

Dacia Maraini's *Norma* '44
An English-Language Translation and Notes
by Lucia Re and Monica Streifer

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CHARACTERS:

SARA AND NORMA

LIDIA AND ADALGISA

KARL HOFFMANN AND POLLIONE

VOICES

ACT I

Sitting with his back to the audience, Captain Karl Hoffmann listens to Norma on the phonograph.¹ He is smoking a cigarette. In the beam of the spotlight shining down on

Translators' note: The Italian feminist writer Dacia Maraini (Fiesole 1936-) is the author of more than sixty plays. *Norma '44* was first performed by the La Maddalena company in Rome, at the Parco del Turismo in EUR on September 2, 1986 as part of the series "L'altra metà della scena" (The Other Half of the Stage). For more information, see in this same volume Monica Streifer, "Female Voice in Dacia Maraini's *Norma '44*," <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3nz25024>. On Maraini as a feminist writer, see Virginia Picchiotti, *Relational Spaces: Daughterhood, Motherhood, and Sisterhood in Dacia Maraini's Writings and Films* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002). The play was first published in the volume *Erzabeth Bathory: Il Geco; Norma '44* (Rome: Editori & Associati, 1991) and subsequently in *Fare Teatro: 1966-2000* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2000). This translation is based on the *Fare Teatro* edition. Few of Dacia Maraini's plays have been translated into English. *Mary Stuart, Dialogue Between a Prostitute and Her Client, Dreams of Clytemnestra, and Crime at the Tennis Club* are exceptions and are available in the volume *Only Prostitutes Marry in May: Four Plays*, trans. Dacia Maraini and Rhoda Helfman Kaufman (Toronto: Guernica, 1994). *Lettere d'amore: lettere inedite di Gabriele D'Annunzio rilette in forma teatrale* was published separately in English as *Love Letters: Unedited Letters by Gabriele D'Annunzio Presented as Theatre*, trans. Thomas Simpson (Toronto: Guernica, 2003). We worked together through each draft and revision and are therefore equally responsible for this translation. Our goal was to produce a faithful, colloquial rendering of the original, conveying Maraini's realistic style and each character's particular voice, personality, and register, in contrast to the ornate rhetoric of the opera libretto and the actresses' "ghostly" singing in unison with the record playing on the phonograph. Reproducing Maraini's stark tone in the play and conveying her ability to bring the melodrama uncannily back to life in the context of the Holocaust without being in any way melodramatic, posed a particular challenge. In order to recreate in English the multivoicedness of the play as a creation for the stage, we read and reread each line and each dialogue sequence aloud to each other several times in Italian and in English (including one reading over the phone), making sure that our version sounded truly spoken and in tune with each of the characters' personal registers. We would like to thank Dacia Maraini for her support with this project. We are grateful to Erika Marina Nadir for her help in drafting the first version of this translation.

¹ *Norma '44* refers throughout to Vincenzo Bellini's bel canto era opera *Norma* (1831), but no prior knowledge of this opera is necessary in order to understand the play. The only recording of the opera that would have been available during World War Two is from 1937 and features the soprano Gina Cigna singing the role of Norma. Cigna is in fact mentioned later in the play. The full cast includes Ebe Stignani as Adalgisa, Giovanni Breviaro as Pollione, and Tancredi Pasero as Oroveso, with Vittorio Gui conducting (Orchestra e Coro EIAR, Turin, Cetra label).

him, the bluish smoke can be seen rising slowly. It is an image of almost blissful meditation.

From off stage, a German voice calls insistently.

VOICE: Hauptmann Hoffmann! Hauptmann Hoffmann! Sie sind von der Ober gewünscht!²

Startled, Karl rouses himself and gets up. He turns off the spotlight and the phonograph. Suddenly it is clear that we are inside a gloomy barrack. Harsh voices are heard outside. A drunkard's song. The sound of marching men, of orders yelled out loud. A gun shot. We are in a Nazi concentration camp. As if he had just painfully realized this fact, Karl listens to the voice for a moment. He runs a hand through his hair and then heads toward the exit, furiously kicking a chair that is in his way. The room remains empty. After a while, the door opens and a blindfolded woman with her hands tied behind her back is violently pushed through. She looks frightened, but it is also apparent that she is dealing with the situation with a certain cockiness. The woman is Sara. She moves toward the front of the stage and starts speaking, thinking she is in front of her torturer. Actually, she is alone.

SARA: Sara Di Nola: identification number 5383981. Sara Di Nola: identification number 5383981.

Silence. Sara is waiting for something. For someone to respond. Or hit her. Finally, she hears someone banging on the door and she starts speaking again quickly, her voice filled with anxiety.

SARA: Sara Di Nola. 5383981... 5383981... Train load number 622. From Italy. Nothing to declare... Sara Di Nola. Mother: Spanish. Born in Malaga, December 2, 1910. Nothing to declare. Already tortured twice... Nothing to declare.

Silence. The door opens. Karl enters. Sara listens to the footsteps approaching. They sound like a man's boots. Typical of the SS. Sara waits for a voice or a punch in the face. And then, almost as if the silence were intolerable, she starts reciting again quickly (Meanwhile, Karl looks at her in silence, filled with curiosity).

SARA: I already said I do not know where my father is... Maybe in Mauthausen.³ Anyway, he was not with me up in the mountains. He was at home transcribing early music

² Captain Hoffmann! Captain Hoffmann! You are keeping the commander waiting!

³ Mauthausen-Gusen was a large complex of Nazi concentration camps located in Northern Austria near the region's capital of Linz. The camp was constructed in August 1938 by inmates from Dachau and was used mostly for slave labor in the nearby granite quarries. It was operational from the beginning of the *Anschluss* in 1938 to the very last weeks of World War Two and was one of the last camps to be liberated by the Allies in May 1945. Mauthausen is infamous for its economic output, being both the most profitable camp and the mostly widely exploited by private industries and corporations. For more information, see Geoffrey Megargee, *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Volume I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), <http://iupressonline.iupress.org/view/pm8pf/default>. While Maraini does not explicitly name the camp in which Sara and Lidia are imprisoned, it is clear through her allusions to an all-female camp and to Dr. Carl Clauberg's medical

scores when they took him. My sister too, she's only twelve. My sister too... maybe she's in Mauthausen as well... she's twelve... my father was transcribing early music scores... my father was transcribing...

Karl, who has just walked around Sara, is now standing before her. He gently removes the blindfold.

KARL: *(Speaking almost to himself)* The singer...

SARA: Sara Di Nola. 5383981... From Italy... 5383981...

KARL: You were talking to yourself...

SARA: They always ask me the same things. What do you want from me?

KARL: Already beaten down... Bug bites, bruises, scabs. And yet you have not been here that long. Are those cigarette burns? Don't tell me... I recognize the work of my friend Gustav Luther. Your fingernails, at least he spared those... *(He takes both her hands and observes them carefully.)*

SARA: If you want to torture me, do it now. I hate these long waits.

KARL: What arrogance!

SARA: Why don't you hurry up?

KARL: I am not here to torture you. I am here to propose a musical project.

SARA: What other shameful tricks have you thought up?

KARL: You are a prisoner. And you do not trust your guards. Of course! I would not either. But it just so happens that I am here to help you.

SARA: I do not want to be helped, especially by you.

KARL: Do you know what beauty is, Sara? The only thing capable of transforming the water of simplicity into the wine of intelligence.

SARA: I do not understand.

KARL: In the camp we have a Polish orchestra. It's fantastic. The conductor is a Russian warden. Completely toothless. He's a prodigy. We even have a children's choir. A while ago, we also had a piano duo that came directly from Amsterdam. You have never attended our concerts... I would recommend you do so... Beauty, Sara, is this: "to forget that here too the world / holds many creatures in its earthly snares. / Beauty is propitious to me... it allows me to dream..." Or so says Goethe.⁴

SARA: You make them play, and then when you have had enough, you throw them in the gas chamber.

KARL: I am in charge of all these musical activities; I, a humble, failed musician from Bremen, today a worthless SS officer in this concentration camp.⁵

SARA: I could hate music because you love it.

KARL: Colonel Saidler heard that two Italian singers have arrived in the camp. He wants to hear you sing opera.

SARA: I am not an opera singer.

experiments that she is most likely referring to Ravensbrück. Soviet forces liberated Ravensbrück on April 29–30, 1945.

⁴ An exact source could not be traced for these lines attributed to Goethe, though the theme of beauty and oblivion resonates through many of his works. See for example the tragedy *Faust*, Part 2, Act 3, 9240–44.

⁵ Karl's hometown of Bremen is a direct reference to the tale by the Brothers Grimm, *The Town Musicians of Bremen* (*Die Bremen Stadtmusikanten*).

KARL: Let me hear your voice.
SARA: I used to sing in the theatre. But I am really just an actress.
KARL: Sing for me!

Sara sings, but her voice cracks in the middle of the song and she stops.

KARL: What happened to your voice?
SARA: Destroyed.
KARL: You must concentrate, Sara. You must think of the music. The dead out there; they do not exist. Listen to this.

Karl puts the record of Norma on the phonograph. We hear the powerful, explosive voice of Norma. Act 1, scene 4.

NORMA: Io nei volumi arcani
leggo del cielo, in pagine di morte
della superba Roma è scritto il nome...
Ella un giorno morrà, ma non per voi.
Morrà per vizi suoi,
qual consunta morrà. L'ora aspettate
l'ora fatal che compia il gran decreto
Pace v'intimo... e il sacro vischio io mieto...⁶

Karl interrupts the song, raising the needle from the record.

KARL: Did you hear how her voice soars? Do you know who she is?
SARA: It is La Cigna.⁷
KARL: No, do you know who is the one talking about war?
SARA: Norma.
KARL: Yes, it is Norma. "Della superba Roma in pagine di morte, è scritto il nome. Ella un giorno cadrà, ma non per voi..."⁸ What fierceness! You are the perfect person to play this grand character on stage: eyes like fire, noble gestures, strong mouth, contempt and pride... Yes, you will be Norma. For Colonel Saidler. For me. For the camp... The need for beauty is killing us and you can give us this beauty, Sara.
SARA: You too will fall. And it will not be us who will make you fall. Other powers will, other eagles will come flying from the other side of the ocean.

⁶ "I read in the secret books of heaven: / in pages of death / is written the name of haughty Rome [...] / it will come one day, / but not through you. / She will die of her vices; / she will die, as if wasted away. / Wait for the hour, the fatal hour / that fulfills the great decree. / Peace I enjoy upon you / and I cull the sacred mistletoe" (3). All passages from the libretto, both in Italian and English, are taken from Vincenzo Bellini, *Norma (Lyric Tragedy in Three Acts)*, libretto by Felice Romani, trans. William Weaver (New York: G. Schirmer, 1969) and are followed in parenthesis by the page number. In addition to being an experienced translator of Italian literature, Weaver was also an opera aficionado, having translated many libretti and served as a critic and commentator for the Metropolitan Opera Radio Broadcasts.

⁷ See note 2.

⁸ "In pages of death / is written the name of haughty Rome [...] / it will come one day, / but not through you" (3).

KARL: Perfect! You are already deep in this character's head. Even in this place filled with daily horrors, sometimes miracles can happen.

SARA: And...who would I be singing with?

KARL: With (*he picks up a piece of paper and reads*) with Lidia Cantù, the other Italian who arrived after you. Do you know her?

