

Betty Milan

GOODBYE, DOCTOR

(A play in two acts)

*to the memory of Oswald de Andrade
and
for José Celso Martinez Corrêa*

DESCRIPTION

The third generation of a family of Lebanese immigrants in Brazil, Seriema lives the drama of a Western descendant of a people from the Middle East. Her ancestors needed to sire a male first-born to meet the expectations of the family. Pregnancy becomes a problem for Seriema, who following two miscarriages and contrary to her wishes, separates from her husband. Why is motherhood impossible for her? Is it because she cannot identify with the women in her family or some other reason?

Seriema decides to leave Brazil in order to forget the drama of separation. She wins a grant and goes to France, where she begins analysis. Through it, she discovers the true reason why she cannot give birth, namely the unconscious desire to satisfy the will of her father, who never authorized her to conceive. Thanks to listening to the analyst, Seriema ceases to be the victim of her unconscious, grasps the possibility of choosing a father for her child and thus becoming a mother.

The play is structured around the sessions. The way each session ends is always a function of what is said during it, and the text clearly indicates this. The Doctor, by interrupting the session to interpret the analysand's words, thereby underscores the essential elements of what she has said. Each session is one scene; given the nationality of the analysand, the transition from one scene to another can be punctuated by a drumbeat.

CHARACTERS

Seriema: the Doctor's Brazilian analysand

The Doctor: A French analyst

In addition to the two characters, a dancer for the role of Maria, Seriema's nanny, who appears in two scenes, dancing, and whose voice is heard offstage.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Paris. The Doctor's office, with a window and two doors in the rear. Analysands enter through the door on the left and exit through the door on the right. On the left side of the office, two velvet armchairs. Between them, a small table with telephone. On the right side, the couch and armchair of the analyst, imposing.)

The Doctor and Seriemma are seated in the chairs, facing each other. The Doctor is wearing a blazer and a white shirt, without a tie. Seriemma is in a suit, long pants and coat, a masculine leather purse. As the play goes on, the heroine's clothing becomes progressively more feminine.)

DOCTOR

But why did you separate? To this day I don't know the reason, the real reason.

SERIEMA

I didn't want the separation. It was Antonio who moved out. After the second miscarriage.

DOCTOR

There were two miscarriages.

SERIEMA

Yes. I lost a child twice. The second time, Antonio went crazy. He smashed everything in the house and disappeared. He asked a friend to come get what he needed, but he wouldn't send any message. *(Pause)* I wanted him back. I waited for three months; nothing. I did everything possible to obtain a scholarship. I got it and packed my bags. I went far away, hoping he would change his mind. So far, nothing. *(Pause)* I need to find out why I'm alone... why I lost Antonio.

DOCTOR

You didn't separate, you lost Antonio.

SERIEMA

(Pause) I also lost Brazil... I didn't know what it means to be a foreigner. *(Sarcastically)* "Where are you from? What country?" And I never know if I'm speaking correctly. For the least little action in the past, French uses three words. *(Pronouncing the words in French one by one)* For "he ate," *il a mangé*. For the simple number ninety, three words: *quatre vingt dix*. Here, I'm constantly translating from one language to the other, I'm forced to *think* all the time. In Brazil, the language thinks for me... Even having a Coke is complicated here. If you don't say *cocaaa* instead of *coca*, and if you don't change the definite article and say *un coca* instead of *une coca*, nobody understands.

DOCTOR

Hmm. What else? Go on.

SERIEMA

I don't know...

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) "I don't know." She wants and doesn't want to do analysis. If the analyst isn't resourceful he's lost. When he's attacked, he has to keep quiet. If he doesn't, the analysis is over before it begins. *(Pause)* And is she going to go on like that, in silence? She's pretty... straight dark hair... Could she have some Indian ancestry? *(Addressing Seriemma)* Is there Indian blood in your family?

SERIEMA

(Soliloquy) What? Me, an Indian? That's all I need. What is he thinking? That I'm the descendant of those Indians who ran around naked and threw themselves onto European ships believing they were headed to heaven? *(Sarcastically)* They were supposed to exhibit their feathered headdress and brandish their war club to liven up French festivals, risking death from the cold or from diarrhea. Where's your bow and arrow, Seriemma? Where are the feathers and maracas?

DOCTOR

You need to tell me what goes through your mind. Is there Indian blood in your family?

SERIEMA

Seriemma is the Indian name of a Brazilian bird, a Tupi-Guarani word. But there's nothing Indian in me. I've already mentioned that I'm the granddaughter of Lebanese. My grandmother emigrated to Brazil because her future husband was there. An arranged marriage. And she didn't offer any opposition. All she could say was, "From Lebanon to Brazil, at fourteen, five children, because *maktub*, it was written, and that is everything." *Maktub* and she boarded the ship, *maktub* and she got married, *maktub*... It never entered her head that a woman could be free, have the same rights as a man.

DOCTOR

And what does your grandmother's story have to do with your own?

SERIEMA

What does it have to do with me? When I was born, she said, "A lovely child. What a pity it's a girl." My birth was a disappointment, she wanted a male, a real firstborn. *What a pity it's a girl.* How can anyone say something like that? One sentence is enough to save or condemn a person, to dig a grave.

DOCTOR

True.

SERIEMA

And what about my aunt? She prayed day and night to conceive a male. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you... Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed is the fruit—" She even

promised to cross the city on her knees. Novenas and more novenas. (*Indignant*) Her entire pregnancy begging heaven for a son.

