

*2018 Marius Götting Award for non-Francophone plays
from the Écriture Théâtrale Contemporaine Caraïbe*

THE 22+ WEDDINGS OF HUGO

A PLAY BY GUSTAVO OTT

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*“Prometheus, thief of light,
Giver of light,
Bound by the gods,
Must have been a book”*

Mark Danielewsky

*“When everything seems closed
and safe for The Self,
The Other breaks in...”*

Levinás.

*“Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,
Plodding to the ports and coasts for transportation,
And that you sit as kings in your desires,
(...) You’ll put down strangers,
Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses,
And lead the majesty of law in lyam
To slip him like a hound.”*
*“But...If you were banished:
whither would you go?
What country would give you harbor?
(...) Why, you must needs be strangers.
Would you be pleased
To find a nation of such barbarous temper
That breaking out in hideous violence
(...) Whet their detested knives against your throats,
Spurn you like dogs
(...) What would you think
To be thus used? This is the strangers’ case
And this your mountainish inhumanity!”*

*William Shakespeare,
The Stranger’s case*

CHARACTERS:

HUGO WAGNER, 50s.
WAFA HADDID, Tunisian, late30s
IRENE CABLÁN, dominican,30's
ELMAR GÓMEZ, Venezuelan, 30's.

SET

Hugo's living room

**The playwright names popular songs only as a cultural reference. Those producing the play should have a license and/or contact the individual copyright holders to gain permission to use this music.*

ACT ONE

1. IRENE CABLÁN: *That day.*

*(We hear the opening of the festive version of “La gloria eres tú” by Mariachi Vargas of Tecalitlan, see *. Or Mendelssohn's Wedding March. Irene Cablán and Hugo Wagner arrive home after their wedding. Irene, in white, tosses her bouquet, finishes off a beer, and quickly goes to get another drink of vodka. Hugo drops his keys on the dresser, looks at himself in the mirror, and takes off his dress suit jacket. He gets his iPad and takes pictures of Irene, trying to get her to stop posing. To one side, a small suitcase).*

IRENE: You know what we haven't talked about? (HUGO SHAKES HIS HEAD, UNCONCERNED) My last name. Seriously: Do I have to use yours from now on?

HUGO: It's up to you, Irene.

IRENE: Irene Wagner. Does it sound good?

HUGO: My last name is wonderful.

IRENE: But now with mine...

HUGO: With your last name?

IRENE: With my first name, dummy.

HUGO: At the courthouse, you said yes.

IRENE: Because it seemed important.

HUGO: It's not.

IRENE: No?

HUGO: Of course not. The important thing is the marriage certificate, that's all.

IRENE: (TAKING OFF HER WEDDING GOWN) Irene Wagner or Irene Cablán? Irene Cablán Wagner? In the Dominican Republic, we'd say, "de Wagner." In Spanish your last name sounds like the word for toilet, it's awful. "(AS Mrs. TOILET) Hi, I'm Irene Toilet, nice to meet you. "(AS Mrs. COMMODOE) And I'm Juanita Commode. "(AS Mrs. BIDET) And I'm Lucrecia Bidet."

(AS HERSELF) ¡I have a friend named Soyla, so she'd be Imma Toilet!

HUGO: Guess I better not marry her.

IRENE: And you just might. (GOES OVER TO THE SMALL SUITCASE) What if you were the one who had to change your last name? Would you like it?

HUGO: Hugo Cablán. Sounds like a detective novelist from Cuba. (SHE SHOOTS HIM A CRUEL LOOK) Sorry, not Cuba, Santo Domingo.

IRENE: You're a charmer.

HUGO: That's why you married me.

IRENE: That and a few other reasons.

HUGO: Of course, but beauty was one of the requirements, right?

IRENE: Well, you would know, just look at me.

HUGO: (TAKING HER PICTURE WITH THE IPAD) Don't pose for the camera, sugar, I want candid shots!

IRENE: I'm not posing, that's just how I am.

HUGO: A real model.

IRENE: The lens transforms me. (DOING HER OWN THING.) So I'll be Irene Wagner Cablan. Honestly, I'm feeling a bit off today.

(SHE TAKES A MORE EVERYDAY OUTFIT OUT OF THE SUITCASE)

HUGO: It's a big step, Irene. This is a life-changing moment.

IRENE: Of course, but it's weird.

HUGO: Are you having regrets?

IRENE: No way!

HUGO: Then enjoy it.

IRENE: It's just that I feel like a different person.

HUGO: You are a different person!

IRENE: Irene Wagner Cablán!

(SHE GIVES HIM A PECK ON THE CHEEK, SWEETLY. SHE GETS DRESSED.)

HUGO: I'm a bit tired, sugar. I'd like to go to bed.

IRENE: Of course, of course. (SHE GIVES HIM ANOTHER KISS. SUDDENLY, SHE PUSHES BACK) Go to bed, bed?

HUGO: Yeah, that flat rectangular thing with a mattress on top and pillows and blankets. Bed, Irene.

IRENE: (SCARED, NOT SURE IF SHE SHOULD GET DRESSED OR NOT) Hugo: you want to go to bed, I mean, to bed with me?

HUGO: (HUMOROUSLY) Well, we're married, aren't we?

IRENE: (SERIOUS) You know, my boyfriend won't like that.

HUGO: Really? You think?

IRENE: But if you insist...

HUGO: So, your boyfriend won't like it if you sleep with your husband on your wedding night? That's what you think?

IRENE: Oh, don't say it like that!

HUGO: I'm just clarifying your words.

IRENE: (SERIOUS) Hugo: we agreed that...

HUGO: (TEASINGLY) I'm messing with you!

IRENE: You don't mean it?

HUGO: Irene, of course not. I don't want to sleep with you. You're my wife but let's not get crazy.

IRENE: Because if it's something you want to do, I'd do it, of course I would. But only because you want to.

HUGO: That's the only reason?

IRENE: And because of what you've done for me.

HUGO: You know it's my pleasure.

IRENE: That's why, I want it to be a *complete* pleasure for you.

HUGO: It already is, Irene.

IRENE: Since you refuse to take any money...

HUGO: It's not about money.

IRENE: I know, I know. But it's weird... right?

HUGO: Yeah, I've heard that a few times: "Hugo, you're weird." I'm starting to think it's not a compliment, you know?

IRENE: Because these things cost a fortune out there. People charge up to ten thousand a pop to marry someone for papers.

HUGO: I don't need ten thousand, love.

IRENE: I know that. That's why you're weird and that's why, if what you want is... ah... bed... with me... (DECISIVE, DRAMATIC AND TAKING OFF HER CLOTHES) I'm all yours!

HUGO: Irene!

IRENE: (STOPS) I mean, you said bed...

HUGO: Don't be stupid. Besides, I like your boyfriend. He's a good guy.

IRENE: (NOW GETTING DRESSED) That's one thing my Puchito has going for him. The only thing. He's a good guy. When I left Santo Domingo, I told myself: Irene Cablán, from here on out do me a favor and fall in love with someone who can give you something decent. No bums or charity cases, because it's enough, Irene. Enough!

HUGO: Your boyfriend seems like a very decent guy, Irene.

IRENE: Of course, he does. And I adore him. But Puchito doesn't have papers.

HUGO: That's what this is about, right?

IRENE: We work like a burro, but without papers. We've been doing this for four years now: cashing checks in someone else's name, paying him as much as 20% of what we earn and then the tax. One time I did the math, and it turns out after paying everyone who's legal for our illegal work, we end up making something like 50% of minimum wage. I knew that's how it was when I decided to leave the Dominican Republic, of course I did. That's why I told myself: Irene, you dope, from now on look for someone who will help you. (LOUD) A motor, not an anchor! But I fell in love with Puchito, who's a shipwreck out on the high seas, and so... What else can a girl in that situation do, but go down with the ship?

HUGO: Love shipwrecks you, but it shelters you too, Irene.

IRENE: You're telling me! That's why I left my country, my merengue, and my *Presidente*.

HUGO: What did you have to do with the President?

IRENE: Everything!

HUGO: The head of state or president of a company?

IRENE: Of the whole country, love: 21 years old, smooth, and fine.

HUGO: You have a 21-year-old president in your country?

IRENE: "Presidente" is the best rum in the world, Hugo. I drank three and a half shots of it a day. (SPITEFUL) I left my country and came all this way just to fall in love with a Dominican who to top it off used to live fifteen minutes from where I grew up! And with all the hot guys in this country.

HUGO: Don't think it's easy to fall in love around here, Irene.

IRENE: Are you kidding? (POINTING TO HERSELF) With these hips and this *dembow*?

HUGO: Wawawhat?

IRENE: With these weapons, I can take down anyone, baby.

HUGO: I believe you!

IRENE: Even you, I've got you droooling.

HUGO: But I'm weird, remember. (POURS HIMSELF A VODKA) You left your country for love? Really? For love?

IRENE: Yes, but the wrong kind of love.

HUGO: That bad?

IRENE: Lots of love and all kinds of wrong.

HUGO: So, you liked the bad boys, huh?

IRENE: One after another.

HUGO: That's what they tell me: the bad boys get the beautiful girls.

IRENE: Thanks for the compliment, but honestly in my case it was a sickness.

HUGO: For real?

IRENE: Diagnosed and everything.

HUGO: I've never heard of a sickness like that.

IRENE: Hybristophilia, they said.

HUGO: (GETS HIS IPAD) How do you spell that?

IRENE: I'll give you the quicker Wikipedia version: it means women who fall in love with criminals.

HUGO: Criminals!

IRENE: Even before I met them. They said it was my “need to feel protected.” Since my father left us and all. So, when I grew up, I threw myself at bad men.

HUGO: How bad?

IRENE: Drug traffickers, mostly. A murderer too, though when we went out, he never killed anyone, but that’s how he acted. I was with him until he finally killed two people and invited me out for pizza that night. I paid for them, and I lost him for good. When it ended with the pizza assassin, that’s when I met the love of my life.

HUGO: Your boyfriend now? Puchito?

IRENE: No. Another guy. A famous Dominican thief.

HUGO: You’re hopeless, huh?

IRENE: Apparently, it’s an incurable disease.

HUGO: (STIFLING LAUGHTER) Tell me about it.

IRENE: The disease?

HUGO: The love of your life.

IRENE: (AFTER A BEAT) When I fell in love with El Choro, he was already famous. And so was I.

HUGO: I didn’t know you were famous in your country.

IRENE: Not famous, but well-known, as they say. An actress, model, all that. I was in magazines, went to parties, TV premieres, and for a while the news of the day was what I wore to this or that event. My cleavage, my legs, my breasts. I loved that. Me, showing everything, and at my side, El Choro, the biggest thief and most corrupt politician on the whole island. Until he got arrested and I fell into disgrace.

HUGO: And you came here.