SARA: What disgusting games! Why not just kill us both now instead of playing this stupid game of cat and mouse?

KARL: Do you have something against mice?

SARA: No, they are certainly nicer than you.

KARL: Our barracks are full of them. They steal bread from the hands of the prisoners. They are very clever. They know when someone is too weak to fight back. Have you seen them?

SARA: What do you want from me?

KARL: Your voice.

SARA: I don't have a voice anymore.

KARL: All right, then... the pretense of a voice. Your stage presence. Do you know how to act?

SARA: Acting is my profession.

KARL: Then you will act. You will imitate. Fake it. Become your character. Nothing more and nothing different than what a normal director would ask of you.

SARA: And when will you send me to the gas chamber, before or after the second night?

KARL: Listen, Sara!

Karl turns to put the record back on.

KARL: Start learning your part...

The aria "Casta Diva" bursts out.

NORMA: Casta diva, che inargenti
queste sacre antiche piante
a noi volgi il bel sembiante
senza nube e senza vel.⁹

There is a knock at the door. Karl turns off the record. The door opens. A woman wearing a prisoner's uniform comes in, clogs on her feet.

KARL: Come in, come in.

Lidia timidly walks forward.

KARL: Norma, meet Adalgisa. Embrace each other.

⁹ "Chaste goddess who / dost silver / these sacred, ancient trees, / turn toward us thy lovely face, / without cloud and without veil" (3).

The two women hug one another in a tight and desperate embrace. It is an embrace of solidarity and recognition, despite the palpable tension and the fear.

KARL: Enough already. I did not say you should cling to each other. It is only supposed to be a greeting. The two female protagonists of the opera meet again. The two are rivals. One will kill the other. But with love. There is so much love in this opera, it can really fill you up.

LIDIA: What do we have to do?

KARL: I already explained to Sara. We must stage *Norma* for the pleasure of Colonel Saidler, who loves Italian music. But above all, he loves the opera, Vincenzo Bellini in particular. I think he went on a pilgrimage to Catania to see the house where Bellini was born. Apparently he was Aryan-looking, tall, blond...

LIDIA: Me... in *Norma*?

KARL: Are you not a singer?

LIDIA: Only a cabaret singer.

KARL: We will make do. We will use the phonograph to help you. Anyway, all Saidler wants is an illusion. The truth horrifies him.

LIDIA: (*Happy, already thinking she might save herself*) Would you like me to sing something for you?

SARA: You sure give in quickly, don't you. What if it is a trap?

LIDIA: Quiet, you jinx! You're so stiff it's like you swallowed a broom. All day long I see nothing but ugly mugs like yours: dark, sullen, dirty. I can't take it anymore.

KARL: You are right Lidia. Even killers have their preferences. They have a soft spot for cheerful people...

Lidia moves purposefully and provocatively toward Karl's chair, softly singing the song "Lili Marlene."

KARL: (*Interrupting her*) Enough, enough. The Colonel does not want this stuff.

LIDIA: I can sing something else. *The Merry Widow*, maybe?¹⁰ Or maybe *Lagrima amare napoletane*. Or Zerlina...¹¹

KARL: No, for goodness' sake! Colonel Saidler does not like Mozart. He considers him a "spineless freemason." Or so he says. He does not like Bach either. He says that Bach was just an insignificant petty bourgeois choir master. Instead, Saidler lives for the glory of the grand opera. Flowers, tears, passion, death. Did you know even Wagner loved Bellini? He hated Verdi, but loved that marvelous Sicilian with a truly apollonian artistic spirit.¹²

¹⁰ *Die lustige Witwe*, operetta by Franz Lehar (1905).

¹¹ Zerlina is a character from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's two-act opera *Don Giovanni*, with libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte (1787). Zerlina is the fiancée of the peasant Masetto. *Lagrima amare napoletane* refers to classic Neapolitan dialect folk songs.

¹² While generally disdainful of the shortcomings of Italian opera, Richard Wagner was an admirer of Bellini, and of *Norma* in particular. Wagner conducted *Norma* as an apprentice in Riga in the late 1830s, and wrote extensively and passionately about the Sicilian composer. He is quoted as saying: "Among all Bellini's creations, *Norma* is the richest in the profoundly realistic way in which true melody is united with intimate passion." See Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 237. For more on Wagner's relationship with Bellini see David Kimbell, *Norma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 92-94.

LIDIA: Okay then...*Norma*... why not? I can do anything.

KARL: (*Singing in a low voice*) “Meco all’altar di Venere / Era Adalgisa in Roma, / cinta di bende candide, / sparse di fior le chiome...”¹³ We must dress her in white, her hair must be covered in flowers.

LIDIA: And when do we start?

KARL: Right away. Or tomorrow. Around here, time does not matter. Or maybe it matters too much. The interesting thing about this place is that nothing ever stays the same. Hate becomes love. Love, sickness. The present becomes the past. The past suddenly becomes the seed of the future. An invaluable experiment... Or so says our Colonel, who is always claiming he has a particular grasp on the future.

SARA: A butcher’s future, Captain Hoffmann.

KARL: You are so dogmatic, Sara. You use moral categories as if they were rules from the multiplication table. But maybe this makes you similar to Norma. Norma was like that too. A magnificent Druid priestess convinced of her own truths.

LIDIA: I’m not familiar with the story of Norma, Captain Hoffmann. Who is Adalgisa?

KARL: An Italian who does not know the story of *Norma*? Colonel Saidler would consider that a perversion. It would be like a Jew who does not know the story of Moses.

SARA: It is a sentimental story, very banal. The conqueror falls in love with the conquered... The victim with the torturer and the torturer with the victim. Romantic fantasies without any foundation.

KARL: The Romans conquer Gaul. Norma, the daughter of Oroveso, high priestess of the Druids, falls in love with Pollione, proconsul of Rome in Gaul.

LIDIA: And who will play Pollione?

KARL: I will.

SARA: Since when do the SS mix with prisoners? Isn’t any relationship, even verbal, prohibited?

KARL: We are the exception to that rule.

LIDIA: And does Pollione fall in love with Norma?

KARL: (*Always slightly ironic, didactic, detached*) Yes, they fall in love. But secretly. Norma is sworn to chastity. No one can know. And besides, what would people think? To fall in love with the one you are supposed to kill... for Pollione she was a traitor. But love, as Virgil says, conquers all. *Omnia vincit amor*. Is that not true?

LIDIA: And Adalgisa?

KARL: Adalgisa, due to the laws of the geometry of love so dear to Goethe, also falls in love with Pollione.¹⁴

LIDIA: (*Childlike, participating; truly interested*) And Pollione falls in love with Adalgisa?

KARL: Yes, Pollione falls in love with Adalgisa. And this will be his ruin.

LIDIA: And what will he do? Will he tell Norma?

¹³ “With me, at the altar of Venus, / was Adalgisa in Rome, / swathed in white veils, / her hair decked with flowers” (2).

¹⁴ This is the first of several allusions, both direct and indirect, to Goethe’s novel *Elective Affinities* (1809). Goethe bases his novel on the metaphor of erotic attraction being regulated by the laws of chemical affinity. He considers the shifting romantic relationships and complex triangulations outlined in the text to be experimental in nature. For more information, see Astrida Tantillo, *Goethe’s Elective Affinities and the Critics* (Rochester: Camden House, 2001).

KARL: No, he does not tell Norma because he is afraid of her. Or because he still loves her. It is not clear. He eventually decides to run away with Adalgisa, but Norma discovers the deception. It will seem like she wants to denounce them.

LIDIA: Does she denounce them or not?

SARA: It is a revolting story.

KARL: (*Responding to Lidia*) So it seems. Up until the last moment when she unexpectedly denounces herself.

LIDIA: And Pollione?

KARL: Thrilled by the danger, Pollione rekindles his love for her, deciding to die by her side. Troppo tardi t'ho conosciuta... / Sublime donna io t'ho perduta¹⁵

SARA: (*Sarcastically*) Yes, really exciting.

KARL: We must win over Sara. It will probably not be easy. What do you say, Lidia?

LIDIA: Can you give us more to eat? That watery soup with three beans floating in it is a joke.

KARL: You will eat more if you work well.

SARA: They will think we are spies. Here, only spies and guards get better treatment.

KARL: No one will think anything. What should the dead think?

SARA: They are more alive than me.

KARL: Have you seen their eyes? They are filled with death even though they are alive. Do you know how long the average lifespan is in the camp? Three months. Those who are still alive see in the others the reflection of their own death. And they try not to look at it.

LIDIA: They're giving us a way out, Sara. You should thank him.

SARA: I don't trust it.

KARL: Norma would not either. You are just like you. And Medea would not trust me either. It is not by chance that Bellini put a knife in her hand and she took it to her two children—note, two children, like those of Medea and Jason—with the intent of killing them in their sleep.

SARA: Don't try to hide behind myth, Captain Hoffmann. You will never succeed in hiding yourself.

A voice from outside calls the captain

VOCE: Hauptmann Hoffmann, Hauptmann...

KARL: I have to go. Memorize your lines. I will come back and bring you something to eat.

Karl leaves. The two women remain alone.

SARA: It's a trick. A ridiculous trick. They always do it like this. They enjoy deceiving you. When they see you have some confidence, that you are allowing yourself to hope, they hit you even harder.

LIDIA: You're wrong. I feel like it's true this time. This man is different from the other SS. Don't you realize that he's not comfortable in his own skin? He doesn't like working as a torturer. He's looking for something that gets him out... and this is it, for him, for us...

SARA: I do not believe it. I've been here longer than you, Lidia.

¹⁵ "Ah! too late I have known you [...] / sublime woman, I have lost you" (16).

LIDIA: But let's try. What does it matter? We've got nothing left to lose.
SARA: I saw a woman grasping her screaming baby. The SS smiled at her. She calmed down. He said, "Now you go take a shower to get rid of the bugs. The baby, you see, I will give to that blonde woman, she is a nurse. She'll wash and take care of him. When you get out of the shower, we'll give him back to you." The woman calmly went into the showers with the other women. The guards locked the door. Then they let out the gas. In a few minutes, they were all dead. A moment later, the baby ended up on the pile of corpses. Shot to death.
LIDIA: Don't think about it, Sara. Don't think about it. The mind focuses on pain just like the tongue always finds the sore tooth. The pain won't go away. The pain will stay. You need to forget about it. You need to find a distraction.
SARA: It is a trick, Lidia. If you smile, they kill you. That's how they do it.

Karl comes back with two pieces of bread and a large blue magician's cloak.

KARL: I only found this... and this (*he turns so that the cloak opens fully*) for Norma. A cloak fit for a queen.
LIDIA: And nothing for me?
KARL: We will find other costumes. Beautiful ones. I swear, the production will be complete.

Karl goes to the phonograph. He puts on the record. Act 1, scene 3: the chorus announces the arrival of Norma.

KARL: (*Citing, always with a slight touch of irony and sadness*)
Norma viene: le cinge la chioma
la verbena ai misteri sacrata,
in sua man come luna falcata
l'aurea falce diffonde splendor¹⁶

Sara, come down from there, walk toward me.

Sara reluctantly obeys.

KARL: Walk... walk taller, like royalty...