DOCTOR

Irrationality...

SERIEMA

An aberration!

DOCTOR

(*Soliloquy*) The pregnancy was torture in her family. Either the woman gave birth to a firstborn male or she was looked down upon. As if the sex of the child depended on the mother! The woman was treated unjustly merely for being a woman. (*Addressing Seriemma*) Is there any relation between your story and that of your mother, or your aunt? I'm referring to the miscarriage... to the miscarriages.

SERIEMA

The doctor said it was a problem in the uterus...

DOCTOR

And you didn't know?

SERIEMA

Not the first time I lost the child, no.

DOCTOR

(*Surprised*) And later?

SERIEMA

I thought the problem wasn't anything serious and wouldn't have greater consequences. I only had an operation after the second miscarriage, when I was forced to... an infection and hemorrhaging... I could have died.

DOCTOR

(*Sighs*) You knew and didn't get treatment? (*Seriemma lowers her head and remains silent*) Speak, I'm listening.

SERIEMA

I know it's my fault.

DOCTOR

You're responsible, not at fault. It wasn't a deliberate act. You didn't willfully ignore the problem.

SERIEMA

And so? Does it do any good to talk? Any good to lock the house after it's been robbed?

DOCTOR

There's no reason for despair. You're in analysis... You can set out on a new path, reinvent your own history. *(The Doctor stands up)*

SERIEMA

It's over? Already?

DOCTOR

Come back tomorrow.

SERIEMA

Tomorrow I can't.

DOCTOR

Then day after tomorrow, at five. *(The Doctor rises, as does Seriema. She puts the money on the table and leaves)* The miscarriage could have been avoided if she had listened to the doctor. She both wants to have a child and for some reason doesn't want to. I hope she reflects on what she said, the fact of not having gotten treatment, of ignoring what she knew, the "problem." The passion of ignorance is the worst passion of all. *(A pause. He sits down, picks up the telephone, and calls his secretary.)* Get me Edouard, please. *(Irritated)* Of course Dr. Edouard. *(He waits)* Hello. Everything all right? Are the test results back yet? *(Pause)* Metathesis? More chemotherapy? *(He puts down the phone, disturbed, takes a deep breath, then resumes the conversation.)* My mother won't do it. *(Pause)* It's going to be very difficult to persuade her... She keeps saying that she's lived long enough, and if it's metathesized she doesn't want further treatment... But I'll get back to you... *(Hangs up)* My God! My mother is condemned! I can't believe it. I have to tell my sister. It won't be easy. They're so close!

(The lights go out and come back on when the next scene begins. This should be repeated throughout the play)

SCENE 2

(Semidarkness. Maria speaks offstage to the sound of a distant drum. Meanwhile, the Doctor and Seriemá remain motionless in the armchairs.)

MARIA'S VOICE (offstage)

The cloud passes, and sadness too. Where are you, Seriemá? You with your smile and your happiness. So far away! The cloud passes, and sadness too. Your husband left, but he can return. Call upon the Lady of Magic, the Goddess of Seduction, who can do everything. Call upon the incendiary angel. *(Tone of invocation)* O lady of the corolla of fire, prepare your magical potion – eye of salamander, toe of newt, tongue of dog – prepare it and have Antonio drink of it. Plunge into his heart the incandescent rod of passion. Invoke, Seriemá. *(Same tone as at the beginning)* The wave comes and the wave goes. Maria waits for you, your Maria. Come back and hear the fiery beating of the drums. Come back and see the flight of birds ecstatic from the rhythm and the blue of the sky. The wave comes and the wave goes.

(Office lighting)

SERIEMA

I dreamed about Maria, the Bahian woman who raised me... Come back, she told me.

DOCTOR

(Pause) Nothing else?

SERIEMA

She advised me to call upon the Goddess of Seduction and ask her to bring back my husband. Unfortunately, I don't believe in magic. If I did, I wouldn't be here.

DOCTOR

And what else?

SERIEMA

(Pause) I've thought about what you said. You'd like me to have Indian blood...

(Laughs) Then you could tell your fellow analysts that you analyzed a savage.

(Ironically) The French love the noble savage.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) Why is she trying to provoke me? What does she gain? It would have been better if she'd thought about what she said: *"I knew and didn't get treatment."* That's the reason for the separation. But it does no good to insist; forcing the issue only increases resistance... That's not why I'm here. Be patient, Doctor! *(Addressing her)* I'm listening.

SERIEMA

Actually, I would *like* to have Indian ancestors, Indian and Portuguese... And not be the descendant of immigrants.

DOCTOR

Why so?

SERIEMA

When I was a child, they called me "Turk." It was derogatory. Besides being illogical, because my grandfather left Lebanon to escape the Turks... to avoid having to serve in the occupying army.

DOCTOR

The Ottoman army.

SERIEMA

And my grandfather's name was changed when he got to Brazil... at customs. What did the name of an immigrant matter? Of a nobody? Later, as if that weren't enough, the nobody was called "people eater."

DOCTOR

(Surprised) People eater?

SERIEMA

Yes. My grandfather was an itinerant peddler. He sold merchandise in the small towns... A hundred-kilo sack on his back, from sunup to sundown. He would go from here to there, without lunch, without anywhere to sleep. "Cotton, silk, taffeta." He would greet people with *Ahlo Sahla* and they would yell: "The Turk, the people eater is here!" Mothers would grab their children and run away. As if my grandfather were a cannibal. *People eater*, just because he spoke another language.