IRENE: And I came here. Here I met Puchito, the first man I've ever loved who hasn't committed any crimes. Well, except working without papers but that's a beautiful crime. A good crime, right?

HUGO: You never told me that story, Irene.

IRENE: It's just I didn't want to scare you.

HUGO: You don't scare me. Believe me when I tell you I've heard worse...

IRENE: (SCARED) When will the immigration officers come to the house? Will it be like in the movies, *mi encanto*, *mi ilusión*?

HUGO: I don't think so. They only do that if they're suspicious. In our case, we'll go to their offices. They'll ask us questions, but they're not as tricky as you think. I'd say they're actually predictable. We have to take the pictures, (POINTS TO THE IPAD), household bills, the rest of the papers, I'll take care of everything, sweetheart, don't worry. My wife: just keep up appearances.

IRENE: (LOOKING AT THE IPAD) Like you said: you're the expert.

HUGO: Besides, no one ever suspects postal workers.

(HUGO, MAKING SURE IRENE CAN'T SEE HIM, TAKES A GUN FROM HIS POSTAL JACKET AND HIDES IT INSIDE A VASE)

IRENE: Because you all seem so obedient and polite, like trained pets.

HUGO: If that's the impression we give it's out of fear.

IRENE: What could you possibly be afraid of, with your government hours and pay!

HUGO: That our office is on the brink of disappearing.

IRENE: Don't say that, you'll never disappear. (LOOKING AT THE PICTURES ON THE IPAD) By the way, how many Mrs. Wagners are out there?

HUGO: Outside?

IRENE: I meant marriages...

HUGO: Three in this city.

IRENE: In this city?

HUGO: Yes, because in others...

IRENE: How many?

HUGO: You shouldn't know these...

IRENE: Tell me, go on, tell me.

HUGO: In my whole life?

IRENE: In all your forty-eight years.

HUGO: It's fifty-six, love, but thanks.

IRENE: Right, in all your fifty-six year life.

HUGO: In all my fifty-six year life I've gotten married in twelve different cities.

IRENE: Twelve cities!!!

HUGO: And counting you, I've had eighteen weddings.

IRENE: Eighteen Mrs. Wagners!!!!

HUGO: (PLAYFULLY) I'm a really bad guy.

IRENE: (PLAYING ALONG) You're a criminal!

HUGO: I have four Misters too.

IRENE: Men!

HUGO: We all have the same rights.

IRENE: Incredible. Eighteen!

HUGO: And number nineteen is coming next month, but far from here.

IRENE: Why so many different places?

HUGO: It helps keep them from figuring it out. Different names, different driver's licenses, health insurance, addresses, zip codes, foreign consulates...

IRENE: And you learned all this...?

HUGO: In the post office, where we gloomy pets do our conspiring. We have everything you need right there: stamps, forms, contacts.

IRENE: And what do you say when your close friends ask why you get married so often?

HUGO: I try to avoid the subject. But when I have to explain, I remind them that my dad got married five times.

IRENE: For papers too?

HUGO: The thing is, my dad was really ugly. (IRENE LAUGHS) Really. He was so ugly that he thought the only way he could sleep with a woman was to marry her.

(SUDDENLY THE DOORBELL RINGS. IT MAKES A STRANGE SOUND REMINISCENT OF THE RINGS OF THE NIBELUNG. BUT STRANGE, RATHER RIDICULOUS)

IRENE: What is that?!

HUGO: The bell.

IRENE: What bell?

HUGO: The doorbell. Someone's at the door.

IRENE: But that sound...!

HUGO: It's a joke from one of my wives.

IRENE: Which of the hundred twenty?

HUGO: Wafa, the 17th. She's from Tunisia. As a thank you, she got a doorbell that played something by Wagner, like the musician. She figured I'd like it, though she's very sarcastic, so I'll never know if that's true. Go on, you open it, maybe it's your boyfriend.

(THE DOORBELL RINGS AGAIN, HORRIBLE)

IRENE: That may be very classical, but it sounds horrendous to me, Hugo. I better give you a different one. One that sounds more like Bachata.
(IRENE LOOKS OUT THE PEEPHOLE) No, it's not him...

HUGO: What?

IRENE: I never open the door without checking, first world as we may be. Old habits from being poor and hanging out with criminals. And I'm telling you: the person at the door isn't my boyfriend, my husband.

(HUGO GESTURES THAT HE WILL OPEN THE DOOR. IRENE MOVES BACK. HUGO IS GOING TO OPEN WITHOUT LOOKING FIRST, BUT DECIDES TO CHECK) HUGO: (LOUD)

HUGO: Who is it?

VOICE: (LOUD) Hugo Wagner?

HUGO: Who is it?

VOICE: This is police Detective Sabine, Mr. Wagner. I'm here with Detectives Molina and Oliver. We have a warrant for your arrest, Wagner. So don't do anything stupid. Don't put anyone in danger. Open the door, now.

HUGO: (TERRIFIED) Me... ah... Arrest? But...

VOICE: You're accused of a very serious crime, so we we're not going to take any risks. Either you open up now or we'll break the door down. Do you have the weapon on you, Wagner?

IRENE: The weapon? What weapon? What's he talking about, Hugo?

HUGO: (MORE TERRIFIED) But... What crime?

(HUGO GESTURES TO IRENE TO HIDE)

IRENE: *¡¡¡Virgen de las Mercedes, ruega por nosotros!!!*

VOICE: We don't have all day, so I'm going to count to three, Mr. Wagner. If you don't open up, we'll break down the door. (LOUD)
One...two....

(We hear Ghalia Benali – Lamouni, see, from second 58 or when the Tunisian woman begins to sing. The lights dim. We see a sign that says: three months earlier.)*

2. Wafa: *Three months earlier*

(Hugo's house. Song dissipates. Hugo is about to open the door, just as the last scene ended, but Irene is no longer there. Certain elements from the first scene are also missing, such as the beers, the small suitcase, the suit, and the bridal bouquet. Hugo opens the door bravely, without checking the peephole. Enter Wafa, with two enormous suitcases.)

Wafa: It's a good thing you're here!

HUGO: Wafa! Weren't you supposed to call me?! Isn't that what we said?

Wafa: I didn't want to bother you.

HUGO: I told you it was fine, that I could pick you up!

Wafa: My plane got in late.

(Wafa ENTERS CARRYING TWO SUITCASES, NOT LETTING HUGO HELP HER)

HUGO: And I asked you to tell me your arrival time, Wafa. You shouldn't have come like this! It's no problem for me to pick you up, sugar.

Wafa: It's fine, Hugo. Besides, it was nice to see a bit of your city. After it leaves the airport, the bus goes through the downtown. What a beautiful city, much better than the place we got married.

HUGO: The bus? You didn't even take an Uber!!!

Wafa: They're too expensive, Hugo.

HUGO: I would have paid for it, woman!

Wafa: You know I spend less than the brakes on a boat. It's all for saving, as my mother always said.

HUGO: You're hopeless, Wafa. Look at you, coming from the airport all by yourself on a bus with these suitcases that weigh... (HELPS HER WITH ONE) Did you bring a dead body from Africa?

Wafa: Not at all.

HUGO: Then you brought rocks from the Sham desert, because this suitcase weighs a ton!

Wafa: Seventy pounds each.

HUGO: And you carried them here by yourself! How do you do that, Wafa?! Going up and down stairs...!

Wafa: They're called escalators.

HUGO: Still!

Wafa: They're escalators, Hugo. And even if they are rocks, remember that's nothing to me because...

HUGO: (CUTTING HER OFF) I know, I know, because you're...

Wafa: (PROUDLY) I'm from África! (BEAT) The species started with us, Hugo, so your silly little first world stairs don't scare me.

HUGO: But there are ways of doing things, Wafa. Remember you live here now, you're my wife, and the way we treat our partners has a certain civility to it.

Wafa: I can't get used to that; you know this.

HUGO: It's part of our strategy. I'm sure the neighbors saw you pull up. And I'm doubly sure they noticed you were carrying two suitcases and most important: that you were wearing a hijab.

Wafa: A hijab, never, honey. This is a scarf I'm wearing because my hair is a disaster. Nearly five days I went without washing it in Carthage because the water was out. And when you have hair as beautiful as mine, but unwashed, it gets oilier than a truck motor.

HUGO: I do, but in this country, you go from scarf to hijab like that.

Wafa: For me, you mean. Cause if I was some cookie cutter white girl, it would be a scarf, right?

HUGO: That's not what I meant. But that's what people pay attention to more than anything else. And when they ask them, they'll say you

were wearing a burka, you came on your own, and that I didn't even go to pick you up at the airport.

Wafa: Then you can tell them the truth.

Hugo: Really? The truth?

Wafa: The truth. And the truth is I don't like when men help me if I haven't asked for it. Or to be treated like some silly girl who needs men to explain everything or to rescue her from every situation. And I like it a lot less when they see me as the kind of woman who can't survive without a ride from the airport.

Hugo: And if they ask me why you're that way, why you're so...?

Wafa: Brown?

Hugo: Unfriendly.

Wafa: Tell them it's because of my religion.

Hugo: (LAUGHS) Seriously!

Wafa: (SHE LAUGHS TOO) Don't I wish! But your fellow Americans don't know a thing about Islam, so if you tell them the Koran orders us to exercise and forbids others from helping us carry things or explaining how to do everything, in addition to commanding us to constantly carry the fleas of a thousand camels under our hijabs, they'll believe you.

Hugo: That bit about the camel is exactly what they believe.

Wafa: (GOES TO HUGO AND GIVES HIM A KISS ON THE FOREHEAD) You are a Malak (ملاك)

Hugo: Don't tell me what that means, 'cause it sounds awful.

Wafa: Angel. Malak means an Angel.

HUGO: You have angels in Islam too?

Wafa: You see how ignorant everyone is around here?

HUGO: (TRYING TO MOVE ONE OF THE SUITCASES) Go on, tell me, how'd it go in immigration?

Wafa: (POURS A BIT OF VODKA THAT NOW IS IN ITS PLACE, THE BOTTLE FULL) First, let me hydrate a bit.

HUGO: The Koran forces you do that too, right?

Wafa: Surah 666, ayah 69: "when faced with sexy infidels," it says...

HUGO: TELL ME!

Wafa: What a man of little faith! (Wafa TAKES THE SUITCASE LIKE IT WEIGHS NOTHING. HUGO MAKES A GESTURE HALF HUMILIATED, HALF RESIGNED) They interrogated me like we thought they would, but in the end, they got tired and so did I. They didn't want to let me in, that was obvious, but I answered everything the way I was supposed to, without a slip. I have a nearly photographic memory, I speak four languages and I studied medicine, for fuck's sake. (TAKES ANOTHER DRINK) They think that just because you're from there, you're an idiot. (BEAT) Policemen. Or more like boys, who don't have half the education, the knowledge, or the intelligence that I do, and still, they treat me like I'm less than them just because they have a passport, which, let's be frank, isn't a personal achievement. They were born here, that's all: it's not something they got through hard work or a moral victory. (DRINKS. REMEMBERS) Oh! They looked for me on the anti-terrorist list!