Ella viene: e la stella di Roma
Sbigottita si copre di un velo¹⁷

You must blind them with splendor... you must be mysterious... you must enchant...
(*He grabs the cloak and puts it on her shoulders. Norma becomes truly regal.*)

L'ampio mantel druidico

¹⁶ "Norma comes: her hair wreathed with sacred verbena, / in her hand, like a sickle moon, / the gold sickle spreads its brightness" (3).

¹⁷ "She comes, and the star of Rome, / aghast, is covered with a veil" (3).

Come un vapor l'ingombra...¹⁸

(To Lidia) Turn on the light please. Put the spot on Sara. Quickly!

Lidia obeys. The theatrical effect is immediate. Norma begins to assume her role.

KARL: And now, sing!

SARA: I can't.

KARL: Sing!

SARA: *(She reluctantly obeys, following the phonograph with her own voice. Little by little, her participation becomes more evident.)*

NORMA: Io nei volumi arcani
leggo del Cielo, in pagine di morte
della superba Roma è scritto il nome:
Ella un giorno morrà: ma non per voi.
Morrà per vizi suoi.
Quale consunta morrà. L'ora aspettate,
l'ora fatal che compia il gran decreto.
Pace v'intimo... e il sacro vischio io mieto...¹⁹

KARL: *(Reading the stage directions from the libretto)* "She cuts the mistletoe: the priestesses gather it in rush baskets. Norma comes forward and holds her arms up to the sky. The moon shines in all its brightness. All prostrate themselves." Norma, what are you waiting for?

Norma comes forward and holds her arms up to the sky. The theme from Casta diva explodes. Sara sings with desperate force. Little by little she becomes Norma.

NORMA: Casta diva, che inargenti
queste sacre antiche piante,
a noi volgi il bel sembante
senza nube e senza vel.
Tempra tu de' cori ardenti,
tempra ancora lo zelo audace.
Spargi in terra quella pace
Che regnar tu fai nel ciel...²⁰

Meanwhile, Karl kneels at her feet. When she finishes the song, he and Lidia run to embrace her, covering her in kisses. Sara does not know whether to respond with joy or frustration. In the end, she responds with contentment, even if they can tell she is

¹⁸ "The full, druidic cloak / enfolds her like a mist" (2).

¹⁹ "I read in the secret books of heaven: / in pages of death / is written the name of haughty Rome [...] / it will come one day, / but not through you. / She will die of her vices; / she will die, as if wasted away. / Wait for the hour, the fatal hour / that fulfills the great decree. / Peace I enjoy upon you [...] / and I cull the sacred mistletoe" (3).

²⁰ "Chaste goddess who / dost silver / these sacred, ancient trees, / turn toward us thy lovely face, / without cloud and without veil [...] / temper in these ardent hearts, / temper still the bold zeal, / spread upon earth that peace / which thou dost cause to reign in heaven" (3).

uncomfortable.

Lidia gives her some bread. She bites into it hungrily. The two women eat, laughing and crying uncontrollably.

Karl watches them amusedly from across the room, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

KARL: Now go, back to the barracks! If you do not leave, Luther will be angry. See you tomorrow. Go, go...

The two women leave, still chewing on the bread.

KARL: Wait! Sara, can you stay for a moment?

Sara stops by the door. Karl approaches her and takes the cloak from her shoulders. But he removes it slowly, with an air of tenderness. Then Sara exits. He remains alone. He recites a poem.

KARL: The lost yet staring eye walks in the dark
it looks behind: the door is closed.
Who will calm you?
my pained heart
that has lost too much...
What lucky day chases away the night
and wakes me from my mortal sleep?
it is a holiday
and in her sweet arms I felt love.²¹

He gets up slowly and puts away the record. He puts out his cigarette on the sole of his boot. He turns off the lights and exits.

Darkness. Sounds from the camp. Intermittent light cuts the darkness of the room. Orders are yelled in German. A dog barks.

Light. A day has passed. The door opens. Sara looks in. She enters alone. She looks around. She puts on the cloak and does a turn. At that moment, Karl enters and takes a deep bow before her.

²¹ Karl's passage is a pastiche of several lines from different texts by Goethe, including the second and third poem of the late "Trilogy of Passion" (*Trilogie der Leidenschaft*, 1824) and the early novel *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, written in 1786, and discovered only in 1910). In the first poem of the "Trilogy of Passion," Goethe evokes, fifty years after *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des jungen Werther*), the ghost of the young man who had killed himself for love. Lines 1-2 of the passage recited by Karl are from the Trilogy's second poem, "Elegy," also known as "The Marienbad Elegy," about the joy and suffering of a love passion experienced late in life; lines 3-5 are from the final poem, "Reconciliation," about the esthetic ideal and how the sense of loss and despair may be resolved by the power and beauty of music. The remaining four lines are from the verse drama by Wilhelm recited by Amelia at the beginning of chapter 5 of the novel.

KARL: How is my sweet Sara this morning?

SARA: Do not bow and ask me how I am. I hate this hypocrisy.

KARL: Are you choking on something?

SARA: This whole camp makes me choke, I can't take it anymore. Am I supposed to swallow you too?

KARL: *(He starts to speak in German, then he stops and begins translating)*

Da kamen Nachtgespenster...
 Then the night ghosts came
 The night ghosts with their long faces
 Passed me by
 Not worrying if I was wise or foolish.²²

Do you know who wrote that?

SARA: I don't care.

KARL: Goethe, my father.

SARA: Your quotations are out of place.

KARL: Where is your friend Lidia?

SARA: Luther sent her out to chop wood.

KARL: She did not come out with you?

SARA: No.

KARL: Jealousy is a gift from the devil. That Luther, if he could, would kill me.

SARA: And how do you not get blood on your hands, Captain Hoffmann?

KARL: Simple. I have a special place in Saidler's heart and in turn, he has a place in Himmler's. Who, as is well known, sits at the heart of history.

SARA: I did not know Saidler had a heart. A heart strong enough to hold you.

KARL: A heart the size of a bean, maybe. But he does have one. I can guarantee it. And that bean knows that I am not a torturer, a tooth puller or even a gravedigger. And anyway, if he does not like it this way, I will get out of here.

SARA: Where? To another camp?

KARL: No, where the shadows are deeper and the days equal the night, as Wagner says. I have already tried twice. But they grabbed me by the hair. They want me to live, Sara, to be alive and productive. Germany must be desperate if they came to look for me in a hospital. They put me in a uniform and brought me here.

SARA: And what were you doing in a hospital?

KARL: What does one do in a hospital? Waste away in bed until someone notices.

²² Karl cites Goethe's poem "Schlechter Trost" (Small Comfort) which comes from his late anthology of lyric poems *West-östlicher Divan* (*Poems of the West and the East*). Written between 1814 and 1819, *West-östlicher Divan* is divided into twelve books and is considered along with *Faust* to be one of Goethe's most important and personal works. *Schlechter Trost* is from book three of the anthology, *Uschk Nameh, Buch der Liebe*. For a bilingual German-English edition, see *Poems of the West and the East*, trans. John Whaley (New York: P. Lang, 1998).

SARA: This is the first time that something about you is beginning to interest me.

KARL: I love dizziness and excess, Sara. Also crime. I have killed, but only enemies in war. I do not love systematic butchery. The daily life of crime makes me vomit. Especially the daily torture and hangings.

SARA: So is that why you enlisted in the SS?

KARL: Every night the sound of buckets being carried to the outhouse. Have you heard that sound? Every time a full bucket of urine goes by, I wake up. It seems like they rub against the barracks' tin walls on purpose. In my mind, I can see the urine spilling. And then they start their tiresome, gloomy march again. I cannot stand that my nights are measured by buckets full of piss.

SARA: I am among those who take out the bucket, when it is my turn, like the others.

KARL: To each his own punishment.

SARA: I do not think you can compare your punishment to ours, Captain Hoffmann.

KARL: I hate this war, I hate this camp, I hate these smells. Do you not believe me, Sara?

SARA: No.

KARL: I did my part. I was wounded. I thought I had been forgotten in that hospital. And instead, here I am.... By now, they must be enlisting children. I am not cut out to be a torturer.

SARA: But here you are. And it seems that you are not doing much against the war or against the torturers.

KARL: The first time I saw those trains filled with thousands of Jewish women stripped, kicked, and shoved, I felt ill. Then, when they assigned me to patrol the ovens, I ceased to be alive. Now, I stand before you a compliant corpse in uniform.

SARA: For a corpse, you seem quite healthy and plump. You even smell good. What scent does the corpse of Captain Karl Hoffmann wear?

KARL: Why are you always so sarcastic, Sara?

SARA: I would prefer not to talk to you at all. This conversation is wearing me out. Just tell me what you want me to do and I will do it.

KARL: Sara, did I tell you that the first time I heard of you, I was choked up with emotion? "There is an Italian in barrack 61, Hoffmann, they tell me she sings. Go give her a look...." I do not know why, Sara, but I knew right away that I would love you without ever having seen you.

SARA: Don't be ridiculous.

KARL: *What is love? 'Tis not hereafter?* Do you understand English?

SARA: No.

KARL: What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
 Present mirth hath present laughter;
 What's to come is still unsure:
 In delay there lies no plenty;
 Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
 Youth's a stuff will not endure.
 Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night*. Another one of my fathers. Let's call him an uncle. My Uncle William.

SARA: If he were alive, you would put him in the gas chamber as a homosexual.

KARL: When I saw you, Sara, my pulse quickened. I am not talking about your looks. Down at barrack 15 is the brothel, maybe you know; it is full of beautiful girls... And we do not even pay. What fascinates me about you, Sara is, well... I am not sure. It is you.

SARA: Every relationship between Aryans and Jews is punishable by death.

KARL: I do not care. It has been nights since I have slept.

SARA: The bucket, you already told me.

KARL: Not the bucket... you. I have been waiting for you for years, Sara.

SARA: You have been waiting for me, or a childish dream?

KARL: I have been waiting for you, with that menacing face, those fierce eyes, that limpid voice, that cruel smile.

SARA: You are in love with an idea. I'm different, Captain Hoffmann, quite different. More stupid, more tender, more vulnerable than you might think. I am mad and not that strong on my feet.

KARL: Sara, I love you.

SARA: I feel like spitting on you.

KARL: May I kiss you?

SARA: I don't kiss corpses.

KARL: May I kiss your hand?

SARA: I am not a lady, my hand is dirty. It would rather slap you than be kissed.

KARL: May I kiss your foot?

SARA: Where I come from they say that a happy woman is so light she can walk on egg shells without breaking them. At this point, I can crush rocks.

KARL: I would kiss your foot covered in sores, hardened with calluses, made heavy by the clogs... Sara, I am only asking for a word of understanding.

SARA: It is outside the realm of possibility Captain Hoffmann. You can ask of me obedience, but not understanding. Frankly, I don't understand. And I don't want to understand.

There is a knock at the door. Karl fixes his hair. He assumes an air of seriousness and dignity.

KARL: Enter!

Lidia enters.

LIDIA: That asshole sent me digging for wood under the snow with bare hands. And if I stopped, he had me beaten.

SARA: Lidia!

Sara rushes over to her. She grasps her hands and warms them with her own. She kisses them tenderly.

LIDIA: You promised me something to eat, Captain Hoffmann. I can't live on hot water and turnips.

KARL: I will go get something from the mess hall.

Karl leaves. Lidia and Sara continue to keep each other warm.