DOCTOR

And now you're in a country whose language isn't your own... French isn't your mother tongue.

SERIEMA

That's true, but my grandparents are Lebanese immigrants. To them, France was synonymous with civilization. My mother's dream was to speak French. "Music to my ears," she used to say. And I studied the language.

DOCTOR

Be that as it may, your mother tongue is Portuguese...

SERIEMA

So?

DOCTOR

You could do analysis with a Portuguese woman who lives here...

SERIEMA

(Soliloquy) A Portuguese, out of the question! Doesn't he know that their language isn't the same? It seems to be, but it isn't. The language of Portugal is one thing, the language of Brazil is another. For sandwich, they say *prego*, which means nail. If someone sees me eating a sandwich, they'll say I'm eating a nail. *Broche*, which is brooch, in Portugal means fellatio. If I compliment her on her brooch, she'll throw me out of her office. No, it's impossible! From her point of view, I warp, I ruin the language... I need Portuguese lessons more than sessions.

DOCTOR

So then?

SERIEMA

No, not with a Portuguese, no way! I'd rather not do analysis.

DOCTOR

Well then, come back tomorrow. At five. *(The Doctor rises, as does Seriema. She pays and leaves. The Doctor sits down) (Soliloquy)* Seriema wants to do analysis with me. And if not with me, with no one. So it has to be the way she wants. But why does she insist on doing analysis in French, in a language that's not her own? In any case, she knows what she wants and doesn't want.

SCENE 3

(The Doctor is sitting alone in his office, reading a newspaper)

DOCTOR

(Looking at his watch) She may not come. She insists on doing analysis with me and then doesn't show up. I suggested a Portuguese analyst; could it be she feels rejected? Not everything she says in Portuguese can be said in French. But maybe that's not even the problem. Maybe it's the sex of the analyst. It may be that she can't imagine doing analysis with a woman. *(Picks up the telephone. A pause)* Why doesn't Mother answer? I asked my sister to stop by her house. *(Pause)* Mother wants nothing to do with further chemotherapy. She's suffered a lot, but I can't accept the idea. How can I live without her? I want her to go on as long as possible. I know I'm selfish. No one can ask the other person to submit to treatment, however much it hurts. I always told myself I would respect her decision, but now... I'm not myself. *(He picks up the newspaper, turns the pages, and reads a headline aloud)*

THE HEART HAS GENDER THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MALE AND FEMALE HEART

Even in the anatomy of the heart, men and women are different! *(The telephone rings, he answers)* Mother? Yes, I was the one who called. *(Pause)* Of course, it's your life. I know, I know. You have the right to decide. But— Mother?... Mother? Hello. Hello... She hung up, shit! *(Replaces the phone on the hook and looks at his watch again)* Five-thirty. Seriema isn't coming. *(He rises, tosses away the newspaper, and leaves)*

SCENE 4

(The Doctor is standing. Seriema comes in, irritated. He sits down; she doesn't)

SERIEMA

(Standing) I heard you tell your secretary, "The little Brazilian woman can come in."

DOCTOR

Sit down. *(She sits but keeps her purse on her shoulder)* Yes, that's right. I said *little Brazilian*. In French the diminutive is affectionate.

SERIEMA

It reminded me of that "little Turk" from my childhood. I can't stand being labeled, Doctor. *("Doctor" is said sarcastically)*

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) Shit! Why did I say *little Brazilian*?

SERIEMA

My grandfather told me that in Lebanon Christians were forced to wear a patch on their sleeve. They could only walk on one side of the street. Anyone walking on the other side would be arrested. *"Ishmel! Ishmel! On the left."* *(Irritated)* My grandfather was called a Christian, a Turk, and a people-eater, and now I'm the *little Brazilian woman*. I prefer to be called by my name: Seriema.

DOCTOR

For good reason. And what else? Speak.

SERIEMA

I don't really know why I'm in France.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) She doesn't listen to herself, doesn't listen to what she says. *(Addressing Seriema)* You said that to your family France was synonymous with civilization— *(The phone rings. The Doctor checks the caller ID screen and answers)* Yes, Mother. As soon as I'm finished, I'll call you. *(To Seriema)* Sorry.

SERIEMA

You can speak to her.

DOCTOR

No, I'm with you now.

SERIEMA

The truth is that my mother would have liked to be born here. *(Ironically)* "Paris! The Eiffel Tower, the Pantheon, Edith Piaf, the Rights of Man! The Sorbonne and real

scholars. The City of Light! Even the Statue of Liberty was sculpted in Paris!" *(A pause)*
But what do I have to do with my mother? I don't know anyone here... My room is tiny
and the bed is so soft I prefer sleeping on the floor. I grew up barefoot and now I never
take off my boots. I'm ten thousand kilometers from home.

DOCTOR

(Emphatically) It's true you left your country, your home, your family... It was a major
dislocation. From one continent to another.

SERIEMA

Because of a husband who only wanted me if I could bear a child. To him, no woman is
unique. He's been "married" several times. Any woman will do. I don't want to be put on
a pedestal, but I have no desire to be like all the others.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) An ancestor who needed to bring a male child into the world in order to be
loved... She ran the risk of being depreciated by giving birth. Seriemma couldn't identify
with her, but she could have identified with some other woman and undergone treatment
to carry her pregnancy to term. Odd... and she always wears suits, with the same purse
on her shoulder... She doesn't use jewelry, just that strange pendant. *(To Seriemma)* You
said you don't want a pedestal, but neither do you want to be like all the others. What
does that mean?

