

## Pinocchio's Tears

by  
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adapted from the French  
by William Snow

### The play:

Jacksonville, Florida. Winter 2002. Laura Welter is being held in custody, charged with killing General Oscar Antonio Somadossi Roederer, the former dictator of her country. The prosecution and the defense counsel are preparing their cases for her trial. Is she guilty? If so, why did she commit such an act?

What motivates Nathalie Franchi, the defense attorney? And what arguments will she use in Laura's defense after determining her to be neither unbalanced nor a terrorist? What follows is a face-off between two women who have risked their lives and chosen different paths in their struggle to achieve the same goal - creating a better world.

### Characters:

Laura Welter: 44

Nathalie Franchi: 43

For Vincent

1.

Laura:

*(Alone)*

For once he didn't shout when he called me. I wasn't used to that. And he pronounced my name in an – almost – normal way. He asked me to take up where I'd left off. I was reading from his diary - in English - for the year 1958. I was his reader. I read whatever he wanted to hear, since he could no longer do it himself. He was sitting in an armchair next to his Baxter apparatus, at the Jacksonville, Florida branch of the Mayo Clinic. Room 495. He was listening, and staring at me, his eyes moving up my body in one long caress. At his age, that was how he caressed. That's what he said, sighing. I asked if there was something weighing on him. He said: "The weight of time". I asked if he desired anything. He said: "I have no more desires".

I read the page for July 10th. This is what he had written: "It's 10 a.m. on July 10th. Kenza's contractions have started up again. She promised to be strong. The summer light is flooding into the spacious rooms of *Grancivico Palace*, where we have just moved. *Cigarralta* is whiter than ever, an iridescent city, the mountains surrounding it like silhouettes of benevolent giants. Kenza is so beautiful. I love her. And her screams are loud enough to be heard all over the country – our little country sparkling like a jewel, proud to shed its light on the great cluster of gemstones that make up Latin America.

Kenza is sailing brilliantly through the pains of childbirth. She's like a ray of sunlight, the *prima donna* of the people who chose me to be their leader. I stand at the helm, elected by democratic process to defend the fine, progressive values of the most powerful party defending our Constitution. Governing is an honor I shall always strive to deserve. To deserve it, as our *campesinos* would say about the earth they have labored all year long, when it comes time to harvest its welcome fruits. To deserve the smiles of all the men and women who have chosen me to be their spokesman in the assembly of the world's great nations. To deserve the laughter of our children –

running free of fear tomorrow over our fertile plains. May God bless my hand and Kenza's womb. May He bring the fruit of our love into the world – a new life that has come with the summer blossoms.

I hope it's a girl. We'll call her Isadora. Isadora-Sabra-Laura after her grandmothers. May the heavens ring with the sound of her name!

God, this palace seems huge when you forget your glasses in the bathroom! I'll get used to it. Kenza's right. If I gain weight, I'll have only myself to blame. This is just the beginning. Dear God, may this time not go by too quickly, and may its swift passage not distract me from my task."

*(changing her tone of voice)*

I looked up then, because he was laughing to himself. I asked him why he was laughing. He said he was pleased with his written English. He took a sip of water, and I started reading again - on the page for the next day, July 11<sup>th</sup>, Isadora's birthday. I kept on reading for a few minutes. His breathing began to sound like a death rattle. I glanced up. He suddenly looked exhausted, no longer sitting up straight. I helped him back to bed. His eyes were vacant and he was perspiring. There was no sign of any pain on his face. He went pale. I asked if he was in pain. He pointed to the tape recorder on the shelf. I didn't understand at first; but he insisted, so I turned it on. Then he began talking, slowly, for quite some time. He died a few minutes before the end of the cassette.

*(The light changes, revealing a prison cell)*

2.

Nathalie:  
*(Taking notes)* What did you say?

Laura:  
Forty-four.

Nathalie:  
Date of birth?

Laura:

Figures.

Nathalie:  
Which are?

Laura:  
Ones: one five, one seven, one eight and even a nine.

Nathalie:  
Where?

Laura:  
In the South.

Nathalie:  
At?

Laura:  
At eight o'clock in the morning, I think. That's what I was always told.

Nathalie:  
A country? A city?

Laura:  
Both.

Nathalie:  
(*gives up writing*) Is this how you want to proceed?

Laura:  
Why not?

Nathalie:  
Do you mind answering my questions?

Laura:  
Yes.

(*Silence*)

Nathalie:  
Are there directions?

Laura:  
For?

Nathalie:

Talking with you in a normal way.

Laura:  
Didn't they give them to you when you got here?

Nathalie:  
Tell me again. It would save time.

Laura:  
I have time.

Nathalie:  
That much?

Laura:  
I know. It's unfair of me to waste it.

Nathalie:  
What are you doing this for?

Laura:  
For nothing. (*sarcastically*) Do you think I should get paid, like you?

Nathalie:  
All right. I'll start over. Hello, my name is ...

L:  
Nathalie Franchi, forty-three, American, married, mother of two boys, eight and ten.  
Involved in the groundwork to set up the first International Criminal Court. A staunch  
defender of universal law. Considered a specialist on article three of the Human  
Rights Resolution.

(*Silence*)

N:  
You forgot ...

L:  
Specialty: criminal law. Prevented presumed terrorist Mohamed Acthar from being  
extradited to the United States. Passionate about her work, her husband – a doctor  
with an international NGO –, her dog and swimming.

N:

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I haven't much time left ...

L:  
It seems to be an obsession with you.

N:  
I mean for swimming.

L:  
It doesn't show.

N:  
That's good.

L:  
Whose fault?

N:  
Mine at first, then ...

L:  
Do you miss it?

N:  
A lot.

L:  
You don't seem to.

N:  
One has to make choices.

L:  
You seem to have done just that.

N:  
What?

L:  
Chosen.

N:  
Not always.

L:  
That in itself is a choice. Especially for you, right?

N:  
Let's just say I chose to dig deeper.

L:  
An over-achiever?

N:  
That was never my goal.

L:  
What is your goal?

N:  
Fighting hatred.

L:  
Great. With what?

N:  
Justice.

L: and its lies.

N:  
I said Justice. Not truth.

*(a beat)*

You seem to know quite a lot about me.

L:  
I'm not pretending like you.

N:  
It's a style.

L:  
And yours consists in interrogating people?

N:  
Yes. And the person has to be unhelpful for me to get interested.

L:  
Then I guess you've come to the right place.

N:  
If you'd been cooperative, I might have given up.

L:  
On what?

N:  
On taking an interest in you.

L:  
Phew! That was close.

N:  
I wouldn't start celebrating too soon.

L:  
Who's celebrating?

*(A beat)*

N:  
You're no good at lying.

L:  
A point in my favor?

N:  
It depends.

L:  
On?

N:  
The rules of the game.

L:  
What game are we playing?

N:  
Defense lawyer, in my case.

L:  
And ...

N:  
I'm preparing your defense.

L:  
Is it going well?

N:  
No. You could be charged with first-degree murder.

L:  
Is it really that serious?

N:  
It depends...

L:  
Again?

N:  
...on you.

L:  
I promise to get treatment, Doctor. What's your diagnosis?

N:  
Hysteria, with a tendency to depression.

*(staring silently)*

Complicated by a difficult family context in which the early loss of the father constitutes a trauma unresolved to this day.

L:  
*(Sarcastic)* You should have come a lot earlier!

N:  
It's never too late.

L:  
Even when you're bad at lying?

N:  
You promised to get treatment.

L:  
By swallowing all this?

N:  
It's a question of motivation.

L:  
And what's yours?

N:  
To make my argument sound plausible.

L:  
Which one?

N:  
Are you really interested?

L:  
Go ahead.

N:  
Euthanasia.

L:  
Oh ...

*(A beat)*

N:  
You put an end to the suffering of a sick old man who was in your care.

L:  
I don't recall him asking me to do it.

