

## BETWEEN VOICES AND SCENES

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and the Portavoz Project

### SCENE I

*(Light comes on to illuminate the Director standing in the middle of the dark stage)*

**Director:** *(in an overly dramatic, exaggerated voice, over-acting with Shakespearean gestures)*

Theater... always seeking to reveal the fever that burns beneath reality... what is the purpose of theater? What are we looking for? *(Director appears to look for something in the crowd)* Is it an aesthetic creation or a cultural product? If so, what for? Isn't reality full of fiction? Is the naked truth so unbearable that we must dress her up in metaphor?

Is performing theater for sixty, eighty, one hundred people at most, all we can do in the face of a world at odds with itself? Why highlight a voice independent of all external voices? Why single out ideas that go against the grain of louder ones in these times? As a certain poet once said, *cursed is the poetry that does not take a stand until it is drowning...* Is there room to laugh as despair comes knocking at the door?

### SCENE II

**Mili:** These heavy roles leave you feeling broken. It's difficult to remove yourself from the pain when the curtain falls.

**Sol:** But that's why it's so powerful. Look at this scene: the shadows of past centuries now look like today's. Felicitas Guerrero, the richest and most beautiful woman in Buenos Aires, who despite surviving an unhappy marriage, the death of her whole family, and the yellow fever epidemic of 1870, became victim of the first femicide in Buenos Aires...

**Mili:** And you are Guadalupe Cuenca... writing of love and revolution to an already dead Moreno. He was sent on a false mission to Europe in 1811, the true objective of which was to poison him and thus put an end to his revolutionary ideas.

**Sol:** We can't perform this grief like it's foreign to us: It's impossible to lie while performing. The text must pierce the body, transforming the wound into living matter, one which cracks open the soul of whoever welcomes its intrusion.

**Mili:** If we don't give it all our love, it would be better not to go on stage, for even if it's unbearable to perform, a play without epic emotion has no substance.

### SCENE III

**Director:** Theater is a devilish undertaking. Everything that an actor thinks and feels must hide away in a secret, impenetrable fortress of their own making...and with this self now devoid of all

previous identity, they will take on other ideas, other emotions, other memories...becoming two souls living in a single body.

#### **SCENE IV**

*(Mili, dressed in casual clothes, talks to Sol, who is finishing dressing up as Guadalupe)*

**Mili:** What happens to Guadalupe Cuenca?

**Sol:** Let me introduce you.

*(Sol moves to the center of the stage, dressed as Guadalupe. Mili moves aside, watching the performance from afar)*

**Sol/Guadalupe:** My beloved Moreno, your absence pierces me like a knife. Your brother Manuel recently returned my undelivered letters, the ones you never had the chance to read... Nothing of you remains... Manuel told me that the captain of the frigate wrapped your body in a foreign flag and threw you into the depths of the sea. Your political rivals sneer: "It took an ocean to put out such a fire." For days, I wept for you, feeling like the Revolution was no longer a dream, but rather a wretched nightmare... They may have taken you from this world, but despite all of their efforts, they can never erase your name. One day a constitution will be written by your students taught by the books, from your public Library. Roads, bridges, and paths will be opened to the revolutionaries, spreading our ideology to every corner of the Motherland... We must kick out the Spaniards and govern for ourselves. There will be swords forged in the workshops you insisted be opened, because every sword, when it serves liberty and equality, brings an end to privileges born in the cradle.

**Director:** *(enters observing Guadalupe, frozen; when he begins to speak, Guadalupe and Sol exit)* Your memory, Guadalupe, will always follow that man who gave his life for the Revolution... And here the spirit of Felicitas Guerrero wanders, asking a blind world to see that behind her beauty lies a beating heart... As a young girl, her parents wed her off to a much older man. In exchange for a great dowry that brought wealth to the Guerrero family. Martín de Alzaga was her husband and jailer. With no say in her own life, she was a prized possession, simply something to be displayed before society. Her two children were her only sources of happiness... and the yellow fever killed them both. That same day, her husband followed in a fit of deadly tremors, and Felicitas was left a widow at 24 years old, bearing the title of the most beautiful woman in the city.

