

# CROSSROADS

by  
Al Schnupp

## THE FAMILY

Tobias, a playwright, thirty-seven years old  
Helen, wife of Tobias, thirty-three  
Demetri, son of Tobias and Helen, fifteen  
Melina, daughter of Tobias and Helen, thirteen  
(The family grows older throughout the play)

## THE WORLD

Alpha, male actor who plays multiple roles  
Psi, male actor, who plays multiple roles  
Omega, female actor, who plays multiple roles  
(Alpha Psi Omega is the National Honorary Theatre Society)

An outcast family travels through time  
and meets a host of bizarre and eccentric characters  
who forever change them.

## SCENE ONE – THE ROAD FROM ATHENS – GREECE - CIRCA 458 BC

(ALPHA is Thespis, the Father of Drama. PSI is a Judge at the Theatre Festival of Dionysus. OMEGA is a Judge of the Law. They confront TOBIAS).

ALPHA            You hit him! The pride of Greece! In the snout!

OMEGA           The man wrote Oedipus, the greatest play ever! Now, because of you, our national treasure is toothless.

PSI                What were you thinking?

ALPHA            He's practically twice your age.

TOBIAS           Sophocles always wins. He always gets first place.

ALPHA            Euripides took top prize last year.

PSI                The year before that, Aeschylus won.

TOBIAS           I always come in last.

OMEGA            Don't you think...maybe...there's a reason for that.

TOBIAS           It's humiliating! Year after year, all I get is honorable mention.

ALPHA            Tobias, face it. Your plays suck.

PSI                Thespis is right. They're dreadful.

ALPHA            Take a lesson from your colleagues: you need to create characters who are recognizable, like Medea.

OMEGA            The woman's a bitch. The audience gets bitch.

TOBIAS           I never met anyone remotely like Medea.

PSI                Next time we have a family reunion, I'll invite you.

ALPHA            A writer has a world of possibilities before him. And what do you conjure up? A crippled girl with a menagerie of clay pots and a mother who continually whines about her fate.

PSI                What's that?

OMEGA            Boring.

TOBIAS           Greek plays are filled with women who whine! Clytaemnestra...Electra...

ALPHA            Yeah. But they whine magnificently. With style.

PSI                We decided you should leave Athens.

ALPHA            Take up residence somewhere else.

OMEGA            We suggest some place primitive. Far off. Like Rome.

TOBIAS           But I like Athens!

PSI                Sorry.

TOBIAS           I won't go!

ALPHA            You don't have a choice, Tobias.

OMEGA            (Holding up a paper). Your eviction notice.

ALPHA            It'll do you good.

PSI                Expand your horizons.

OMEGA            See the world from a different perspective.

ALPHA            Take up a new profession. Use your muscles. Smoke hash. Acquire a mistress. Try exotic foods.

TOBIAS           Leave?

OMEGA            Immediately.

TOBIAS           Might I return home - just for a moment - to gather together a few things? Say farewell to my wife and children?

PSI                It's not safe to enter your neighborhood.

TOBIAS           I must leave . . . without seeing my family?

ALPHA            Don't fuss. We've rounded them up.

PSI                They're on their way here now.

(A two-wheeled cart, loaded with supplies, is pulled on stage by HELEN, DEMETRI and MELINA).

TOBIAS What's this?  
 OMEGA They're going with you, Tobias.  
 HELEN Hello, dear. It's always something, isn't it?  
 MELINA Thanks, Dad. You've ruined my life. I'm destined to be the loser daughter of a freak father, like, forever.  
 DEMETRI Why can't you be normal?  
 HELEN Your father hates that word, Demetri.  
 PSI (Handing DEMETRI cash). A little spending money. For the road.  
 DEMETRI (To PSI). Who are you?  
 PSI A judge. I help select winners of the theatre festival.  
 DEMETRI Are you the jerk who slams Dad's plays?  
 PSI He makes it easy, son.  
 DEMETRI (To OMEGA). Are you a critic, too?  
 OMEGA I represent the court, here to enforce the law.  
 TOBIAS Did you bring my writing supplies?  
 HELEN From what I hear, your career as a writer is over, Tobias.  
 DEMETRI What about my paint and brushes?  
 HELEN I'm only one person!  
 MELINA You snagged my makeup...and hair gel?  
 HELEN It's not like I had advance warning!  
 PSI Quickly.  
 MELINA Can Seline come with us? She's my bestest friend.  
 TOBIAS No! One teen queen is enough!  
 HELEN I thought Adele was your B. F. F.  
 MELINA That was last week.  
 ALPHA We recommend the north road out of town.  
 PSI As a precaution, we prepared a disguise.  
 TOBIAS I'm not wearing that!  
 OMEGA If you were recognized, it would be disastrous.  
 ALPHA (To HELEN). Talk to him. (Starts to exit).  
 HELEN There's a bounty on your head, dear.  
 MELINA It's like we're characters in *Oedipus*. Banished from our own country.  
 TOBIAS DON'T. MENTION. THAT. PLAY!  
 MELINA Where are we going?  
 HELEN You have an aunt in Sparta, honey.  
 TOBIAS We are not staying with *him*.  
 MELINA I'm hungry.  
 TOBIAS Thespis! When we settle down, if I write another play . . . will you read it?  
 ALPHA If you find a way . . . to smuggle it back to Athens, yes, Tobias, I'll muddle through. (ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA exit).  
 MELINA (Rummaging through baskets). Where's the food?  
 TOBIAS (Shouting off). Tell Sophocles I'm sorry.  
 MELINA Where am I supposed to sit?  
 HELEN (To MELINA). Grab the other shaft!  
 DEMETRI (Standing in for MELINA). I have it.  
 TOBIAS I'm sorry, Helen.  
 HELEN Push!  
 TOBIAS I'm such a fool.  
 HELEN There will be plenty of time, later, to discuss that!