N:  
Well, you know how vague memories can be ...

L:  
Suppose I did remember. The laws in this country are more precise than that, aren't they?

N:  
Laws can be vague too – in meaning and in coverage. So?

L:  
So what.

N:  
Will you take the cure?

L:  
Your remedy seems complicated. Do you have something else on offer?

N:

It's a great role to play.

L:  
You think so?

N:  
Fragile, human.

L:  
Compassionate.

N:  
Quite.

L:  
And everyone will forget what a monster that old man was.

N:  
Everyone will forget anyway.

L:  
Did you know the responsibility for his death was claimed by *Nueva luz*?

N:  
A tiny terrorist group spreading violence in your country. I'm sure they've got nothing to do with it. They would never have acted in such a "clean" way.

L:  
What does your little community of pacifist refugees have to say?

N:  
*El pueblo libre?*

L:  
That's right.

N:  
They gave me a very thorough briefing.

L:  
How sweet. And are they willing to forget too?

N:  
They'll forget.

L:  
I won't.

*(A beat)*

N:  
Did you kill him?

*(They stare at each other in silence)*

What a pity.

L:  
Whoever killed Oscar Antonio Somadossi Roederer didn't do it out of compassion.

N:  
A cold-blooded terrorist who executes a retired dictator turned senator-for-life would be harder to defend.

L:  
We all have our job to do.

N:  
And I'm not sure it would be easier to pull off.

L:  
Than a nurse's aide who performs euthanasia on an old man who's dying? Sure it is!

*(A beat)*

N:  
It's a pity, for a terrorist.

L:  
What?

N:  
Aiming at the wrong target.

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

N:  
True. He is dead. And that's what you wanted.

*(Silence)*

My job, as you put it, is to keep you from paying for it - with your life. By thwarting me, you're aiming at the wrong target.

*(Silence)*

L:  
Even if I had killed him, his death wouldn't be enough.

N:  
No? And what would you like as a bonus? A unanimous acquittal from the jury?

L:  
That's right. And, if possible, without lying.

N:  
Even if it saved your life?

*(Silence)*

L:  
I must be willing to risk that, since I'm here.

N:  
Risking your life is one thing. Choosing to die, another.

L:  
I'm telling you, you're wrong. I wouldn't be here if I had made that choice, and neither would you.

N:  
Then why not help me?

L:  
To do what? Tell the truth or lie?

N:  
To save your life.

L:  
All right, if you agree not to lie.

*(a beat)*

N:  
So he gets the last word.

L:

Meaning?

N:

His death will have been for nothing. Is that what you wanted? (*She stands up*)

L:

What are you doing?

N:

I'm throwing in the towel. I can't be responsible for your suicidal streak.

L:

The truth is worth dying for.

N:

If all my clients were like you, I'd have been laid off ages ago.

L:

You could always go into humanitarian aid.

(*Nathalie gets ready to leave*)

Where are you going?

N:

To work on another case.

L:

I thought you were here for something besides persuading me to lie.

N:

That's exactly my point. You don't need a lawyer.

L:

No?

N:

(*Starting to leave*) A typist will do.

L:

Thanks, I can type for myself.

N:

Then don't waste any more time. Start typing your patriotic declarations. They'll make the front pages of all the newspapers.

L:  
 Since when do newspapers want the truth? Come on, let's get on with it. I thought you'd already started taking notes.

*(Silence)*

N:  
 I find it sad.

L:  
 "It"?

N:  
 That you should choose to add to the long list of innocent victims of a bedridden dictator. Especially the day after his funeral. It's really sad for you.

*(A beat)*

You want his death to serve as an example - is that it?

*(They stare at each other in silence)*

The important thing is for *your* sentence not to be the example.

L:  
 That's why you're here.

N:  
 I can't do it without you. I agreed to defend you, not to have your name go down in history.

L:  
 You know my conditions.

N:  
 And you know mine. *(She exits)*

3.

Laura:  
*(Alone)*

It was about a year ago. We were at his summer house up in the hills. The sun was dazzling that morning in an unchanging blue sky. He was waiting for me in the

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library, after his walk. Despite being nearly blind, he could still walk alone with a cane. He went for a walk around the grounds every morning at 9 o'clock and after his nap in the afternoon. I'd been in his employment for just over a year. I sat down. He asked me to resume reading his diary from the year 1963 - where we had left off about a month earlier. The night before, we had finished Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea", in English. He added that it was time he got back to speaking English, which he had learned in school and spoken his whole life.

I opened his diary up to the year 1963. The bookmark was placed at September 10th. I began reading: "Last night I told my sweet little Isadora a story, to put her to sleep. It was the first time. She was tucked into bed, smiling at me, her eyes sparkling. I had a Spanish translation of "Pinocchio" by Collodi, a gift from her godfather Adolfo. I began to read slowly, and from time to time I looked up to see if she was following. I'll never forget her concentration. She stared at the book, and you could have sworn she saw all the characters. First there was Geppetto, the old carpenter, and his puppet Pinocchio, and all the other ones I invented. Actually, after reading the part with Pinocchio's oath never to lie, I launched into my own story. I made it all up, beginning with Pinocchio's superhuman effort to resist the temptation of the snake promising to give him the arms and legs of a real boy – the devil take his wooden puppet's limbs! – if only he would lie just once. In order to resist the snake, who meanwhile had summoned the crocodile for help, Pinocchio had run into the woods and climbed the highest tree, hoping to lose both of them. Geppetto had made him swear not to tell any lies, because with each lie he would lose a year of his life, and would have ears like a donkey and an elephant's nose. But how could he resist the two ninnies that had joined him at the top of the tree and were piling on the mischievous promises to get him to lie! Pinocchio climbed valiantly from treetop to treetop, higher and higher, until he reached the clouds; and there, feeling desperate, with the snake and crocodile on his heels, and unable to hold on any longer, he let out a great sob, and out came all the lies he'd been holding back. But then the Snow Fairy, who had seen everything and knew what a good boy Pinocchio was, changed his tears into ice crystals and his lies into snow crystals that sent the snake and the crocodile sliding down to the depths of the earth.

So Pinocchio's tears and lies became snowflakes that fall in winter, covering the woods in a pure white blanket and never reaching the ears of Geppetto. The fairy gave him the gift of living another hundred years, and to Pinocchio she gave the real arms and legs of a little boy. I wasn't a very good storyteller, but I did my best for her to imagine the whole story. I used a different voice for each character. She listened and laughed. What a pretty laugh! Then she sighed deeply and gave in to the weight of her eyelids heavy with sleep. She fell asleep with a little giggle, and I thought she was as beautiful as an angel, my little golden angel, my sweet Isadora. Thank you for making that first night of sleep unforgettable. Thank you for being rocked to sleep by my first fairy tale." *(Changing her tone of voice)*

Suddenly, a tear ran down my cheek and fell onto the page. I had barely wiped it away with the back of my hand, when I heard him ask why I was crying. I told him that I had spent a restless night, that the lack of sleep and the strain of reading had provoked a physiological reaction. He asked me if the teardrop had marred the page. "Barely", I replied. He insisted on seeing for himself. I handed him the diary. He ran his fingers over the page. When he gave it back to me, he said it wasn't a physiological tear. That's what he said. That it wasn't a physiological tear.

4.

*(Same place)*

L:

I'm not a terrorist.

N:

Is that why you wanted to see me again – to tell me that?

L:

Neither of us is any good at lying.

N:

That doesn't bode well.

L:

You have plenty of time ... and you're lying if you deny it.

N:  
Like everyone. You're the one who thinks it's unfair.

L:  
Unfair?

N:  
That's what you said the other day.

L:  
I doubt that.

N:  
It's interesting, how you let it slip out.

L:  
But apparently nothing slips by you.

N:  
That's my job, isn't it?

L:  
Why is it so interesting?