*(Felicitas appears, entering from the other side of the stage)*

**Mili/Felicitas:** My father sent me to the estate that I had inherited from Don Martín, and it was there, while riding in a horse-drawn carriage, that a storm erupted. The driver lost control of the carriage... and then, like an angel emerging from the rain, Samuel appeared, mounted on his horse. He was the sun in the midst of a storm, and he introduced himself to me, saying: "Welcome to my estate, which is now your own."

And from that precise, unmistakable moment, I knew. Here was the man my heart had long awaited. While Martín, my late husband, embodied power and gravitas, Samuel was a warm smile.

I wanted to announce our engagement right away, but I was the talk of the town in a society that only judged and my parents objected, but still I fought for us. Mother, you wanted wealth? I have given it to you. Father, were you seeking a family to elevate the Guerrero name? I have found it for you. Did you want land? Here, there are vast estates whose borders stretch beyond your eyesight that are now mine, and therefore yours. But could it be that, perhaps, you do not understand that money is not enough to quench the thirst of my lips, parched for affection? A man's saliva is what I need.

On the day of my engagement to Samuel, Enrique Ocampo arrived. He was always so caring, and I was barely a little girl when I first met him. He always said that he was in love with me, but I treated it like a game. Back then, perhaps, if it hadn't been for the agreement between Father and Álzaga, maybe I would've seen him... but so much has happened in recent years that it seems like a lifetime ago.

**Mili/Felicitas:** *(addressing someone offstage)* Hello, Enrique!

**Director:** *(entering)* Then Enrique Ocampo said, "If I can't have you, no one can," and then BANG, BANG! *(makes a shooting gesture with his fingers)*  
{dies}

## **SCENE V**

*(While the director is talking, Mili and Sol are onstage, changing into their costumes to play Alfonsina and Julieta)*

**Director:**

It often feels as though all the stories have already been told, but theatre insists otherwise. So naturally, here I am; a man taking centerstage to tell a story that isn't mine. . ~~Oedipus searching for the culprit of a murder he himself committed; Ulysses returning home, battling monsters that only exist in his memory; Christ dying again and again to remind us of what we are incapable of saying without a shudder.~~

In theatre, we're taught that the spaces *between* words are more important than the words themselves. That it's more important to listen and receive, rather than articulate our own thoughts.

Yet, one undeniable truth continues to cut through the silence: the history of the world has changed every time a woman has refused to remain silent.

Julieta Lanteri demanded the right to vote. Alfonsina Storni insisted on reciting her work in places where only men had spoken. These women exposed themselves to constant ridicule from "elegant" male minds. From men who wrote unequivocally of the inferiority and incapability of women, and who argued that their brain's heavier weight boasted greater capabilities.

It's an exacerbated masculinity that didn't understand then and *clearly* doesn't understand now. Because beneath all of those arguments, jokes, and laughter is fear. Fear of a woman who is and always will be the subject of her own story... even if she has a man narrating it for her.

## **SCENE VI**

*(The director sits on the side of the stage, observing as Mili and Sol perform the scene. Mili is pacing, Sol is seated.)*

**Mili/Julieta**: Alfonsina, after everything we've been through... no matter how hard we try, it all comes down to one thing. Men are afraid of women.

**Sol/Alfonsina**: It's true. They're afraid because they don't know us, because none of them have taken the time to understand who we are or how we think.

**Mili/Julieta**: *(Sitting down, exasperated)* They're afraid of an imaginary threat! Sometimes, at the Feminist Party meetings or the International Women's Congress, people would ask me: how did you dare vote? Weren't you afraid, knowing that only men were allowed? And honestly, the only fear I ever saw was on the face of the person who tried to stop me from voting and couldn't. *(She laughs)* And even worse was the fear when they tried to stop me from running as a candidate. What were they so afraid of? I was the only woman in an all-male electorate; I couldn't have gotten far anyway.

**Sol/Alfonsina**: *(She begins to brush Mili's hair)* They weren't afraid you'd win, Julieta. They were afraid of the precedent; a woman's voice in parliament for the first time, women voting and electing other women. That's why they passed a law requiring voters to be registered for military service, which was obviously reserved for men.

