**ISABEL BANISHED IN ISABEL**

*The action takes place in any street of any place.*

*The set is reduced to a garbage can, one of those oil barrels cut in half. A white, sad light illuminates the scene.*

*The woman (Isabel), dressed in dirty, worn out and ragged clothes, of any age over 40, comes into scene limping. From one of her hands a burlap sack hangs and drags on the floor, one of those flour sacks, whose colour has become indefinite through time and wear. Isabel keeps some of her belongings in it.*

*She briefly inspects the place, comes up to the garbage can, leaves the sack on the floor and seats on the curb beside it.*

**ISABEL:**

*(Taking off one shoe)*

Damn it! Just what I needed now! A flat tire…

*(She examines the shoe)*

Oh, good it’s just a nail.

*(She looks around)*

Not a single stone around. Damn your bad luck, Isabel!

*(She looks at the garbage can)*

And you, do you have anything I can borrow? Something to hammer with? I’ll give it back to you real quick.

*(She stands up and searches inside the can and pulls out a piece of iron)*

Here it is, thank you, you are the only kind and good-willed chap I’ve found today. Everyone else runs away when I get close, they run away as from the plague.

*(She shrugs her shoulders)*

Well, what can you do? Such is life. Ok Isabel we are ready, with this piece of iron we’re all set. But before starting just a little sip, just in case we raise some dust while hammering.

*(To the garbage can)*

Of course, you have to take good care of your throat. Don’t you see that the smog makes you lose your voice?

*(She sits again, fumbles for something inside the sack; pulls out a bottle and drinks. Closes the bottle and puts it back inside the sack, takes the shoe and starts working on it and then she looks at the result)*

You know what Isabel? If you keep on pounding on it, it will break in two, better fix it carefully at home.

*(To the garbage can)*

No. Really, I do have a house.

*(Pause)*

But I can’t find myself locked in. I like to be in the midst of life, to see houses, people, dogs, trees, birds; all of those things that tell you that you haven’t died yet, even if your heart might have fallen into a hole where there’s no light. It’s true that I spend all my days alone, but on Sundays it feels like you were twice abandoned. I don’t know why that happens, I don’t know why on holidays loneliness hurts deeper inside; that’s why I go out to walk.

*(She pays attention to a passer–by that can’t be seen. When she passes beside her:)*

Hey, do you have a cigarette to spare. It’s been so long since…

*(The passer–by seems to go on her way. Isabel shrugs. To the garbage can:)*

What were we talking about? Ah! About the house. Of course I have one. I’m not gonna tell you that is a big house. No, I’m not gonna lie to you, it’s just a little shack that we built with Jana, at the end of Santa Rosa street… We were really good there until they started building one of those nice buildings, where people with money live and they moved away all of the other people to a different place. To Jana and me, they didn’t even give the time of day, because we were not married and didn’t have children. I loved her and she loved me but they wanted a signed paper that said so.

*(To the audience)*

“Listen –I told the man that was registering people– Only God would have to sign that paper, and where do you want us to find him?” And I started asking

*(Pointing)*

“You know where He is? You know where He is? You know where He is?”

*(To the garbage can)*

People just shrugged, looked away or laughed, as if you were asking for someone who had died a long time ago.

*(Pensive)*

But He hasn’t died, right? If He had, life would have died too, right?... Anyway the thing is they took everyone else away and left us forsaken there until the machines come to demolish everything. It’s just like living in a cemetery. Only time lives there, I mean the day and the night, the moon and the wind. All those things that don’t reply when you talk to them, and I like to talk, that’s why I go out to walk… Ever since my mother passed away I’m walking. Just imagine the how long it’s been. No, I’d better not think about it. “Muffin head” was right, he always said to me “Don’t think Chabela, thinking is just like having hope’s throat slit right in from of your eyes”

*(To the garbage can)*

“Muffin Head” was a guy who always wanted to take me to his house when he found me around, but I never went with him. Poor thing, he was nuts. When he didn’t have money to drink or fell in love with a woman who didn’t requite, he went and stuck his head in the oven of any kitchen, to kill himself, that’s why they called him so… “Muffin Head”. Once, Death got bored of him having her come in vain all the time and made him forget to turn off the gas…

I think he should have fallen in love with life not with people. What do you think?

*(She taps the can cheerfully)*

How I’d love to be with Jana now that I’ve found you talk to! Of course, she’s a little jealous but since you talk so little… But that will be on another time, OK?

With her, we walked everywhere. Once, she even wanted to take me to Lota, to meet her family, I mean my mother–in–law and all the in–laws. We couldn’t go because our bone and paper sale went through a bad time and she wanted me to go well dressed. –“Because they are not in love with you, they’ll only look at your clothes”, she said. Now who knows when we could go because she’s in jail; she’s been a long time in jail now. What could she be thinking? Would she remember me?... She wasn’t mad, she went off laughing, she stared at me and said: “What a way you have to show me love! I’m glad I didn’t kill a horse!” and she laughed and laughed.