N:  
Saying it's unfair to waste time implies a moral connotation and a predisposition to judge what's fair and what isn't.

L:  
Really?

N:  
Having a sense of justice. And admitting you're powerless to do anything about it.

L:  
Admitting?

N:  
Deep down.

L:  
*(Sarcastic)* Is that all?

N:  
I could elaborate.

L:

Where would that get us?

N:

To your need to dispense justice.

L:

I see! Well if I had to choose, I guess I'd pick that role.

N:

Between a mercy-killer and a cold-blooded terrorist, I thought you'd have chosen the latter.

L:

They're not incompatible.

N:

You may find dispensing justice a bit harder behind bars.

L:

I thought about the long list of victims.

N:

That was smart.

L:

I thought so.

N:

It's a powerful image.

L:

Very.

N:

I have others ...

*(Silence)*

Regarding the relative sentences for your two options, for instance. You'd have the choice between fifteen years – perhaps even ten for good behavior – or life imprisonment.

*(Silence)*

At best.

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*(Silence)*

Inside the walls of an establishment that's not as *clean* as this one.

L:  
And at the worst?

N:  
Being sent back to your own country.

*(A beat)*

L:  
What about Article 3 of the International Human Rights Resolution: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment"?

N:  
That's no match for the Prosecutor.

L:  
Oh ...

N:  
An imposing man, with integrity and a clear conscience. A real professional. John Waters, State Attorney for the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Florida. Single, straight, liberal. Claims to be nearsighted and an atheist. All *qualities* that won't be of any help to you when your country decides to take a hard line and concede as little as possible. He'll escort you personally to the airport to avoid a quarrel with your government.

After all, why didn't you do it in your own country? What possessed you to come and spoil relations between our man and his Excellency your ambassador - very friendly since becoming members of the same golf club. Neither of them will take the risk of setting off an explosion between our two countries, especially with a pretty little fuse like you.

L:  
Don't tell anyone, but I've got some matches in my socks.

N:  
You should stop playing with them. It's a matter of life and death.

L:  
I hadn't forgotten.

N:  
I don't like lost causes.

L:  
Nor do I.

N:  
Then listen carefully. I want to make sure you understand. You still have time to choose between the reprieve this country is willing to grant you, and the *prison cell suicide* in store for you – after hours of torture – in that hot little country of your childhood, in celebration of your return.

*(A beat)*

Believe me, the ones who didn't make the right choice regret it.

L:  
How do you know?

N:  
To die for your ideals before the entire world - which no longer has any - is a great goal. Serving them in silence in a dark and filthy prison cell before being cut up, without anyone's knowledge, by a handful of angry soldiers whose pricks didn't all get satisfied, is less appealing.

*(A beat)*

Do you really want me to call in that typist?

L:  
You said ten years?

N:  
For "good behavior".

L:  
What makes you think my behavior will be good?

N:

It's just a hunch.

*(A beat)*

L:

We're the same age.

N:

Not really. You're eight months and twenty-two days older.

L:

I was trying to create a bond ...

N:

It's not a total loss. *(Offering her candy)* In an old Hollywood movie this is where they'd have a cigarette. Have you ever noticed that about those old movies?

L:

*(Taking a piece of candy and smiling)* This is better than a cigarette ... but just as mushy as some of those old films.

N:

I agree.

L:

You're wrong to underestimate your powers of persuasion.

N:

Does that mean you accept my conditions?

L:

If you accept mine.

N:

I wouldn't have come back otherwise. I'm ready to take a step in your direction.

L:

I like that stance better than the one you took the other day.

N:

I said a step. But without your help I can't keep them from giving you the death penalty.

L:

Really? And what would I be guilty of?

N:

Please, don't backpedal. We've got to walk side by side if you want to get out of here. And you know it. If dying behind bars tempts you that much, you're on the right path, and you can walk it without me.

L:

Why did you come back?

N:

To find out your motive.

L:

What will you do then?

N:

We'll decide together.

L:

Without lying?

N:

Let's just say we'll only lie once I've convinced you that we have no other choice.

L:

I like your candy.

N:

So do I. (*Suddenly*) Did you kill him?

L:

I "carried out his death sentence".

N:

We could talk about ourselves a bit next time. All right?

(*Laura nods*)

5.

Laura:

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*(Same place)*

One December morning, while I was reading the year 1968, it started snowing. Although barely audible, his sobbing interrupted me. I looked up. He had turned to the window. He was crying, his face squashed against the misty windowpane. It wasn't the first time I'd seen him cry. Suddenly he pretended to have an irrepressible cough and said: "January 3<sup>rd</sup>, '64." I searched for the diary entry for January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1964 for quite a while, but couldn't find it. It was the law of little humiliations. Whenever he asked me to find a specific date, it took me forever to find it. He seemed to be used to it and showed no sign of impatience. It was as though he expected it. While I was searching for that day, I heard him say: "That's how it goes. The harder you search for the happy days, the harder they are to find." I finally found it, quickly went to the right page thanks to a bookmark with a photograph on it, and started reading: "Feast day. Departure for *Pico Alto*. It's a beautiful winter day. It snowed all night long. We got on the road early this morning. Good thing. We want to get to the village in time for the procession. It's going to be a wonderful day. Kenza and I are in the back seat of the car with our Isadora. Evaristo is driving. I didn't order an escort ... What the hell, it's our vacation!

We're heading for *la Azulada*, where Auntie Gemma is expecting us for lunch. We've been driving through dreamlike white landscapes out of a fairytale. It's snowing on top of the snow that fell last night. It's so beautiful. Suddenly Isadora squeals and laughs in delight: "Look, Papa, it's Pinocchio's tears!" At first I don't understand. "What?" "Pinocchio's tears!" "Pinocchio's?" "Well sure! Those are all Pinocchio's tears falling down as pure snowflakes – like in the fairytale you told me! You know ... Pinocchio, Geppetto, the snake, the crocodile and the fairy."

"But of course, darling, good for you! What a memory!", I say, catching myself in time, and she can't stop laughing as she watches the snow fall. The more she laughs, the harder it is for her to sit still. "Pinocchio's tears!" Isadora says again. "Look, it's true! Papa, Mama! They're all Pinocchio's tears falling harmlessly from the sky! Thanks to the Snow Fairy. it's so beautiful! Look!" I look at Kenza, and we gaze into each other's eyes with Isadora's laughter flooding all around us. The mountains along the way are crowned with icy peaks, nature's outlines defined by the cotton-wool sky..." *(Suddenly changing her tone of voice)*

I was in the middle of that sentence when he suddenly got up to blow his nose and quietly told me to start reading the page for April 2nd, 1968, where I had stopped before ...

*(The light changes, revealing Nathalie who has been listening)*

N:

I was born on April 2nd.

L:

I did what he asked.

N:

What happened on April 2nd, 1968?

L:

An argument with his wife about their daughter Isadora's "premature puberty".

N:

Did they have any other children?

L:

I have no idea.

N:

He didn't talk about it?

L:

No. Yes, once, I think.

N:

What did he say?

L:

I don't remember. He became very solemn when he talked about it. He seemed to feel guilty about not bringing her up properly and for her suffering from such a strict upbringing. Later on she traveled around for years and died abroad in a car accident. Something to that effect. Something very sad in any case.

N:

*(point-blank)* Were you acting on your own?

L:

What does my report say?

N:

That's not what I'm asking you.

L:

Are you asking for the truth, or for what's missing in the report?

N:

What do you think?

*(Silence)*

Go ahead, I'll sort it out.

L:

Good luck. There are nine of us. You won't find out anything more about us, because I don't know any more than you. All I can tell you is that we don't belong to any known group.

N:

*(reading the report)* The execution of Oscar Antonio Somadossi Roederer, found guilty of crimes against humanity by the tribunal of the *Last of the Disappeared*, took two years to plan and was carried out in four phases. Is that correct?