LIDIA: Do you think they will send us to be gassed?
SARA: I don't know.
LIDIA: I saw a group leave this morning. Naked women, children with swollen stomachs, sick old women.
SARA: As long as Saidler wants to hear *Norma*, they will probably keep us alive.
LIDIA: You know, I kind of like Captain Hoffmann. There's something soft and subtle about him... something trustworthy. He's not like the others. Who knows where he's from.
SARA: From Bremen. He is a failed musician, or that's how he put it. He was wounded in the war and spent eight months in the hospital... from there, they took him and brought him here to us.... At least that's what he says.
LIDIA: You're hard on him. I'm jealous. I could never be like that. We shouldn't feel sympathy for our executioners, right?
SARA: No, no we should not.

Karl comes back with some soup. The two women hastily and greedily start eating.

KARL: Okay, by now Norma suspects that Pollione no longer loves her. She confides in her servant. She is afraid he will go back to Rome, leaving her alone with the children... Are you ready, Sara? Norma is there with the knife in hand, and like Medea thinks of killing them in order to kill their traitor of a father... but right at that moment, she hears someone arrive. Someone is coming, says the servant. *Va'...li cela*,²³ urges Norma. And who does she see coming toward her in the darkness of the temple? Adalgisa. The young Adalgisa in her white headdress... Speaking of which, I brought bandages for you... try to tie them around your head.

Karl hands Lidia some of the bandages from the infirmary. Slightly disgusted, Lidia wraps the bandages around her head like a mummy.

KARL: Not like a mummy... softer, looser, more floating (*he adjusts them for her*)... there we are. Now you, Adalgisa, confide in Norma. She will tell you that she loves a man and is afraid of being punished by the god. She turns to her friend and priestess to be acquitted or absolved. "How was this flame ignited?" Norma asks her, and she: "By a single glance." "Anch'io, anch'io arsi così / l'incanto suo fu il mio,"²⁴ says Norma. And with sweetness, she dries her tears... with a gentle gesture... like this... and then: "Dai voti tuoi ti libero / i tuoi legami infrango / al caro oggetto unita / vivrai felice ancor."²⁵ Okay, do we want to rehearse this duet? Norma: with trepidation, generous... Adalgisa is frightened, submissive, but both women are taken by the same amorous enchantment. Are you ready?

Karl puts on the record. Meanwhile Norma throws off the blue cloak. Adalgisa is veiled with the bandages. The music rises. Act 1, scene 8.

²³ "Go... hide them" (6). (This refers to Norma's two children, whom she has the nurse hide).

²⁴ "I myself burned thus. / Her spell was mine" (7).

²⁵ "I free you from your vows, / I break your bonds. / United to the object of your love, / you shall yet live happily" (7).

NORMA: Adalgisa!
 ADALGISA: Alma, costanza!²⁶
 NORMA: T'inoltra o giovinetta
 t'inoltra. E perché tremi? Udii che grave
 a me segreto palesar tu voglia...²⁷
 ADALGISA: È ver. Ma deh, ti spoglia
 della celeste austerità che splende
 negli occhi tuoi... dammi coraggio, ond'io
 senza alcun velo ti palesi il core.²⁸
 NORMA: Mi abbraccia e parla. Che ti affligge?²⁹
 ADALGISA: Amore...³⁰

Cut part of the duet and come to "Oh! Rimembranza"

NORMA: Oh! Rimembranza, io fui
 così rapita al sol mirarlo in volto.³¹
 ADALGISA: Ma non mi ascolti tu.³²
 NORMA: Seguita... t'ascolto.³³
 ADALGISA: Sola furtiva al tempio
 io l'aspettai sovente
 ed ogni dì più fervida
 crebbe la fiamma ardente.³⁴
 NORMA: Io stessa... arsi così,
 l'incanto suo fu il mio...³⁵
 ADALGISA: Vieni, ei dicea, concedi
 ch'io mi ti prostri ai piedi
 lascia che l'aura io spiri
 de'dolci tuoi sospiri
 del tuo bel crin le anella
 dammi poter baciare...³⁶
 NORMA: Oh! cari accenti,
 così li proferia

²⁶ "Be steadfast, my soul!" (6).

²⁷ "Come in, O maiden, come in. / And why do you tremble? / I heard that you wish to reveal / a serious secret to me" (6).

²⁸ "It is true... / but, ah! Divest yourself / of the celestial austerity / that shines in your eyes... / Give me courage, / so that I without any veil, / may reveal my heart to you" (6).

²⁹ "Embrace me, and speak. / What distresses you?" (6).

³⁰ "Love" (6).

³¹ "Oh memory! / I was thus transported / by just looking at his countenance" (7).

³² "But... are you not listening to me?" (7).

³³ "Continue... I am listening to you" (7).

³⁴ "Alone, furtive, at the temple / I often waited for him; / and every day more intense / grew the burning flame" (7).

³⁵ "I myself burned thus... / Her spell was mine" (7).

³⁶ "Let me breathe the air ... / of your sweet sighs, / give me the locks of your lovely hair, / give me, so that I may kiss them" (7).

così trovava del mio cor la via.³⁷

ADALGISA: Dolci qual arpa armonica
 m'eran le sue parole,
 negli occhi suoi sorridere
 vedea più bello un sole.
 Io fui perduta e il sono
 d'uopo ho del tuo perdono
 deh, tu mi reggi e guida
 me rassicura, o sgrida,
 salvami da me stessa,
 salvami, salvami dal mio cor.³⁸

NORMA: Ah! tergi il pianto
 te ancor non lega eterno nodo all'ara.
 Ah! sì, fa core, e abbracciami
 perdono e ti compiango
 dai voti tuoi ti libero
 i tuoi legami io frango
 al caro oggetto unita
 vivrai felice ancor...³⁹

ADALGISA: Ripeti, o ciel, ripetimi
 sì lusinghieri accenti.
 Per te per te s'acquetano
 i lunghi miei tormenti.
 Tu rendi a me la vita
 se non è colpa amor.⁴⁰

At the end of the duet, Karl claps his hands and the two women, seemingly happy, embrace.

KARL: Enough for today. We have to interrupt the rehearsals. This should make Bellini happy! Go back to the barracks and do what Luther and Mrs. Eckart tell you. I do not want them to have any reason to pull you both out of rehearsals.

Lidia exits first in a hurry. Sara remains behind to take off the cloak. Karl moves closer to her.

KARL: Sara, remember what I told you. My every thought is yours. In every moment of the day and night I will be close to you.

³⁷ "Oh dear words! / Thus he uttered them... / thus he found the way to my heart" (7).

³⁸ "Sweet as a harmonious harp / were his words to me; / I saw a more beautiful sun / smiling in his eyes. / I was lost, and I still am. / I need your forgiveness. / Ah! Support me and guide me. / Reassure or reproach me, / save me from myself, / save me, save me from my heart" (7).

³⁹ "Ah! Dry your weeping: / an eternal bond does not tie you / to the altar. / Ah! Yes, take heart and embrace me. / I forgive you and sympathize with you. / I free you from your vows, / I break your bonds. / United to the object of your love, / you shall yet live happily" (7).

⁴⁰ "Repeat, O heaven, / repeat such pleasing words: / through you, through you, are soothed / my long torments. / You restore life to me, / if love is not a sin, / you restore" (8).

SARA: You want to torment me even when we are apart?
KARL: Enough to infect you. Love is contagious.
SARA: It would be easier if I caught scarlet fever, typhus, tuberculosis, diphtheria... these are the diseases of the camp.

Lidia peeks in through the door.

LIDIA: Sara! They're doing roll call, run!
SARA: Wait for me, Lidia, I'll come with you.

Karl remains alone again. He picks up the libretto of Norma.

KARL: *(Reading)* "Culla ei non ebbe in Gallia... / Roma gli è patria..."⁴¹ Captain Hoffmann, get yourself two wings, even tattered and worn out, two wings so that you can fly away. *(He turns off the lights and exits. Sounds of the camp: a shooting, a sad choir of women, the scream of a little girl, dogs barking).*

The lights turn back on. A day has passed. Lidia enters hungrily eating a boiled potato. She sits on the ground and waits. Karl enters.

KARL: What about Sara?
LIDIA: I haven't seen her. Actually, I wanted to tell you, Captain Hoffman, I'm worried about her.
KARL: Why?
LIDIA: The woman in charge of the barrack told me that this morning they sent her to Doctor Clauberg. I don't know him, but the others told me that when you go to doctor Clauberg, you come back maimed, *if you come back...*⁴²
KARL: *(Sarcastically)* Doctor Clauberg conducts experiments on women for "the good of humanity." Perhaps the deported Sara does not want to sacrifice herself for the good of humanity.
LIDIA: Please, Captain Hoffmann, don't joke! What can we do for her?
KARL: I will go look for her. But first we must rehearse for at least an hour. If he does not hear music, that pig Luther can denounce me for not doing my work. He is just waiting to.
LIDIA: What should we rehearse?
KARL: Considering it is only the two of us, the scene with Pollione and Adalgisa. Act one, scene six.
LIDIA: I have so little desire to sing today.
KARL: A good actor rehearses even when he does not want to. Is that not true?

⁴¹ "His birthplace was not in Gaul... / Rome is his homeland" (8).

⁴² Carl Clauberg was a Nazi physician infamous for conducting gynecological and other medical experiments on female prisoners, including forced sterilization via formaldehyde injections. While most of his experiments were conducted at Block 10 of Auschwitz, he was moved to Ravensbrück in 1945. Clauberg was captured by Soviet troops during the camp's liberation on April 30, 1945 and was subsequently arrested and tried in 1948. For more information on medical experimentation in concentration camps, see Robert Lifton, *The Nazi doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

LIDIA: At roll call, naked, three hours on our feet with the wind cutting our skin. I had to hit my feet to warm them up again. And now I have two wounds under the sole, where the nails in my clogs stick out.

KARL: (*Sardonically*) It is for your own good, Lidia, to take your mind off things. Small pains cancel out the big ones. It is an intensive cure of small pains in order to make the bigger ones go away. This is ancient wisdom. If you were not distracted by these “little problems,” like thin cotton jackets in the snow, those clogs that make your feet bleed, the bugs that itch like mad, how could you accept being separated from your children, threatened by death, subjected to medical experiments?

They hear German voices coming from outside.

KARL: Let’s rehearse, quickly now. (*He hurriedly puts on the record and follows the voice of Pollione.*)

POLLIONE: Va, crudele, al dio spietato
offri in dono il sangue mio.
tutto, ah, tutto ei sia versato,
ma lasciarti non poss’io,
no, non posso!
sol promessa al dio tu fosti,
ma il tuo core a me si diede.
Ah! Non sai quel che mi costi
perch’io mai rinunzi a te.⁴³

ADALGISA: E tu pure, ah, tu non sai
quanto costi a me dolente!
all’altare che oltraggiai
lieta andava ed innocente.⁴⁴

Adalgisa stops, removing the needle from the record player.

KARL: What is worrying you? Sara?

LIDIA: No, Captain Hoffmann. Right now, at this moment, I’m thinking about you.

KARL: About me?

LIDIA: I wanted to tell you... that...

KARL: (*slightly annoyed*) yes?

LIDIA: I wanted to tell you that I believe I’m in love with you.

KARL: Who gave you permission to fall in love? Do you not realize that you are a Jew, condemned to die?

