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# Castaways

(Varadas)

by  
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translated by  
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*(Excerpt in English)*

*From sea to sea, the war between them,  
far deeper than the sea.*

Antonio Machado

For all those women in the twentieth century  
who sailed on the ships of the forgotten. And,  
in particular, to my mother and grandmother.

Itziar Pascual

## 1. Exchanges

*An inhospitable, undefined space. Dark and cold. On stage, A and B. A is a young woman, dressed in dark clothing. B is a young woman, dressed completely in black. It is raining.*

A

Is anyone there? Who is it? (Silence.) Is that you?

B

What do you want?

A

Oh! Are you... the Hyena?

B

Who sent you?

A

I'm here for my mistress.

B

And what does your mistress want?

A

To leave the country. A safe conduct. And a guide to the border.

B

*(With a loud laugh)* And what does she have to offer?

A

She's offering money.

B

Who wants devalued currency?

A

She's offering a lot of money.

B

*(Aggressively)* I'm not going to say it again.

A

She has bank stock.

B  
I'm in a hurry. Doesn't your mistress have anything of value?

A  
She has jewelry.

B  
What kind?

A  
Strands of pearls, necklaces of coral, amber, amethyst, jade, agate, set in silver—

B  
Don't insult me. (*Crosses to exit.*)

A  
Rubies, sapphires, emeralds and diamonds, set in platinum and white gold.

B  
That's better. (*She stops walking.*) Anything more?

A  
More?

B  
Paintings? Silverware? Ivory and ebony carvings? What about tea sets made in Czechoslovakia? And Persian rugs? Velvet curtains? Chinese ceramics? Swiss fountain pens? Or fancy jewelry boxes? And watches?

A  
There's nothing left.

B  
I don't believe you.

A  
I'm not going to say it again. (*Pause.*) It's a good deal.

B  
(*Laughing nervously*) No. It's not enough.

A  
What do you want, Hyena?

B  
Everything.

A

That's all that's left. She's had to sell it secretly, bit by bit.

B

She still has the house.

A

It's mortgaged. Two mortgages.

B

There's still the return.

A

What do you mean?

B

If she returns, she'll work for me. She'll be my servant. In exchange, I'll open the border for her.

A

Work for you? For the Hyena? Are you crazy? That's the world upside down!

B

*(Sharply)* You said it. We're the ones on top now. The ones who open doors. The ones who save people from a certain death. A life is worth nothing. But saving one costs a lot. Send that message to your mistress. With my kindest regards. *(Exits.)*

A

Don't expect her to accept a deal like that.

*Blackout*

## 2. Passport

*A comfortable dining room. Table, chairs, a painting or two, a wilted bouquet of flowers, an embroidery frame. On the floor there are two sturdy suitcases, fully packed. It is late afternoon. On stage, A and B. A is a middle-aged woman with a strong build and dark complexion. B is a fragile-looking middle-aged woman with thin legs, pale skin and light-colored eyes.*

A

Will it take much longer?

B

No. *(Pause.)* By now should be...

A  
Ah.

B  
I've been taking pictures. You'll see. Of the back closet. Of the rocking chair. I took lots of the chest of drawers. Poor drawers, so empty. Well... I couldn't buy—

A  
What time is it?

B  
Oh... I didn't have time. I should have remembered. The clothes will be ruined. They'll rot away. First there will be tiny little holes. Then bigger and bigger ones. I don't like the smell in the drawers, on the hangers, but there's no other way. They mask it with lavender, but that does no good. It smells just as bad. Reminds me of the end of summer.

A  
Are you sure? Should have been here...

B  
You never know. You have to plan ahead. They're there, into your things, into your life, prowling around, in the back of the closet, in the heart of... And one day they gobble it all up. How do they do that? I mean... Do they swallow, or chew, or eat? Do they gulp it down in one bite, without savoring the taste? Or are they like cows, chewing their cud? On the other hand, in wood they leave labyrinths, corridors, immense, interconnecting tunnels—

A  
What's this? Look. Here, here. Don't you see it? Run, get me a rag. It's... Run. I can't get it off. It's dripping.

B  
I didn't tell you. A vase broke.. Before, in such a hurry... It's the water from...

A  
It's dripping from one or the other. Look, it's coming from there. You must not have shut it properly. That's it. (*Silence.*) What vase?