SERIEMA

What does it mean? I don't know.

DOCTOR

Think about it. That's all for today. *(He stands up and extends his hand to receive his
fee.)* One hundred euros.

SERIEMA

Why a hundred?

DOCTOR

For today's session and the other one, the one you didn't show up for.

SERIEMA

I don't have a hundred... *(Looks in her wallet)* I do have a hundred.

DOCTOR

Excellent. *(Seriemma, embarrassed, pays and leaves. The Doctor remains, seated.)* Why
does she say she doesn't have what she owes me when she has it?

SCENE 5

(Seriema is seated in one of the velvet armchairs. The Doctor is standing, staring at the pendant around her neck)

DOCTOR

What are you thinking?

SERIEMA

With you staring at me like that, I can't think. *(Soliloquy)* Should I say I don't like to be looked at that way? That his staring bothers me? That I don't want to be coveted by him? *(Addressing the Doctor)* You're the age my father would be if he were still alive.

DOCTOR

Hmm. *(The Doctor moves back a little, but remains standing)* What is it you have around your neck?

SERIEMA

The glass eye?

DOCTOR

Yes, the eye. Could it be a fetish?

SERIEMA

(Surprised) A fetish... The idea never occurred to me. *(Soliloquy)* After taking me for a savage, now he thinks I'm a fetishist...

(Silence)

DOCTOR

(The Doctor sits down) What else do you have to tell me?

SERIEMA

It's true that I only leave home wearing the eye, with my body "sealed."

DOCTOR

What?

SERIEMA

Sealed body means protected against envy... against the evil eye, as Maria says.

DOCTOR

Maria? Who is she?

SERIEMA

The black nanny who raised me... You don't listen. I've already mentioned her. Because she's the one I miss the most here.

(Semidarkness. The sound of a distant lullaby. Maria's voice offstage. Maria enters, dancing and singing a lullaby to little Seriemma. Meanwhile, the Doctor and Seriemma remain motionless)

MARIA'S VOICE OFFSTAGE

Come here, my love, come here, my dear. Let me give you a hug. The little princess needs to go to sleep now. Afraid? Of what, my sweet girl? The howling wind? The lightning bolt? The thunder? While I am here? Sleep, my love, sleep.

(Maria exits. Normal lighting of the analyst's office)

SERIEMA

Maria never left me. The eye is an amulet that she gave me, a talisman... I can't live without it.

DOCTOR

Can't live?

SERIEMA

No. But why do you ask?

DOCTOR

For you to become aware of your belief in magic.

SERIEMA

What?

DOCTOR

That's right, you believe in magic.

SERIEMA

(Ardently) I believe in Maria, who raised me. Maria is more than a mother, she's my protector... She gave me the talisman to protect me the way she's protected. Who doesn't need protection? Isn't it enough that I'm in France all alone? Living without love?

DOCTOR

Love... That's what you want more than anything.

SERIEMA

True. A man for whom I'm unique...

DOCTOR

As unique as a daughter can be to her father?

SERIEMA

(Pause) My father? He died years ago! I lost sight of him.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) She says she lost sight of her father. That kind of forgetting is both strange and important. *(To Seriema)* Well, I'll see you next time.

SERIEMA

(Ironically) Next time? Already?

DOCTOR

(The Doctor stands up. Seriema pays and leaves. Then he sits down and makes notes. The phone rings. He looks at Caller ID and answers) Edouard? I know, I know. My mother refuses further treatment. Why don't you speak to her? Try. Thanks. *(Hangs up the phone. Raises his hand to his forehead. Presses his head with his fingers)* She had a mastectomy and went through chemotherapy... She doesn't want any more. "It's not living that matters, it's living well." Mother says that, and I agree, but... It does no good to know that for her life is no longer worth living and has become synonymous with borrowed time. Knowing is one thing, accepting is another. I wonder if my sister's at home. *(He picks up the phone and dials. A pause. He hangs up)* Answering machine.

SCENE 6

(*Seriema and the Doctor are seated face to face. Silence*)

DOCTOR

(*Soliloquy*) Did Seriema come here to say nothing? If she at least talked, I could stop thinking about death, about the passage of time. (*To Seriema*) Here you can speak freely. Nothing you say will be censured.

SERIEMA

It never occurred to me that you could censure me. Otherwise I wouldn't come. I thought it strange that you called asking what time I would be at your office... I never heard of an analyst doing that. You must have guessed I didn't want to come.

DOCTOR

But you came. Talk.

SERIEMA

(*Irritated*) I don't have any way of saying what I want. Because, in your language, I don't know the word...

DOCTOR

What word?

SERIEMA

Saudade. Without that word, I'm not who I am. I miss the language of Brazil. *Bonjour* and I miss my country, *bom dia*. *Bonsoir* is strange, because *bonsoir* doesn't exist in my language, only good evening, *boa noite*, *bonne nuit*. Because night falls there in the blink of an eye. Here, when I say a word wrong, the person I'm talking to first corrects me and only afterward listens to what I mean to say. And it's impossible not to make mistakes. In French *sea* is *la mere*, feminine; in Portuguese, it's *o mar*, masculine. *Banco*, bank, in French is feminine, *la banque*. But no matter how often I go to the bank, I always say *le banque*, I get it wrong.

DOCTOR

(*Soliloquy*) Is she going to go on with that list? There's not a session when she doesn't talk about the language problem. That allows her to skirt what's really important, the essential.