HUGO: You say that with such joy.

Wafa: Well, it made me feel dangerous.

HUGO: You are dangerous, Wafa!!! (Wafa GROWLS LIKE A BAD CAT) Why did they look for you on the world's most wanted list, desert cat?

Wafa: (PRESENTING HERSELF) That's obvious, isn't it?

HUGO: (PLAYING ALONG) It is to me, of course. But to them...

Wafa: You're better at answering trick questions than I am

HUGO: Being your husband has its advantages, sweetheart.

Wafa: The officer was really young; he could've been my son. He didn't like me from the second he saw me waiting in line. He was looking at me like: "This one I'm going to hold up for her defiance. Look at her coming here with that filthy *hijab* and those fleas of a Babylonian camel." That's what he thought. I heard him thinking it. Then, when it was my turn, he looked at my passport for long time, he entered my data in one of the cheapest Dell computers. The kid took my passport, pushed a button, and two other police officers came, and they surrounded me. And serious as a machine gun they asked if I was Wafa Hadid and I said no. That I was Wafa Habib.

HUGO: (SCARED) But why?

Wafa: Because that Wafa Hadid, with two d's, is on the anti-terrorist list.

HUGO: What bad luck! You must've gone green!

Wafa: Not even a little, green is for Lebanon, and we hate them in Tunisia.

HUGO: Don't play tough, Wafa, I bet you were peeing your pants.

Wafa: No, I really wasn't. I knew *that* was going to happen.

HUGO: You knew!

Wafa: Of course. Every time I go to an airport, I know they'll stop me, and they'll ask if I'm her. Once, when I was leaving Cairo, they detained me for two days. And they didn't do it the way you do here, with pretty words and a look of concern, a woman searching your body with gloves while two police accompany you in silence. No sir. In Egypt they shove you along, screaming and hitting and dragging you across the floor. And five men with filthy hands search you. (DRINKS) And then they throw you in a dungeon built for four people where they've crammed in thirty men and women and children and about two hundred flying cockroaches. All of them waiting for them to straighten out their paperwork and uncover their identity. And finally, after two days, if you're lucky, an officer will come, take you by the shoulder and tell you everything's fine. Right, it's fine. The world is beautiful. Then they give you back your papers and it turns out it's true you aren't the bad Wafa Hadid, the terrorist with the two d's, but Wafa Habib, the good one with the two b's, who studied medicine but didn't graduate, the one

that was humiliated, who after everything if she didn't become a terrorist, or at least a troublemaker, it was because she has two kids to take care of. (LOOKS AT HIM) Relax, it sounds worse than it is. I don't feel bad. I'm used to it.

HUGO: (DRINKS VODKA) I'm sorry, Wafa.

Wafa: I wasn't vindictive when I told you about it. Did you notice?

HUGO: (HUGO NODS) And the kids?

Wafa: They're with my sister in Carthage.

HUGO: Do they know you won't see them for a while?

Wafa: Hugo, they're fine. When we fled to Syria, we went almost a whole year without any contact. They're trained.

HUGO: A year?

Wafa: One year and one week. And when they saw me again all they said was: (IMITATING) "Did you bring us toys, Mommy?"

HUGO: (LAUGHS) They're little...

Wafa: Yes, toys from Siria for my African boys: a fragmentation grenade for Ali. And for my younger boy, Mazen, a rock from a house destroyed in the Hermel bombings.

HUGO: Bombings?

Wafa: Yes, I was in the Hermel bombing. Actually, that was when my husband, deciding between saving me or helping himself, like a good Muslim martyr, chose option number two and took off with a Lybian woman fifteen years younger than me. (TAKES ANOTHER DRINK, A LONG ONE) Around then, I discovered how good vodka is. I guess that's why I'm so suspicious even to my mother. So, I decided to come here. For the children toys. And since everything's so pretty here and nothing ever happens...

(Wafa POURS SOME VODKA AGAIN. HUGO IS AWARE SHE CAN'T SEE HIM, SO HE GOES TO THE BOOKSHELVES, TAKES THE GUN, HIDES IT INSIDE HIS POSTAL JACKET)

HUGO: That nothing ever happens is debatable.

Wafa: The only drama you people have is baseball.

HUGO: We just don't hear about it.

Wafa: Maybe it's just me, but between a home run and a massive bombing, I don't know, I think I'd miss the four bases hit.

HUGO: (TAKES HER GLASS OF VODKA) Wafa, you're here now. And now you're part of football and the people who don't know anything about anything. So, remember to pick a team and become a superfan, ok?

Wafa: For you. Because if it wasn't for our marriage, I'd still be in the airport waiting for them to deport me to the moon, which is the only place they don't ask for papers or a work visa. (LOOKING AROUND) By the way, I like this house.

HUGO: I bought it with my whole life.

Wafa: (CLOSES THE BOTTLE OF VODKA) And where am I going to sleep?

HUGO: Wafa, you sleep in your room.

Wafa: I have a room?

HUGO: You always have one.

Wafa: The same room as all of them?

HUGO: Let's go with yes.

Wafa: How many of us are there now?

HUGO: Counting you, 17.

Wafa: You're a *Supermalak*. Seventeen weddings! And all of them with the same conditions?

HUGO: Different ones.

Wafa: I mean for free.

HUGO: Of course. Free, like you said.

Wafa: No one does anything today if it doesn't benefit them, habibi.

HUGO: I didn't say that I didn't benefit.

Wafa: So you do it for a reason?

HUGO: Of course.

Wafa: What is it?

HUGO: It's personal.

Wafa: Private or secret?

HUGO: Both.

Wafa: And immigration officers won't come to check?

HUGO: They already *checked*, Wafa. You're legal. You have your documents. Furthermore, you left and entered the country with your new status and aside from the terrorist suspicions, everything went fine. Here you are. Now what we want is to bring your children. It's your right.

Wafa: (SINCERE, MOVING AWAY A LITTLE) The thing that surprises me the most, or the only thing that surprises me, is that you haven't forgotten about them.

HUGO: Of course I haven't forgotten, silly.

Wafa: With my boys... Um... It'll be the way we agreed?

HUGO: They'll be my children too.

Wafa: (VOICE SHAKING, MISSING THE CONFIDENCE SHE'S SHOWN UP TO NOW) I... Hugo... I... I could give you money, I have savings in...

HUGO: Wafa, please...!

(PAUSE. THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER. Wafa GOES TO HIM AND KISSES HIM ON THE LIPS)

Wafa: If I could fall in love again, I'd do it with you. My room?

HUGO: (POINTS) There.

Wafa: Tomorrow at 7?

HUGO: To be at the lawyer's office at 9.

Wafa: On the dot.

(THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER. SHE IS ABOUT TO TAKE HIS HAND AGAIN, BUT MAKES A DECISION AND GIVES HIM ANOTHER LONG KISS ON THE LIPS. HE TAKES THE SUITCASES AND CARRIES THEM AND THEY DISAPPEAR FOR A MOMENT UNTIL WE HEAR Wafa SAY)

Wafa: Good night, Hugo.

(HUGO APPEARS AGAIN, NERVOUS)

HUGO: Maybe what's happening is that I'm going crazy.

*(We hear "La gloria eres tú," Lucrecia's versión see *. The lights dim and we see a sign that says: Six months earlier)*

3. ELMAR: *Six months earlier*

(Hugo's house. We hear the music until it fades. Hugo, nicely dressed, is sitting, watching how Elmar, nearly naked, wearing an apron and nothing else, puts plates on the table)

ELMAR: You think they'll like arepas?

HUGO: What are they called?

ELMAR: Arepas (POINTING TO THE SOUPES) Will the immigration guys like them?

HUGO: Yeah, but don't take it too far. The inspectors get skeptical if you're overeager. If you suck up to them, they notice and put it in the suspicious column.

ELMAR: I'm not doing it to sweeten them up, it's a tradition.

HUGO: Just watch the overly correct gestures.

ELMAR: Overly correct?

HUGO: I'm talking about political correctness and do-goodism.

ELMAR: Yeah, I better focus on barbaric incorrectness and do-badism.

HUGO: Exactly, that's what we call decency in these parts.

ELMAR: Gestures: what a word. Did you know that all of Latin American literature begins with that proposition, Hugo, the gesture?

HUGO: And don't bring up literature, Elmar! Remember I don't know much about it and then that makes it hard to explain to the agents what we have in common. Two people who like different things also sets off the marriage fraud alarm bells.

ELMAR: Fine. *No necesito ir al cielo, tisú.* I'll stay close to the barbaric incorrectness and *do-badism*.

HUGO: Yes. Don't forget, some folks get very offended here if you're not a monster.

ELMAR: But just so you know, literature is scary stuff.

HUGO: Only to writers. To everyone else, it's just annoying.

ELMAR: How can they be annoyed by beauty?

HUGO: Here's the thing: beauty, if it doesn't go the gym, we're not interested. So, no literature to teach lessons to the immigration inspectors.

ELMAR: But I'm a writer, Hugo!

HUGO: That helps, but in other ways.

ELMAR: How does being a writer help me?

HUGO: Well, for one thing writers don't like to work.

ELMAR: But we do work, like tractors!

HUGO: What I mean is no one can accuse you of stealing someone's job. The writers from here are just as pointless as the ones who come from other places.

ELMAR: And here I thought writing was prestigious.

HUGO: Maybe so, but we don't call it work.

ELMAR: (CITING) *How do I explain to my wife that when I look out the window I'm working?*

HUGO: I'm not your wife, I'm your husband, strictly speaking.

ELMAR: Yes, my husband. But the quote is from Conrad and it means...

HUGO: Elmar, of course I know what you mean. I'm talking from their perspective... It's just better if you don't go all man of letters on the immigration guys, that's all. Winning their admiration isn't your goal.

ELMAR: What is? Gaining their pity?

HUGO: Being pitiful will get you a long way.

ELMAR: So, inspire pity and stay away from fancy words.

HUGO: That's a must in this country.

ELMAR: So, from now on I'll be an idiot writer. Aren't we all? So, if what I do isn't work, won't they ask me how I plan to make a living?

HUGO: Yes, but to them that's obvious.

ELMAR: Obvious how?

HUGO: That I'll be the one supporting you, what they call your sugar daddy. An older lover who's managed to convince a talented young guy like you to be his in exchange for comfort, a home, and papers.

ELMAR: Talented but not beautiful, huh?

HUGO: Let's not go overboard.

ELMAR: All my lovers have sworn I'm gorgeous.

HUGO: And how many lovers have you had?

ELMAR: Two.

HUGO: Really!

ELMAR: Counting you, three.

HUGO: But I'm your husband and I don't count as a lover.

