woman. As a woman, the best way I could keep you at my side was by loving you. And I also got you to love me as a woman. You responded.

Claudia has been two people. Mother and woman. They take over from one another as needed. There's no disagreement between them. The same essence. Now the woman is stretching out her arm and passing the baton to the daughter. If you want, I'll be your daughter.

As daughter, I'll need you. I need you now. Make me believe I need you. To keep you close by.

6.

In which the frogs fight.

Dora, Claudia.

DORA

What I saw. In the white room. Was it Dalia?

CLAUDIA

I don't want to talk about it.

Don't you believe it?

DORA

You told me... It was really bright. I was scared. And whatever it was it wasn't moving. You told me that if I did something out of turn, you'd kill it. You made me complicit in your evil.

CLAUDIA

Dalia wanted to run through too many folds at once. She went mad. That time I saw her near the pond, it was raining, we were soaked. And the return door slammed shut on her. Shut right behind her. You need to know the steps. Even love can get overwhelmed.

DORA

With kindness.

CLAUDIA

With madness.

DORA

I don't believe you. I'm starting to believe you less and less. You forced me to stay with you. To say nothing. To lie to your son. To save Dalia, that's what you told me. You have to do all this to save Dalia. I think you tricked me. Dalia's not behind there. She's never been there. You're keeping me here. Why?

CLAUDIA

Keeping you? Because I need what's outside.

Aldo enters.

ALDO

And how do I look today?

CLAUDIA

We're working. Don't disturb us.

ALDO

Just a moment. Look at these muscles! Well?

CLAUDIA

Amazing.

ALDO

"Mens sana...!"

The doorbell rings.

ALDO

Lenzo! The last visit from Lenzo!

Aldo goes to open the front door.

DORA

He's trying to make you happy.

CLAUDIA

He makes me happy.

DORA

My knee is better.

CLAUDIA

Already?

Dora gets up from the wheelchair.

DORA

I'm taller than you.

CLAUDIA

You say I'm keeping you here. But it's of your own free will? You can walk. Go. Leave. What you need is a reason to hate me. Haven't I shown you enough of those? What's keeping you here?

DORA

Loving Aldo.

CLAUDIA

Aldo said this would be Lenzo's last visit.

DORA

I've spoken to Aldo. I'm breaking up with Lenzo.

Aldo and Lenzo enter.

DORA

Hi, Lenzo.

LENZO

Dora. How are you?

DORA

As you can see, I can walk.

ALDO

Impressive.

LENZO

Not so much. It took her quite a while to get better.

ALDO

I'm not referring to the fact she can walk. I'm referring to the phrase, "As you can see, I can walk". It's the perfect phrase to use as an opening gambit. Haven't any of you noticed? This is the first time all four of us have been together: Claudia, Dora, Lenzo and I. The four of us in the same room... In reality, it's not the first time, but imagine it was... The curtain goes up and the four of us appear. On stage. The scenery, this room. Whatever. We have so many possibilities before us. Possibilities, opening up like a paper flower, a fantasy flower. Its petals shake... The beginning of an imagination. Let's allow it to develop. Dora fires her opening shot: "As you can see, I can walk." A girl standing beside a wheelchair. The announcement of a miracle? Claudia, at her side, a mature woman who stares at the new arrival in terror. No, not in terror. In warning. She's trying to warn him of something. But I don't think the new arrival realizes what it is. Are you getting any of this, Lenzo? You're the new arrival. That's obvious straight away. Obvious from the way you move, clearly unfamiliar with your surroundings, which you're finding somewhat hostile. What is it that Claudia's warning you? Maybe that you're a hero. We're all hoping you'll act like a hero, and you're certainly hoping it. What with your devotion to honor. What a pity you've no part in this play, a hero without a part. In less than five minutes you'll be leaving through that door, never to return. Did you know that? No?

LENZO

Aldo, I think...

ALDO

Be quiet. You don't have a part. You can't talk. Listen, if you want.

Dora, you talk.

DORA

I'm... In love... With Aldo.

LENZO

What?

ALDO

Silence!

DORA

I love him.

Lenzo drops the packet he has brought with him.

LENZO

Your music.

ALDO

What's this?

DORA

Lenzo.

LENZO

Since when?

ALDO

Since we kissed when we were five years old.

LENZO

Dora?

DORA

Yes.

ALDO

And they lived happily ever after. The hero leaves, tail between his legs. Farewell, hero. Now can you guess the title of the play? It's not that hard, I just told you it: "Hero without a Part".

LENZO

Farewell.

DORA

Lenzo, don't go.

Lenzo leaves.

ALDO

I was wrong. That took a lot less than five minutes. Dora, pick up the package on the ground.

Pick it up.

DORA

Aldo.

ALDO

It's for you, isn't it?

Dora goes towards the package.

ALDO

No. On all fours.

Dora hesitates. And obeys. She kneels down.

ALDO

Head bowed.

Hands, behind your waist.

Ankles touching.

CLAUDIA

Aldo, no.

ALDO

Have you got something to say?

Dora, ankles together so they're touching.

And now, go towards the package. Jumping. Like a frog. A jumping frog. What you – mother – didn't want to show her, I'll show her. In just four steps.

Dora starts to cry.

CLAUDIA

No.

ALDO

What's that, Mother? You won't allow me to humiliate Dora? Or are you annoyed that she's surpassing you in my estimation? Dora's a very good student. Better than Dalia, I think. Look how quickly she's learnt the frog. In four steps. It took Dalia a lot more than that. Something to say, Mother?