SERIEMA

But the worst is what happened to our samba. *O samba*, masculine, became *la samba*... Everything is turned around. Tree, palm, fruit – in French they're masculine, not feminine. Even the sex of a ball is different.

DOCTOR

The masculine sex of words, the feminine sex, sex... (*Seriema abruptly turns away from the Doctor's gaze. She stares at the couch. Then she gets up and throws herself onto it. Following her movement, the Doctor sits down in the armchair*) You didn't go to the couch, you conquered it! From now on, it's yours.

SERIEMA

(*Pause. Ironically*) The couch is mine... To say what? That I sleep alone every night? I don't even remember anymore what sex is like. Or rather, I do. But sex without love doesn't count. With him, at least—

DOCTOR

With whom?

SERIEMA

Antonio. With him I at least had the illusion of love. I thought he loved me... My happiness was clear as day.

DOCTOR

And now you think you were mistaken? That it wasn't love?

SERIEMA

(*Pause*) I don't know what I think anymore.

DOCTOR

(*Seriema raises her head and stares at the Doctor*) And? Speak.

SERIEMA

I remembered something my father told me shortly before he died: "Don't forget that I love you." It seemed like a demand.

DOCTOR

It was. (*Emphatically*) And you haven't forgotten him... (*The Doctor stands up. Seriema pays and leaves*) Well, the face-to-face is over. Seriema no longer needs to look at me. She can lie down and listen to herself. It was a victory. People live their lives without listening to themselves, with a tin ear. Some even die without ever having listened to themselves, eternally deaf to themselves... to their own body, which screams rather than talks. A deafness that in itself is enough to justify psychoanalysis. If it even still needs to be justified.

(*From this session to the end, Seriema will go to the couch*)

ACT II

SCENE 1

(The armchairs are in the dark and the light is focused on the couch. The window, barely visible at the start of the act, becomes more noticeable as the play advances. Seriema enters, frightened, and lies down.)

DOCTOR

What happened? Talk.

SERIEMA

(Pause. Abruptly) What happened was that I had a hallucination. That never happened to me before.

DOCTOR

A hallucination... *(Without changing his tone)* And what was it?

SERIEMA

What was it? I saw—

DOCTOR

Speak.

SERIEMA

(Softly) Rats. *(Disgusted)* I saw rats in the waiting room. The other patient said there weren't any, but I saw them... I saw two.

DOCTOR

Two what?

SERIEMA

Two huge, black, horrible rats.

DOCTOR

(Puzzled) Two rats?

SERIEMA

(Pause) That's strange!

DOCTOR

What?

SERIEMA

When you pronounced the word, I suddenly realized that *ra* is the first syllable of my father's name... and my great-grandfather's.

DOCTOR

What is the name?

SERIEMA

Raji... And it was to keep from being executed that my great-grandfather emigrated... so his children could revere their saints, live in peace, and bury their dead. He died on the ship and, to avoid the plague, was thrown into the sea. The body was wrapped in a shroud. Bible verses... farewell... *alla cum mag.*

DOCTOR

Hmm.

SERIEMA

He left Lebanon, but he never arrived in Brazil.

DOCTOR

He did arrive. Otherwise you wouldn't be talking about him.

SERIEMA

Till today I had never spoken of him. Just as I never said the name of my father when I was a child. "What's your father's name?" "Roberto... Ricardo..." I never said Raji. Why should I run the risk of being called a Turk? (*Seriema covers her face with her hands*)

DOCTOR

(*Affectionately*) What matters, my dear, is that now you can say the name. That you can tell the truth. There is no way to forever deny one's origins... renounce one's ancestors. Life depends on what we can say... Your life has changed.

SERIEMA

What about the hallucination?

DOCTOR

You won't have it again. The name you silenced to hide your origins has materialized... Materialized in the rat. Now you can say Raji. There's no more cause for hallucination. You're no longer subject to an unexpected apparition of your father... (*The Doctor stands up*) Come back tomorrow. (*Seriema gets up, pays, and leaves*) It's horrible not being able to be Arab, Jew, black... Not being able to be who you are... Nothing is worse than racism turned inward. Seriema is cured of that... She was cured today, here in analysis. (*Pause*) I'm the one who needs analysis now, because I can't accept my mother's decision. She's categorical: "Only palliative care." She was always opposed to the therapeutic fury, but death means *never again*... It means living without the assurance that she's there for the next time we meet... to call me *son*.

(*The light goes out at the end of this and all subsequent scenes.*)

SCENE 2

(The Doctor in the chair and Seriema on the couch)

SERIEMA

I dreamed about my father. He died so long ago!

DOCTOR

The dream, what was it like?

SERIEMA

I was at a judo center, near the house where I lived as a child. I was the only girl. Wearing white and ready to spar... and a yellow belt on my waist.

DOCTOR

Yellow?

SERIEMA

Yes, for beginners. My father was sitting down and showing me the black belt of champions. He wanted to watch the fight. Suddenly, the instructor bursts into the room and demands he return the black belt. I scream and run out. My father catches up to me in the street, takes me by the arm, and pulls from his pocket another black belt, laughing loudly.

DOCTOR

An unbeatable father!

SERIEMA

He wanted me to be unbeatable, a champion at judo, karate, whatever... Everything the boys in the neighborhood did, I did. My father would say, "You were born to be like them. If boys can learn, so can you!" Anything my father wanted, I wanted... Sports and studies. I was brought up to compete, to win contests, scholarships...