**Mili/Julieta**: *(Smirking)*. You should have seen the shock on that soldier's face when I told him I wanted to register... the entire parade of officers refusing to enlist me! I told them, "If I have to do military service just to vote, then sign me up."

**Sol/Alfonsina**: *(Chuckles)* What did they say to that?

**Mili/Julieta**: The regiment commander and his officers explained to me that the law didn't allow it because of a woman's supposed "lack of independent judgment", and the danger of handling weapons without the supervision of a husband, father, or older brother...

**Sol/Alfonsina**: *(Scoffs)* Lack of independent judgment? You graduated from the University of La Plata medical school at a time when women weren't even allowed to study. You were a pharmacist, a teacher, a doctor, and yet they had the *audacity* to claim you lacked sufficient judgment?

**Mili/Julieta**: And when I decided to leave clinical medicine to study psychiatry they rejected me once again because the civil code considered women incapable.

**Sol/Alfonsina**: But they must have known that those arguments weren't true in your case...

**Mili/Julieta**: They're not true in *any* case.

**Sol/Alfonsina**: Under the law, written by men, women can only function in society under the authority of their father or their husband.

**Mili/Julieta:** Despite having the best grades and training with the most prestigious professors in psychiatry, they rejected my application to the Academy of Medicine and barred me from working in a hospital.

**Sol/Alfonsina:** Let's just call them what they are: blatant sexists, refusing to recognize your capabilities as a psychiatrist.

**Mili/Julieta:** Their thinking was completely outdated. But they didn't dare put it in writing – instead, they told me to my face: “A woman can't maintain emotional balance with patients due to her ‘hysterical’ nature”.

**Sol/Alfonsina:** But, don't they know how involved you were in the Feminist Party and the International Women's Congress? Doesn't that prove you *are* capable of making decisions, despite what they claim?

**Mili/Julieta:** Of course they know, that's why they rejected me. I ran on a platform of maternity leave for working women, child subsidies, abolition of the death penalty, and equal rights for legitimate and illegitimate children. They're afraid of women's opinions in books, schools, factories...

**Sol/Alfonsina:** Essentially, anywhere a woman's voice is expressed against the dominant current where only male voices are heard.

**Mili/Julieta:** I admire your persistence; getting your poems published, making your voice heard in literary circles where you're the only woman amongst dozens of men who sit there congratulating each other as they read their verses aloud. I admire your bravery, Alfonsina. I'm proud to be your friend...

**Sol/Alfonsina:** And I yours, Julieta. You've confronted them in politics. All I've done is write a few poems...

**Mili/Julieta:** Poetry is a political tool; it goes straight to the heart. When you say “*Hombres pequeñitos*” and “*tu me quieres nívea, tú me quieres blanca, tú me quieres alba,*” you're telling them that if they demand that of you, they should take a look at themselves first, because they are small men who don't understand you and never will.

**Sol/Alfonsina:** When I was an actress they admired me for my beauty; as a teacher, for my abilities and dedication. They praised me for being self-made, having worked as a laundress, dishwasher, cashier, and seamstress to achieve my dreams. They looked to me as an example. After endless tours, I felt the need to write a play in my own voice. Critics mocked me, deriding me in newspapers and magazines, telling people not to see my work. The same thing happened when I began to write poems, expressing myself as a single mother. They called me immoral and mocked me for reading my poems in women's gatherings. They accused me of degrading men. It didn't matter at all that Gabriela Mistral and Juana de Ibarborou had encouraged me to keep writing. Borges laughed behind my back at a verse about birds taking refuge in between the branches of a tree: “*Alados inquilinos tocan sus dulces flautas,*” ‘They're poor verses,’ he would say, but never to my face.

**Mili/Julieta:** Borges is a misogynist, completely enamored with himself...

**Sol/Alfonsina:** As are most directors and newspaper editors. Every time my poetry was reviewed, they couldn't get past the fact that I had a child out of wedlock. They complained about my smoking, the length of my skirts, my affair with Horacio Quiroga. It was exhausting. Every time I submitted my work, I was met with silence or indifference from writers I admired.