*(Pause)*

Maybe that’s why I talk so much. Loneliness is hard, isn’t it? It walks behind you like a dog, it follows you everywhere you go. At night it’s even harder, all your sorrows come over you at once. Memories are the worst executioner there is, because they shout inside you and you can’t shut them up with anything. I don’t know why things you’ve done before have to bother you so much. It’d be alright if bad things hurt but it turns out that it’s the good things that bother you the most! What hurts you the most is, for instance, remembering when you were young and beautiful, the time that a girl grabbed you and kissed you all over in that park for an Independence holiday, the time you had a father and a mother and everyone talked to you: those are the things that make you wanna cry when you are in the bumps.

*(Pause)*

They say you can go mad thinking, that you don’t even realize when you start talking alone, that’s what I am most afraid of.

But I ask myself how can you go mad out of sheer loneliness when there’re so many people everywhere? It can’t be. That comforts me. Bah! Imagine I go mad, who would wait for Jana?

*(Nostalgic)*

Jani…

*(Cheerfully)*

One day I’ll introduce you to her, she’s so cool… Do you know how I met her? I was eating something really good that a lady had given me, I was in a square near San Diego street. I was crouching like this, eating when suddenly I hear someone singing… I will remember it all my life, it was that song that says:

*(She sings a bit of one of those tearful boleros by Lucho Barrios or Ramón Aguilera)*

Pretty ain’t it?

It was her. It was her that came singing right in the middle of the square, drunk dead. When she got to where I was, she stopped and stared at me:

Hey, honey –she said to me– Where am I?

Right there, where else? –I said– Can’t you see?

It was one of those humid and cloudy days, one of those days that seem to be crying on top of you. But when I said so she started laughing and it was as if the sun had suddenly come out from everywhere. She said she had arrived from Lota a few days back and she had started drinking because she didn’t have any friends. “So, when you finish having lunch I invite you to have a digestif” –she said– and she started laughing again. She didn’t want to talk about herself anymore nor wanted me to tell her about myself because she said that people were born when they met, that everything else didn’t matter. And I, that had never loved anyone and no one had ever loved me, started to feel like thanking life, feel like holding her. That’s how we met and we started to…

*(She shuts up, looks around, listens)*

…Maybe this one has cigarettes; the night is so long…

*(She smooths her dress, fixes her hair, smiles. When the woman, we can’t see passes beside her)*

Miss…Wouldn’t you have a cigarette to spare?

*(She stops, follows her a few steps with her shoe in one hand)*

It’s been a week since… Bummer, are you sure you don’t have any?

*(She walks back disheartened)*

Such a well–dressed lady. How’s that she doesn’t have any cigarettes?

*(She sits again. To the garbage can)*

No, I do have, it’s just that I only have two more left and I am afraid of the night… I am like a blind woman who can’t escape from the dog bites. I am so quiet and suddenly a bite comes out of nowhere. For instance, today I got up in a happy mood.

*(To the garbage can)*

I don’t know, don’t know why

*(She shrugs her shoulder)*

Summer, the skies, people in short sleeves, I don’t know.

The thing is I heard of a party in a house around San Pablo, so I went there to look for the leftovers. I asked the maid if I could help her cleaning and she went in to ask her boss and said yes. Lord, they had a lot there!!! Chicken, chips, sandwiches, everything.

*(Isabel makes the gesture of drinking)*

And of this, they had everything you may want. I couldn’t even count it. Of course, I don’t do much of those things with weird labels, I’m not gonna boast in front of you; But Jana does, she even rolls her eyes when she sees one of those coloured bottles. I do not because just one sip and I pass out on the floor. I’m not used to it, you see? I just drink the cheap stuff, I’d rather be on the safe side. Anyway, the thing is that the maid had me doing her job all morning, she even made me mop the bathrooms and when she was preparing a package, the old man comes in, the boss, and tells her: “No, don’t do that, can’t you see these people are not used to eating? Give her a bottle of wine and she’ll be more thankful, but give her a bottle of the cheap one that’s the kind they drink” and she came and gave me this bottle

*(She shows the bottle)*

It was right then and there when I felt a jolt inside because I remembered one time my father took me with him to borrow money from a neighbour and he said he didn’t have any money… my father begged him because hunger was making us all see black. Then our neighbour invited him to drink a bottle of wine. We went with him in hopes he would lend my father some money but he had him drinking all afternoon and then he got mad: “You shameless bastard– he said to him– “Now that I gave you drinks until you got full you want me to lend you money?”

When we got home my father started to cry.