L:

I was chosen to be the closest to the "condemned man". We never knew anything about each other during the entire plan. Each of us was recruited to accomplish a top secret task. We were totally independent – even in the case of an eventual failure.

N:

Recruited? By whom?

*(a beat)*

What were the different phases?

L:

First of all, in training me so that I'd be hired by the "condemned man's" personal assistant as a live-in trilingual reader. The training period lasted one year. At the end

of that phase, the plan was to continue "blind". Meaning that we would no longer have any contact with our base, for security reasons. The second phase started when I began working for the "condemned man". It was to last two years and would end with his execution.

N:  
What did your job consist of?

L:  
Reading out loud whatever he wanted.

N:  
When and where?

L:  
The sessions took place at fixed times twice a day - from ten to eleven a.m. and from five to six-thirty p.m.

N:  
And outside of those times?

L:  
Outside those appointed times, according to a schedule and mode to be defined, it was my duty to compile a selection of things to read – other than reviews, magazines and newspapers – to be approved by the butler.

N:  
How did it go, working for Somadossi?

*(a beat)*

Any hitches?

L:  
No.

N:

*(reading the report)* You accompanied the "condemned man" on his four trips to the Mayo Clinic in Florida, where he had been treated for kidney disease in the same unit for ten years. The events concerned took place during your last trip. Is that correct?

L:

The "condemned man's" medical condition corresponded exactly to the one I had studied during my training. I followed my orders to the letter.

N:

That's not what you said in your deposition.

L:

You said you'd sort that out.

N:

When did you meet Somadossi for the first time?

L:

I already told you.

N:

I forgot.

L:

Over two years ago.

N:

How did it go?

L:

You won't find out anything useful.

N:

Are you sure?

L:

The disease had made him almost blind. Our first interview was basically one long silence during which he sighed several times. At the end of our second meeting, he took off his dark glasses in order to look me over from the bottom up with that vacant stare of his. The third time he said that I had the same first name as his mother and that he would call me by my family name, Welter. When I began

reading, it was the first in our series of one thousand four hundred and sixty sessions.

N:

In the deposition you talked about being kidnapped on August 24th, and you said you didn't know anything about it.

L:

That's correct.

N:

You also said that during your captivity you did your best to lend Somadossi moral and physical support. (*Reading the report*) "You were hooded, handcuffed and gagged. You supposed he was being treated the same way. You were locked up in what you thought was a damp cellar, which it indeed turned out to be. You were fed at specific times, after being taken to the latrine; you were deprived of all comforts and were unable to establish contact with your kidnappers. You lost all notion of time. Then one day, things got moving again, and you heard them bustling around Somadossi. You smelled ether and figured they'd given him an injection. You heard him groan and suddenly someone took off your hood and quickly disappeared. You didn't realize straight off what was happening. It took you a while to open your eyes. When you were able to open them, you saw Somadossi in front of you, you thought he was lifeless, and you started searching desperately for his medicine which...

L:

Which there was no point looking for since he'd already been injected.

N:

Excuse me?

L:

In keeping with the third phase of the plan. And that's not in the deposition.

N:

Wait a minute. Are you saying that your kidnapping, your captivity, paying the ransom and being released...

L:

Were all part of the plan. Even I didn't know it.

*(A beat)*

N:

What was the purpose of it?

L:

To revive public interest in the issue of his parliamentary immunity, which made it impossible to bring charges against him. The only way to counter that was to keep the "condemned man" outside his own country. That's why the kidnapping took place during one of his trips here to the US. Thousands of people demonstrated around the world to show their support for us.

N:

*El pueblo libre.*

L:

Not just them - men and women from here and elsewhere who agreed with us. The ransom was meant to reimburse our betrayed people for a tiny part of the wealth stolen by the "condemned man" during his thirty years of dictatorship. The work of the five comrades who kidnapped and detained us was completed once the ransom was obtained and the insulin administered.

N:

Insulin?

L:

A dose of Actrapid® – fast-acting insulin – and a dose of ...

N:

Insulin? But ...

L:

The "condemned man's" kidney failure was due to his chronic illness.

N:

What chronic illness?

L:

He was diabetic at a very critical stage. The kidnappers gave him a shot of EPO, a highly powerful activator of red blood cells, for his chronic anemia. He never went anywhere without it.

N:  
Why?

L:  
You can't buy EPO in a pharmacy. It's a powerful drug that's only available in hospitals.

N:  
How did they know that?

L:  
The plan. That's how I realized they were part of it. I continued according to instructions. Down to his execution.

N:  
And the fourth phase?

L:  
That's now.

N:  
What do you mean?

*(A beat)*

L:  
I got the "condemned man" out of our hiding place, and in less than three hours we were picked up by the police. They gave us first aid. The "condemned man" was hospitalized immediately. The injection of Actrapid® and the EPO had produced the desired effect ... and he was feeling peppier. I attended to the "condemned man" every day in his hospital room for an entire month. To avoid arousing any suspicion, I gave him Glucagon® twice to bring down his insulin level, which meant his dose of Actrapid® had to be increased. He got through two crises, and the third was meant to be fatal. It was. He died on the night of October eleventh and was given the last rites. After he died, I continued to follow instructions to the letter. Given all the clues

I spread around, it didn't take long before I was taken into custody, then charged with the crimes of which you are aware.

N:  
You mean that ...

L:  
I had to get to you.

N:  
Excuse me?

L:  
You're part of the plan.

N:  
What?

*(A beat)*

Why me?

L:  
I think you know why, Natalia Franchigiano.

N:  
What did you say? *(she bows her head and takes a deep breath)*

L:  
Executing the "condemned man" hasn't brought back your father, Natalia ... but it was fair punishment for his assassin.

*(a beat)*

N:  
What do you want from me?

L:  
Nothing more than what you're already doing.

N:  
I think I should warn you that being who I am won't change the way I intend to defend your case.

L:  
But deep down in your heart and conscience ...

N:  
They have nothing to do with it. And I'll thank you to ...

L:  
You're the only person in the world who could get the international community to approve the execution of the "condemned man"! The only person in the world, do you understand?!

N:  
I forbid you to ...

L:  
I swear you'll do it. With or without a heart! As for your conscience ...

N:  
Leave my conscience out of it!

*(a beat)*

I'm sorry.

L:  
I'm willing to help you. We'll walk side by side - like you said. And we'll only lie in order to tell the truth. You can count on me.

*(Nathalie exits)*

6.

*(A room in the prison. A table, some papers, two chairs.)*

N:  
*(She reads from one of Somadossi's notebooks, then closes her eyes and recalls the words from her childhood fable. From time to time she checks in the notebook)*

*¿Dime Geppetto, qué quieres que haga  
para quedarme contigo, darte siempre alegrías y nunca penas?*

Tell me, Geppetto, what must I do to stay here with you forever, giving you only joy and no sorrow?

*Qué seas siempre bueno, Pinocchio,  
entonces tu bondad será correspondida con un gran obsequio.*  
You must always be a good boy, Pinocchio,  
and your goodness will be rewarded with a great gift.

*¿Cómo de grande?*  
How great?

*¡Tanto como mi amor por ti! Un obsequio inmenso que sólo  
las hadas pueden donarte si lo has merecido.*  
As great as my love for you! A gift so wonderful that only the fairies can give you  
if you deserve it.

*¿Que obsequio?*  
What is the gift?

*El que te crezcan piernas y brazos dignos del muchacho  
que eres en lugar de estos miembros de madera y estopa,  
y ninguna cuerda más de marioneta.*  
That you would have the arms and legs of a real live boy  
instead of those puppet's limbs made of wood and string.

*¡Qué maravilloso!*  
How wonderful!

*Pero esto ocurrirá bajo una sola condición.*  
But it can only happen on one condition.

*¿Cual?*  
What?

*Que no mientas nunca.*  
That you never lie.

*¿Nunca?*  
Never?