**Mili/Julieta:** This still happens to women like us.

**Sol/Alfonsina:** Women, or should I say, feminists.

**Mili/Julieta:** Feminists, and above all, women.

## **SCENE VII**

**Director:** Women and feminists... Julieta was hit by a car while crossing a street in Buenos Aires. The car intentionally reversed over her, driven by a far-right extremist of the Argentine Patriotic League organization, which sees feminism as an enemy of the nation. Alfonsina committed suicide, wading slowly into the ocean until she was completely under. It was an exercise of her own free will. Some say she did it out of fear, afraid of the cancer that was slowly eating away at her body. Others say she was driven to depression by a world that had turned its back on her.

These brave women may have met tragic ends, but their stories live on. Today, women vote and hold office. They are poets and playwrights. They demand equal rights.

This is why my plays speak of women—they are the catalysts of change in the world. Women who live on in the bodies of actresses. Actresses who smash their own identities to pieces, seeking to disappear on stage so that a character can be born, moving and creating life...

The stage is transformed by the actors' imagination and the audience's willing suspension of disbelief. To create what the soul longs to feel; a tiny suffocating jail or an immense space filled with natural beauty.

Theater is just this, here and now: there is no safety net. Instantaneous and ephemeral, through smiles and tears, ardent and barbarous, it lives only in those who saw this little piece of reality, while it lasted...

## **SCENE VIII**

*Sol stands on a podium, speaking to the audience. The Director and Mili are in the back of the stage, arranging props.*

**Sol/Environmental Activist:** The planet is dying in front of our eyes... Epidemics have come, and death with them. It hides around every corner, in every cough, on every door handle, in handshakes, in kisses, in shared meals that I would have received with pleasure yesterday but terrify me today. Each one of us could infect the other, could kill without the least intention... How in the world are we supposed to reclaim joy? (*pauses, then calls to the back of the stage*) Director!

**Sol/Environmental Activist:** It says here the character asks to "reclaim joy," but this is a tragedy... So, help me understand how I can believably say this.

**Director:** I can't speak the words for you. You are the one who sets words free from the page, bringing them to life on the stage... *(He begins speaking louder, shaking his finger at her)* It is your responsibility, your duty to the audience, to embody your character. You must become these women who, in the face of mankind's hatred and disbelief, fought to change the world. You, who today can vote when Julieta died for it, and who can marry whomever you wish, who will never be trapped in Felicitas' cage, owe them that.

*A pause. Sol looks annoyed, but hides it from the Director, looking towards Mili instead. Mili shakes her head.*

**Sol/Environmental Activist:** But how can I be hopeful while my character speaks in front of everyone she loves and blames them for destroying the planet?

**Director:** Our human existence is temporary. We live on an infinitesimally small rock, moving between colossal masses traveling through the universe. But on this rock, Mozart mastered the musical form, and Hamlet saw the ghost of his father. This rock harbors the poetry of Frost and the voice of Aretha Franklin. It's where the Beatles sang "Yesterday", where saints have walked the earth, for whom we have built cathedrals. If these people thought that at any given moment we would collide with a bigger rock, they would not have gotten out of bed...

**Sol/Environmental Activist:** Okay, I see... *(Her manner changes back to that of the activist)* We're still in time to avoid the collapse. Every day the news speaks of rising rivers and of temperatures never seen before. The carbon mines and the oil drills are useless to generate the energy the world needs. They tell us we will have to sacrifice all of the fresh water to cool the towers that house the memory of artificial intelligence.

We are a species that first outsourced our knowledge to machines and then to artificial intelligence, and maybe to multiply or apply the simple rule of three, we should go back to counting on our fingers if they're going to cut the lights for lack of energy...

The dollar, the ruble, the euro, the rupee, the yen, and the pound sterling--can they reproduce drinkable water? How can we stop the temperature from rising while tearing down trees, destroying forests, constructing buildings over wetlands, polluting the water, all to extract gold and silver?

We do nothing while ice caps that once seemed eternal melt, and our animal brothers flee from disaster, ~~jumping, running, crawling, swimming, or flying~~. Polar bears and penguins are driven out by the heat, while birds search for the shade of a tree that no longer exists...

Time runs on, ticking away on the watches of the audiences, of the town councils and the churches, while governments and those in power continue to multiply their fortunes. But *there is still time* if we understand that a glass of cold water is more valuable than all of the oil, that a bird singing as the sun comes out is worth more than any playlist... go out and talk to your neighbors, splash around in puddles, run wild with the dogs, stop and smell the roses. We must defend the miracle of life...