LIDIA: Do you mean to say I’m unworthy of you?

KARL: On the contrary, I am unworthy of you.

⁴³ “Go, cruel one, to your pitiless god / offer as a gift my blood; / all, ah! let all of it be shed, / but I cannot leave you, / no, no, ah! I cannot, / You were only promised to the god... / but your heart gave itself to me... / ah! you do not know what it would cost me / to give you up” (4-5).

⁴⁴ “And you too, ah! you do not know, / how much it costs me, suffering! / To the altar I have violated / I went happy and innocent” (5).

LIDIA: When I wake up in my bunk at night and feel the frozen feet of my four bedmates, when I get up in the dark to pee in the bucket, when I look for fleas in my shirt, when I leave every morning at four, wearing only this cotton jacket in the snow, when I walk, my feet sinking into the mud, I only have one thought in mind....

KARL: Kill that thought, Lidia. Kill it. Love is not possible between Captain Hoffmann of the SS and Lidia, the Italian opera singer detained in this camp. Enough now, let's get back to rehearsal. Go ahead, Lidia, start where you left off.

Lidia reluctantly places the needle back on the record and begins to sing.

ADALGISA: Il pensiero al cielo s'erge
e il mio dio vedeva in ciel...
Or per me spergiura e rea
cielo e dio ricopre un vel.⁴⁵

POLLIONE: Ciel più puro e Dei migliori
T'offro in Roma, ov'io mi reco.⁴⁶

ADALGISA: Parti forse?⁴⁷

POLLIONE: Ai nuovi albori.⁴⁸

ADALGISA: Parti! ed io?⁴⁹

POLLIONE: Tu vieni meco.
De' tuoi riti è Amor più santo?
A lui cedi, ah, cedi a me.⁵⁰

ADALGISA: Ah! non dirlo.⁵¹

POLLIONE: Il dirò tanto, il dirò tanto
che ascoltato io sia da te.⁵²

ADALGISA: Ah non dirlo!⁵³

POLLIONE: Ah, deh vieni
vieni a me.⁵⁴

ADALGISA: Ah non dirlo.⁵⁵

POLLIONE: Vieni in Roma, ah, vieni, o cara,
dov'è amore è gioia è vita
inebbriam nostr'alme a gara
del contento a cui ne invita
voce in cor parlar non senti,
che promette eterno ben?

⁴⁵ "My thought I raised to heaven, / and in heaven I saw my god! / Now for me, false to my oath and guilty, / a veil covers heaven and god" (5).

⁴⁶ "A purer heaven and better gods / I offer you in Rome, where I am going" (5).

⁴⁷ "You leave perhaps?" (5).

⁴⁸ "At dawn..." (5).

⁴⁹ "You leave!... and I?... " (5).

⁵⁰ "You are coming with me. / Love is holier than your rites... / give way to him, ah! give way to me" (5).

⁵¹ "Ah! do not say it..." (5).

⁵² "I will say it so much, I will say it so much / that I will be heard by you" (5).

⁵³ "Ah! do not say it..." (5).

⁵⁴ "Ah! Give way! Give way to me" (5).

⁵⁵ "Ah! do not say it..." (5).

Ah! Dà fede a' dolci accenti,
 sposo tuo stringi al sen.⁵⁶

ADALGISA: Ciel! Così parlar l'ascolto
 sempre, ovunque, al tempio istesso
 con quegli occhi, con quel volto,
 fin sull'ara il veggio impresso.
 ei trionfa del mio pianto,
 del mio duol vittoria ottien.
 Ciel! Mi toglì al dolce incanto,
 O l'error perdona almen.⁵⁷

POLLIONE: Adalgisa!

ADALGISA: Ah! mi risparmi...
 tua pietà maggior cordoglio.⁵⁸

POLLIONE: Adalgisa, e vuoi lasciarmi?⁵⁹

ADALGISA: Io... ah! non posso... seguir ti voglio.⁶⁰

POLLIONE: Qui... domani all'ora istessa.
 Verrai tu?⁶¹

ADALGISA: Ne fo promessa.⁶²

POLLIONE: Giura.⁶³

ADALGISA: Giuro.⁶⁴

POLLIONE: Oh! mio contento
 ti rammenta.⁶⁵

ADALGISA: Ah! mi rammento
 al mio dio sarò spergiura
 ma fedele a te sarò.⁶⁶

POLLIONE: L'amor tuo mi rassicura
 e il tuo dio sfidar saprò.⁶⁷

Meanwhile Sara has arrived and is sitting on the ground as if in pain, she claps her hands and smiles.

Karl and Lidia bow as if they were in front of an audience.

⁵⁶ "Come to Rome, ah! come, O dear one, / where there is love, where there is love and joy and life! / let us intoxicate our souls, vying, / with the happiness, to which we are bidden... / Do you not hear a voice speak in your heart, / which promises eternal love? / Ah! trust the sweet words, / as your husband, clasp / me to your bosom" (5).

⁵⁷ "Heaven! I hear him speak like this / always, everywhere, in the temple itself... / With those eyes, with that countenance, / even on the altar I see him imprinted... / He triumphs over my weeping, / over my grief he achieves victory... / Heaven! Free me from the sweet spell / or pardon my wrong-doing at least" (5).

⁵⁸ "Ah! Let your pity spare me / greater suffering" (5).

⁵⁹ "Adalgisa! And do you want to leave me?" (5).

⁶⁰ "I... ah!... I cannot / I want to follow you" (5).

⁶¹ "Here, at the same hour tomorrow, / will you come?" (5).

⁶² "I promise it" (6).

⁶³ "Swear" (6).

⁶⁴ "I swear" (6).

⁶⁵ "Oh! My happiness! / Remember..." (6).

⁶⁶ "Ah! I remember... / To my god I will be faithless, / but I will be faithful to you" (6).

⁶⁷ "Reassure me of your love. / and I will be able to defy your God" (6).

Lidia and Sara are about to leave.

KARL: Sara!

SARA: Yes?

KARL: Stay for a minute, please? I have to tell you something about your character. Lidia, you can go.

Sara stops uncertainly. Lidia leaves.

KARL: How are you, Sara?

SARA: As good as someone can be who has been subjected to the “surgical whim.”

KARL: What did that vulture Clauberg do to you?

SARA: I don’t know. He injected something into my breast and now it is all swollen and bruised.

KARL: I know a Polish doctor in the camp, he is very good. He’s not a butcher like the others. Do you want to go see him?

SARA: No.

KARL: Do not be so proud, you need to survive.

SARA: For a week I was immobilized in that terrible infirmary with people screaming night and day, people dying of dysentery and typhus. I would close my eyes and listen to myself singing *Norma*. It was the only thing that gave me the will to survive.

KARL: Does that mean you thought about me, Sara?

SARA: Yes. And about our rehearsals together, singing together. It seems almost like an island of happiness in this camp of death.

KARL: Sara, if you could only imagine how long I have waited for you!

SARA: Please, don’t say anything, Captain Hoffmann.

Sara moves closer to Karl. Decisively, she takes his face in her hands and strongly kisses him on the lips. Karl seems stunned with joy. Just as he tries to embrace her, she slips out of reach. She opens the door and leaves. He runs after her, afraid of losing her just when he has found her again.

KARL: Sara!

Silence. The room is empty, the door open. First Sara is heard: the shuffling of her clogs. Then, his boots. After a bit, it is clear he catches up to her and they embrace in the night. Their distorted shadows are visible against the wall of the empty barrack. Then, a voice yells halt. The clogs run, the boots follow. A series of clean, precise shots is heard. Silence.

ACT II

*The same room in the Central Barracks. Ten months have passed. Karl enters carrying costumes. He is nervous. He puts the costumes down off to the side. He picks up a chair and moves it. He puts it back in the same place. He picks up one of the costumes. He throws it to the floor. He picks up another costume.
Lidia enters.*

KARL: Lidia!

They run toward each other. They stand still and look at each other.

KARL: Where is Sara?

LIDIA: I didn't think we would see each other again, Captain Hoffmann...

KARL: I am happy to see you again, Lidia. But what about Sara?

LIDIA: She's coming. She told me she's coming. Aren't you even going to ask me how I am?

KARL: How are you?

LIDIA: Great.

KARL: Did they mistreat you?

LIDIA: No, they didn't mistreat me. I ate delicious things. I also slept a little longer. I only had to have 30 to 40 SS every day.

KARL: *(Sarcastically)* You gave your body for your country, just like the others.

LIDIA: They ate my body, piece by piece... and they are still chewing, chewing...

KARL: What about Sara?

LIDIA: Sara had her baby. I don't know how she did it after they shot at her. She was lucky, as she would say, to have a special place in Colonel Eckart's heart.

KARL: Christa Eckart? The lanky blond with the sad-looking dogface?

LIDIA: Yes, that sad dog. She fixed it so Sara wasn't sent to the gas chamber. She made her the camp choral director. And when the time came she sent her to give birth in the infirmary. And now she is keeping the baby.

KARL: So at least someone is still trying to make a family in this state-run slaughterhouse.

LIDIA: No one knows whose son it is. She didn't even want to tell me. But I think he is Eckart's boyfriend's. That fat guy. Eckart is a complicated woman: she is capable of forcing Sara to sleep with her boyfriend and keep the baby. I have heard her many times say that pregnancy is disgusting.

KARL: Does she know that we are starting rehearsals for *Norma* again?

LIDIA: She knows, she knows. But how are you?

KARL: You mean, after they shot at me?

LIDIA: Yes, that terrible night when we all thought you were dead.

KARL: I bounced back. You know how corpses are. Hard to kill. So tied to their shadows, they return, they always return.

LIDIA: In the brothel... under those beer bellies...

KARL: Don't say you were always thinking about me. That would be unbearable.

LIDIA: They told me about their wives. And I would just listen. The younger ones would scream and scream... as if instead of making love they were disemboweling the

enemy... and then they would cry or vomit on me... I should have had the courage to throw myself on the barbed wire...

KARL: Do not torture yourself... it is your body that wants to live. Not you.

LIDIA: It starts like this: the morning you see the others get in line, naked, with soap in hand and demented faces... they know they are going to get gassed, but they don't want to know... smiling meekly, submissively, sweetly, obscenely... and you look the other way thinking: go to hell with your shitty soap. Then you look around to see if there is something to steal. I've gotten really good at stealing, especially from the weakest, the ones who have given up, who can't make it...

KARL: It is a way to control you, Lidia. It is part of the strategy. They inject you with poison and watch to see how long can survive. How long you can stand it... What level of abjection you can tolerate. This is the heart of the experiment. Actually, you have done well. You have turned into a little hyena.

LIDIA: Great, Captain Hoffmann. I don't give a shit what you say. I want you and I'll have you.

KARL: Here is Sara!

Sara enters. She goes to embrace Lidia. Karl tries to attract her attention.

KARL: Did you see the costumes?

LIDIA: Where did you steal them from?

KARL: Why do you think I stole them?

LIDIA: Because everything in the camp is stolen. You're a gang of thieves.

KARL: You have really changed, Lidia.

LIDIA: And you haven't changed at all.

KARL: Anyway, you guessed it. I did steal them. From a theater in the city that Colonel Saidler had closed for subversive activities.

SARA: A Jewish theatre?

KARL: *(Sarcastically)* I do not know. People who believed in liberty, equality, fraternity. And they were denounced by brothers, crushed by their equals, and killed in the name of liberty.