DOCTOR

That's why you're here... You came on a scholarship, didn't you?

SERIEMA

(Pause. Ironically) I won the scholarship after losing my life, the child I conceived. I miscarried instead of giving birth. It would have been better to be born sterile and not have built up expectations.

DOCTOR

What is the relationship between having lost the child and your story?

SERIEMA

What story?

DOCTOR

Your childhood... your father.

SERIEMA

My father is dead and buried!

DOCTOR

Buried doesn't mean forgotten. Your dream is proof of that.

SERIEMA

He died after raising me to love only him. "Don't forget that you can always count on me. No one is ever going to love you the way I do." Always, never...

DOCTOR

What else?

SERIEMA

He would pick me up at school and want to know if some boy had spoken to me. When I told him no, and repeated *the same thing* every day, he would smile. Then he'd ask, "What would you have done?" I said I would have hit the boy. And he said, "Good for you." He couldn't accept that I would be interested in anyone else. He wanted me only for himself. (*Seriema covers her face with her hands*)

DOCTOR

(*Soliloquy*) He definitely did everything he could to turn his daughter against men... half of humanity. No wonder she's in analysis. (*To Seriema*) What's important is that you've remembered the story.

SERIEMA

Important why?

DOCTOR

Because whoever ignores the past becomes its victim, goes on repeating, and can't reinvent his life. (*He stands up. Seriema pays and leaves*) She didn't want to know about her father, but he returned in her dream. Ancestors return, they don't cease to exist. That's my consolation. When Mother is no more, she'll still be with me in dreams and in memory... to tell me it's necessary to live well.

SCENE 3

(The Doctor in the chair and Seriemma on the couch)

SERIEMA

I left here in bad shape. I'm paying just to suffer. I don't know if I should continue.

(Silence)

DOCTOR

Why did you leave in bad shape?

SERIEMA

I left feeling ashamed of my father... and I remembered other embarrassing things.

DOCTOR

You can talk here. You must... I'm here to listen.

SERIEMA

(Pause) My breasts... When they began to grow, I was ashamed! And the nipple that became hard as a rock. It hurt and meant *body of a woman*. Suddenly, I was no longer sexless.

DOCTOR

You were no longer sexless?

SERIEMA

Yes. I was no longer sexless. Before that rock-hard nipple, sex didn't exist. From then on, it was one embarrassment after another. The pubic hair, the blood every month... menstruation. I would writhe in pain from cramps and felt disgust. Whether I wanted it or not, I was no longer like my father. And, like my mother, I didn't want to be... She lived for the church. To her, everything was a sin. The word *freedom* was meaningless. Luckily, it was Maria who raised me.

DOCTOR

You were as ashamed of your body as of your origins... Your body contradicted your desire to remain sexless.

SERIEMA

(Ironically) "If boys can learn, so can you!" And I imagined I was like them. *(Laughs)* Nonsense! I only had the right to do what my father wanted. And when I met my first boyfriend, he stopped talking to me. He wanted to kill me.

DOCTOR

Really?

SERIEMA

If it weren't for Maria...

(Semidarkness. The sound of bossa nova. Maria's voice offstage, then she enters dancing)

MARIA'S VOICE OFFSTAGE

Why do you mistreat yourself? There's nothing wrong with you, Seriemma. Your father is jealous. The jealous heart is jealous because it is. Pay no attention... What matters is how you feel... Pay it no mind, let it be. Come, my love...

(Maria exits. Office lighting returns)

SERIEMA

Maria gave me strength. But my father was devastated and I no longer found pleasure in the courtship. I wanted to dump my boyfriend and in the end he dumped me.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) One more victim of jealousy... of the tyranny of jealousy.

SERIEMA

I didn't know pleasure when I met Antonio. He inflamed me. I liked what I felt... Sex was never the same again, and I went far. I put away shame. For us, the word *sin* had no meaning. With him, I didn't know who was man and who was woman; each of us could be one or the other. If it hadn't been for the miscarriage— Antonio told me I didn't want his child. *(Pause)* That was at the hospital, just after the hemorrhage and the operation on my uterus. From that moment on, nothing went right. I was cured but had no husband.

DOCTOR

(Emphatically) And you did want to have Antonio's child?

SERIEMA

(Pause) I don't know. *(The Doctor rises)* I say *I don't know* and you get up.

DOCTOR

True.

SERIEMA

You're going to leave me with *I don't know*? I can't stand this way of ending a session... this sudden brutal interruption. *(Seriemma rises and is about to leave without paying)*

DOCTOR

Fifty euros.

SERIEMA

I didn't withdraw any money.

DOCTOR

Then go and get it.

SERIEMA

(Soliloquy at the office door) I'll come back tomorrow. Today I'm taking a break from the unconscious!

SCENE 4

(The Doctor waits for Seriema sitting in his armchair)

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) A being without sex is what Seriema wanted to be. Because biological sex ran counter to her fantasy... the fantasy of being like her father.

SERIEMA

(She enters agitated and immediately lies down) I'm late because Antonio called. It was last night. He said he needed to see me. I simply told him I'm in Paris. He hung up and called back. "You're there... then that's where I'm going." I was puzzled.

DOCTOR

Not without reason.

SERIEMA

And now I'm confused.

DOCTOR

Hmm.

(Silence)

SERIEMA

This business of paying every time I come here bothers me. I don't understand why it has to be that way. It'd be better if it wasn't.

DOCTOR

For you to forget that you pay me... that I'm your analyst. Unconditional love is what you want.