*(To the garbage can)*

Have you seen a man cry? They don’t say anything, they don’t moan, they don’t cry, they just stare, stare into the void and suddenly you see the tears running down their face and when you catch them they try to laugh and then it’s as if they were crying two times… I was six years old, but I remember well… That’s why I started crying when the old man gave me the bottle; he laughed and said to the maid: “Didn’t I tell you, these people even cry of happiness when they see a bottle of wine? Don’t I know them” and…

*(Pause)*

What was I supposed to say? I just came back. I started walking…

We were always hungry. Hungry for food, for clothes, for happiness, hungry for everything and the hunger we had since we were born became bigger when my mother got fed up with my father because he couldn’t find a job and told him to leave. “And the kids” –he said– “They stay with me and I’m gonna work to feed them” –she said–

*(To the garbage can)*

I can’t say anything but if one person suddenly forgets another it’s because she has someone new in the heart, isn’t it?

*(Pause)*

Why do we always stay with the mother?

I met desperation looking into my father’s eyes: Looking at his eyes you got to a dark backyard, a backyard where everything was dead. My mother had sadness in her face but my father had sadness in his heart. He had sadness there, from where it won’t come out anymore, where it leaves a stain forever… Why do we stay with our mothers for the rest of our life?

*(She pulls out the bottle)*

We had it bad since then because every now an them my father got a little job here and there, but my mother could never get a job.

*(Pause)*

Hunger, bro’, is long and black. It’s like a hole in which you are falling and never stop, but you don’t free fall, no, you fall hitting the sides, hitting bigger pieces off you every time: that’s life for us, falling and getting hit outside and inside, but most of all inside.

In the afternoon I went to look for discarded fruit in the vegetable market. At around six the garbage trucks arrive and they start putting out the cans from inside. That was very good before, but now lots of people go and clutter behind the truck deposits. Old, young, kids, everyone; even pregnant women and women with babies get there to look for scraps…They become a sort of wild animal, they shout, push each other, fight and since they stick their arms up to the elbow to reach for the less rotten fruit soon the fruit becomes a mushy, earth colour mass, and like that they eat it or put it in a plastic bag to share it at home…

I couldn’t grab anything. I mean I grabbed an apple. I caught it in mid-air when it was falling inside the truck but a girl of about eight years old, who couldn’t get to the truck started staring at me, she was thin and long, bones sticking out of her from everywhere…but the worst were the eyes she had, she had the eyes of an animal hit by a car, eyes of someone suffering consumption. She stared at me, she didn’t say a word. She didn’t need to say a thing because her eyes were shouting out loud… When I gave her the apple, she grabbed it with both hands and bit into it so fiercely that I wanted to cry… She didn’t even notice that she was biting into the rotten part of it, that mushy brown part that becomes mud inside your mouth and I knew she was going to throw up so I left… Poor girl. How long will she last?

*(Pause)*

Damn, if I were God’s wife I would tell him/her:

“Sweetie, you, who know so much about miracles, open the eyes of those bastards down there. They are just screwing up the life you gave them. I mean they divided laughter and money for some and gave silence and blows to the others. I know you don’t want to interfere, that you want them to learn on their own but they don’t learn and you can’t just stand with your arms crossed. How do you want them to like you if they eat from the dumpsters and sleep in the streets? That’s a lot to ask. To the others is also a lot to ask to remember you when they are busy taking walks and eating. It’s a very serious problem Hon’, if you don’t pull off a miracle soon, we’ll be left all alone, lonelier than loneliness and on top of all they killed our Son. Wake up, wake up darling that down there we’re dying!!!”

*(She laughs)*

God’s wife, the things one comes up when there’s no one to talk to.

*(She pulls out the bottle, drinks. Sad)*

Yes, of course the only one who talked to me was Jana; I put her in jail, I didn’t know that without her I would go through this…

Do you know why I put her in jail. Because she squeezed the birds. I mean we sold birds. When they stopped buying bones and paper in San Camilo, Jana came up with the idea of selling birds, we had a real good business. It didn’t cost us a penny. I hadn’t realized though that every time she gave the birds to people she squeezed them. Then the birds died in two o three weeks. They were dying little by little. She said that business had to be like that so the sale wouldn’t stop but I couldn’t bear it. It made me so sad because it was as killing kids. Now nobody speaks, nobody laughs, nobody says hello. Birds are the only ones singing, if they shut up the whole life will shut up and us who don’t have anything will die crushed by silence… I begged her, I cried to no avail: “Life is like that, Isabel –she said– if we don’t kill the birds you’ll starve to death; I do it so you won’t die”

She said many things but I didn’t bear it and turned her in. It was right, wasn’t it? What else was I to do?... How much do you get for killing birds? She must be more than a year locked up now and I haven’t been able to see her, first they transferred her to a different place and then to another. I have asked but nobody knows.

*(To the audience)*

Where would she be? Where would she be? Where would she be?