*Nunca, debes prometérmelo.*  
Never. You must promise me.

*Te lo prometo, Geppetto, ¿pero cuándo me crecerán  
piernas y brazos de un muchacho de carne y hueso?*  
I promise you, Geppetto. But when will these arms and legs grow of a boy of flesh  
and bone?

*Cuanto más bueno seas, antes te crecerán.*  
The better you are, the faster they'll grow.

*¿No tendré nunca más hilos?*  
I'll never have strings again?

*Ninguno más.*  
Not a one.

*Pero Geppetto, ¿que me pasará  
si digo una mentira?*  
But, Geppetto, what will happen if I tell a lie?

*Mañana te lo diré, ahora es tarde, buenas noches Pinocchio.*  
I'll tell you tomorrow. It's late now. Good night, Pinocchio.

*Buenas noches, Geppetto.*  
Good night, Geppetto.

L:  
*(A guard has escorted her in while Nathalie was reciting)* It sounds better in Spanish.  
Did you learn that story in school?

N:  
*(Hiding the notebook)* Hmm?

L:  
How long have you ...?

N:  
About thirty-five years.

L:  
Been ...

N:  
It came back so fast, I was surprised.

L:  
No, I was asking ...

N:  
How many times I fell asleep before hearing the end.

L: How long you've been ...

N:  
I'm amazed that I remember it so well. Excuse me?

L:  
I was asking how long you've been here?

N:  
Oh. Uh, I spent the night here. After I left your cell yesterday I had a long look at the report drawn up by *El pueblo libre*. It's about a real network of solidarity created by refugees all over the world. The night just flew by. They're the ones you found me through, aren't they?

L:  
Yes. You're the only reason they have left to believe in human beings.

N:  
That's their business.

L:  
Do you often do this?

N:  
What?

L:  
Stay up all night to defend lost causes? I thought you didn't like them.

*(Silence)*

You must get that from someone.

N:  
He gave his life to lost causes.

L:  
What kind of father was he?

N:  
In a hurry ... to leave memories.

L:  
He left you the best part of himself.

N:

That's what you tell yourself. I wish he'd left me the worst part and stuck around a bit longer.

L:  
We never get what we want, do we?

N:  
(*ironic*) That's the truth ...

L:  
And what were you like?

N:  
Like a little girl my age, I suppose. Like all the other ones I knew. For a few years anyway. Happy years.

L:  
And then?

N:  
After that, nothing was ever the same again. Maybe that's the hardest thing to live with - the way people look at you. It makes you ...

L:  
Different.

N:  
It excludes you from everything around you, everything you know.

L:  
You have no frame of reference, no earth to ground you, no sky above your head.

N:  
And nothing is familiar anymore.

L:  
It's strange.

N:  
What?

L:  
Having you here - gives *me* a frame of reference.

N:  
Because I'm the daughter of the great leader of the revolution?

L:  
A frame of reference.

N:  
Imagine!

L:  
What?

N:  
I fell asleep listening to the same story as his torturer's daughter.

L:  
It's strange, being here with you. Now I see the reason for everything I've been through for so long.

*(A beat)*

N:  
I understand. It's silly, isn't it? I suppose Isadora Somadossi and I weren't the only little girls who fell asleep listening to "Pinocchio".

L:  
No, I think not.

N:  
It's silly, and yet ...

L:  
They drilled me for hours about your father, your mother, your brothers and sisters. And now that you're here in front of me, I've forgotten everything, as if ...

N:  
Is that part of the plan? Or are you going off the beaten track and taking the risk of having to improvise? It isn't advisable – in the last stretch.

L:  
My fate is in your hands.

N:  
It all depends on you. I told you that.

L:  
Tell me again.

*(a beat)*

You're the daughter of Oswaldo Franchigiano. Your father is the hero of our fight for freedom. You are the heir to his struggle, and the moment has come to take up the cause.

N:  
I was eight years old when they assassinated him. Two years later my entire family was slaughtered by the dictatorship's armed militia.

L:  
I know.

N:  
Really? And do you know how I was tortured with my brothers and sisters, while my mother looked on in horror, so that she'd tell them where my father was hiding? She didn't give in, I promise you.

Do you want me to show you the marks of men's barbarism on my body? The distinctions in my flesh in honor of the great revolutionary who declared war on the horror, despite the cowardice of his countrymen? Do you want to see? Here, look at my feet ... They don't look much like feet anymore, do they? There's not a toe – among the ones left – that still has a nail on it. They tore them off one by one. I was about six.

Our younger brother was luckier, so to speak; he died of fright ... while they were slicing his armpits and inserting bamboo shoots soaked in honey as a feast for termites. Died of fright! Can you imagine? At the age of 4!

And my mother? Do you know how they killed my mother, without her admitting a single thing? Imagine it. Go on, try to imagine the most horrendous death you can think of. Hers was worse. *(She takes a breath)*

I'm much obliged to you for learning about our martyr by heart – but I don't think it gives you a precise idea of what I endured during the first ten years of my life. I mean a precise idea. For ten years. The first ten. I promise you it's beyond all comprehension. So what exactly do you expect me to be the heir to?

L:

To the man who gave you life. I've studied his revolt, his every gesture.

N:

And the one you murdered ...

L:

I didn't murder him!

N:

... took his life away, along with thousands of others! That's how it's been since the world began – the endless story of the struggle against human barbarism. It spreads like the plague because of greed for power. And I'm here to try and stop it, to break up the brotherhood of monsters. That's what I'm defending you for.

*(A beat)*

L:

He brought you into this world - to dispense justice for his sacrificed life!

N:

He sacrificed his life to spread peace! That's the only justice I can do him.

L:

*(Sarcastic)* Peace?! Beware of big words like that. They conceal human monsters. Sometimes peace is just a cover-up for "might makes right". We have no experience with peace, and no predisposition to observe it. I suppose it's not natural for us. We can only "maintain" it. The way you hold in check a ferocious beast you've succeeded in taming and force to respect you through violence and hatred. That's the only kind of peace we're capable of maintaining. Peace maintained by force.

N:

And that's how you want to fight the chain of human barbarism - through hatred?

L:

I'm asking you to break that chain and avenge the injustice done to thousands of people, to build ...

N:

Nothing can be built through revenge! "Revenge is oil on the fire of our own devastation", as a wise man once said.

L:

Who will respect the memory of our dead if we don't start with our own?

N:

Don't fool yourself. Somadossi got people to forget his crimes while he was still alive.

L:

What are you saying?

N:

Ask the younger generation. Ask people in the streets of major cities. No one in the world today talks about him as the monster he really was, and you know it. No one. Ask the young people. The heirs to his legendary diplomacy, the disciples of his well-calculated bonhomie and fairness as a political strategist applauded all over the world. Ask the young Turks he trained if they don't believe in the upstanding values he instilled in them. Ask the entire country what has changed and what they believe in.

Look at the party of the dictatorship. Despite its new name, it has the same power to exploit the weak. You're an idealist, like thousands outside our little nation.

Thousands who fled the murderous madness of a man who encountered no human justice capable of stopping him - for thirty years. A man who met with indulgence even from his former enemies - by virtue of his venerable age and his parliamentary investiture. It gave a reassuringly pale cast to his face - that of an old man whose ill health was the most effective of diplomatic passports. That's the old man you killed, you see, and keeping him from dragging you down to hell is my way of honoring my father's memory.

L:

I didn't kill him!