SARA: Stop fighting. These are real costumes Lidia, real costumes, for a real show.

LIDIA: I'm never putting that stuff on.

KARL: The correct word is: confiscated. But I agree with you. It smells of theft. Legally sanctioned theft.

LIDIA: That bastard Saidler is persistent. I've never seen anything like it. He wanted to stage *Norma* ten months ago... wanted it so badly, like a cat in heat. Then the guards shot at Karl and Sara by mistake. Sara was in the infirmary for two months. She fell in love with some doctor or nurse and had a baby, half-Jewish, half-Aryan. Karl was sent home to suckle his mother's breast. And now, he's back, taken up once again by the scheme of the diabolical colonel who insists, persists with the stubbornness of a mule, on his project of staging a production of *Norma*. Isn't that incredible?

KARL: You can reproach the SS for many things, but you cannot say they lack persistence, fortitude. In fact, I would say it is the one quality that they all have. Fortitude, rock solid, like the saints. They are so persistent in assassinating and stealing that they will surely all go to heaven. God rewards fortitude.

SARA: Spare us your sarcasm, Captain Hoffmann. Why don't we rehearse, seeing as that is why we are here?

KARL: Let's rehearse. You are right, Sara. But your persistence in being sullen is just as bad as Saidler's persistence.

LIDIA: Where do we pick up?

KARL: Okay, Adalgisa has gone to confide in Norma. She said that she loves a man, a foreigner. Norma is stunned; she, too, is in love with a foreigner. She sees in this younger woman those same feelings: "Così rapita al sol mirarlo in volto,"⁶⁸ she says to herself slowly, "io stessa... anch'io arsi così."⁶⁹ So, I would say that at this point you, Sara, stay seated here and Adalgisa kneels at your feet. Since you, Adalgisa, have not yet taken your vows, Norma says, I release you from your vow of fidelity to our God. You may go with your lover. And Adalgisa says, "Ripetimi o ciel ripetimi..."⁷⁰ afraid she has perhaps not understood correctly. "Tu rendi a me la vita se non è colpa amor..."⁷¹ This part is pure honey... let it flow sweetly... right before the storm explodes... because Norma right after this asks her the name of her beloved. And Adalgisa says "il mira,"⁷² pointing him out... And right at that moment Pollione enters. And Norma finally realizes her mistake. And now the storm rages, the deception is revealed. "Oh non tremare, o perfido, no, non tremar per lei, essa non è colpevole, / il malfattor tu sei,"⁷³ yells Norma. Female solidarity wins over jealousy.... Bellini was really naïve.... Okay, Sara. It is your turn. Come on! Put some passion in it!

Meanwhile the women have put on the costumes. The record begins.

NORMA: Tremi tu? e perché?
 O non tremare, o perfido
 no, non tremar per lei,
 essa non è colpevole,
 il malfattor tu sei.
 Trema per te, fellow,
 Pei figli tuoi, per me...⁷⁴

ADALGISA: Che ascolto? ah! deh, parla...
 taci, t'arretti!... ahimè!⁷⁵

NORMA: Oh! di qual sei tu vittima
 crudo e funesto inganno
 Fonte d'eterne lagrime
 egli a te pur dischiuse
 come il mio cor deluse,

⁶⁸ "I was thus transported / by just looking at his countenance" (7).

⁶⁹ "I myself burned like this" (7).

⁷⁰ "Repeat, O heaven, / repeat such pleasing words" (7).

⁷¹ "You restore life to me, / if love is not a sin (7).

⁷² "See him" (8).

⁷³ "Oh do not tremble, / O treacherous man, / ah, do not tremble for her / She is not guilty, / you are the evil-doer" (8).

⁷⁴ "Do you tremble?... And for whom? / Oh, do not tremble / O treacherous man, / ah, do not tremble for her... / She is not guilty, / you are the evil-doer... / tremble for yourself, villain... / tremble for yourself, for your children" (8).

⁷⁵ "What do I hear?... Ah! pray, speak... / You are silent!... you draw back!... alas!" (8).

l'empio il tuo cor tradi.⁷⁶
 ADALGISA: Oh! qual mistero orribile
 trema il mio cor di chiedere,
 trema d'udire il vero...
 tutto comprendo o misera
 tutta la mia sventura
 essa non ha misura
 s'ei m'ingannò così.⁷⁷
 POLLIONE: Norma, de' tuoi rimproveri
 segno non farmi adesso
 deh a quest'afflitta vergine
 sia respirar concesso.
 Copra a quell'alma ingenua
 copra nostr'onte un velo
 giudichi solo il cielo
 qual più di noi fallì.⁷⁸

Karl stops the record.

KARL: And now I have to go. Please put the costumes back. And go back to the barracks.
 LIDIA: To the brothel?
 KARL: Where—I don't know. Where they put you. Hell is full of astounding possibilities.
 LIDIA: I'm not going back there.
 KARL: I will talk to Saidler about it. I guess I am destined to keep my special place in his heart, in spite of my unruliness and treachery. The hearts of men are truly unpredictable, do you not agree, Lidia?
 LIDIA: He owes you an apology after having the guards shoot at you.
 KARL: Saidler has nothing to do with it. It was dark. And I was running toward the fence.
 SARA: I will talk to Eckart, Lidia. She will listen to me. She is also a music lover. She said she will come to hear us.
 LIDIA: If she's in love with you, milk it! Make her spill her guts, Sara, turn her inside out, make mince meat out of her.
 KARL: What a hyena! (*but he says it sweetly*)

Karl exits. Sara and Lidia remove their costumes while chatting.

LIDIA: He said it admiringly, did you notice?
 SARA: What?
 LIDIA: That I'm a hyena. He likes hyenas, I know. Do you think he likes me?

⁷⁶ "Oh! Of what a cruel and dire deceit / are you the victim! / Rather than knowing him, / dying would have been less / harmful for you. / A source of eternal tears / he has disclosed also to you; / as he disappointed my heart, / the wicked man betrayed your heart" (8).

⁷⁷ "Oh, what a horrible mystery! / My heart trembles to ask, / trembles to hear the truth. / I understand all, O wretched me, / all my misfortune... / It is measureless, / if he has thus deceived me" (8).

⁷⁸ "Norma! Of your reproaches / do not now make me the mark. / Pray! Let this distressed maiden / be allowed to breathe... / Let a veil cover, for that innocent soul, / cover our shame... / Let heaven alone judge / which of us sinned more" (8).

SARA: Do not think about it Lidia. He is one of them.
LIDIA: He's one of them but he's also against them. If it were up to him, he would have just run away. Imagine him in Bremen playing the piano, in his house with all those curtains, his old, blind mother listening.
SARA: Who knows what he would have been if there had been no war.
LIDIA: A moneylender. Can't you see he has the hands of a moneylender?
SARA: But moneylenders are all Jews. (*Sarcastically*) Right?
LIDIA: Maybe he is part-Jewish... his sweetness is suspect...
SARA: And what about your young husband, Lidia? Didn't you tell me that they took you two days after your wedding?
LIDIA: Forgotten. Gone. Lost. Besides, he never tried to find me. He wasn't Jewish... he was afraid...
SARA: Didn't you love him?
LIDIA: I still love him. But like a ghost. I think of killing him and then bringing him back to life by my caresses and bites.
SARA: (*Affectionately*) So it is true that you are turning into a hyena...
LIDIA: Oh yes, I cut my teeth in that brothel. Do you remember what a sentimental creature I was when I got here?
SARA: You don't seem less naive and sentimental now... Lidia, you are dreaming.
LIDIA: No, I don't dream anymore. Ever since I got sent to the brothel I can't dream, not even a bad dream. In the beginning I at least dreamt of eating... a plate of spaghetti, Sara, can you imagine? A steaming plate of spaghetti with fresh tomato and basil... what an aroma! What I would give to have a whiff of basil!
SARA: I, instead, dream constantly. I get up, I get in line. I see them raise their weapons. A flash. They fire. I wake up.
LIDIA: Enough with these dark thoughts.
SARA: What should I think about?
LIDIA: About your newborn son... about *Norma*... about me.
SARA: About you?
LIDIA: About me... you know I love you like my mother, like my sister, like myself.
SARA: Oh, Lidia.

They embrace; in the meantime they have removed the costumes and put on their prison uniforms.

LIDIA: Let's go—it's late.

The two women exit.

Darkness. Sounds of footsteps. Voices speaking Yiddish. Dogs barking. Orders in the distance. Laughter. A little girl's cry.

Karl enters. He turns on the light. Straightens the costumes, the spotlights. Lidia enters.

KARL: Done with the brothel?

LIDIA: Yes. But not thanks to you.
KARL: Thanks to Eckart. I know. The woman Sara has sex with in order to keep her baby. What strange love triangles.
LIDIA: Until she gets bored. And she sends her to the gas chamber with a goodbye kiss. There is no better way to get rid of an old lover that you no longer want. That Casanova of a fiancé will help her.
KARL: Lidia, you know your cynicism disgusts me... but I like it. It is as if you are always about to spit. To spit and to steal. A good example for the camp!
LIDIA: Captain Hoffmann, are you telling me you love me?
KARL: Me? Maybe... I have a soft spot for rogues. No, let us say that I have a soft spot for the oppressed who revolt with hate against the kindness of the people who keep them down. I want to embrace you Lidia. May I?
LIDIA: I have been waiting months for this moment. Hold me tight, Captain Hoffmann.

Karl goes closer to Lidia. He looks at her for a moment, smiling. He puts out his arms and embraces her tightly. Lidia lets him hold her like a corpse. She cries. But without sobbing. Her tears trickle quietly down her cheeks and he doesn't notice.

*There is knocking. They let go.
Sara enters.*

SARA: Sorry, I had to nurse the baby
LIDIA: You and that fucking baby. What's the use? Eh? What is the use? They will just kill him anyway. Like you. Like me. Like all of us.
SARA: Maybe not, Lidia, maybe not.
LIDIA: Do you remember ten months ago? When we started rehearsing? You were beautiful Sara, dammit, you were as hard as a rock, you were a lioness. Now with this baby, you have become soft, you are, you are, I don't recognize you anymore.
SARA: What is your problem? Why are you so upset? What did I do to you?
LIDIA: Nothing! God! Nothing.
SARA: You are the one who has changed in that brothel...
LIDIA: Me, changed? Look at your hair: crying. Your eyes: praying. Your mouth: trembling. Your hands: screaming. I pity you, I really pity you.
SARA: And Karl? Do you think I have changed too?
KARL: A werewolf and two sheep?... do you like it like this? Or two tigers and a lamb to slaughter?
SARA: Can we just rehearse, please.
LIDIA: You see how she is: submissive, obedient, plodding. I hate you.
SARA: If you have to blame someone, blame yourself, Lidia. Where are we starting from, Captain Hoffmann?
KARL: Second act. Norma has summoned Adalgisa to tell her to take away her children with Pollione.
LIDIA: Take them where?

KARL: To Rome... “ciel più puro e Dei migliori / t’offro in Roma, ov’io mi reco...”⁷⁹ And roughly and boldly the Roman centurion invites the young druid priestess whom in his heart he thinks of as savage—to his city at the center of the world, Rome.

LIDIA: But Adalgisa does not want... a boiled potato.