ELMAR: Anyway, writers don't need a model's body or a beautiful face. And also, trust me, I don't need a sugar daddy like you.

HUGO: Elmar; what guy your age, with your face, would fall in love with an old man like me?

ELMAR: But you're not old, darling.

HUGO: It's what they'll all think. That I'm the sugar daddy of a South American writer from the Third World and fourth-class literature...

ELMAR: More like fifth world, or five point two, almost sixth world from hell. A hack from a Latin America that's expert at childish dreams.

HUGO: A writer who inspires lots of pity.

ELMAR: Like an injured dog on the highway. A helpless thing looking for a gesture to tell. (REMEMBERS) *The Gay Goddess will help us!* That's what you said, Hugo.

HUGO: I didn't say the Gay Goddess!

ELMAR: Those first days, when we met, when I proposed to you...

HUGO: You didn't propose to me!

ELMAR: Right, you suggested...

HUGO: That I could help you with your papers.

ELMAR: For nothing in return.

HUGO: Exactly.

ELMAR: No sex, no money, nothing.

HUGO: That's right.

ELMAR: And I said: I don't believe you. You don't exist.

HUGO: And I said: I'm from here! I exist!

ELMAR: (ALARMED, POINTS AT HIM) The first human! The man that invented solidarity! *The Gay Goddess* goes unnoticed, you said. Which, by the way, is totally unbelievable! Dead, maybe, deported, probably. Arrested, that's my destiny. But unnoticed, never!!!

HUGO: Listen, poet: What I was referring to is that statistics show there are very few marriages for residency in the gay community.

(ELMAR GOES TO HIM AND GIVES HIM A PECK ON THE CHEEK)

ELMAR: Don't go getting cute because then I'll fall for you *y de esos ojos negros que me dominan e incitan al amor*. (BEGINS TO GET DRESSED) In Caracas they called me a poet too, but that's what they call every writer.

HUGO: Writing is writing...

ELMAR: I write novels. You know that, right? I mean, in case the inspectors ask you.

HUGO: Fiction, that's what we call it here.

ELMAR: Words, that's what we call it there.

HUGO: I guess it's not the same.

ELMAR: Of course, it is. They're the same. But words that come from pain. Words that make imagination change. And if imagination changes, reality changes, Hugo. Barbarity changes.

HUGO: (INTRIGUED) How do you separate the words that are more important than others?

ELMAR: Important words act like hieroglyphics.

HUGO: Hieroglyphics? Like the ones on the pyramids?

ELMAR: But living Hieroglyphics!

HUGO: Tell me a living hieroglyphic that will surprise me.

ELMAR: Did you know I have a daughter?

HUGO: (SURPRISED) A daughter?

ELMAR: Writers have children, don't they? (HUGO NODS) Well, gay writers do too.

HUGO: (HESITATINGLY) Uh... In Venezuela? Is your partner taking care of her there?

ELMAR: My ex-wife in Caracas.

HUGO: Ex-wife?

ELMAR: I was married.

HUGO: To...

ELMAR: Raquel.

HUGO: And she...

ELMAR: Was my psychologist.

HUGO: You married your psychologist!

ELMAR: She was older than me. During our sessions, we fell in love. Who wouldn't? They listen to you, support you, give you advice, understand you

like they were your mother: a lasting love like it sprang from the womb. For a writer it's not easy to find someone like that, whether it's a man, woman, cat, or dog.

HUGO: Dogs don't write. Cats, maybe.

ELMAR: And I was with that cat. With shouting, clawing, and the good kind of pain. We had sex, of course. And lots of it. Being with her made me feel calm, even though I had a serious boyfriend.

HUGO: And she knew about him?

ELMAR: Yes, of course. She was my therapist. She knew everything about me. Then, when she got pregnant, we stopped having sex. Instead, we separated like we had both won what we most wanted.

HUGO: What about your boyfriend?

ELMAR: Twenty minutes after I found out I was going to be a father, I stopped loving him. Him and the whole country. Like Venezuela was that other lover who makes you feel insecure, who you're not sure if he loves you, like that loved one clinging to gestures of violence. You see, gestures again. I stopped loving him with the simple gestures: passing the salt, waiting for a green light, in goodbyes, a child. I stopped loving him like a dull, dark, violent word, like the country was waiting for you to screw up so it could attack you the way it should. The way you deserve. The way you've been asking for forever in your barbaric incorrectness.

I took my books, my laptop, a plane, and I came here. To be a writer from another country. The six months on my tourist visa went by like three weeks. I visited museums, tourist spots, libraries. I read writers from here and they seemed possible, attainable, like me. The snow came, I saw it for the first time and for some reason I remembered it as there in my childhood. I admired everything from here because somehow it seemed achievable. Here I'll be more than I am! I shouted. Until Christmastime when the attack happened. A truck plowed into a crowd, killing more than thirty. I wasn't even nearby, but the police started asking for ID from anyone who didn't look like they were from here. And, of course, they got me, as usual! Then, the deluge without papers, half abandoned, half fucked, half terrified, like that truck was after me every day waiting to run me down. A writer with a daughter, but with no way to bring her here: his daughter and her mother. His medicine and his psychiatrist. That's what they call *the masculine passion*, darling, what I feel twice as much like I was a soldier. Until in the midst of my paperless odyssey, you showed up at the post office.

(HUGO HANDS HIM CLOTHES AND HE BEGINS TO GET DRESSED)

HUGO: The one who showed up there was you; I was working. (HE SEES THE TIME) They should be here soon. Elmar, one thing: (ELMAR STOPS DRESSING) You could have told me, and I wouldn't have changed my mind.

ELMAR: That I had a daughter and a wife and I wanted to bring them to live here? I was scared to, Hugo.

HUGO: You figured I'd back out if I knew?

ELMAR: A writer who's never been published, with a daughter and an ex wife: it's not a top-selling Christmas package.

HUGO: Does your therapist want to come?

ELMAR: She loves her daughter. And kids split you in two, Hugo. It's not you anymore. It's them. Do you have kids?

HUGO: I think about sixty-five or seventy-six. After thirty, I lost count. My eleventh wife, from Nigeria, Talita Wagner is her name now, she came to the country with thirteen kids: five were hers, three from her first husband and five more from her second husband. And then, when she got her papers, her ex-husbands came too with their new wives and more kids. All of them Wagners!

ELMAR: To the Wagner neighborhood! You must be proud.

HUGO: A large family to show off for a man who hasn't done anything but be alone his whole life.

ELMAR: (QUOTES) *Solitude is the central experience of today's man.*

HUGO: Don't start with the literary quotes!

ELMAR: It's Sam Shepard. And it's theater, so I guess it doesn't count as literature. (FINISHES DRESSING. GOES OVER TO HUGO) So no kids of your own, Hugo?

HUGO: No, none of my own...

ELMAR: With me, if you want...

HUGO: Is that your way of telling me we're going to be fathers?

ELMAR: Don't I wish, love!

HUGO: Me too!

ELMAR: Though the playwright would say "they're all your children".

HUGO: Who? Shepard?

ELMAR: You're really not gay, Hugo?

HUGO: I told you I'm not!

ELMAR: But are you sure? You never know till you try.

HUGO: (LAUGHS) I'm fifty-six, of course I'm sure, love. Very sure ever since I was with my first girlfriend when I was fifteen.

ELMAR: You had sex with your girlfriend when she was just fifteen? You're a pervert!

HUGO: Fuck, no, not sex. Affection, affection, affection, Elmar. Passion but with affection. My first love came later... What about you?

ELMAR: I started late with both things at the same time: sex and love. At eighteen with my literature teacher, as God and tradition mandate.

(ELMAR FINISHES COMBING HIS HAIR, PUTTING ON COLOGNE)

ELMAR: Ok, I'm going to confess something this once, and then I'm never going to repeat it. And if you tell anyone, I'll say it's a lie, and you made it all up. Ok?

HUGO: Yes! Confess!

ELMAR: Ok. I confess, here between us two, that you should be the writer.

HUGO: (LAUGHS) ME?

ELMAR: Go ahead, laugh, it looks good on you too.

HUGO: So why me?

ELMAR: Because you're surrounded by people. All kinds of people. You have a world of family!

HUGO: And that's what you need to be a writer? I thought it was talent that it took, Elmar.

ELMAR: No, Hugo. Believe me. Talent is other people. (SUDDENLY, EVERYDAY) So, we eat the *arepas* and turn into barbaric incorrectness? (HUGO TAKES HIS PHONE, PUTS HIS ARM AROUND ELMAR AND TAKES A SELFIE)

HUGO: So when you get famous, I can say I was your husband and you owe it all to me.

(HUGO, MISTANKLY, OPENS THE SIDE TABLE DRAWER)

ELMAR: And it's true. Every word. Even an artist's last name: Elmar Wagner. Much better than Elmar Gómez. In Spanish Elmar means the sea and Gómez sounds like rubber. (SEEING THE WEAPON) Hugo, what is that?

HUGO: (NERVOUS, HE PULLS AWAY FROM ELMAR) It's not what you think!

ELMAR: Of course not! That's a gun, Hugo! (PAUSE. THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER) Hugo: What are you doing with a gun?

(HUGO TRIES TO HIDE IT. ELMAR GOES OVER TO HIM. THEN HUGO SHOWS IT TO HIM. IT'S A HANDGUN. ELMAR LOOKS AT IT IN TERROR)

HUGO: (NERVOUS) Really, it's not what you think.

(They look at each other. We hear "La gloria eres tú," Siguaraya's version starting at second 52, when the singer comes on. Or Mendelssohn's Wedding March. End of Act One.)

ACT TWO

1. IRENE, ELMAR & HUGO: *Three weeks later*

(Mendelssohn's Wedding March. A sign announces: Three weeks later. Visiting room, police station. Hugo, alone onstage, is sitting at a table. He looks around attentively. He is wearing very simple clothing. Any noise causes him to turn quickly, as though it were a threat. He looks at the ceiling and gestures like he's testing a microphone. We hear a short alarm. We hear a gate open and then a door. A voice resounds onstage)

VOICE: (OFF, AFTER A SHORT ALARM) Visits are for ten minutes. And remember all physical contact is prohibited. Don't forget!

(ENTER IRENE AND ELMAR. SHE IS CARRYING A PACKAGE. ELMAR, A SCRIPT. THEY GO TO HUGO)

ELMAR: Just look at your face, Hugo!

IRENE: You don't look so bad to me, mi cielo.

ELMAR: He looks like he spent three weeks in Siberia inside a fridge with a broken lightbulb.

IRENE: (TO HUGO) Hugo, darling, first of all, I want you to know I tried to come before this...

ELMAR: But they wouldn't let us!

IRENE: Since you were all over the news!

ELMAR: And then we had problems with our ID.

IRENE: I had to use my disgusting documents from when I was single!

ELMAR: And me, my filthy ID as a deceived writer!

IRENE: (ANNOYED, TO ELMAR) Let him talk!