N:  
 Stop lying to yourself! It won't get us anywhere. What do you want me to say? That you "executed" him, is that it? According to the sentence proclaimed by your revolutionary group declaring him guilty of crimes against humanity? Do you know what the International Criminal Court recognizes as crimes against humanity? "Any of the following acts, when committed as part of a general or systematic attack against the civil population and with knowledge of the attack: murder, extermination, slavery, deportation or forced transfer of populations, imprisonment (...), torture, rape, sexual slavery (...), (...), forced disappearances, the crime of apartheid, and other inhuman acts of a similar nature intentionally causing great suffering or severe attacks on a person's physical person or their moral or physical health." Did you hear? A "civil population" has to mobilize before such crimes can be denounced. Where is this civil population? Where are your countrymen? The ones who should have come together to declare the monster guilty? Where is the national court that should have been conducting the trial of its biggest criminal for the past twenty years? Where? Tell me! *(She dumps a bagful of letters onto the table)* Read these and stop dreaming. They're letters addressed to *El pueblo libre* by your amnesiac countrymen. That should give you a more precise idea of the repercussions of your act.

*(Laura reads, distressed)*

Don't wear yourself out, they're all the same.

L:  
 Thanks.

N:  
 A handful of you – acting illegally – did what thousands of people had wanted to do for a quarter of a century through legal channels. Are you surprised they resent you?

L:  
 And what did they expect? To have the Law on their side?

N:

Time was working in their favor at any rate.

L:

And the monster would have died at a ripe old age. Absolved of the crimes he committed. While the martyrs of the dictatorship were immortalized. I know the story. It's too easy – blaming it all on time.

N:

Time casts a veil of insignificance over everything we do. You can't stop it. And the dance of men's deeds will begin again, with its usual hypocrisy and devastating passions. Time sets the pace for the dance. Imagine that. One day it exterminates and the next day it lays flowers on the graves of its martyrs. And on it goes. The torturers become the new commanders. Nowadays they're even elected by the voters, proclaimed "knights" – of yet another "round table". Face-lifted businessmen on the go, wealthy sharpshooters and national string-pullers, spin-doctor politicians with dirty hands who pledge allegiance to the free-market economy and rush to bury yesterday's ideology while throwing a token flower on its grave.

L:

And that's what you blame me for? For not giving them time to become even more hypocritical? Tough luck. I don't regret "executing the condemned man" illegally. Or not giving them time to bring back their "disappeared" in color photos on our national holiday.

N:

Your death won't bring them back either.

L:

Even if I had the power to bring back the dead, I'd still have taken the life of the monster who spent his own life spreading death. Instead of bringing back their dead, I brought them justice. Why didn't the Law do it before me?

N:

It would have – with dignity.

L:  
Really?!

N:  
It would have broken the chain of terror by repealing the law of "an eye for an eye"  
– through a trial. I was seeing to it ...

L:  
And you call me an idealist. Well, see to it now! Defend me in the name of that same  
sense of dignity. Now! Win a verdict of innocence for me before the court of  
humanity. My case is worth the trouble. It's got them shaking in their boots - that  
pack of monsters you're trying to break up.

N:  
*(pointing to the letters)* Have you seen which side humanity is on?

L:  
Humanity, yes, but what about you?

N:  
Bad luck. They're the ones you have to convince.

*(A beat)*

Do you realize who your greatest enemy is?

L:  
I'd rather you told me about my greatest ally.

N:  
In your case they're one and the same: Public opinion. Yesterday it supported you by  
demonstrating in the streets. But this thousand-headed hydra can only obey one of  
its heads – out of fear. It is ruled by the media, and is consensual, sentimental and  
ignorant. Now it condemns you for answering hatred with hatred, and will determine  
whether you live or die. It needs a scapegoat to believe in its idols - in the name of  
some fleeting faith it readily invokes when it no longer believes in anything else.

*(Silence)*

Think it over. There's still time to make it your ally.

L:  
I'm counting on you.

7.

*Laura is alone in her cell, sitting on her bed, cradling her head in her hands. She gets up, picks up a book, lies down again and reads. After a minute, she puts down the book and tries to fall asleep, but can't. She gets up, looks at herself in the mirror for a long while, then splashes water on her face. She picks up a pen and paper, sits on the bed and scribbles a few pages. She puts it down, picks up her walkman, puts on the headphones, turns it on and listens.*

8.  
(Same place)

N:  
The nurse was heard by the examining judge, and she is categorical: she took Somadossi's pulse at around eleven p.m. while making her last rounds, about an hour after his evening injection.

L:  
She's lying.

N:  
How do you know?

L:  
She's lying.

N:  
She was very precise. She says she went into room 495, where Somadossi was sleeping – like you. You had fallen asleep in the armchair with your book on your stomach – "Talking with Angels" by Gitta Mallasz.

L:  
She didn't come in. She knew what I was reading. We'd spoken about the book several times. She'd started reading it a few months earlier.

N:  
She says that, without waking you, she took Somadossi's pulse, checked on his drip and left very quickly to answer her pager ringing in the corridor.

L:  
She didn't take his pulse.

N:  
Where did you get that from? You were sleeping.

L:  
I was ready. I'd followed the instructions to the letter and was waiting for her to come in and find out – but that's not what happened.

N:  
Find out what?

*(A beat)*

Tell me. You say she's lying. I want proof.

L:  
As soon as I heard her footsteps in the corridor, I pretended to be asleep. She opened the door a crack, peeked in, and seeing the two of us sleeping so peacefully, I suppose she hesitated for a second, then her pager started ringing and she took off. She didn't come into the room and she didn't take his pulse.

N:  
Prove it.

L:  
If she had come in, she would have called for help and nothing would have happened the way she said.

N:

Help? What for?

L:  
Because she'd have taken the pulse of a corpse.

N:  
What are you saying?

L:  
The "condemned man" had just died. All I had to do was inject him with a pen of 3 milliliters of Actrapid®, less than half an hour after his evening injection. It caused an overdose of insulin as planned – and a fatal coma half an hour later. I had no more than an hour to act before the nurse's last round. I found out how punctual she was.

N:  
A pen – of Actrapid®?

L:  
A syringe that's already loaded and ready to use. Easy to handle and painless. He felt nothing. He was nodding off.

*(A beat)*

N:  
You ...

L:  
He started feeling uncomfortable very quickly. He was in the armchair. I helped him get into bed. He died six minutes before the nurse peeked in. I barely had time to fix the covers and make it look like he was sleeping, change books and sink back into the armchair where I pretended to be asleep. I was ready.

N:  
Change books?

L:  
What?

N:  
You said: "to change books"?

L:  
Before the nurse peeked in, I wasn't reading "Talking with Angels" to him.

N:  
What were you reading?

L:  
The nurse is lying, because if she didn't lie, she'd lose her job. Is that proof enough?

*(A beat)*

Of course it's enough. But you'll still believe the nurse.

N:  
Excuse me?

L:  
It was part of the plan. There was no reason for that woman to lose her job.  
Anyway, her lying has no effect on your task.

N:  
I thought we were only going to lie if there was no other way.

L:  
Which is the case. The plan never risks "hurting innocent bystanders". Due to the circumstances, this woman has to lie in order to keep her job. We're covering for her.

N:  
You've made her an accomplice.

L:  
You and I are the only ones who'll know.

N:  
How did you follow instructions despite this unforeseen event?

L:  
The instructions allowed for it. As soon as she left to answer her pager, I pressed the call button, turned the "condemned man's" body over, stretched his right arm toward the button and sat back down in my armchair pretending to be asleep. A minute later

she came running in and I pretended to wake up. She saw that the “condemned man” was dead and thought he’d had just enough time to call her.

N:  
Are you afraid of nothing?

L:  
And you?

N:  
I’m worried.

L:  
You don’t look it.

N:  
I can’t understand your motive anymore.

L:  
That is worrisome – after all the sleepless nights you’ve spent on my case.

N:  
Whose fault is that?

L:  
Mine?

N:  
You’re trying to protect yourself.

*(A beat)*

What are you running from?

L:  
Memories. Like you.

N:  
What are you so afraid of?

*(A long silence, Nathalie moves closer to Laura and strokes her cheek)*

9.

