

ΓΑΛΑ, AIMA
MILK, BLOOD

ΘΕΑΤΡΙΚΗ ΣΕΙΡΑ ΦΕΣΤΙΒΑΛ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ ΕΠΙΔΑΥΡΟΥ / ΝΕΦΕΛΗ

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ΦΕΣΤΙΒΑΛ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ ΕΠΙΔΑΥΡΟΥ

ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΝΕΦΕΛΗ

ΑΘΗΝΑ 2021

SCENE TWO

(The Stranger takes the man's clothing down from the line, folds it, and puts it in a suitcase. Their Teacher enters carrying a roasting pan full of food. She's wearing her best clothes for the wedding. The Stranger doesn't even look her way, just continues her task throughout the scene, finally shutting the suitcases at the end.)

their Teacher

I made you something to eat. All three of you need to put something in your mouths.

Stranger

Leave it there, with the rest. See how much they've brought? For years all the women pretended I was invisible, and now they're all rushing to comfort me. To see the victim up close. The one who suffered what they escaped.

their Teacher

You haven't eaten a thing.

Stranger

I was busy.

their Teacher

You'll collapse, and they'll call you weak.

Stranger

Let them say what they like. Didn't they always?

their Teacher

Where are your girls now?

Stranger

I don't know – I'm not a mother today, my mind's not here –

their Teacher

Someone saw them out late last night, playing in the streets. He says they were alone and dirty and hadn't eaten.

Stranger

They'll eat well enough at the wedding feast.

their Teacher

They're too young to be out so late.

Stranger

They're girls, they'll always be too young
should I have kept them home, with me as I was?
They can go a day uncared for – I've done it for years

their Teacher

You chose to be that way – they're just children.

Stranger

You think there's some other way? Look at my hands – after just ten years they're more like a man's than his. My eyes, my mouth, full of resentment – they've gone into hiding, don't want to see, or speak, or kiss. Look at my clothes, my hair – washed out, limp and colorless, a hazy mess – you really think this is how I wanted to be?

their Teacher

Make an effort, then... Put on a clean dress. Comb your hair a bit –

Stranger

For whom?

their Teacher

For the village. For him and for her – so they don't pity you. But most of all for your daughters. They'll be women one day – what's it teaching them to see their mother like this?

(Pause.)

Stranger

whatever their mother could do, she did
now the new one can teach them to be women
she's fresh to the job, and has some time before she's unwomaned

because mark my words, she'll be unwomaned, too
even with a slew of servants to do her bidding
my husband is not the kind of man who keeps his wife a woman
he's the kind who eats her alive
the more alive they are, the wilder their husbands' teeth
and their children's and parents' – everyone feeds off them
until nothing's left but a sack of dull bones
that no one looks at, or talks to, or desires
a fleshless, acrid corpse, all its juice wrung out
so everyone else can rest easy – husband, children, parents, animals,
fields
nothing left but a scrap woven of grievance

and then everyone asks why you don't smile as you used to
she soured on us, they say, like spoiled milk, forgot how to be a woman
a fresh, uneaten female passes by and they sharpen their teeth
eyes on her like huge empty plates
and they begin again because they can
blood still runs in their veins

think about that and don't let your guard down

that's a nice dress

you're ready for a wedding

their Teacher

I couldn't not go. Will you hold it against me?

Stranger

Her father will count you one by one to see who's missing. I know that
man like the back of my hand – even I'd have to go if he'd invited me.

their Teacher

I wrestled with it – I need to keep my job.

(The Stranger takes a man's dress shirt down off the line.)

Stranger

You'd best, or you'll go from teacher to some man's wife.
Not many jobs for a woman around here.

(As she folds a shirt.)

Look, just look at this fabric, this stitching – touch it,
he's been rubbing against it all these years and it's still as fresh
as when my father wore it

he brought it back from a trip
he used to bring lots of things
beautiful things – things none of us had ever seen
silk and rings for my mother
antique toy cars for my big brother
perfumes for me – so useless
I was his little trinket
he'd tuck me with perfume, caress me
and when the scents wore off
he'd put me back on the shelf above his desk

he believed in ugly ideas
his money was drenched in other people's blood
as a child, I pretended not to know
he was so strong and I wanted to be like him
but if I ever spoke I was a *chatterbox* and that was bad *(Laughs.)*
that's no way to behave, women don't speak
the only voices you heard in our house were men's
such rubbish, delivered with such pomp
squandering words without thinking twice
– *king, partisans, fatherland* –
whereas I
I had good things to say, but no words to say them

and so I snuck in and taught myself the healing arts
from his books
with medicine you can do good and never make a sound

my husband took this as his best shirt when we left,
as plunder from my house, before he –
I helped him
I told him all I knew
I showed him where to hide and what to burn
and in exchange my family would live
but my younger brother was found
head in one place body in another
murdered
by one of our own – I didn't ask
I didn't want to know

what I did for love
and how it's repaying me now

this is mine
I'll be the one to wear it now

(The Stranger puts on the shirt.)

can you take these suitcases to his new house?