SERIEMA

I don't deny it. I wanted to be loved unconditionally by Antonio, with or without a child. I wanted to be loved just as I loved. I got pregnant twice because that's what he wanted.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) She got pregnant to satisfy her husband! Truly an aberration... That's what it means to be the object of desire of the other... *(To Seriema)* You only wanted what Antonio wanted... just like in your childhood.

SERIEMA

I don't understand.

DOCTOR

In childhood, you only wanted what your father wanted... You didn't speak with anyone at school... with any boy.

SERIEMA

(Pause) True. And later... without being aware of it, I lived only to satisfy Antonio.

DOCTOR

Except that you got pregnant and didn't give birth. The desire to satisfy your husband wasn't realized... Why?

SERIEMA

You only listen to what I say in order to find out something else.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) She's evading again. If she could, she'd argue analytical theory with me just to continue in ignorance... to not do analysis.

SERIEMA

You ask questions... Answers, you never give me. And today I have nothing to say. I can't take any more. May I leave? I want to sleep. Last night, after the phone call, I didn't sleep a wink. I kept thinking about what I should do.

DOCTOR

See you next week. *(He stands up)*

SERIEMA

Next week?

DOCTOR

The holiday... because of the holiday.

SERIEMA

(Gets up. Ironically) Have a nice holiday. *(She pays and leaves)*

DOCTOR

(Standing, walking) She's prettier when she's irritated. As much feminine as masculine. There's nothing of sexless, androgynous, about her That's why she loves Antonio... "With him, I didn't know who was man and who was woman; each of us could be one or the other." Seriemma doesn't insist on being one or the other, she has a freedom that I lack... I've never had an experience like hers. Or rather, I may have had but would never dare say it. Say I didn't know if I was man or woman? Never. Fear of being homosexual – as if that were a perversion – as if bisexuality didn't exist. I studied but didn't learn what I studied... It's not enough to study theory in order to recognize one's own bisexuality... Seriemma's freedom astounds me.

SCENE 5

(The Doctor in his chair and Seriemma sitting up on the couch)

DOCTOR

Better to lie down. *(Seriemma puts on leg on the couch)*

SERIEMMA

I wasn't even going to come today.

DOCTOR

But you came, and that's what matters. And you're here on the couch, lying down... *(Seriemma doesn't change positions, and the Doctor doesn't insist. Soliloquy)* I can't insist on the correct position. I can't take the chance that she'll leave and interrupt her analysis... I have to be cool.

SERIEMMA

(Pause) Friday I forgot the key to my apartment and couldn't get into the building. I had to wait in the street until my neighbor showed up, till three in the morning. I got sick and spent all weekend in bed. *(Emphatically)* And, yesterday, what I had wasn't a dream, it was a nightmare!

DOCTOR

I'm listening.

SERIEMMA

(Ironically) "I'm listening." If I hadn't spoken about my father, I wouldn't have had the nightmare. I woke up so frightened that I cut myself... I hit my head on the glass door in the bathroom. I can't take this analysis anymore.

DOCTOR

But what was it you dreamed?

SERIEMMA

I can't tell you.

DOCTOR

You can. Here, you can.

SERIEMMA

(Lies down) I was in a red bubble... sleeping on the floor. Suddenly, I heard a whistle and a voice saying, "Time to wake up now." It was what my father would say every morning.

DOCTOR

And what else?

SERIEMA

(Pause) I wake up and see the floor of the floating bubble. I stretch and get up carefully so I don't fall. I walk as if I were on a tightrope. At every step, the voice: "*Mens sana in corpore sano.*" Another favorite saying of my father's. I stop and look at the red, which lightens in color and changes into a glaring brilliance... Suddenly, he appears.

DOCTOR

Who appears?

SERIEMA

My father... (She falls silent and covers her face with her hands)

DOCTOR

What are you ashamed of?

SERIEMA

Of what happened.

DOCTOR

(Softly) Tell me.

SERIEMA

(Agitated) My father hands me a newborn that he's holding in his arms. "Take him, take our son." (Beside herself) "Our son..." That's incest! (Seriema crosses her arms over her chest and turns her head away to hide her face) The child of insanity, of my father's morbid jealousy and my own submission. (Bitterly) *Mens sana in corpore sano.* I woke up as if I'd just left hell. Incest is a crime... an abjection. I'm afraid I'm going crazy!

DOCTOR

Stay calm. The fantasy of incest isn't incest, and no one is crazy because they want to be.

SERIEMA

Hmm.

DOCTOR

It's true that an incest fantasy isn't innocuous.

SERIEMA

I don't understand what you mean.

DOCTOR

If not for the incest fantasy, you wouldn't have sought treatment... You could have had Antonio's child. But the father of your child, to you, wasn't Antonio.

SERIEMA

Now I understand even less.

DOCTOR

The father of your child, in your fantasy, was your father. *(Pause)* The unconscious exists, we are all subject to it. *(The Doctor stands up)* Come. You're no longer unaware of what you needed to know. *(Seriema remains seated)* Come, Seriema. *(She rises mechanically, pays, and leaves)* "My desire will be yours." A father who shackled his daughter... kept her from even imagining a father for her own child... and thus made motherhood impossible. A perverse father who destroyed his descendants before they ever came into the world. The unconscious exists and it isn't the little lamb of a good shepherd. But Seriema has taken a giant step and broken the shackles. She's no longer the slave of repetition.