B  
(*Compulsively, in a rush*) Forget it, what's done is done, what does it matter, it's all the same, just think, I didn't get a picture of it, I forgot the vase...

A  
You know what your problem is? You spent your whole life collecting things. Collecting, yes, collecting. Putting aside, saving, filling space and even the air with so much... "I couldn't just leave it there," you said. Every day, something more. Cramming the rooms with meaningless, useless, worthless stuff. And my few little things, they disappeared. The mystery of things that break by themselves. The case of the suicidal vase. But your things, not at all. They grew and grew

overnight. "I couldn't just leave them there," you insisted. And now what? What are you going to do?

*(Silence. B stands, looking down.)*

C *(Voice from offstage)*

Your passport is being held until further notice. You cannot leave the country. Until further notice. Your sister can board if she wishes. Take it easy, ma'am. You are talking to the person in charge. You two decide. We're casting off in fifteen minutes. One suitcase per person. Yes, one. Alright. Have a good trip, ma'am. *(Silence.)* Did you know that your suitcase is dripping?

*Blackout*

### 3. Farewell

*A comfortable living room. Table, chairs, a small sideboard. A and B are on stage. A, a middle-aged woman, is wearing a purple skirt and a short, loosely woven knit housecoat. B, also middle-aged, wears a knit sweater and skirt set of moss green and low-heeled black shoes.*

A

So everything is decided. Everything. I've checked out the pantry, the cupboard, the little attic over the kitchen, the built-in closets in the front hall. Even the storeroom. Just think, I even had time to go into the storeroom. Everything's in order. I've counted everything. I wore myself out, and that's the truth. We lack for nothing. In the pantry we have olive oil and sunflower seed oil; lentils, chickpeas in glass jars and in bags, and a couple bags of kidney beans, just in case, although I know you don't much like kidney beans; and rice, rice until you're sick of it. But a rice dish always comes in handy. There are cans of peas, corn—who would have thought that people would start eating what used to be just for pigs—and those special red peppers, two boxes of them. You won't believe it, but there's even a can of asparagus that we didn't use at Christmas. You remember that fancy white asparagus? Well, we still have a can of it. Wait, I've forgotten something. What was it? Oh, yes, flour. How long have we had it? Well, what doesn't kill you makes you fat. It's in the pantry. Then—

B

The last boat leaves tonight. Then they stop running. This is the last one. *(Pause.)*

A

So? What are you saying? What are you telling me?

B

Just what I said. Afterwards there will be no escape. We won't be able to leave.

A

And who wants to leave? Haven't you been listening? Sometimes you say things that... Oh, well. Let me continue. In the cupboard, the one we keep locked, you can see that somebody has been

rummaging around, maybe the maid, who knows, I imagine it was the maid because, who else could it be? You have to keep an eye out.

B

I've bought two tickets. There weren't many left, I couldn't bargain for them. But I have two.

A

Have you lost your mind? What on earth made you go to the port? You could have been mugged. You hear me? And what do we want two tickets for, for what? You'll have to return them. Send the maid to turn them in, don't take the risk yourself. Don't even think of it.

B

We have to go. Here we're alone, defenseless against what might happen.

A

Here we're safe. At home, in my home. You want me to leave everything, just like that? Here I put in years of effort, of work, of sacrifice. Payment by payment, month by month. And you want me to run away? If we go, who will protect the house? We have locks, dead bolts, we can close the windows, it's a thick door, we can shut ourselves in here, but if we go away... Who will protect it from thieves, from strangers, from...? They'll strip it bare!

B

Even if we stayed, we could not protect it. We have to go.

A

They'll get in over my dead body.

B

That they will. *(Pause.)* I didn't mean... I'm sorry. No one can guarantee safety here any more.

A

*(Nervously)* You're telling me... you're telling me that...?

B

I'm telling you that's I'm going. And I want you to come with me. *(Pause.)*

A

Think about it. You would never have had this. A home like this, with balconies, sunlit. Now it's coercion. My home or you. What a coincidence, two tickets left, to go away, the two of us, who knows where, who knows with whom, nowhere, to die of hunger at the border, to die of shame when some dirty man searches us, to die of sorrow when we see how our world is vanishing, but we do have the tickets. So everything is decided. Right?

*(B does not answer.)*

*Blackout*