ELMAR: Me? You're the parrot who swallowed a radio!

IRENE: And you're the one with a nose like a wild macaw!

ELMAR: (TO IRENE) Plus, let me remind you that I'm his husband, and I'll do as I please with my spouse.

IRENE: And I'll remind you I'm his wife!

ELMAR: But I was first!

IRENE: And I was last!

ELMAR: You're like the lover! The mistress!

IRENE: Besides, you weren't first at all! Hugo has eighteen now!

HUGO: (NERVOUS) Keep it down, Irene! (SOFT, NERVOUS) Remember, I'm not in here because of *that* but because of *the other thing*.

IRENE: *Other thing?* You mean thief, terrorist or liar? Or all of them together?

ELMAR: (TO IRENE) He means he's not in jail because of the multiple *thing*. It's because of *the other thing*.

IRENE: (LOUD) So what's *the other thing*?

HUGO: (NERVOUS) Keep it down, fuck!

ELMAR: What you need to do with this Borinquen is stuff a rag in her mouth and toss her in the ocean.

IRENE: Borinquen is from Puerto Rico!

ELMAR: An island is an island!

HUGO: (CALMING THEM DOWN) Don't say any more than you have to, understand?

ELMAR: Of course, I understand, Hugo. You're in here because you fired six shots, mercilessly killing computer.

IRENE: You see what a brute you are, Hugo. And here you pretended to be so first world! Who does something like that? Killing an unarmed computer!

ELMAR: Though it was a Dell, so while it may be deceased, calling it a computer is going too far.

IRENE: Here I even thought that the reporters were saying that to get to the other thing!

ELMAR: To *that thing*. *The other thing* is this.

IRENE: What thing? *The other thing* isn't *that thing* but *this thing*?

HUGO: The *multiple thing*, to keep things straight.

IRENE: Right. The *multiple* thing.

ELMAR: The beautiful crime of Hugo Multiple.

HUGO: Zip it, there's no crime. (BEAT, SOFTLY) The thing is I think they don't know anything.

ELMAR: Are you sure?

HUGO: The lawyer said I'll be out next week. I just have to pay bail, do some therapy. And that's it.

IRENE. I mean, you say it and I just can't believe it. You with a gun, Hugo!

HUGO: It was my service pistol. It's my right to have it.

ELMAR: You never told me you were a soldier.

HUGO: I'm telling you now.

ELMAR: You're not telling me, husband of mine. I found out on the news!

IRENE: And me, like gossip at the hairdressers, it's shameful!

HUGO: Enough with the jokes, please.

IRENE: I'm not joking. I'm really suffering.

HUGO: ENOUGH!

ELMAR: We better keep it down or else they'll find out about *that thing*, *the other thing*, *this thing*, and *the multiple thing* too.

IRENE: (NOW FINALLY MORE SERIOUS) Hugo, why didn't you talk to me about this?

HUGO: (FED UP) About what, Irene?

IRENE: The gun!

HUGO: Because it wasn't something I was carrying around every day! Actually, until that day I had never taken it out of the house.

(THEY LOOK AT HIM WAITING FOR AN EXPLANATION. HUGO LOWERS HIS HEAD, LIKE DROPPING THE SUBJECT)

IRENE: Come on, tell me: why?

HUGO: The thing is you won't believe me.

ELMAR: I'm a writer, I believe everything. It's my bread and butter.

IRENE: And me? I believe even my own lies. Go on, tell me a tall tale, I speak fluent giant.

HUGO: The incident happened twenty-four hours before I married Irene, but it has nothing to do with you, sweetheart. It was during my regular shift at the post office. That's where the circumstances came about.

ELMAR: The circumstances of killing the unfortunate Dell Respirom computer? Just like that?

IRENE: But how are you going to go to work with a gun, Hugo? Why did you shoot it?

(SHE LAUGHS BUT NOTICES THAT HE DOESN'T. THEN, SERIOUS)

ELMAR: I think maybe it's about time for you to explain why you shot the computer, Hugo.

HUGO: (AFTER A PAUSE) It started a while back, when that truck ran over those people outside the post office and management asked us to take precautions.

IRENE: And you took a gun!

HUGO: I never thought I was going to use it. (MOVES TO ONE SIDE, LOOKS AT THEM. AFTER A BEAT, HE TURNS, NOT SPEAKING TO THEM) The first circumstance was me taking the gun to work. I

remembered I was a soldier and I told myself: if something happens, well here I am. I'm not going to let my co-workers become victims. Not while I'm in charge, not on my watch, when I know I can keep them safe. (HE MOVES TO THE OTHER SIDE) In time we had forgotten the alarm, but that day, the day of our wedding, I took my break at my desk to eat lunch, check the news, my mail, social media. Ten minutes before it ended, I did what I always do: I looked for her.

IRENE: Her... Her... Who?

HUGO: Carine Wagner Kobina, *the one born on a Tuesday*, popped up bluer than the rest on page ten of the search results. Carine Wagner, far away, unimportant, born on a Tuesday going Wednesday.

IRENE: Who was Carine, Hugo? To you?

HUGO: The first person I married to fix her immigration papers. My first marriage of convenience for me was like my first love. Love and compassion like they were the same thing; solidarity and love like they explained a single feeling.

IRENE: So what did you find out about Carine?

HUGO: It wasn't good news. It was the official site of the US Citizen and Immigration Services. It was the list of people who had received deportation orders. That very same day they were putting her on a plane and expelling her from this country.

ELMAR: But, why did they deport Carine if her papers were in order?

HUGO: Exactly. I panicked. My hand was shaking. There was a little link next to her name that explained the reasons. And when I clicked it... Then, then... The computer quit working! It froze. And that's when, I was pressing every button on the keyboard, and the thing turned green and started spitting out letters and numbers.

And it happened. Suddenly I saw myself there in combat, terrified, running from the bullets, feeling them close in. I wasn't at my desk in the post office. I was in that other planet of crime, terror, hunger, searching for a place to hide, dragging myself through the dirt, wanting to find something, a rock, some rubble, an abandoned body that would give me a hiding place. And between the images of war and my search for salvation, my coworkers say I insulted the computer. That I started hitting it. That I attacked the monitor and threw it against the wall. That I was enraged, shouting about fury and blame and in the heat of it I pulled out my service pistol and...

IRENE: You fired six shots...

ELMAR: ...into the Dell Mortuarium.

IRENE: But, what were you yelling at it?

HUGO: (EMBARRASSED) That we had to fire on all inhumanity.

IRENE: All humans?

ELMAR: IN-humans! Kill everything inhumane.

HUGO: And their irresistible desire to be despicable.

IRENE: Well that doesn't sound like such a bad idea to me!

HUGO: What's such a bad idea is that I'm here.

ELMAR: And one last question, Hugo, an important one... (HUGO NODS. A PAUSE BEFORE A KEY QUESTION) Were all the shots into the monitor or did you spread them out between the screen and the keyboard?

(THE THREE LAUGHS. HUGO PUNCHES ELMAR AFFECTIONATELY, WE HEAR A SHORT ALARM AND A VOICE)

VOICE: Remember, all physical contact is prohibited.

HUGO: (TOWARD THE DOOR) Sorry! (TO IRENE AND ELMAR) They watch us all the time...

(SHE TAKES HIS HAND. WE HEAR THE SHORT ALARM AND THE VOICE)

VOICE: Remember, all physical contact is prohibited.

IRENE: Oh, that guard is so frigid! He sounds Mexican!

ELMAR: I sound Italian, darling.

(HUGO LEANS INTO THEM, IN SECRET)

HUGO: One thing, before you go... (HE LOOKS AROUND) Don't forget that a lot of people are depending on this.

ELMAR: A lot of people and me.

IRENE: And me. (PAUSE) A lot of people... like how many? (HUGO DOESN'T ANSWER)

ELMAR: Eighteen weddings... Right? Or are there more?

HUGO: Every one involves not just my husband or wife, but their families too: children, partners. One person isn't just one person. It's a family that gets multiplied. Children, parents, etcetera...

ELMAR: You see? It's that etcetera that keeps the compassionate old Christian ladies of this nation awake at night.

IRENE: You mean, that the number is...

HUGO: Three hundred and forty-two.

IRENE: ¡Coño!

HUGO: At least the last time I counted.

ELMAR: There could be more?!

HUGO: I'm not fooling myself; I know it: each time I get married it's not to one person, it's to a community.

IRENE: Well, don't expect the multiplication of papers with me. It's me, my boyfriend, the baby on the way, and no one else.

HUGO: Irene, you're part of this too. In time, more people will come for you.

HUGO: (PAYING NO ATTENTION TO HER) Loves, friends, kids: a grove that turns you from something that exists, into a human being. A species that will only survive if it's among many others. A family the size of a continent.

(WE HEAR A BELL IN THE VISITING ROOM AND THE SAME VOICE FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE SCENE)

VOICE: Five minutes to say your goodbyes!

IRENE: (HANDING HIM A PACKAGE) Here's the mail that came to the house for you. I brought you some food too. They said they'd give it to you after the visit was over.

HUGO: (LOOKING AT ELMAR, WHO HANDS HIM A SCRIPT) Your book?

ELMAR: Dedicated to my husband.

HUGO: (SEES THERE IS NO WRITTEN DEDICATION) Where?

ELMAR: (SHOWS HIM) *To the man who invented solidarity.*

(HUGO HANGS HIS HEAD, ASHAMED)

IRENE: Elmar Wagner Gómez: let me remind you that he's my husband, and I'm right here, so if you're going to say beautiful things, wait till I go to the bathroom to cry.

(A TENDER PAUSE. HUGO TRIES TO FIND SOMETHING TO DO NOT TO CRY, HE CHECKS THE MAIL THAT SHE GAVE HIM)

HUGO: (STARTLED) Immigration! (OPENS THE LETTER, NERVOUS, READS IT) It's...

ELMAR: With that face?

IRENE: Good god, what does it say?

HUGO: They've called me to appear in the immigration offices immediately.

ELMAR: And what's it about?

HUGO: It's a file for...

(HUGO RIFLES THROUGH THE MAIL. HE FINDS ANOTHER LETTER)

HUGO: Nigeria!

IRENE: What is going on with Nigeria?

HUGO: Talita Wagner.

IRENE: One of your...?

HUGO: Number eleven.

(HUGO READS THE LETTER, DESPERATE. WE HEAR TALITA'S VOICE)

TALITA: (OFF) Dearest Hugo. I finally met Mr. Rugg. Things are bad in Nigeria, but at least we're all together. Jobless, sick, lost, but together. Today I realized it's our fault, that we're the sheep that never stop thinking about the wolf's hunger. His hunger moves us more than our own, and that's why we feed the wolves with those we love most. Kisses, and now you know where I am.

HUGO: (TENSELY) Good lord!

ELMAR: But the letter sounds very nice.