## **SCENE IX**

**Director:** Theater is the embodiment of hope. We pursue it in every scene, every text, every gesture...

**Mili/Feminist:** What is the price of being a woman today, of breaking free from the rigid models of decades past? Choice is costly. Being true to yourself is hard; you can never stop fighting, even when they tell you that independence isn't worth it. They'll say, "How will you handle what the world throws at you?" How did our grandmothers do it? Our mothers? They conformed. So perhaps that makes us the strange ones, viewing the world as upside down.

**Sol/Feminist 2:** They'll call us witches, say we're evil, that we simply refused to submit to Nature..

**Mili/Feminist:** I see you, a woman heading down the same path as me, followed by more and more women. Crowds of women filling the streets, the joy of marching together, dancing and singing as a form of resistance. They may call us *pañuelos verdes*, but as a collective, our voice surges, we begin to dance, and from the depths of our throats comes the shout...

**Sol/Feminist 2:** My body, my choice!

**Mili/Feminist:** I decide for myself.

**Sol&Mili/Feminist & Feminist 2:** (*"...to fight alongside your sister, your sister... we are together, and now they will see us, now they will hear us... Down with the patriarchy, it will fall, it will fall... Long live feminism, which will prevail, which will prevail..."*)

*At the end of the scene, Mili and Sol stop and look at the Director.*

**Mili:** Was that what you wanted?

*The Director nods.*

**Sol:** (*as an aside to Mili*) Ironic, that even now us feminists must ask for his approval.

*(Mili laughs bitterly as they move to the back of the stage to change costumes. The Director moves past them into the light.)*

## **SCENE X**

*As the Director speaks, he methodically dresses himself in the costume of the Man, the torturer.*

**Director:** Independent theater takes dark themes, those which we'd truly prefer to ignore, and brings them to light on the stage: ~~the exploitation of workers, their resistance against the broken systems, the misery of the working-class slums, the impunity with which the employers accumulate money, the brutality of war in the first half of the twentieth century, and the struggle of women in the second..~~ That is the mission of independent theater, to bring out of darkness and into the light that which we would prefer to ignore...

Onstage, the shadows are where secrets live, where energy and mystery converge into a shared identity, where audiences laugh and cry together.

Wherever I put on a play, I ask permission from the ghosts that dwell in the dark corners of the theater. As actors, we are merely passing through. We are temporary occupants of these spaces, and all that remains is to ask the indulgence of the spirits who watch us, as we expose the

honesty of our purpose and our love for this vocation. Our respect for all that came before us and all that will take place on stage when we are gone...

*(As a final part of his costume, the Director moves to the props and picks up the electric prod.)*

We must learn to coexist with the darkness, to bring the horrors to light and place them in front of the audience.

## **SCENE XI**

*The Director turns away from the audience and takes a moment to get into character. As he does this, Mili (acting as another man) drags a blindfolded and bound Sol/Tortured Woman center stage. Mili forces the Tortured Woman into a chair and then goes to the dressing area, leaving the Tortured Woman alone and trembling with fear. The Director/Man approaches, holding the prod.*

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** I'm a Sunday school teacher. I make puppets in my free time.

**Director/Man:** Aren't you the one speaking at all those university rallies?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** I study there.

**Director/Man:** And that blonde man who's always with you?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** He's my husband.

**Director/Man:** He's the delegate from the Metalworker's Union, isn't he? The one that's always demanding a raise?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** He works at the factory, yes. His coworkers elected him to speak on their behalf.

**Director/Man:** *(drawing close)* And where is that son of a bitch now?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** I swear, I don't know!

**Director/Man:** That's a shame... If only you could remember, then your son might be spared. Is he hiding with your husband?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** Please, he's only two months old!