Nathalie:

*(Alone, speaking to her dead)*

I've got my work cut out for me. Her statements have re-established the truth. The truth ... *(with an ironic smile)* The nurse wasn't fired. Laura has been indicted. The Department of Justice has rejected the request for extradition. We've been sent to a Court of Appeals. An incredible stroke of luck. Holding the trial here is the first step, and we'll keep on fighting. She's got to plead mitigating circumstances. Our relationship has improved since we talked about you.

I've never felt all of you so close to me, your hands gently stroking my head like in the old days. Her face lights up whenever I talk about you. Sometimes I feel like you're the ones who've sent her to me.

I told her about what I remember of your faces. I told her about your laugh, Andrea, how you always pinched my bread from the table, Lia, and that stupid look on your face, Aidan, when you'd fart in bed ... and so many other things – your silky hair, Mama, and the way Papa used to scare you when he'd pick me up to play "airplane bomber". Remember? His scent, his strong arms like the branches of an oak tree. She listened as if she were hearing me for the first time. She wanted to know how it happened. Those ten years - and how I escaped the massacre. I told her. About the execution squad and the unmarked grave, the peddler's cart – then the trains, the boat and my arrival in New York. She wanted to know everything about my adopted family. I told her about the antique store, the estate and the clapboard house, and then college. She's heard so many details - it's almost like seeing a photo album. She asked if you were buried in a grave now, and if I had gone back to our country. She doesn't know you're here with me wherever I go. I'll tell her someday. Maybe she'll get it, and maybe she won't. We've got time. This fight is more pressing. I find her daunting. I'm not sure I can convince the jury if she doesn't help me. Maybe she is helping me, but not the way I'd like her to. Maybe I'm the one who should bend. What do you think, Papa? What, Mama? Really – you think so? I'm not sure. I'll give it a try. Why not? You're right, the sooner the better. Yes. Sometimes I really feel like you sent her to me. Thanks. I love you all.

10.

*(The same set as in scene 6)*

L:

I lied to you.

N:

I never doubted it.

*(They look at each other for a beat)*

L:

I didn't "execute" him only for his crimes.

N:

I see ...

L:

I killed him so I could keep on going. And tread the same ground that he defiled ...

N:

They'll understand that even less.

L:

Because I was afraid - of not being able to breathe the same air he breathed.

N:

You've got to help me, Laura.

L:

I thought of no one but myself.

N:

They won't accept you taking the Law into your own hands.

L:

I could only think of one thing - washing away the shame of his old body, still living with those unavenged murders, the weeping mothers, the orphans and the crippled.

N:

They won't forgive you.

L:

I'm not asking for forgiveness.

N:  
How can you ...

L:  
I've set off a battle, and you've been chosen as the heroine. If you refuse to fight, you'll regret it your whole life.

N:  
You've been charged with first-degree murder. How can you ...

L:  
I'm no murderer, and you've got to make the world understand that!

N:  
That isn't my job!

L:  
But it's what's keeping you here. Think of future generations. This is the time to speak to their consciences. Tell them my motive.

N:  
Which one? You said you didn't "execute" him for his crimes.

L:  
Not only for that.

N:  
For what else then?

L:  
For the loathing I felt for him.

N:  
They won't believe you.

L:  
Why not?

N:  
Because *I* don't believe you.

L:  
Then lie.

N:

I still haven't pleaded mitigating circumstances – because you wouldn't let me.

L:  
And I never will!

N:  
I promise you that ...

L:  
That they'll take pity on a terrorist because she lost her Daddy too soon?! Don't make me laugh. I don't believe in your hysterical orphan and neither will they!

N:  
Your pride will ...

L:  
What about yours?

N:  
Please, try to understand.

L:  
Create a precedent! Isn't that what you call it? Have all tyrants who are still at liberty sentenced for their crimes because of the judgment rendered in my case! Make my case a warning for all those who are hungry for power, and get the court to agree never to extradite me. During my sentence, I ...

N:  
We're talking about life imprisonment! Are you afraid of saying it out loud?

L:  
Tell me then, how many years would your Grade B psychodrama spare me? How many? Admit you're not even thinking anymore about the suspended sentence you were dangling in front of me at first. Because it's unthinkable now. Unrealistic. Admit it!

N:  
Laura, this is your life we're talking about.

L:  
Do your job so that all your dead will be proud of you, so that your father won't have died for nothing! I beg you.

N:  
If I could just talk about you in these terms ...

L:  
What terms?

N:  
Your obsessive need to honor the memory of your father. That would suffice to make the case for mental instability, so that ...

L:  
You'd be a total laughing stock! Just as you would have been if you'd fed them that one about euthanasia! Give it up, or you can kiss your career goodbye.

N:  
My what?

L:  
I have no father! Do you understand? None who could prove the truth of your argument – the hysterical pubescent girl weaned too soon from her Daddy.

N:  
*(She takes an old document out of her briefcase - probably a birth certificate - and throws it onto the table)* Then who is this?

*(Laura looks at the document)*

Isadora Sabra Laura Somadossi Roederer, look me in the eye and tell me to give up trying to save your life. I swear I'll obey you.

*(A very long silence)*

L:  
Adding father-killer to my list of accusations won't make things any easier for you.

N:  
It all depends on what argument I use. You know that.

*(A beat)*

Was the tribunal of the *Last of the Disappeared* aware of this?

L:  
No.

N:  
Who is?

L:  
You.

N:  
What?

L:  
I said you, no one else. How did you figure it out?

N:  
*(Taking a deep breath)* The first hint was when you associated Isadora's problems at puberty with the hysterical character I wanted you to play. You did it again just a minute ago. Then I hunted. Finding these put me on the right track. *(She shows Laura a cardboard box on the floor)* They're Somadossi's diaries from 1959 to 1979. I noticed some striking resemblances between Isadora and you in your father's diary.

L:  
*(Glaring)* Don't use that term for him.

N:  
I'm sorry.

*(Silence)*

I realized the "reader" wasn't neutral. For instance, when she cried while reading the diary entry for September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1963. That was confirmed by your troubled reaction when you caught me by surprise reciting "Pinocchio".

L:  
That fable thing was so obvious. You wanted to get a confession out of me, right?

N:  
You'd never believe me if I told you it's the truth.

L:  
The truth? You?

*(A beat)*

I don't see where it would lead us anyway.

N:

To what connects us.

*(Silence)*

L:

*(Pointing to the box)* Where did you find those?

N:

Some of it in the kidnappers' house, the rest at the hospital.

L:

In other words, wherever I left them lying around.

N:

What?

L:

So you'd find out who I am.

*(Silence)*

I knew it was the only way you'd give up pleading my supposed psychopathological problems.

*(A beat)*

Here. It would take too long to find this one. Now you have the whole collection.

*(She takes one of the diaries out of her pocket and hands it to her)* Here it is, 1958, the year of my birth. It's the one I read to him while he was dying. The one I hid when the nurse peeked in. A real treat.

N:

Where are you trying to go with this?

L:

Right where we are. From now on you'll have to deal with knowing my secret. I never lied to you about that. Even the tribunal of the *Last of the Disappeared* doesn't know who I am.

N:  
What are you trying to do?

L:  
The same thing for about the past 16 months.

N:  
You can see where that's taken us. What do you want?

L:  
For you to forget your pseudo-psychological arguments and mitigating circumstances, and to plead in favor of a political act I committed in complete awareness, and for which I intend to bear full responsibility. And I'm doing it for the reasons I've already explained.

N:  
It's suicidal! He was the kind of father who ...

L:  
(*Furious*) I already told you – I never had a father!

N:  
He loved you too much, and you were ...

L:  
(*Cynically*) Sent off to hard labor at the age of fifteen and trained by the militia of his bloodthirsty regime! I suppose that was because he loved me too much.

N:  
What?

L:  
When he found out I didn't share his convictions, he treated me like a traitor to the country. I was punished like a crimi ...

N:  
Don't you want to use that for your defense?