(The family begins walking).

SCENE TWO - THE PHANTOM ROAD - BOHEMIA - CIRCA 1212 AD

(If a revolve stage is used, the family walks counter to the movement of the rotating stage. They stop. They unload supplies and begin to prepare their evening meal. The makeshift table consists of a plank and two sawhorses. An iron tripod, with a kettle hanging from it, is set up).

MELINA           Why can't we get an ox?  
 TOBIAS           We've gone over this.  
 MELINA           Look how rough my hands are!  
 HELEN            Soon, your father will buy a parcel of land.  
 TOBIAS           Don't encourage her. You know we can't afford it.  
 MELINA           How can I ever get married? We never stay anywhere long enough for me to meet  
                       someone. I need a manicure.  
 HELEN            Demetri, would you gather some firewood?  
 MELINA           Why not burn Dad's plays?  
 HELEN            What an awful thing to say!  
 TOBIAS           What happened to our table?  
 HELEN            I sold it. Weeks ago. Outside Kiev.  
 DEMETRI          It's getting cold.  
 MELINA           How can Demetri become an artist if he doesn't go to school?  
 HELEN            Melina, find the sack of beans. Tobias, can you sharpen the knife?  
 MELINA           I miss Minerva. If we can't have an ox, can we at least buy a slave?  
 DEMETRI          Why does it feel so cold?  
 OMEGA           (Enters with ALPHA and PSI. They wear red gloves that extend up under their sleeves).  
                       Good evening.  
 PSI                Don't be frightened.  
 ALPHA            We intend no harm.  
 PSI                Very wise. To keep a knife close by.  
 ALPHA            Perhaps you would share your provisions.  
 PSI                We're quite hungry.  
 OMEGA            We don't require much.  
 ALPHA            A pinch will do.  
 OMEGA            Do you have any meat?  
 ALPHA            We love fresh meat.  
 PSI                But smoked or brined is fine.  
 ALPHA            We don't turn down flesh of any kind.  
 PSI                What a darling child.  
 TOBIAS           I'm sorry. We have no meat.  
 MELINA           Let them stay!  
 OMEGA            What's your name, sweetheart?  
 MELINA           Melina.  
 DEMETRI          We have plenty of food.  
 OMEGA            Such a handsome boy.  
 DEMETRI          What about the lamb in the salt chest?  
 PSI                Lamb! I adore lamb!  
 OMEGA            We can't pay.  
 PSI                We can tell you stories.  
 ALPHA            Show you tricks.  
 PSI                Will you set a place for us at your table?