**Director/Man:** Maybe this'll jog your memory. *(He shocks her with the prod. There is a loud BZZ noise. She convulses and cries out in pain.)* Where is your husband? Tell me. Where is he?! *(He shocks her again and she screams. The BZZ sounds again, but then suddenly stops and sputters out.)* Goddamn it! This piece of shit keeps breaking. Consider yourself lucky. I'll be back... If I were you, I'd take this time to think about what comes out of your mouth next. It really is in your best interest to talk. *(The Man withdraws and retreats to the back of the stage out of sight.)*

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** He told me to say Alberdi 318, or any street that doesn't resemble Zelaya. I cannot say Zelaya 813. I'll mislead them, send them to Alberdi 318. Perhaps then my husband and son will have time to escape. I'm losing my mind, I can't take it anymore. I can't think straight with the pain, the smell of my own burnt flesh... Alberdi 318, not Zelaya 813... Alberdi 318 is our path to survival.

*(The Man returns, now holding a live wire.)*

**Director/Man:** Now *this* will surely work. Where to begin... where it hurts most? Where you can't endure it? (*drawing close*) Perhaps your teeth, your breasts... (*The Tortured Woman begins to sob.*) I'll ask again: Where is he?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** (*still sobbing uncontrollably*) Alberdi 318.

**Director/Man:** What did you say? Oh, so *now* you remember... Let's see if your story sticks. (*He shocks her with the wire. BZZ. As this happens, Mili comes back onstage, dressed in the costume of Mother from La Plaza de Mayo. She stands at the side of the scene, watching.*)

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** (*out of breath*) Al... Alberdi 813...

**Director/Man:** 318 or 813, which is it? (*He shocks her again. She screams.*)

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** (*weak, exhausted*) 813...

**Director/Man:** Which street? Does Alberdi 813 even exist?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** I meant 318... I was mistaken...

**Director/Man:** Where is Alberdi Street? What neighborhood? (*He grabs her. She cries out.*)

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** I don't remember! Please!

**Director/Man:** What street does Alberdi intersect with?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** Zelaya Street...

**Director/Man:** Zelaya what?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** Alberdi 318...

**Director/Man:** 318 or 813? Zelaya what number?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** (*barely conscious*) 813...

**Director/Man:** So Zelaya 813...

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** (*realizes her mistake, tries to convince him*) Alberdi 318.

**Director/Man:** (*to offstage*) It's Zelaya 813.

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** (*screaming*) No... no!! Don't hurt them!

**Director:** (*breaking character*) I can't go on. I'm going to be sick.

**Sol:** (*breaking character*) What's wrong? I can go on, this isn't a new story. You always say that the purpose of theater is to lift the veil from evil. To expose the injustice of blind ambition. (*The Director shakes his head, turning from the audience and hugging his stomach. Mili joins Sol, who takes off her binds and her blindfold, at the center of the stage.*)

**Mili/Mother from La Plaza de Mayo:** While our director takes a moment to settle his stomach, we invite the audience to bear witness to the barbarity of hatred, to man's attempts to exterminate those who think differently... Don't you always say that when you feel lost on stage, listen to your body?

**Sol/Tortured Woman:** The body holds memories. Your body will tell you what to do, even in unimaginable pain.

*As she talks, Sol retrieves two protest signs from the props. She passes by the Director, who is still recovering. She offers him a protest sign with a wry smile. The Director looks up at her, nods, and takes the sign. He lets her take the lead as she travels back to Mili/Mother from La Plaza de Mayo, who has been getting into character. All three, the Director following last, begin to march in a circle, hoisting their signs and chanting:*

**Audio: Protesters from La Plaza de Mayo:** *Como a los nazis, les va a pasar / adonde vayan los iremos a buscar! Alerta, alerta, alerta que caminan / los desaparecidos por las calles de Argentina!*

**Mili/Mother from La Plaza de Mayo:** *(in character)* When we began to shout, “Where are our children and grandchildren?!” a pair of the police officers came to corral us. *(imitating them)* “Move along, move along... You can’t be here!” It was a dictatorship, and it was forbidden for more than three people to stand together... so we started walking. And as we walked, our path became a circle, and we walked around, and around and around...

“They’re just crazy old women,” the dictator said. “Who are ‘*los desaparecidos*,’ ‘the disappeared’? Nothing but a figment of your imagination.” The administration pardoned themselves and tried to close the dark chapter, but history does not allow for full stops, only ellipses...