ACT TWO

SCENE TWO

(In the yard of the house, his Mother, dressed for the wedding, waters and weeds the flowerpots, talking to the flowers.)

his Mother
two days was too long, poor things
all that water and as soon as I look away, you wilt
I've got to keep you constantly in my mind – as if I had no worries
of my own
all that trouble every day – and what for? so you'll be beautiful
you sprout, bloom, smell sweet, then rot
stupid life

but surely God knew what he was doing, creating you

(The Stranger enters from offstage, dripping from head to foot.)

Stranger
What, now you're wearing your finery to water the plants?

his Mother
(Laughs.) And my bracelets to the grape harvest. What could I do,
leave them like this? I knew you'd have no mind to care for these
flowers. I saw them in my sleep – all night they were turning yellow
and dropping, one by one. *(She looks at her.)* Where were you,
how'd you get so wet?

Stranger
I went down to the sea for a bit

(Pause.)

his Mother
To do what?

(Pause.)

Don't do anything ugly, you have little children.

Stranger

I went to find someone to take me across tomorrow

his Mother

You listen to what I said!

Stranger

I don't know if you heard, they're sending me away.

his Mother

My son told me.

Stranger

And you didn't speak up?

his Mother

To say what? His hands are tied.

(Brief pause.)

Stranger

don't tell me you're feeling sorry for him?

his Mother

He's my child, who am I supposed to feel sorry for?

Stranger

I was your child, too – your daughter.

his Mother

You're a woman, you can stand anything.

Stranger

We're strong when it suits us, eh?

his Mother

We're strong inside the home. Outside it's the men. You never understood that. It's what got you in trouble – putting your love for yourself above your own house.

Stranger

That's what you think? Who do you think raised your son – you? A mother never makes a man a man – you know that as well as I.

his Mother

I made all the sacrifices in the world. I was a child myself, with a baby in my arms and a husband out at sea – I lived my whole life for him, my son. Never a thought for myself – everyone says so.

Stranger

And where's your husband now?

his Mother

he went out to see the world

Stranger

Didn't you want to see the world?

his Mother

I did my duty as his wife – and I'm proud.

Stranger

Of teaching him to stand on his own feet, so he could go live his life somewhere else –

his Mother

I felt bitter, too, when he left. But I'd come to the end of what I could give him as a woman. So I swallowed my sadness and took myself out of it. I became my son's mother, my time had come for that.

Stranger

And what did you achieve? You know who raised your son? Me. With my body and my blood and my mind and the children I gave him so

he wouldn't cease to exist – as long as he was just your son, he was fit for nothing. But it seems neither you nor I taught him to respect our pains, and now he's off to suck another woman's blood.

his Mother

What you do for your husband or your children isn't pain. It's love. And it brings love back to you.

Stranger

You call that love? To give and give until they've wrung you dry? A lifetime of making beds, setting tables, scrubbing other people's bodies and dishes and clothes, worrying who'd take care of them if you ever fell sick. Making homes, making food, making children as if it's a duty, and on top of it all they treat you as if –

his Mother

It's what our nature demands.

Stranger

It's what people demand, not nature.

his Mother

Nature is the first to teach a woman to suffer. If we who know how to suffer don't endure, who will? You should be proud; we're the reason the world doesn't stop.

Stranger

Then that's how I want people to treat me. As if an entire world would disappear if I did. Just count all the things we give them – gifts upon gifts, every day. Did anyone ever thank you for the child you made? For all that pain?

his Mother

You did, once.

(Brief pause.)

I made a man who loved you, cared for you, gave you a house and food. You'd be in the streets now if it weren't for him.

Stranger

And that's where I'll be tomorrow.

his Mother

Maybe that's what suits you. Why make a home if you didn't want it?