KARL: Adalgisa is in love with Norma. She calls her “mother.” “Norma, oh Norma, ancora amata / madre ancora sarai per me...”⁸⁰ Whom should she choose: the man or the mother? Why don’t you go and stand down there, Sara? And you, Lidia, on this side... ready? Start Sara, it is your turn.

Sara follows the voice on the recording.

NORMA: Deh! con te, con te li prendi...
li sostieni, li difendi
non ti chiedo onori e fasti,
a’ tuoi figli ei fian serbati:
prego sol che i miei non lasci
schiavi, abietti, abbandonati
basti a te che disprezzata
che tradita io fui per te.⁸¹

ADALGISA: Norma, ah Norma, ancor amata
madre ancor sarai per me
tienti i figli. Non fia mai
ch’io mi tolga a queste arene.⁸²

NORMA: Tu giurasti.⁸³

ADALGISA: Sì giurai
ma il tuo bene, il sol tuo bene
Vado al campo ed all’ingrato
tutti io reco i tuoi lamenti.
La pietà che mi hai destato
parlerà sublimi accenti
spera, ah spera... amor, natura
ridestarsi in lui vedrai.
Del suo cuor sono io sicura
Norma ancor vi regnerà...⁸⁴

NORMA: Ch’io lo preghi?... ah! no: giammai.

⁷⁹ “A purer heaven and better gods / I offer you in Rome, where I am going” (5).

⁸⁰ “Norma, ah! Norma, still beloved, / you will still be a mother to me” (11).

⁸¹ “Ah! take them with you... / support them, defend them / I do not ask honors and power; / let those be reserved for your children. / I beg only that you do not leave mine / as slaves, abject, abandoned. / Let it be enough for you that I / was scorned, betrayed because of you” (10).

⁸² “Norma, ah! Norma, still beloved / you will still be a mother thanks to me. / Keep your children. / Ah! let me never / be taken away from these shores” (11).

⁸³ “You swore” (11).

⁸⁴ “Yes, I swore... / but for your good, only for your good. / I will go to the camp, and to the ingrate / I will deliver all your laments. / The pity you have wakened in me / will speak sublime words... / Hope, ah, hope! You will see / love, nature reawaken in him... / I am sure of his heart...” (11).

più non t'odo parti, va' ...⁸⁵

ADALGISA: Mira o Norma ai tuoi ginocchi
questi cari tuoi pargoletti
Ah pietà di lor ti tocchi
se non hai di te pietà.⁸⁶

NORMA: Ah perché la mia costanza
vuoi scemar con molli affetti?
Più lusinghe, più speranza.
presso a morte un cor non ha.⁸⁷

KARL: Enough... great job.... What a Norma! And what an Adalgisa! This is like a game of musical chairs: you go, no you, you first, no you go first, this is your love, no yours... two women with incredible generosity and altruism. What a nut that Roman librettist was. But I have to go. I'll be back. If you want, stay and rehearse... I will be back soon.

LIDIA: A new flock of Jewesses to pluck, Captain Hoffmann?

KARL: Nobody speaks English but me at this camp. And Saidler wants me to translate Truman's speeches from the radio.⁸⁸

LIDIA: Bring us something to eat, Captain Hoffmann. Something special. From the officers' canteen. I heard that you feast on venison with rose petals and creamy desserts.

KARL: Yes, flying deer and fried stars.

Karl exits. The two women remain alone and deal with the costumes and wigs.

SARA: Eckart swore to me that she would have you pulled from the brothel.

LIDIA: As a matter of fact, she did pull me out. But I can't get rid of the smell of those bellies. Did you know that sperm smells?

SARA: *(Laughing)* No.

LIDIA: You didn't know it smelled either. It has a strange odor, like a rat's tail, like scorched grass... day and night... day and night... you have to bathe in it to really notice.

SARA: Try to forget, Lidia... *(She takes her hand)* We are here, Lidia—we are here, alive, did you hear the airplanes last night? Americans. They are going to bomb Berlin... Understand? Berlin!

LIDIA: I could care less about Berlin. I'm here. With the smell of rats all over me. And I fell in love.

SARA: In the brothel?

LIDIA: One of them, Sara, one of them. A shitty potato-eater.

SARA: But who?

LIDIA: Karl Hoffmann.

SARA: Karl? Our Karl?

⁸⁵ "Am I to beseech him?... / Ah no! Never" (11).

⁸⁶ "See, O Norma, at your knees / these dear little children of yours. / Ah! let pity for them touch you, / if you do not have pity for yourself" (11).

⁸⁷ "Ah! Why do you want to weaken / my steadfastness with sweet affections? / A heart near death / has no more illusions, no more hope" (11).

⁸⁸ Harry S. Truman was president of the United States from April 12, 1945 to January 1953, including the end of the Second World War. He was the vice president to Franklin D. Roosevelt, and assumed the presidency upon his death.

LIDIA: Our Karl. Our beautiful Karl, sweet Karl. The sophisticated, smart, anxious, gentlemanly, friendly Karl. Karl my ass!

In that moment, Karl enters.

KARL: I brought you some beer and . . . and when the cook was not looking I got you some chicken... how long has it been since you have eaten a real chicken?

The two woman lunge at the food and eat heartily. They drink the beer spilling it on themselves hysterically.

LIDIA: There he is! Look at him! How can you not love someone who risks his life bringing you a chicken.

SARA: *(Laughing)* Captain Hoffmann, do you know that Lidia is in love?

KARL: Oh really? And with whom?

SARA: With you. Didn't she tell you?

LIDIA: *(Laughing and eating)* I told her, Karl. Please don't make that face.

SARA: And so now, Captain, tell Lidia who you are in love with.

KARL: You are disgustingly drunk.

SARA: And tell Lidia whose baby it is, at this moment, in the arms of that sad dog Christa Eckart...

LIDIA: You and Karl... *(Laughing desperately)* You and Karl had a baby together?... and I didn't understand anything... *(Still madly laughing)* Nothing comes of nothing... shit shit shit... oh what a great surprise!

KARL: Why did you tell her Sara? It was a secret.

LIDIA: And you had a fun time with those secrets... you lousy shit-eating pig.

KARL: I love Sara. I love Lidia. If you do not believe me, I do not care.

SARA: Here you go, liar... in your game... behind the backs of those condemned to die.

KARL: First I loved Sara. I adored her. Then I was seduced by you, Lidia. I am crazy about you.⁸⁹

SARA: Better to say that you don't love anyone... That you are fully devoted to your holy navel, your navel...

KARL: I did not want to pit you against one another.

LIDIA: What a noble sentiment, Captain Hoffmann!

KARL: There is something grotesque in all of this... do you not realize that we are imitating the story of *Norma*? *(Dramatically)* I will go to Rome like Pollione... Other gods, other countries... less savage, less foreboding.

SARA: I do not want anything, Lidia. I leave him to you. Take him away.

LIDIA: Where, Sara?

SARA: He can save you... and you can save him... the war will end. You will be liberated.

LIDIA: I love him now. Not when the war is finished.

SARA: When did you start this duplicitous game, Karl?

KARL: I don't know, Sara. I love you.

(Angry voices are heard outside the door screaming in German)

⁸⁹ This turn in the plot mirrors not only that of *Norma*, but also that of *Elective Affinities*.

KARL: Hurry up, let's start again. If we do not want Luther bothering us, let's start rehearsing again.

(Karl goes to the phonograph. Puts on the record.)

KARL: Ready with the costumes? Let's go, Sara...

(The two women quickly don the costumes. They start singing.)

ADALGISA: Cedi, deh! cedi!⁹⁰

NORMA: Ah, lasciami.
Ei t'ama.⁹¹

ADALGISA: E già sen pente.⁹²

NORMA: E tu?⁹³

ADALGISA: Lo amai... quest'anima
sol l'amistade or sente.⁹⁴

NORMA: Oh giovinetta!... e vuoi?⁹⁵

ADALGISA: Renderti i dritti tuoi
o teco al cielo, agli uomini
giuro celarmi ognor.⁹⁶

NORMA: Sì... hai vinto... abbracciami
trovo un'amica ancor...⁹⁷

ADALGISA

AND NORMA: Sì, fino all'ore estreme
compagna tu m'avrai
per ricovrarci insieme
ampia è la terra assai.
Teco dal fato all'onte
ferma opporrò la fronte,
finché il mio core a battere
io senta sul tuo cor.⁹⁸

(Sara stops the record)

KARL: Why did you stop? What happened?

⁹⁰ "Give way... Ah, give way!" (11).

⁹¹ "Ah! leave me... He loves you" (11).

⁹² "He already regrets it" (11).

⁹³ "And you?" (11).

⁹⁴ "I loved him... My soul / now feels only friendship" (11).

⁹⁵ "O maiden! And you want to—?" (11).

⁹⁶ "To restore your rights to you, / or else I swear to conceal myself / from heaven and mankind with you forever" (11).

⁹⁷ "Yes... you have won... Embrace me. / I find my friend again" (11).

⁹⁸ "Yes, until our last hours, / you will have me as your companion. / To shelter us together / the earth is wide enough. / With you the affronts of destiny / I will firmly face, / as long as I feel your heart / beating over my heart" (11).

SARA: I can't do it. I'm sick.
KARL: What is wrong, Sara?
SARA: Leave us alone Karl, please? Go talk to Luther, calm him down. Tell him that we will do the show, that we are almost ready... I need a minute with Lidia.
KARL: Lidia? Are you chasing me away too?
LIDIA: If Sara says she needs to talk to me...
KARL: Very well. I will leave you alone. But only for a little while. I should have a say in this too!
SARA: Karl, go.

(Karl exits)

SARA: Lidia, Lidia...

(Sara takes Lidia's hands and holds them tightly)

LIDIA: Are you all right?
SARA: Whatever happens Lidia, I beg you to get my child and take him with you.
LIDIA: I will take him to hell, Sara. Don't you understand that they will never let us live, to bear witness... they will set fire to everything, barracks, prisoners, camps... I wouldn't be surprised if they set fire to their own SS guys along with the archives... to leave scorched earth behind them... Our lover Karl may not even be saved.
SARA: But you hear the airplanes? They go up and down, up and down... as if searching for us.
LIDIA: They aren't searching for anything. No one is looking for us, Sara. We are dead to them, dead and buried, in fact not even buried but with mouths wide open, thrown on a heap of skeletons, like those shining in the sun behind the kitchen, in a communal grave...
SARA: But maybe...
LIDIA: If we grab one extra minute of life, that's the best we can do, Sara. Don't think about the future. It doesn't exist.
SARA: Lidia, Lidia...

(Sara holds her friend's hands tightly. Lidia looks at her tenderly. They embrace. Karl enters.)

KARL: I brought the knife that Norma will use at the beginning of the Second Act. Here, watch out, it is real.
SARA: If you had to choose between us Karl...
KARL: I would do the same as Pollione, I would choose you... I love you too much to share you with someone else...
SARA: Shrewd and elusive...
KARL: It is your turn, sing... we have to work. The whole camp is agitated today, I do not know what is going on.

(Karl puts the record on. Sara sings.)

NORMA: Ei tornerà, sì... mia fidanzata è posta
in Adalgisa. Ei tornerà pentito
supplichevole, amante. Oh, a tal pensiero
sparisce il nuvol nero
che mi premea la fronte e il sol m'arride
come del primo amore...
ai dì felici...⁹⁹

While Sara sings, Karl approaches Lidia and kisses her. Lidia returns the kiss. The two embrace behind Sara who understands what is happening, but doesn't see them. While she sings, tears silently stream down her face; her terrible pain, devoid of any anger, is palpable.