TOBIAS So be it!  
 MELINA Thank you, Papa.  
 PSI Melina. Such a pretty name. The boy. Is he your brother?  
 MELINA Yes. His name is Demetri.  
 OMEGA A fine specimen.  
 ALPHA Is that your doll?  
 MELINA Yes.  
 ALPHA May I touch it?  
 MELINA Of course.  
 PSI (To MELINA). May I touch you? (There is never any aggressive movement on the parts of ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA to touch MELINA and DEMETRI. The children must grant permission to be touched).  
 ALPHA You have a sweet face.  
 OMEGA Such pretty eyes.  
 PSI May we touch you?  
 MELINA (Pulls away). What do you do?  
 ALPHA A little of nothing.  
 PSI A bit of everything.  
 OMEGA Always busy.  
 PSI Coming. Going.  
 ALPHA Never stopping.  
 OMEGA We just returned from the crusades.  
 ALPHA What a glorious sight.  
 PSI Thousands of innocent children.  
 ALPHA Disciples of Christ. Unarmed. Barefoot.  
 OMEGA Marching to Jerusalem  
 PSI Meeting the Disciples of Mohammad.  
 OMEGA Warriors on horseback.  
 ALPHA A sublime slaughter. Fraught with divine purpose.  
 OMEGA Limbs littering the ground.  
 ALPHA Severed veins. Broken bones.  
 PSI Exquisite cries of woe.  
 OMEGA The lamb looks delicious.  
 PSI (In unison with ALPHA and OMEGA, to DEMETRI). May we touch you?  
 ALPHA Just once.  
 OMEGA Briefly.  
 DEMETRI Who is Christ?  
 MELINA Who is Mohammad?  
 ALPHA They are Children of God.  
 DEMETRI Did you take part in the battle?  
 PSI Oh, no!  
 OMEGA We don't engage in combat.  
 DEMETRI What do you do?  
 ALPHA A little of nothing.  
 PSI A bit of everything.  
 ALPHA I once counseled Cain as a young boy.  
 PSI I was a tutor to Hannibal.  
 OMEGA Attila was a pupil of mine.  
 PSI Always busy.  
 OMEGA Never a moment to pause.  
 PSI Never a moment to rest.

MELINA Why are your hands red?  
 OMEGA I was born this way.  
 PSI These are gloves. Given to me many years ago.  
 ALPHA I had to knit my own. From the fleece of a ram. Slaughtered by Juno.  
 OMEGA (To TOBIAS). You are good . . . to share your meal.  
 PSI Might we spend the night?  
 OMEGA We'll gather wood.  
 PSI Stoke the fire.  
 ALPHA We will gladly share our beds with the children should they grow cold.  
 MELINA Father, say yes.  
 DEMETRI They promise to tell stories.  
 MELINA Perhaps they will inspire you.  
 DEMETRI (To ALPHA). Father is a writer.  
 OMEGA A writer?  
 ALPHA Oh, the stories we have.  
 PSI They will tantalize your flesh.  
 ALPHA Curdle your blood.  
 MELINA May I try on your gloves?  
 PSI We can't remove them.  
 ALPHA The fibers have grown into our skin.  
 PSI They are part of us.  
 OMEGA Would you like to touch them?  
 TOBIAS Keep your bloody hands to yourself!  
 ALPHA Bloody?  
 PSI Our hands never touch blood!  
 TOBIAS (Rises abruptly, brandishing a knife). It's time to go!  
 ALPHA We just arrived.  
 PSI We were having such a pleasant time.  
 TOBIAS Leave! Now!  
 ALPHA Don't you wish to be entertained?  
 MELINA Father!  
 HELEN All of you. Out!  
 OMEGA What have we done to upset you?  
 TOBIAS It's what you plan to do. I've seen your face before - in the plays of my colleagues. Furies.  
 Demons who destroy their prey.  
 PSI Have you gone mad?  
 TOBIAS I've given you fair warning.  
 OMEGA You would cut our throats?  
 TOBIAS To the bone.  
 PSI It's far too dark to navigate the road.  
 ALPHA The weather may turn foul.  
 OMEGA There could be bandits lying in wait.  
 TOBIAS You will not recruit my children!  
 ALPHA Farewell, children. Perhaps we may entertain you another time.  
 PSI We'll set up camp down the road, just around the bend. (ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA exit).  
 DEMETRI Why did you chase them off?  
 TOBIAS Eat!  
 DEMETRI We haven't entertained guests in a long while.  
 MELINA They wore exotic perfumes and had the most enchanting voices.  
 TOBIAS You are in need of company?

DEMETRI Sometimes Mom and you aren't enough.  
 TOBIAS I'll forgive you for that.  
 MELINA They meant no harm. Demetri's right. You can't give us everything we need.  
 TOBIAS (Rises). Clean the dishes! And stay close at hand tonight!  
 DEMETRI We're being grounded?  
 TOBIAS (Turns back). I know what you're thinking. Don't!  
 DEMETRI What?  
 TOBIAS We all heard their invitation. They wish for you to join them later tonight at their camp.  
 MELINA Oh, Dad.  
 TOBIAS I don't want to wake up and find you gone.  
 DEMETRI You don't trust we can look out for ourselves?  
 TOBIAS They are bigger than you. In ways you can't imagine.  
 HELEN Your father was right to dismiss them. (To MELINA). Melina, not so rough with the dishes. They're one of the few mementos of home.

SCENE THREE - THE SILK ROAD – ARMENIA - CIRCA 1260 AD

(The cart is repositioned, to indicate a passage of time and a new location. HELEN is adding numbers on a slip of paper. MELINA is hanging clothes on a rope strung from the wagon into the wings DEMETRI is sketching. TOBIAS is mending a canvas cloth that is used to cover the supplies.