SCENE 6

(The Doctor is sitting in his chair, alone)

DOCTOR

Half an hour late. One step forward, one step back.

SERIEMA

(Seriema comes in and doesn't lie down but remains standing) I'm in no condition to do the session and I don't even know if I'm going to stay in France.

DOCTOR

Why?

SERIEMA

I lost the eye.

DOCTOR

What?

SERIEMA

Coming out of the telephone booth.

DOCTOR

Did you hurt yourself again? You lost an eye?

SERIEMA

The glass eye, the pendant. My protector.

DOCTOR

How did it happen?

SERIEMA

Uh... in the booth.

DOCTOR

Where?

SERIEMA

(Hesitantly) In the booth where I disconnect the telephone.

DOCTOR

(Without censure) You disconnect the telephone?

SERIEMA

Yes... to talk to Brazil. All Brazilians do it.

DOCTOR

And how was it that you lost the fetish, the protector?

SERIEMA

I don't know. I only know that nothing else matters to me.

DOCTOR

(Imperatively) Go back to the booth, look for the eye. If you don't find it, call Brazil, order another one right away. *(Seriema leaves)* Without the pendant, Seriema won't stay, and I'm here so she'll stay. Look for it, make a phone call, send a telegram... Anything for her to continue analysis till the end. If it's necessary for me to act like a guru, I'll become a guru. The analyst is an actor who pretends not to be acting, he can take on any role. Just because I'm French doesn't mean I'm not Brazilian. Even without believing in magic.

SCENE 7

(The Doctor in his chair and Seriemma on the couch, in feminine clothing)

SERIEMA

In the waiting room I saw rats... Today, I dozed off and dreamed you were dead and in a coffin. From time to time you would get up and console the people present, say *adieu*. As if you were a fantasy.

DOCTOR

How so, a fantasy?

SERIEMA

No, I made a mistake. I meant to say *phantom* – as if you were a *phantom* – but I misspoke. *(Pause)* In French, I get confused. Two languages so similar and yet so different! I even think you were dead because–

DOCTOR

Because of what?

SERIEMA

(Pause) If you died, I would go back to Brazil... here I stumble over words, stumble and fall, words seem like stones in the road. They're only good for me to communicate. "What does it cost?" "Give me change" "Please pass the bread." They don't take me back to anything, they're opaque, they're like things.

DOCTOR

(Tenderly) What about the other words, the ones in Portuguese?

SERIEMA

I was born and brought up with them... they have more than one meaning, they take me back to other times, other places... I don't make use of words just to achieve this or that. With them I play and find joy, I invent, I surprise myself. My language is my joy. And I need the relief it gives me. In Portuguese, I feel safe. I have the certainty of being able to say what I mean. *(Pause)* Besides, I've had enough of living without sunshine. The French say that the sun shines for everyone, but here I never see the sun. What did I do wrong to be so far from home? Antonio calls me every day, asking me to return. He's the man I love... and want to have a child with.

DOCTOR

(Emphatically) The man you want to have a child with. Then you've chosen the father!

SERIEMA

(Pause) I've chosen.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) Now she'll leave...

SERIEMA

I want his child... a child born there, who speaks my language.

DOCTOR

Hmm. And what else?

SERIEMA

(Laughs) You're not interested in what I say but in what's left unsaid.

DOCTOR

That's true. See you tomorrow. *(Seriema pays and leaves)* What interests an analyst if not the part that's left unsaid? The fact is that a child is now within Seriema's reach... Now she can give life, because she can choose the father. She has stopped being against herself. Analysis is over. *(Pause)* No, analysis will only be over when Seriema understands why she chose an analyst whose language isn't her own, since for her, language is fundamental.

SCENE 8

(The Doctor in his chair. Seriema enters and sits on the couch)

SERIEMA

(Pause) It's not easy to say...

DOCTOR

Hmm.

SERIEMA

The time has come to go home... I don't want to stay here forever. And I don't have anything more to say.

DOCTOR

I think you do. Maybe now you can tell me why you did analysis in a language that's not yours.

SERIEMA

I don't know. *(Pause)* Maybe it was—

DOCTOR

Yes, yes?

SERIEMA

(Hesitating) Maybe it was in order to not say everything.

DOCTOR

How so?

SERIEMA

My father always said he was the only one I could tell everything.

DOCTOR

(Soliloquy) My God!

SERIEMA

(Pause) It was to do what my father wanted that I chose you... in order to not say everything. I chose an analyst who didn't know my language. So as not to reveal myself... Unbelievable! An aberration!

DOCTOR

No, my dear. It was an unconscious act.

SERIEMA

Choosing an analyst to obey my father?

DOCTOR

The unconscious acts and speaks for us. And no one can be held responsible for what he does without being conscious of it.

SERIEMA

What madness!

DOCTOR

A madness that was the condition of your analysis. I had to accept your choice so you could move ahead. *(Pause)* Now you're free... free of your father's desire.

SERIEMA

Free of my father's desire?

DOCTOR

Yes. Now you can follow your own path.

SERIEMA

(In a low voice) Is it over?

DOCTOR

Like it or not. Of course. You didn't gain your freedom from your father just to be tied to the analyst.

SERIEMA

(With confidence) The analysis is over. Brazil... Antonio is waiting for me.

DOCTOR

Seriema...

SERIEMA

Adieu.

DOCTOR

Adeus.

SERIEMA

Goodbye, Doctor.

(The characters remain motionless. The distant sound of a samba. Semidarkness. Maria enters, dancing.)

THE END