*(Silence)*

L:

Look me in the eye, Natalia Franchigiano. I swear that I'll risk an even heavier sentence if you force me to play the psychopath who slowly kills off her Daddy while reading select bits of his life to him. I won't give you the slightest chance to convince anyone that I'm mentally ill. Do you understand? I'll prove to everyone that I'm a father-killer who is completely sound of mind and body – who deserves the death penalty.

N:

You're ...

L:

It's up to you.

N:

How do you expect me to ...

L:

I don't know! Deal with it. You keep saying the truth will lead nowhere. So I'm telling you the truth now to prove you're right. I can't do any better than that. The truth won't save me. So you'll just have to keep it to yourself. I put a monster to death. An assortment of meat that didn't deserve to be called a human being! I'm asking you to defend my act as an attempt to create a better world. Do it in memory of our brothers.

*(Silence)*

Have you ever thought that you could be in my place right now?

*(They look in each other's eyes for a long while, both thinking about it in silence)*

11.

N:

*(Alone, talking to her dead father)*

She killed her father. Can you hear me, Papa? Oh ... hello. Yes. No. It's tough. It depends on the jury. She knows it. She won't help me. She wants me to plead a political crime. She must have really suffered to do what she did. A lot. It still hurts her. She has no one to talk to. Can you imagine? She's really in the dark when she shuts her eyes. I think so. I've never asked her. I know so little about her. She didn't believe me about "Pinocchio". No. That's right! Too bad. Yes, of course. She'll figure it out; there's plenty of time. How did she get to this point? Is it a path of suffering? Is that it? It's the only answer. She said I could have been in her place, to get revenge for you - all of you. Why didn't I do it, instead of her? Tell me, father? I could have. Should I have? It's unimaginable. I don't know. What's that? The trial? In two days. Yes, you're right. I'll ask her to tell me. Yes, everything. I love you.

12.

*(The cell)*

L:

Don't ask me that.

N:

How can I lie to them if I don't know the facts?

L:

Not knowing will help you.

N:

The other day you said I could have been in your place. I haven't stopped thinking about it ever since. Why aren't I?

*(Silence)*

There must be an answer. Give me a chance.

L:  
I want your word.

N:  
You've got it.

*(Silence)*

I'll enter a guilty plea for "executing a man who committed crimes against humanity".

L:  
You said humanity wouldn't be there to lodge a complaint. And that you'd lack evidence to prove the "condemned man's" guilt.

N:  
My sleepless nights must have been good for something.

L:  
Swear it.

N:  
I swear. Tell me how you ...

*(Laura takes a cassette out of her closet and puts it in the tape player. We hear the voice of Oscar Antonio Somadossi Roederer, her father, in mid-sentence. It is the voice of a dying man, with moments of silence and moaning. He speaks English with a very slight accent from an unidentifiable place)*

OASR:  
... one day you left, but you'd been away for a long time. You'd begun to leave your mother and I well before you actually left. It was unbearable ... *(moaning)* I didn't know where I was sending you when you left for "correctional holidays" as it was called. I know – I was the one who came up with the idea, for all the young people in our country. I could think of only one thing, that you'd be their model of the perfect loyal adolescent.

I had to show an example to my people. I had no idea of the camps, the trials and humiliations they used to educate you, to make you a new kind of youth. I had no idea. Your mother never knew. When you went out there for the first time, on your

fifteenth birthday, I had a feeling that something had changed between us. You had begun to change, and you changed very quickly. You took part in the first "Active Youth" meetings. You had become someone else. But you pretended so that your mother and I wouldn't worry - especially your mother. You pretended. I realized when I walked into your room one morning without knocking.

You had run off to catch the bus and had forgotten to shut your closet. I saw your uniform on a coat hanger there and certain instruments – which I would never have imagined belonging to you. I looked into it. And I found out. What to do? I did it. For the honor of the country I was building. I agreed for you to be *trained*, like all our youth. And for you to learn to fight to preserve our most noble values at the risk of your life, like a young warrior.

When you turned twenty-one, your mother and I had lost you but the country could count on your head, your arms and legs. Until the day of your message. Until that day. *(a long silence)*

We'd made a huge mistake. A huge one. We had made a bad judgment, all of us. So bad. We thought you were one of the "active youth guides", ready to sacrifice herself for her country, when you were actually up in the mountains fomenting a rebellion with the armed traitors, that mob intent on destroying the country. I was only informed of it a year later. A year – too late! My sadness was unending. Impossible to imagine.

I invented your death for your mother and for the whole country, and your funeral was grandiose. The entire country was in mourning. Inconsolable. Your mother died the following year, taking my love with her forever. Isadora mia ... my child, my darling who was lost ... pard... pardo... perdoname *(a long silence, then Laura turns off the tape player)*

*(Silence)*

N:  
Were those his last words?

L:  
And you just swore not to repeat them under any circumstances to plead my case, since you have other proof of his guilt.

N:

Don't worry, I won't repeat them. What was the message he talked about?

L:

I had sent a message to *Grancivico Palace* from the mountains where I had joined my comrades. I agreed with his death sentence pronounced by our tribunal.

N:

The *Last of the Disappeared*?

L:

Yes.

N:

When did you confess to him?

L:

On the evening of October 11<sup>th</sup> in his hospital room. He had already recognized me. He was aware of my act and my motive. I told him in detail the physiological reactions that would cause his death. He was waiting for it, and for my forgiveness. He wanted me to know that everything he had done to me had been out of love. Like the cruelest wounds we inflict on each other.

N:

There must be an answer.

L:

Hmm?

N:

I'm looking for an answer for why I didn't do it instead of you.

*(a beat)*

How could you have ...?

L:

Out of love. Like he did.

*(a beat)*

N:

I ad ...

L:

Don't use that word.

N:

Because ...

L:

There's nothing admirable about what I did. I killed out of love for life, like you'd amputate an infected limb to save a healthy body.

N:

Ever since the other day, I've been thinking about how lonely you must be.

L:

Rebels are all part of a big family. I joined it a long time ago. I learned there that the species evolves at the cost of the horrors it inflicts on itself. That it has always gone through barbarous times and yet aspires to the silent beauty of stars. That we are part of that beauty and that we have it in us to reach for it or to push it away.

N:

Whether we like it or not, we have taken root in our fathers' ashes. And each of us has scattered them in her own way.

L:

I would have grown differently in the soil of resistance.

N:

Perhaps, but then our branches would never have brushed against one another.

L:

There's the answer you were looking for.

N:

Hmm?

L:

If you had done what I did instead of me, then I would never have known you.

*(a beat)*

You're fine right where you are. Our intertwined branches are much stronger together. They can weather any storm.

N:  
True.

*(a beat)*

L:  
He told me that dying was painful – that he deserved the pain because I was the one giving it to him in the name of the innocent blood he had shed for nearly half a century. He told me that governing was hard. That man is too fragile a creature for his own intelligence. That, thanks to me, he was going to join his lovely Kenza for always. My Mother ... *(crying softly)*

N:  
And bring her your forgiveness.

*(A beat. Nathalie strokes Laura's head, closing her eyes. She speaks as if she were repeating something she can hear in her own mind: her own dead)*

He went to meet your mother where she is now, where Pinocchio's tears turn into pure snowflakes high up in the sky, to bring her your forgiveness.

*(Laura, overwhelmed, stares at her)*

Your forgiveness, Laura, your forgiveness – in the name of all my people. For a better world. Close your eyes. Go ahead. *(Laura closes her eyes)* Go on. Can you see?

L:  
*(While she's talking, there are long silences during which she seems to be listening to someone)* Mama? Oh! Hello, Ma ... Mother. I wanted to say ... just ... to say I'm sorry. Yes, to you. What's that? No, just sorry if I ... well ... for not having been brave enough to die when I should have. *(in a softer voice)* What's that? Yes ... Do you think so? Yes ... yes ... *(As she continues whispering, the lights fade to Blackout)*

**The End**

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