HUGO: (SERIOUS, AS HE HAS NEVER BEEN SO FAR) No, you don't understand. This letter is in code.

IRENE: In code? What do you mean?

ELMAR: And what does it say?

HUGO: Mr. Rugg is immigration. (ALMOST IN SECRET) And the reference to the wolves means that they know.

IRENE: (PANICKY) They found us out?

HUGO: They deported her, and they know what I'm doing. (WASTING NO TIME) Irene, Elmar, listen carefully to what I'm going to tell you: when you leave here, go to a place that's absolutely new, where you've never been before. A hotel is best. Irene: don't go back to my house. Not for clothes, not for anything. Call your boyfriend and both of you get lost. Hide. Elmar: change houses and disappear into the crowd.

ELMAR: (NERVOUS) Darling, I don't...

HUGO: Do what I tell you!

ELMAR: What about you?

HUGO: If they know everything, I'm not getting out of here.

ELMAR: (STANDING UP, DECISIVE) Don't worry about me, love. Ever since we got married, Hugo, I've been waiting for this day to come. It's normal: we all think the worst is just around the corner. That's why I'd

already made up my mind about this. I'll be a writer exiled by a civilized and democratic dictatorship that pursues its people. I'll be a writer who runs from immigration minions. An anarchist without papers against the empire of law and order: an undesirable who isn't from here. But I'm not leaving, Hugo. I'm staying in this city. And if they search for me and find me, then what? What are they going to do to me? Deport me? I've always been a deportee anyways! (HE MOVES CLOSER TO HUGO)

Talent is other people.

HUGO: The people of the world.

(HUGO KISSES HIM. THEY EMBRACE. WE HEAR THE SHORT ALARM TWICE AND THE VOICE OVER THE LOUDSPEAKERS)

VOICE: Remember, all physical contact is prohibited!

ELMAR: I'm going to grab that guard right this minute by all his personal parts and let's just see if he doesn't like physical contact!

(ELMAR LEAVES THE PRISON AREA)

HUGO: (TO IRENE) And forgive me, forgive me, my love.

IRENE: It's ok. I still love you. I love you more than anything.

(WE HEAR A BEEP FOR AN ANNOUNCEMENT, NOT THE ALARM) VOICE: Wagner, it's time to go!

(THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER)

HUGO: Here goes everything.

*(We hear Ghalia Benali "Once, we met" see *, starting at second 30 or when she begins to sing. We see a sign that says: Four years later)*

2. Wafa: *Four years later*

(Hugo Wagner's house. The music comes up slowly. To one side, Hugo, running a finger over the furniture. He is wearing a simple outfit and looks worn out. He looks at the portraits, laughs. Wafa appears onstage with a grocery bag.)

Wafa: How does everything look, Hugo?

HUGO: (SURPRISED) The house is the same!

Wafa: Of course it is.

HUGO: And it's very clean!

Wafa: I've cleaned it often enough, love. Though the first time I came it was full of dust and cockroaches, and you know if they don't fly they give me the chills.

HUGO: That wasn't necessary, Wafa.

Wafa: Of course it was necessary.

HUGO: I mean, you didn't have to do it.

Wafa: Someone had to take care of it, Hugo. With all the wives you've had...

HUGO: And husbands.

Wafa: Right, and husbands. Your husbands and wives feel more like my relatives.

HUGO: Because they all married the same person?

Wafa: Because when it's time to clean, they all disappear, like the chocolate you're saving in the refrigerator.

HUGO: Don't be so bad, Wafa.

Wafa: None of them took care of your house. Who was the last one to live here?

HUGO: I think it was Irene Cablan.

Wafa: Oh, yes. Wife number eighteen. Irene Wagner. They talked about her on the news a lot. By the way, they treated you like the most depraved terrorist, nefarious criminal and evil degenerate in the whole country.

HUGO: They called me a bigamist! Hugo Wagner, unpatriotic and a bigamist!

Wafa: A multiple Bigamist, maybe, since there are eighteen of us. The fact is Irene disappeared so fast she didn't even flush the toilet. The girl was a model?

HUGO: Don't say that, she's a good person.

Wafa: I'm sure. Good but a bit of a pig.

HUGO: I'm sure she was scared.

Wafa: Right, but cleaning isn't dangerous, you know? There's no need to be scared of dusting or washing dishes, there's no fear in mopping the floor.

HUGO: I was the one who told them to get lost, Wafa.

Wafa: But I didn't get lost.

HUGO: Because you've never done a single thing I told you to.

Wafa: Good thing too, without me this house would've been condemned by the health department.

HUGO: When immigration found everything out, they even did sweeps at the house where I was born. And I only lived there for two months! But they searched it like it was a den of subversives!

Wafa: I heard about that too. The poor people who lived there complained all the way to Congress. Human rights, they said. Of course, since they were white and born here, everyone was very moved by the police abuse.

HUGO: With all this mess I can see why no one wanted to have any contact with me!

Wafa: No one?

HUGO: No one but you, Wafa. That's just understood.

Wafa: The thing is I'm a bit thick and I don't just understand anything.

HUGO: Wafa, it's been you. Four years in jail doesn't seem like long when you compare it to what other people have to go through, people no worse than me, if you ask them. But these four years, it's been you. Hope has been you. The visits, the letters, the photos you sent. Four years sending things. I hung up the pictures of Ali and Mazen in my cell, and when they asked me if they were my kids, I said yes.

Wafa: Because they are.

HUGO: They are. My cellmate saw your picture and said: your wife is beautiful. I know you know this better than I do, but in a tragedy, there's nothing like hope. It hurts, but it makes you want to go on living. If it weren't for you and your photos, I would've hung myself after three months.

Wafa: Don't talk about hanging, there's no dignity in dying like that.

HUGO: No way of dying has any dignity.

Wafa: But there are worse ways.

HUGO: Like what?

Wafa: Like I had an aunt who was beaten to death with shoes.

HUGO: That's awful! What did she do?

Wafa: She fell in love with decency. (SEES THAT THIS MAKES HUGO SAD) Don't take it hard, the women in my family remember her as the one who died a good death. Who died happy. And that's practically a luxury, don't you think?

(HUGO SEES HIS IPAD ON A SHELF)

HUGO: It's still here!

Wafa: I found it hidden in the bathroom.

HUGO: (CHECKS IT) How is it still charged?

Wafa: I charge it up every day.

HUGO: Every day? For four years, Wafa? That's a lot!

Wafa: Four years, three months and two weeks.

HUGO: You've been living here all that time?

Wafa: I don't live here. Beautiful Malek.

HUGO: I mean, how long have you been taking care of cleaning the house?

Wafa: Ever since I found out it was abandoned.

HUGO: To who?

Wafa: To the house. The house. This house. I'd come at noon and stay in the hall, sitting on the front steps, looking at it, like a prison I longed for, listening to its empty house sounds, feeling its neglect. I'd bring my lunch and eat there, on the stoop, but imagining I was inside, at the table, with you, chatting with the kids, laughing, telling each other stories. Then, one afternoon, it dawned on me to try the key you'd given me when we got married. To see what it felt like. Or better yet, to see if the house was able to feel something when it was penetrated softly, when it was possessed, accessed, entered.

I opened the door and the house was there, like waiting. Dry, sure, not wet at all, like a forced marriage. The windows closed, breakers thrown, electricity off, phone line dead. But when I entered it was like suddenly, she woke up. Like a lover who goes unconscious after waiting so long and then revives. Like that, just by smelling me, feeling my footsteps and that's all, like a wife who's never had a husband, like a house made of mirages. I guess after cleaning it so much, I feel like its lover.

HUGO: (GOES OVER TO HER) Tell me, how are Ali and Mazen doing?

Wafa: Insufferable as always.

HUGO: (HOLDING BACK LAUGHTER) How old are they now?

Wafa: Ali's thirteen, Mazen's eleven. And all they think about is videos, internet and friends. They each have a phone, and I swear it's been a year since I looked them in the eye. Since they look at the screen the whole time they talk to me, I don't recognize them anymore. (TO ONE SIDE) I love

them a lot, Hugo, of course I do, but sometimes I wish I could take them to Tunisia for a couple of hours, and then, I wouldn't be the least bit afraid to stomp their phones to pieces and slap them sideways to see if they don't look me in the face then. Oh!

(PULLS OUT A BOTTLE OF GREY GOOSE VODKA FROM THE GROCERY BAGS SHE BROUGHT) Look what I brought you!

HUGO: Vodka?

Wafa: More or less, because it's French.

HUGO: That's super expensive, Wafa.

Wafa: Lately I don't know how to save. I guess it's a skill you lose with living and the territory.

HUGO: Remember what your mother always said.

Wafa: It's just I don't remember her very well either.

HUGO: (TAKES THE BOTTLE, OPENS IT) After four years and three months in jail I'd be happy with rubbing alcohol... (SHE TAKES THE BOTTLE FROM HIM. SHE POURS HIM A GLASS AND SHE DRINKS FROM THE BOTTLE) Which, by the way, is what I drank with my comrades behind bars. (LOOKING AT HER) You don't know how beautiful you look drinking vodka that way, like a Cossack.

Wafa: I guess you're not surprised, huh?

(HUGO DOWNS THE GLASS. SHE POURS HIM MORE)

Wafa: If I'd known it was French, I wouldn't have brought it, but it's what I could get at the grocery store. And I wanted to get out of there fast.

HUGO: Why the rush? After four years locked up, I know how to wait.

Wafa: It's just there was this woman acting suspicious.

HUGO: No one is going to do anything to you, Wafa.

Wafa: I'm resigned to run, the way I've been trained to my whole adult life. Escaping is a whole philosophy for us, love.

HUGO: (LOOKS AT HER) Wafa... I just wanted to tell you that... That you're admirable.

Wafa: Jail's done a number on your head, Hugo.

(Wafa LOOKS AT HER WATCH, PICKS UP HER PURSE, AND GETS READY TO LEAVE)

Wafa: Well, I think you've got everything. There's food for three days. But then you'll have to go out shopping. Is that ok?

HUGO: I've got it all under control.

Wafa: I'm warning you; prices have gone up like these four years were twenty.

HUGO: Don't worry, I'll be fine. What about you?

Wafa: What about me?

HUGO: Where will you go?

Wafa: Home, Hugo. Where else? I have to go pick up Ali and Mazen. (GOES TO HIM) Hugo Wagner, welcome to freedom. Don't lose it again. (KISSES HIM ON THE CHECK) You're a Chiron.

HUGO: Another angel in Arabic?

Wafa: Saved by your ignorance and beauty.

HUGO: What does Chiron mean?

Wafa: Chiron was man and horse at the same time.

HUGO: Now you're calling me horse!

Wafa: In medicine he's known as *the wounded healer*.

HUGO: The wounded healer...