Stranger

is yours the only way to make a home?

his Mother

That's how I learned from my mother, and she from hers.

Stranger

it's what you taught your son, too, and look at me now

his Mother

He did nothing to you. No more than all men do.

(Pause.)

Stranger

is this what you'll tell my girls when I'm gone?

his Mother

It's what I'd say if you stayed, too – I don't want them to grow up strange. You can stop worrying about them, it'll be better for them once you're gone. They'll enter that house and come out quiet, good, people won't talk about them. They'll have a better life, and us too, even you. All that's happened up to now will be forgotten. It's over – and you both survived. Now you can each quietly go your own way, and I can finally rest after all these years.

(Pause.)

Stranger

You lived through the same things I did, but learned nothing.

his Mother

This time tomorrow, I'll have a bed beside my grandchildren. And you?

(Pause.)

I'm sorry. I didn't come to do harm. I came to kiss you, say goodbye.
And get his good shirt. It wasn't in the things you sent, he's looking
for it.

Stranger

There's no other shirt he could wear to his wedding?

his Mother

It's his best shirt, give it to me.

Stranger

It was my father's.

He can ask his bride for one from her father.

(Pause.)

his Mother

Wash and dress the children. They have a wedding to get to.

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

(No one in the yard. Bells ringing. The wedding is over. In the distance we now hear songs from the wedding party. The Stranger appears in her door. She has trouble standing upright. She listens to the music. The sounds drive her crazy.)

Stranger

shhhhh
shhhhhhhhhhh!
quieter
a little quieter, please
can you just be quiet
you'll wake my babies
they'll start crying again
and my husband has no patience
it's been fifty days since they slept
and I just managed to get them down –
they've finally fallen asleep
I don't want them to wake again
no more crying, take pity on me
a bit of peace and quiet – just a bit – please
just an hour
so I can close my eyes, too

Do you hear me?

don't you hear me?
just stop for a bit so they won't wake up
they'll want to eat again and I'm aching
each time I nurse they bite
and my milk mixes with blood
my breasts are two wounds
and I bite my lip to keep from crying

lest my milk turn sour and they spit it out
up top I'm aching, but from the neck down I'm a mother
consider me, please, I just need a little more night
you're waking the animals, too – and they'll cry
out back in our hut I have a little baby goat
it was born the same month as my daughter – and it too is always
hungry and crying
my breasts can't tell one cry from another
a child cries, a kitten cries – as soon as my breasts hear they cry milk

how in a single day did I become the whole world's mother?

Why can't you be quiet?
Don't you hear what I'm saying?
yes, I know, there's a celebration – you're marrying someone
the man or the wife?
are they happy? do they love one another?
may they have luck – and patience
love brings more than it promises
I'm sorry if I'm spoiling your party
I'd be there too if I could
I'd dance, I'd –

I'm not jealous

though I'd do it all again
I'd give up my children to have all that back
people say that for women children come first
but mothering and loving are just as sweet
I want love, I long for love, as much as my husband does
it's like drowning: men and women go under just as fast

Where is my husband?
Call him, I want him.
Tell him they've fallen asleep – he should come and kiss me.
Take his wine away, enough.
It's time for him to come back home – no more songs.

Be quiet, I say! Enough! Why can't you pity me?
Haven't you had your fill of joy? – leave a bit for me.
Send my husband back, tell him I'm aching – a little water – a helping
hand.

My breasts are running blood, the children are waking up again,
there'll be nothing for them to eat, my milk dried up, he needs to come
now and feed them whatever he has, I'm hungry, tell him I'm hun-
gry – I'm all empty, there's nothing left of me but skin, tell him to go
and find my mother, quick! – and bring her here! – she's the only one
who can help me now, I've torn up all my days – can she please come
and mend them, I need to be held and fed, forgiven – I want love –
love, tell her I need love, tell her from me, who unmade her a mother.

(Their Teacher comes running, finds her curled in a heap on the ground.)

their Teacher

Where are the children? Their father is looking for them – what's
wrong?

You seem frightened, did something happen? Where are they?

Stranger

where is my husband? where has he brought me?

their Teacher

your husband?

Stranger

where is he? tell him to come, it's late

their Teacher

Just tell me, where are the children

Stranger

they're sleeping in their cribs

*(Their Teacher runs into the house. We hear her shouting, "Wake up,"
again and again until she's shrieking. She comes outside. She's shaken,
in shock.)*