And then there are our grandchildren. More than five hundred were whisked away in the dark. While we have recovered some of their identities, many more are still missing...

They asked us to move on, yet here we remain, nearly fifty years later, still walking. Not out of hatred or revenge, but to preserve memory, truth, and justice...

## **SCENE XII**

**Director:** Why, in independent theater, do we speak out about these things? We don’t have the same reach as mass media, film, or television— we are small, almost insignificant;

Some say that making theater is useless when such a cruel reality surrounds us, and maybe they’re right. But I’ll continue writing, so that actresses can put on makeup, dress unlike they normally do, speak words that are not their own, and we insist once more...

~~Like in those Chinese legends, when war breaks out and the bombs fall, it is my duty to plant a tree, one whose fruit will be harvested by future hands.~~

## **SCENE XIII**

**Sol/Woman at the Community Pot:** Some people have never been to our neighborhood, yet still judge us. Here we are, preparing food for the children and elderly, in solidarity with our neighbors. Many of us cook here every day so that the neighborhood can feel a small sliver of joy.

**Mili/Second Woman at the Community Pot:** We women usually keep this pot full every day. The men help on occasion, but we are the driving force. Many of the men here used to work in factories or construction. Yet, when unemployment strikes, they only have the skills to look for similar work and can never find it. They take odd jobs, but those don’t last long either...

If a man has a wife and kids, it might even make more sense for his wife to seek employment. She can earn money as a domestic worker while her husband stays home with the kids. But this is a reality these men are simply unable to face...

So what do the men do with the time on their hands?

Drink? Fall into depression? Gamble on horse races or play the lottery?

**Sol/Woman at the Community Pot:** We women, on the other hand, know how to navigate our reality. We may fall, yes, but we get back up. Others depend on us: children, the elderly.

Working here has taught me something I hadn't understood before: this pot is worth it. Every time someone eats from it, I am happy.

**Mili/Second Woman at the Community Pot:** For the poor, nothing comes without struggle. In that struggle, you learn to dream that your children will be able to afford crayons, chalk, rulers, compasses, school clothes, and sneakers. Dream that they will share this space with others, one where we exchange stories, memories, hugs, or a bowl of soup. Where, miraculously, there is enough for everyone...

**Sol/Woman at the Community Pot:** Ah! Good thing we made it in time. Now there will be food for everyone!

**Mili/Second Woman at the Community Pot:** Alright, I'm heading home. My kids will be back from school soon...

**Sol/Woman at the Community Pot:** You'll be here tomorrow, yes?

**Mili/Second Woman at the Community Pot:** Of course! Bright and early.

**Sol/Woman at the Community Pot:** God willing, we'll have enough for everyone...

#### **SCENE XIV**

**Director:** The performance is over. I'm proud to have shared this message and taken part in this journey, living out my dreams with actresses I admire. They help me see the stage as a place to celebrate life.

**Sol:** Theater is a space where the soul is exposed and life becomes art. It's a meeting between those who have something to say, and those who want to listen. A place where you can be anyone.

**Mili:** Theater has always held a special place in my heart. At times, it's been a warm embrace that made me feel like I wasn't alone. When I became too weary, it sustained me. It gave me an outlet for my anger, joy, and sadness. Theater is a refuge that's always there, giving a voice to the voiceless, embracing those who need it, saying what no one else will. My life makes sense when I'm on stage.

**Director:** Alright, friends... how about pizza and a beer?

**Mili:** I don't know, I'm exhausted. I just want to go home.

**Sol:** Same... I need to sleep. To rid my body of this residual anguish.

**Director:** Come on... beer and pizza at the bar on the corner, talking about nothing at all...

**Sol:** I don't know...

**Director:** What are castmates for, if not as friends with whom we live our characters' lives on the stage, and live our own off it? Come, just a pizza and a beer.

Mili: Why not? Theater can't only be sacrifice...

**Director:** Turn out the lights. Nothing of this world, none of the pain and misery we created will remain...

*The Director leaves. Mili and Sol remain on the stage, looking tired. They stand silently facing each other for a long moment, as if each was waiting for the other to speak. When neither does, Mili walks over to turn out the light and they leave arm in arm.*

**(FINAL CURTAIN)**