*(Disheartened)*

Nobody knows where God is or where people are…

*(To the garbage can)*

What’s with everyone? Why don’t they talk? Why don’t they kiss and laugh? What’s with everyone that they all seem as if they were dead?

*(As if someone was passing by)*

Hey, listen don’t you have a…

*(Disenchanted)*

Damn! She walked away because I was talking

*(She looks around)*

What time is it? It must be late… But there’s no one in my room, I get nothing by going home, not even the buses run around there so I can hear some noise. Fuck! Is a crime what they are doing to me, they are all killing me and I haven’t done anything, just being poor and walk like this, but that’s not a crime, certainly not a crime for being left alone or not to talk to me…

*(Grabs the bottle and drinks, fumbles inside the sack and pulls out a pack of cigarettes, it shows it to the garbage can)*

You see, I have. I only have two and the night never ends when you live missing someone, because it’s not only her you miss. For instance, Jana and I had tea, cooked and talked, that is gone too.

When she was drunk, she sang, laughed about everything and chased me around the room… And she was so funny to speak to. I was very good for sleeping so every night I tucked myself in and cuddled beside her and told God: “Dear God make this night last forever, don’t let it ever end” and the she would say to me: “Stop asking for that, one day He’ll listen to you and comply and it will be disastrous and it’s all gonna be your fault”

She always answered like that, with some joke… But there’s none of these things anywhere anymore. There’s only silence, sheer darkness. No, I can’t be in our room. Everything her eyes saw, everything her hands touched, take me to sadness right away. Sometimes I watch a chair and it seems like a dagger pierced me through, that’s why I go out to walk.

*(She drinks)*

But it’s the same during the day, even though there’s a lot of people in the street, nobody even looks at me, they are afraid I would ask them something. What then can I do? I’m not gonna start talking alone, that frightens me, I’m afraid of going mad.

If Jana doesn’t go out soon at least my father could show up somewhere.

*(To the garbage can)*

Don’t you laugh. Do you think that because I’m old I never had a father?... When I was little I remember I used to go out with him and he used to say to me: “If you ever get lost, sit down and wait for me right there, don’t start walking because that’s worse. Sit down and wait for me”. I don’t know where I got lost, I don’t remember but sometimes when I go out to walk, I sit down for an hour or two just in case he comes to look for me… but he hasn’t showed up either… But how can he show up if he also got lost.

*(To the garbage can after a pause)*

Are you bored of talking to me? Don’t get bored, can’t you see that I don’t want to leave yet? Anyhow it’s cool here and we are comfortable. Aren’t we comfortable? Of course, we are. You are not only comfortable when you have money, you are also comfortable when there’s someone who listens, who pays attention, like you.

Better be dead if you can’t talk to anybody. What’s the point of it.

*(Thoughtfully)*

People are weird now, aren’t they? Yesterday I was sitting in a square fixing this shit

*(She shows the shoe)*

When an old man comes and sits beside me. I got happy. “Now you’ll talk a lot Isabel” I said to myself. I didn’t look at him, I didn’t want to seem to forward. They may get the wrong idea, you know? And just because you are poor doesn’t mean you don’t have dignity. So, I kept fixing the shoe as if nothing were happening, suddenly I hear him speak. Since he spoke to this side

*(She shows her left)*

And I am a little deaf on that ear, I didn’t understand him much so I turned around and in a very polite and educated way I said: “I am so very sorry sir but I did not understand a thing”. The man kept mumbling without paying attention to me so I told him to excuse me again but I could not understand him from that side because I had gotten hit with a stick in a quarrel we had with some neighbours who wanted to beat Jana when we were in an eatery in San Rafael.

When I finished explaining the old man turned around and as mad as if I had insulted his mother he looked at me with crazy eyes and said: “And what is it that you need to understand you nosy cow, I’m not talking to you. I’m talking to myself”. He stood up and left cursing me.

*(To the garbage can)*

What do you think?

*(Confused)*

Alone, talking alone…That’s got to be so sad. Didn’t I tell you that people are turning mad little by little? And what’s worse nobody seems to realize it. As in all things, when there is no turning back we’ll look at each other…

*(She looks at the audience)*

And we’ll say: How could we let this happen?

*(She shuts up, thinks for a while, slowly turns her head towards the garbage can and stares at it)*

Well it’s been only me speaking. Aren’t you my friend? Didn’t you lend me this piece of iron and heard me for about an hour?

*(Aggressively)*

Or you also think you are better than me?

*(She hits it)*

Speak up! Am I not a person too?

*(Anguished)*

Am I not a person?

*(She shakes it)*

Speak up, speak, speak!!

*(Tearfully)*

There’s no one at home, there’s no one anywhere…

*(Shaking the can with desperation)*

Please, talk to me, talk to me, talk to me!...

The End