Jump, Dora.

Dora jumps like a frog towards the package.

ALDO

Stop! I forgot! Mouth and eyes! Mother, would you be so kind. Didn't you want to be treated like a child? Paint some eyes and mouth on her, please. Give her a really big smile. Really big eyes.

CLAUDIA

It's not fun.

ALDO

No, I'm not finding it fun either. Children's games aren't for adults. But don't you worry. In next to no time one of you – just one, mind – will be having great fun. Eyes and mouth!

Claudia paints a mouth on Dora's back.

ALDO

No! Take her clothes off! On her skin!

Aldo tears Dora's clothes off.

Claudia paints eyes and a mouth on Dora's bare back.

ALDO

Jump, little frog. Towards the package.

Why are you crying, Dora?

Croak.

Croak!

Dora breaks down.

DORA

Claudia... She told me... If I didn't obey everything... She would kill... Dalia... That you've both got her locked in that room... That you could do what you liked to her... That I had to obey everything... So you wouldn't hurt her... And you've just told me you loved me and I love you and I can't stand it anymore...

ALDO

Lies!

Just how much did you want to humiliate her, Mother? Was it really that much?

Nothing to say?

Don't you want to defend yourself?

Do the same as her. On your knees. Head bowed. Hands, behind your waist.
Ankles touching. Go!

Claudia obeys.

Aldo removes her dressing gown and paints eyes and a mouth on her back.

ALDO

This is what you did to Dalia, isn't it? She was tied up, of course. There's no arguing that wasn't an advantage. She'd deceived you for so long, she'd talked about Theo so much...

Until you found her in that bed. With me. Remember I was also in that bed. We were both making love. You tied her up. You kept her prisoner. Hours. Days. You drove her mad. But even in that state she resisted you. You fought. She pulled your hair. She escaped.

CLAUDIA

Theo was you.

ALDO

Yes. The man who used to love her at night. That was me. At night, her. During the day, you. You ran after her. Running in the rain. What did you do to her at the pond?

CLAUDIA

I...

She cried and told me Theo didn't exist. That you were Theo. That she loved you. More than anyone. More than I did. And...

Nothing. She left.

ALDO

I can't treat you like a child. Innocence cannot be regained.

CLAUDIA

I can be your woman. Another woman. A woman who's different to the one I am now. You don't need Dora.

ALDO

Yes. I need her like I needed my father. To protect me from you. Do you want Dora to leave too? No. You won when Dora came along. She met all your little whims. Music, cigarettes, newspapers, everything my father, your husband, hated. Everything he knew could harm us. Everything from out there, everything else, everything that wasn't me, everything that had turned me into a dead child, an amnesiac, a mute. All that shapeless mass which stopped me thinking. And all behind my back.

How did you convince Dora that Dalia was still locked in that room? I don't know how you did it, but you managed it. Of course, you found the best way to control someone. The key. Making Dalia's life depend on her. You passed the blame onto her. Turned her into your accomplice. And yet you didn't feel guilty at all, because there was no other life at stake. The white room is empty.

CLAUDIA

What's happening to you, Aldo?

ALDO

You're going to die. And you've never taught me how to be alone. I feel panic.
You're going to die.

You're going to leave me on my own.

I have to stop loving you.

CLAUDIA

No. Why do you say that? You wouldn't be able to.

ALDO

Human paper-folding. Origami.

CLAUDIA

I love you.

ALDO

Show me. Both of you, show me. Use every bit of life in your body to love me, desire me. Whoever wins, will make a wish. It will be fulfilled. A wish: the door to any possibility. The essence of Origami. One of you subjecting all three of us to your wish. In the meantime, you love me. Isn't that right? Drink your fill. Devour me. Quite simply, I don't want to be alone.

Dora and Claudia hesitate briefly. Claudia is the first to react: she launches herself like a jumping frog on Aldo. Dora follows her.

The two human frogs kiss, bite, spit and suck on Aldo's body. Three bodies entwined. Six arms and six legs entangled in a passion uniting love and hate. Aldo, Claudia, Dora. The bodies of the other two, his own body. With no beginning and no end.

Until Dora's lips steal Aldo away and show him their hiding place. And Aldo fills it.

All of a sudden, Claudia realizes what is happening. She is losing. She sheds her frog's body, stands up straight, screams and starts to choke Dora. She grabs her by the neck and squeezes. But, at the last moment, her arms go limp. Dora takes a deep breath, a mouthful of life. Her eyes fixed on Aldo's eyes, as he mirrors her breathing with his own and surrenders to the girl. As they both become accomplices.

And Claudia retreats, a strange intimacy impelling her to withdraw. She lights a cigarette. Her gaze wanders to some distant place. Beside her, the couple make love. And the infinite silences set in.

As the cigarette burns itself out, so do the bodies of the lovers.

And Aldo shatters the silences.

ALDO

Dora.

DORA

Claudia, go.

CLAUDIA

Aldo...

Your father died and I set fire to it all. Burning. Burning it all. Burning us. You, me. I changed my mind at the last moment. I saved you. Every single cigarette I smoke is a reminder of that ending. I saved you and I lost myself. I lost. Just like now. You can't be like your father. You've shown me that. He was perfect. You aren't. And can feel I'm dying. You've made me feel like I'm dying. Finally, I'm burning. Alone. Just like it was meant to be. My freedom. Yours. Goodbye.

Ah, son. I just need to tell you one thing.

Dalia has come back.

All by herself.

Goodbye.

And a frog croaks. Behind the white door.

Which slowly opens.