When Sara has almost finished the aria, Karl and Lidia exit together. Sara remains alone. She stops singing. She takes off the record. She sits on the ground with her head in her hands. Darkness.

Lights up on a deserted barrack. Another day has passed. The door opens. Karl enters. Straightens up the costumes. He is distracted. Lidia enters.

KARL: Did you sleep well?
LIDIA: Let's stop pretending, Karl. Go back to Sara. She is the one you love.
KARL: I love you ... and her.
LIDIA: You have to choose. And choose her. She gave you a son.
KARL: And you?
LIDIA: I just want to sleep in a soft bed. Just sleep....
KARL: I love you, Lidia.
LIDIA: And you love Sara too. You said so. You will not pit us against one another.
KARL: May I kiss you?
LIDIA: No.
KARL: Let me kiss you.
LIDIA: No.... Here's Sara. Kiss her.

Karl approaches Sara who has just arrived. He takes her hands. He pulls her towards him. He kisses her sweetly on the mouth.

Lidia approaches them. She slaps him. He is dumbfounded. Sara laughs.

LIDIA: Let's rehearse. It's our job. I want to work, I want to work.
KARL: *(returning to his senses)* Yes, you are right, yes, let's rehearse. Now, Norma has Pollione in the palm of her hand. She could kill him. But she hesitates; maybe because she still hopes he may love her.

⁹⁹ "He will return. / Yes...my trust is placed in Adalgisa... / he will return, repentant, / pleading, loving. / Oh! At such a thought / the black cloud vanishes / that weighted on my brow, / and the sun smiles at me / as in the days of our first love, the / happy days" (12).

Karl drops the needle on the record and starts singing in a tenor voice.

POLLIONE: Chi veggio? Norma!¹⁰⁰

NORMA: Sì, Norma.¹⁰¹

CHORUS: Il sacro ferro impugna
vendica il dio...¹⁰²

While the chorus sings:

KARL: That's right, take the knife, hold it well. The audience must think that you are going to kill him, the man you love...

He puts the sharpened knife in her hand. He shows her how to hold it by the handle.

NORMA: Sì feriam.¹⁰³

CORO: Tu tremi.¹⁰⁴

NORMA: Ah! non poss'io.¹⁰⁵

CORO: Che fia? perché t'arresti?¹⁰⁶

NORMA: Poss'io sentir pietà...¹⁰⁷

CORO: Ferisci.¹⁰⁸

NORMA: Io deggio
interrogarlo, investigar qual sia
l'insidiata o complice ministra
che il profan persuase a fallo estremo.
Ite per poco.¹⁰⁹

Jump to "In mia man alfin tu sei."

NORMA: In mia man alfin tu sei
niun potria spezzar tuoi nodi.
Io lo posso.¹¹⁰

POLLIONE: Tu nol dei.¹¹¹

NORMA: Io lo voglio.¹¹²

¹⁰⁰ "What do I see? Norma!" (13).

¹⁰¹ "Yes, Norma" (13).

¹⁰² "Grasp the sacred blade, / avenge the god" (13)

¹⁰³ "Yes. Let us strike..." (14).

¹⁰⁴ "You tremble" (14).

¹⁰⁵ "Ah! I cannot" (14).

¹⁰⁶ "What is it?... Why do you stop?" (14).

¹⁰⁷ "I can feel pity!" (14).

¹⁰⁸ "Strike" (14).

¹⁰⁹ "I must question him... / discover who was the ensnared / or compliant priestess / whom the infidel persuaded to fatal sin. / Go away for a little while" (14).

¹¹⁰ "You are in my hands at last; / no one could break your bonds. / I can do it" (14).

¹¹¹ "You must not" (14).

¹¹² "I want to" (14).

POLLIONE: E come?¹¹³
 NORMA: M'odi...
 pel tuo dio, pei figli tuoi
 giurar dei che d'ora in poi
 Adalgisa fuggirai
 all'altar non la torrai
 e la vita io ti perdono
 e mai più ti rivedrò...
 Giura.¹¹⁴

POLLIONE: No, sì vil non sono.¹¹⁵
 NORMA: Giura, giura!¹¹⁶
 POLLIONE: Ah! pria morrò.¹¹⁷
 NORMA: Non sai tu che il mio furore
 passa il tuo?¹¹⁸

POLLIONE: Ch'ei piombi attendo.¹¹⁹
 NORMA: Non sai tu che ai figli in core
 questo ferro...¹²⁰

POLLIONE: Oh dio! che intendo?¹²¹
 NORMA: Sì, sovr'essi alzai la punta
 vedi... vedi... a che son giunta!
 Non ferir, ma tosto... adesso
 consumar potrei l'eccesso
 un istante e d'esser madre
 mi poss'io dimenticar.¹²²

POLLIONE: Ah! crudele, in sen del padre
 il pugnale tu dei vibrar
 a me il porgi.¹²³

NORMA: A te!¹²⁴
 POLLIONE: Che spento
 cada io solo.¹²⁵

NORMA: Solo! Tutti
 i romani a cento a cento
 fian mietuti, fian distrutti.

¹¹³ "And why?" (14).

¹¹⁴ "Hear me. / By your god, by your sons, / you must swear that from now on / you will flee Adalgisa, you will not take her away from the altar... / And I will spare your life, / and never again will I see you. / Swear" (14).

¹¹⁵ "No. I am not so cowardly" (14).

¹¹⁶ "Swear, swear!" (14).

¹¹⁷ "Ah! I will die first!" (14).

¹¹⁸ "Do you not know that my fury / surpasses yours?" (14).

¹¹⁹ "I am waiting for it to fall" (14).

¹²⁰ "Do you not know that into our children's / hearts / this blade..." (14).

¹²¹ "Oh god! What do I hear?" (14).

¹²² "Yes, I raised the point over them... / You see to what I am come! / I did not strike... but soon... now / I could carry out the crime... / An instant... and I can forget / that I am a mother" (14).

¹²³ "Ah! cruel one, you must thrust / the dagger into the father's breast. / Give it to me" (14).

¹²⁴ "To you!" (14).

¹²⁵ "Let me alone fall, / slain!" (14).

E Adalgisa...¹²⁶
 POLLIONE: Ahimè!
 NORMA: Infedele
 a' suoi voti
 Adalgisa fia punita
 nelle fiamme perirà.¹²⁷
 POLLIONE: Ah ti prendi la mia vita
 ma di lei, di lei pietà.¹²⁸
 NORMA: Preghi alfine? indegno! È tardi.
 Nel suo cor ti vo' ferire.
 Già mi pasco ne' tuoi sguardi
 del tuo duol, del suo morire
 posso alfine, io posso farti
 infelice al par di me.¹²⁹
 POLLIONE: Ah t'appaghi il mio terrore
 al tuo piè son io piangente
 In me sfoga il tuo furore
 ma risparmia un'innocente
 basti, basti a vendicarti
 ch'io mi sveni innanzi a te.¹³⁰

KARL: Now the scene gets more intense. Norma has the knife in her hand and Pollione wants to grab it to kill himself.

POLLIONE: Dammi quel ferro.¹³¹
 NORMA: Che osi?¹³²
 POLLIONE: Il ferro, il ferro.¹³³
 NORMA: Olà, ministri,
 sacerdoti accorrete!¹³⁴

KARL: (*Interrupting the music*) And here, right at this point, Norma reveals to her priests that a vestal virgin has broken her vows. Pollione thinks that she will name Adalgisa and he cries “non le credete”¹³⁵ and pleads for pity for his lover. But Norma, undeterred screams: “il rogo ergete.”¹³⁶ Norma must be terrifyingly determined, a maenad, an

¹²⁶ “Alone! All. / The Romans by the hundreds / shall be mowed down, shall be / destroyed. / And Adalgisa...” (14).

¹²⁷ “Faithless to her vows... / Adalgisa shall be punished. / In the flames she will die” (14).

¹²⁸ “Ah! take my life, / but on her, on her have pity...” (15).

¹²⁹ “At last you plead? / Unworthy man! It’s late. / In her heart I want to wound you. / Already I am gloating on your glances, / on your suffering, on her dying. / I can at last, I can make you / unhappy as I am” (15).

¹³⁰ “Ah! let my terror appease you; / I am weeping at your feet. / On me vent your fury, / but spare an innocent. / Let it suffice, to avenge you, / that I open my veins before you” (15).

¹³¹ “Give me that dagger” (15).

¹³² “What dare you do?” (15).

¹³³ “The dagger, the dagger!” (15).

¹³⁴ “Ho, ministers, priests, hurry” (15).

¹³⁵ “Do not believe her” (15).

¹³⁶ “Raise the pyre” (15).

infuriated goddess... more intensity Sara, more force... brandish that knife, and you Lidia, what are you doing sitting there?

LIDIA: I'm watching you.

KARL: Stop it. Go to the lights. Put a spotlight on Sara. Follow her movements... follow me.

Lidia obeys.

KARL: From the height of her grandeur Norma screams: "It is I. I am the betrayer." And he, ingenuous, uncertain, he, the enamored Pollione feels tenderness. Something in him vacillates, admiration for her—he feels his love for Norma return. Go, Sara!

Puts the record back on. Sara sings.

NORMA: Qual cor tradisti, qual cor perdesti
quest'ora orrenda ti manifesti
da me fuggire tentasti invano
crudel romano, tu sei con me
un nume, un fato di te più forte
ci vuole unire in vita e in morte,
sul rogo istesso che mi divora,
sotterra ancora sarò con te.¹³⁷

POLLIONE: Ah! troppo tardi t'ho conosciuta...
sublime donna io t'ho perduta...
col mio rimorso è amor rinato
più disperato furente egli è.
Moriamo insieme ah! sì moriamo
l'estremo accento sarà ch'io t'amo.
Ma tu morendo non m'abborrire
pria di morire perdona a me...¹³⁸

Pollione's last words. Sara holds up the knife and drives it into his chest with force, again and again, finally leaving him on the ground.

LIDIA: Sara!

SARA: Go, take the baby, hide him. Take him away. Go, Lidia.

Lidia embraces Sara and runs away. The record continues to play. The voices of Pollione and Norma, now disembodied, continue to fill the barracks.

¹³⁷ "What a heart you betrayed, what a heart you lost, / let this dread hour reveal to you. / From me you tried to flee in vain; / cruel Roman, you are with me. / A god, a destiny stronger than you, / wants us united in life and in death. / On the same pyre that consumes me, / in the earth again I will be with you" (16).

¹³⁸ "Ah! too late I have known you... / sublime woman, I have lost you... / With my remorse is love reborn, / more desperate, it is raging. / Let us die together; ah yes, let us die. / My last words will be that I love you. / But you, dying, do not loathe me. / Before dying, forgive me" (16).

LIDIA: What about you?
SARA: I will wait with him.

As soon as Lidia leaves, footsteps are heard. Sara bends down. She takes Karl in her arms as she sits on the ground and rocks him as if he were a baby. The door is left open. German voices are heard. Orders yelled. Guards are heard outside, rushing. Sara rises. She goes to the door with her hands up. From outside, a machine gun fires. Sara falls down. The music continues until the end.