Wafa: Chiron was a Greek god who grew up alone. One day he was wounded by an arrow in the leg but since he was immortal, the injury wouldn't kill him even though he'd spend his whole life in pain. And thanks to that wound he learned to heal others. And not to be alone. Our pain diminishes when we help. My Chiron, wounded healer.

HUGO: Wafa...

Wafa: What is it, love?

HUGO: Before you go...

(WE HEAR GHALIA BENALI "WISH I HAD TWO HEARTS"⁶ HUGO TAKES OUT AN ENVELOPE. INSIDE IS A LETTER, WRITTEN BY HAND)

HUGO: You left it for me on one of your visits.

(THEN, HUGO READS IT TO HER)

HUGO: *You were a lost ship
And I, a deserted shore
Or was I the lost ship
And you, the deserted shore?
Or were we both. Lost ships
That found each other at sea
In an ocean without a coast*

Wafa: (FROM MEMORY)
*With waves breaking in my face
Over and over again
But this is a meeting
That will never happen
Because we are alone
We have always been alone We
are two deserted coasts.*

Wafa: It's a poem by the Syrian Monzer Masri. It talks about...

HUGO: I think it's talking about us, Wafa.

Wafa: Or maybe it's talking about countries.

HUGO: Or lovers like they were two coasts...

Wafa: About borders.

HUGO: Lovers at the limits.

Wafa: That's what I am: the woman at the limits.

(HUGO LOOKS AT Wafa INTENSELY. SHE LOOKS AT HIM TOO BUT NOT KNOWING WHAT IS HAPPENING. THERE IS A LONG PAUSE, JUST THE TWO OF THEM LOOKING AT EACH OTHER. HUGO DOESN'T TRY TO SAY ANYTHING, HE JUST LOOKS AT HER)

Wafa: Hugo... I... Have...

HUGO: Wafa, wait...

(THE MUSIC CONTINUES. A PAUSE. BUT THIS TIME SHE SEES SOMETHING SPECIAL IN HUGO'S EYES. SHE'S SURPRISED. SHE GROWS A BIT NERVOUS. JUST THEN, SLOWLY, HUGO BEGINS TO MOVE CLOSER TO Wafa. SHE THINKS MAYBE HUGO WANTS SEX AND THAT MAKES HER MORE NERVOUS. SHE DOESN'T REJECT THE IDEA BUT SHE WASN'T EXPECTING IT. SHE LOOKS ALL AROUND, LETTING HIM KNOW SHE UNDERSTANDS. BUT HE LOOKS AT HER IN CONFUSION, AND SHAKES HIS HEAD, LIKE SAYING, "NO, THAT'S NOT IT." THEN, HE MOVES CLOSER TO HER. NOW Wafa IS VERY CONFUSED. IN THAT MOMENT, HUGO TAKES HER FACE IN HIS HANDS, HE LOOKS AT HER AND SLOWLY GIVES HER A KISS. THIS IS A BEAUTIFUL KISS, A LONGED-FOR KISS, A KISS LIKE NEVER BEFORE. THE KISS IS FOLLOWED BY AN INTENSE LOOK BETWEEN THEM. NOW IT'S Wafa WHO TAKES HIM AND KISSES HIM TOO. THIS KISS IS LONGER THAN THE FIRST.)

HUGO: Wafa, marry me.

Wafa:(NERVOUS) Hugo, we're already married...

HUGO: Two deserted coasts but together for a period of time that's something like forever.

Wafa: Hugo, I...

HUGO: I want you to be my real wife.

Wafa: Because I cleaned your house? Is that it?

HUGO: No, of course not.

Wafa: What then?

HUGO: Because I fell in love with you from the day you came to this house and we kissed. You are the Malek, my angel. And I want to be with you for the time I have left in this world.

(HUGO THEN KISSES HER AGAIN BUT THIS TIME MORE

SENSUALLY. SHE LETS HIM)

HUGO: We were both...

Wafa: Lost ships...

HUGO: That found each other at sea...

Wafa: An ocean without a coast...

(Hugo unbuttons her dress. She goes on kissing him while he starts to undress her. And a sign that says: eleven months later. The music continues to play)

3. *Eleven months later*

(Hugo's house. To one side, there are two suitcases. Hugo, annoyed, paces from side to side shaking a paper in his hand. Seated beside the suitcases is Irene. The music from the previous scene continues but begins to dilute as Elmar recites)

ELMAR: *"Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage, Plodding to the ports
and coasts for transportation,
And that you sit as kings in your desires,
(...) You'll put down strangers,
Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses,
And lead the majesty of law in lyam
To slip him like a hound."*

HUGO: (LOUD) Foreigners treated like dogs! That's right!

ELMAR: (DRAMATIC, FROM MEMORY)
*"But...If you were banished:
whither would you go?
What country would give you harbor?
(...) Why, you must needs be strangers.
Would you be pleased
To find a nation of such barbarous temper
That breaking out in hideous violence
(...) Whet their detested knives against your throats,
Spurn you like dogs
(...) What would you think
To be thus used? This is the strangers' case
And this your mountainish inhumanity!"*

HUGO: (ENRAPPED) "Mountainish inhumanity!" That's it, Mister Shakespeare! That's what he says, right?!

ELMAR: From memory, but pretty close to the original.

IRENE: Hugo, you need to calm down!

HUGO: I am calm!

IRENE: I never heard you use that tone before!

HUGO: But, you think it's over nothing?

ELMAR: Shakespeare sounds better chill, Hugo.

HUGO: Don't be ridiculous! Am I talking loud?

ELMAR: No, but the neighbors a block over are nodding their heads.

HUGO: (EXPLODES) It's just if they had told me during the war that I would defend my country for it to turn around and do a lousy thing like this, I swear I would have thrown down my weapons and joined the enemy!

ELMAR: Don't talk no-nonsense, you're more patriotic than the flag.

HUGO: Well then, I would've run to the enemy and let them eat me alive.

ELMAR: (POINTING TO THE LETTER) But, Hugo, that letter isn't personal. They're sending them to every foreigner like a two-for-one special.

HUGO: And you think that makes it ok?

ELMAR: Of course it's not ok!

HUGO: After all I've done, for them to come and fuck it all up!

IRENE: Remember your cholesterol's at three hundred.

HUGO: I'm fine!

ELMAR: (TO HUGO) Anyway, that letter isn't about you.

HUGO: Of course it's about me!

ELMAR: Your name isn't on it, Hugo.

HUGO: (ANGRIER, HE READS) *If by that date we have no record of your departure from the country, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Officers* (STOPS READING) *ICE, no less!* (READS) *will begin search, capture, and immediate deportation proceedings...* Good God! They don't threaten the worst of the worst that way!!! Like they were talking about some animal or some disease: hunting, kidnapping, and expulsion. That is what they did during slavery! One of the most powerful countries on Earth and they have everything ready to go after... (HE READS MORE) Oh! And there's more: *There will be severe penalties, fines, and a lifetime ban from entering the country.* And who are they threatening with that? Could it be a serial killer? A child rapist? A fucking terrorist? No! All of this against a simple immigrant! One!!!!

ELMAR: So, if you leave voluntarily, you can come back again?

IRENE: After six years and you have to start the whole process all over again.

HUGO: What terrorism is worse than for them to go to your house and drag you out, kidnap you from where you live with your family, in front of your children?!

(THE PHONE RINGS. ENTER Wafa)

Wafa: Love, the lawyer.

HUGO: Maybe he managed to delay it! (HUGO TAKES THE PHONE) Mr. Pruitt... (LISTENS) Yes, right here, with suitcases and everything... (LISTENS) What then?

(THEY ALL LOOK AT HIM, WAITING FOR THE NEWS. HUGO OPENS HIS EYES. IRENE LOOKS HAPPY) But... (HUGO'S EXPRESSION CHANGES. THEY ALL LOSE HOPE)

HUGO: Thanks, Mr. Pruitt. You did what you could. (HE HANGS UP THE PHONE) At this point, hours before leaving, there's nothing they can do.

(SILENCE. THEY BOW THEIR HEADS)

Wafa: What about staying?

(Wafa'S WORDS HAVE A SPECIAL EFFECT. EVERYONE LOOKS AT HER)

IRENE: Staying?

ELMAR: Just like that?

HUGO: Wafa, please!

Wafa: What's to stop it? No one's here watching anything. You take your suitcases, call a taxi out front. If they ask, we say you came to say goodbye and you took a taxi to the airport. If you didn't get there, that's someone else's problem.

ELMAR: But a taxi to where?

Wafa: Where else! To the bus station! (SHE PULLS OUT MONEY AND SETS IT ON THE TABLE) Buy a ticket to the farthest city you can find and that's that.

HUGO: That way is hard, Wafa. Everything I did, going to jail, was precisely to avoid that!

Wafa: Money fixes everything.

IRENE:(TO Wafa) And you know that how?

Wafa: I just do, of course I do.

HUGO: So now my wife is the expert!

ELMAR: Remember, Hugo, you have to be more specific, because we're all your husbands and wives.

IRENE:(TAKES THE MONEY AND HANDS IT BACK TO Wafa)
Thanks, Wafa, but it's too late.

Wafa: Not even close. It's not even noon!

IRENE: I'd have to go back to when I was arguing and fighting with Puchito and I don't want to go there ever again. We went through it, we decided, and that's that. Besides, that's what he wanted to do: the taxi, the bus, and lost in space, forgotten out there somewhere, hiding in the anxious illegal zone. (TAKING THE LETTER FROM HUGO'S HANDS) I was the one who convinced him that the best thing was to leave the right way.

ELMAR: Women!

IRENE: Women with two small children, Elmar. That's very different from a writer with a eight year old daughter.

Wafa: Who lives with her mother by the way, the only nice psychologist I've met in my entire life.

ELMAR: Nice now that she's an immigrant, because before, when she was in Caracas, Raquel was the worst kind of snob.

Wafa: Nothing like immigrating without papers to knock you off your high horse.

IRENE: I can't do that to my kids, Wafa. They're just starting to live. I can't condemn them to the life of an illegal. The decision's made. Puchito's leaving.

ELMAR: What about you?

IRENE: I'm supposed to wait for him here with the kids until he can come back.

ELMAR: Six years!

Wafa: Time flies when it's a sacrifice.

HUGO: Like in prison: one good day knocks another one off your time.

Wafa: And cuts your sentence in half.

HUGO: They gave me eight years. I was out in four.

IRENE: Meaning: staying is like prison too.

ELMAR: Irene, you won't be alone: you'll wait with us. We are like *Sisters wives*. Your kids and I have the same last name, Wagner, so I'm like a kind of Guncle.

IRENE: It sounds nice, but the truth is I'm not waiting six years, and neither are my kids.

Wafa: No?

IRENE: I mean we're leaving with him.

(ELMAR, SURPRISED, SIGHS IN DEFEAT. Wafa GETS UP AND HUGS HER. HUGO EXPLODES AGAIN)

HUGO: That's exactly what those bastards want! For you to leave, for all of you to leave! So we can be left here empty with our damned loneliness! All of us with the same face, not recognizing ourselves, sick, losing our memory, our mercy, becoming worse than what we are! (Wafa GETS THE VODKA. POURS HIM ONE)

IRENE: (SHOWS HIM A PAPER) We have our tickets. Even the cat has her ticket to Santo Domingo! Though she's traveling with the cargo! (GOING OVER TO THE SUITCASES) I hope they don't put her with the dogs. She hates them like they were a different religion.

ELMAR: (REALIZING) I thought these suitcases were Puchito's! That you were taking them to the airport for him while he took care of the kids!

IRENE: More or less. He's taking the kids and the cat and I came to say goodbye to my husband, his wife, and his husband,

ELMAR: That sounds like a *menage a trois*.

WAFa: More like a *menage a dix-huit*

ELMAR: Dis what?

WAFa: *Menage* of eighteen.

ELMAR: That's more than a *menage*, that's an *orgie*.

(PAUSE. HUGO GOES OVER TO IRENE, DEFEATED)

HUGO: Irene, are you sure? (SHE NODS) What's waiting for you in the Dominican Republic?

IRENE: Honestly, nothing. But at least there I get the impression they can't expel us.

WAFa: Don't be too sure. Your own country puts out its claws when you go back.

IRENE: The kids will be school age soon and then maybe my Puchito and I will find jobs. And finally get married because we were terrified to try here. We never got divorced, Hugo!

HUGO: I hate divorces. It's marriage for life for me.

WAFa: With dozens of women and men, that is.

ELMAR: (THEY LAUGH. ELMAR TAKES THE BOTTLE OF VOKDA AND POURS FOR EVERYONE) A toast then to the Island Irene Wagner, the girlfriend of Puchi, mother of Puchita the first and Carolinita the zero, also, children of Puchito, though those girls are so beautiful that they seem more like the children of their uncle, the pseudo South American writer, Elmar Wagner Gómez, with two novels no one reads because Elmar may sound like the sea but he's more like a dried up creek, with nothing to say...

HUGO: Elmar, now you have something to write about. Talent comes from others! The others!

ELMAR: That's what I admire most about this place! (HUGO MAKES A GESTURE LIKE *What?*) Your optimism. Native, first world, enthusiastic and talkative. Who wouldn't be?

HUGO: That's true, I do like to beat my gums, my husband.

ELMAR: Then, why have you never wanted to tell me?

HUGO: I don't know what you're talking about.

ELMAR: The reasons...

HUGO: For...

ELMAR: The self-interest?

HUGO: In...?

ELMAR: The reasons you decided to do it. (HUGO REALIZES BUT GESTURES NO WAY, LIKE SAYING *Never!*) Come on, tell me! Give me something to write! We already know it wasn't for money or sex. The whole community knows that! But the town of the Wagners-Who-Made-it-Through-Immigration-Thanks-to-You still doesn't have an explanation.

Wafa: (TO ELMAR) Don't waste your time. He hasn't even told me! (Wafa, ELMAR AND IRENE START TO SURROUND HUGO)

IRENE: (TO HUGO) Come on, tell us. Why did you decide to be a multiple bigamist to get strangers their papers? What made you do it?

HUGO: There's no reason.

Wafa: One day you told me it was in your self-interest.

ELMAR: Hugo, tell us.

Wafa: Talk!

IRENE: My going away present.

(PAUSE. HUGO, DEFEATED, GOES TO THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM AND TAKES THE BOTTLE OF VODKA. HE DRINKS)

Wafa: Hugo Wagner: why did you decide to marry eighteen undocumented immigrants and make them all legal?

HUGO: Fine. I did it because... (THEY ALL LOOK AT HIM. PAUSE)
Because it's the human thing. The decent thing.

(THEY ARE ALL DISILLUSIONED)

ELMAR: That's why?

HUGO: What did you think?

Wafa: I figured it had to do with what you went through in the army.

HUGO: Not at all.

ELMAR: Or a tragedy at the post office.

IRENE: Or some sad family story.

Wafa: Families torn apart? Children without parents?

IRENE: Displaced, refugees...

ELMAR: Whole towns dying? Little things?

(Wafa SEES THAT HUGO ISN'T GOING TO TELL, AND SHE HEADS FOR THE KITCHEN. ELMAR IS GOING TO POUR HIMSELF A DRINK. IRENE LOOKS AT THE CLOCK, GETS UP, CHECKS HER PHONE)

IRENE: Puchi's on his way to the airport now. I'm going to call an Uber.
(SHE LOOKS AT THEM, SADDENED) I'm leaving.

(TO ONE SIDE, IRENE, ELMAR AND Wafa ARE SAYING GOODBYE BUT THEY ARE INTERRUPTED BY HUGO)

HUGO: Until I felt the first symptoms of my disease.

(THEY ALL STOP. HUGO IS GOING TO TELL!)

Wafa:(AMAZED) What disease, Hugo?

HUGO: First, forgetfulness. (TO ONE SIDE, DRINKS) Forgetfulness. It started with little things, but then it got more frequent, important. People's faces started looking all the same, like no one had different features. I figured I could deal with that.

But my disease kept getting worse and my forgetfulness intensified. I went to the doctor. They ran tests and the diagnosis wasn't very promising: a small tumor was causing symptoms similar to early onset Alzheimer's. The location of the tumor made it dangerous to operate. I wondered: what if I die in a few weeks? Or in a year? Dying without having done anything with my life. No wife, no kids, nothing. I was, as they say, forgettable, just like the symptoms of my disease. Around then, I met Carine Kobina.

IRENE: Who was born on a Tuesday...

HUGO: Carine, the first one. She was a pianist. In Togo, she had no future and she told me about her immigration problems. And I said: I'll die soon, what's it matter? How could I not help Carine, so young, beginning her life, talented, so full of plans, with so many things to do for this planet? (HE DRINKS)

After Carine came Evelyn Macapore, a nurse from the Philippines, with a husband and three kids. And a year later, the one who would be the last, the woman from Sudan, Tina Ben Hasain, who brought her whole family and thank goodness because war broke out soon after.

A year went by. I had gotten married three times and I hadn't died. I said: ok, I'll try it one more time. And I married number four, Mali Lansang, an architecture student from Thailand. I was going to stop there but then there was an emergency with two Nicaraguans: Marisela Arriaga and her girlfriend, Valentina Sierra, both of them pregnant, numbers five and six. Marisela and Valentina threw a party with their friends to celebrate my double crime. And dancing, drinking, living my life like a Central American spectacle, half drunk, I told them my story. And I remembered all of it! Even things I had forgotten before I had the tumor! I wasn't losing my memory, I was regaining it! And at the party everyone had a different face. I went back to the doctor. They ran the tests and the tumor was shrinking. It was almost gone.

(TO Wafa) Like helping was healing. Like Chiron, the Wounded Healer. While he's saving others, his own pain diminishes.

Number seven was Fara Vinuesa, a dentist with an enormous family that came later from Burkina Faso. Carola Vargas, a Cuban woman with three children, was the eighth. And the ninth was my first man: Omar El Khadra, a teacher from Iraq. The tenth was Maria Hussain, an excellent cook from Pakistan. Number eleven from Nigeria, the famous Talita, who brought as many as five grandchildren and eight parents in law. Twelve, Selene Ortiz,

a Colombian actress. Thirteen was my second husband, Augusto Martins from Brazil, one of those guys who knows how to do everything. Fourteen was Zaza De Lossada, a lady who at the time was twenty-five years older than me and was a great-grandmother already. Fifteen was Keo Li, from Laos, a man who liked to call himself an inventor though he didn't know of what. And finally, sixteen, Wafa; Elmar, seventeen, Irene, eighteen...

Wafa: But you've married me twice, so I'm sixteen and nineteen.

ELMAR: So what happened with your disease?

HUGO: In the place where the tumor used to be blood was circulating out of control, passionately, with stories of people who are worth saving.

ELMAR: (QUOTES) *The intruder inside me who makes me a stranger to myself.*

HUGO: What's that?

ELMAR: It's what the philosopher Jean Luc Nancy said about the heart transplant that saved his life. (TOUCHES HUGO'S HEART) That heart, that belonged to someone else, was what he called *the stranger in me.*

(WE HEAR THE "WAGNER" DOORBELL, MIXED NOW WITH BACHATA, DRUMS, AND ARAB MUSIC.)

IRENE:(CHECKS HER PHONE) That must be my Uber. I'm off...

Wafa: Hugo, remind me to add some Asian chords, or later your other wives will complain.

ELMAR: I'm going with you to say goodbye to my nieces!

(IRENE NODS AND PICKS UP THE SUITCASES. ELMAR HELPS)

IRENE: You know you have a family waiting for you in the Dominican Republic.

(THEY HUG AND SAY GOODBYE. BEFORE LEAVING, IRENE TURNS AROUND)

IRENE:(TO HUGO) Hugo Wagner, my husband: those eighteen marriages you counted out are wonderful. And I'm proud to be one of them.

(IRENE BLOWS HIM A KISS. IRENE AND ELMAR LEAVE. SILENCE. HUGO AND Wafa LOOK AT EACH OTHER. THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. HUGO PUTS UP HIS HAND, LIKE SAYING THAT IF SHE GOES ON LOOKING AT HIM, HE WILL START TO CRY. Wafa LEAVES HIM ALONE. SHE CLEARS THE TABLE, PUTS AWAY THE BOTTLE, THE GLASSES. BUT AFTER A PAUSE, HUGO EXPLODES)

(Wafa LAUGHS. SHE HANDS HIM THE IPAD. HUGO CALMS DOWN. THE DOORBELL WITH ITS MULTIPLE RHYTHMS RINGS AGAIN. Wafa IS GOING TO OPEN, BUT FIRST SHE LOOKS THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE)

HUGO: Did they forget something?

Wafa: It's not them. It's her.

HUGO: Who?

Wafa: The woman from El Salvador. Number twenty.

HUGO: Aurora Brito!

Wafa: Her. What a pretty name, *Aurora*. When are you getting married, my husband?

HUGO: This Friday.

Wafa: What about the Tunisian woman?

HUGO: That's next week.

Wafa: And what about the other woman? The pretty one from Honduras?

HUGO: We better check the calendar 'cause we're full up this month.

HUGO: What a terrifying silence!!!

Wafa: You see, now it's me who's losing her memory. (LOOKS THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE AGAIN) And it looks like she brought her whole family from El Salvador! (CHECKS, WORRIED) There's a lot of them, Hugo! There's not enough room for so many people!

HUGO: Yeah, but don't worry. Open the door. There's room for us all here!

*(The doorbell rings again and at the same time we hear “Piel Canela” with Pedro Vargas. See *. Wafa opens the door. Hugo fixes his hair. The lights dim. The music comes up. Blackout)*

The End.