HELEN How much did you make today?  
 TOBIAS Three ducats.  
 HELEN Son?  
 DEMETRI Two.  
 HELEN Reaping is a young man's job. I expected four.  
 DEMETRI Dad had a sharper sickle.  
 HELEN Is there anything I should add to the shopping list?  
 MELINA Soap that isn't made from porcupine quills.  
 TOBIAS Thread.  
 MELINA Lip gloss.  
 HELEN Demetri?  
 DEMETRI Nothing.  
 MELINA Nail polish.  
 HELEN No paint?  
 DEMETRI (Edgy). I'm fine.  
 MELINA Don't waste time thinking about the vassal's daughter, Demetri. She isn't worth it.  
 HELEN (Referring to a dress that MELINA is hanging). Where did you get that awful frock?  
 MELINA Lisbon.  
 HELEN (Flipping through book). Lisbon? What did we do there?  
 MELINA Dad shined shoes.  
 HELEN Oh, yes. I repaired rugs. Portuguese was difficult. I doubt I remember more than ten words. What was the name of that music they played all night?  
 MELINA Disco. From America.  
 HELEN Dreadful. Your father gets seasick. I consider it a blessing. Otherwise he might pack us in a ship and we'd be off to . . . what is it?  
 MELINA America.  
 HELEN Now German, on the other hand, was fairly easy.  
 MELINA You're better with words than Dad. You should have been the playwright.  
 DEMETRI Melina!  
 HELEN Yes! It comes back. Lisbon. Carlos!

MELINA Mom! Let it go!  
HELEN That man was a snake. It's no wonder the child was a stillborn. Tobias. Which do you find more difficult? German or Portuguese?  
TOBIAS French. Too many curves.  
HELEN Demetri, do you have a favorite language? Let me guess. (Laughs). Dutch?  
DEMETRI I hate them all.  
HELEN You don't mean that!  
DEMETRI Every country has a derogatory word for us.  
MELINA He's sore because he was flirting with one of the field hands today. She called him a mutt.  
TOBIAS Demetri, take tomorrow off. Go find yourself a quiet place and paint.  
OMEGA (Enters with ALPHA and PSI. They each wear a long coat). Greetings fellow travelers!  
PSI What's the next town on?  
TOBIAS Zvolen.  
PSI How far be she?  
TOBIAS A four hour walk.  
ALPHA Four hours! Holy god.  
OMEGA We're merchants.  
PSI Returning from the east.  
ALPHA Could we interest you in our wares?  
TOBIAS Not today. Thank you.  
PSI These be no ordinary trinkets  
OMEGA I got beads. Scarves of silk.  
PSI They're awfully pretty.  
OMEGA Humor us.  
ALPHA Let the mistress have a look.  
OMEGA (Opens coat to display scarves and numerous pockets, filled with items). More wares than a market stall. Ivory charms. Pouches filled with jade.  
ALPHA (Opens coat). Spices. Dried tea. Magic herbs.  
PSI (Brushes a scarf against the face of MELINA). Did you ever feel anything so soft?  
ALPHA (Hands a scarf to HELEN). Hand-painted.  
OMEGA (Offers a scarf to DEMETRI). Go on. Smell the sky of China.  
ALPHA (To TOBIAS). Have you ever been to the east?  
TOBIAS No, sir.  
PSI Someday, the Chinese are going to rule the world.  
MELINA Mother. Please. May I have one?  
ALPHA (Quietly, to TOBIAS. Indicating MELINA) Is she yours?  
TOBIAS Yes.  
ALPHA The boy, too? (Stares at TOBIAS). I could get a good price for either one.  
TOBIAS They're spoken for.  
ALPHA You haven't heard my offer, sir.  
TOBIAS They're not for sale.  
ALPHA Our caravan is stalled.  
PSI The wheel on the master's coach – that be Marco Polo – broke.  
ALPHA There's no repairing the relic.  
OMEGA It has but one use - firewood.  
PSI (Caressing a wheel of the cart). Your wheel seems to be the proper size. How much?  
TOBIAS It's not for sale.  
PSI Four hours! That's making my feet a little anxious.  
OMEGA Go on. Make an offer. How much?  
TOBIAS The wheel's not for sale.

OMEGA (Putting his arm around the shoulders of TOBIAS). This rocky path is called The Silk Road. Soon it's going to be paved with stone. Empty wagons, with merchants whose pockets are full of coins, heading east. And westward bound, far as the eye can see, wagon after wagon, loaded with goods from the Empire.

ALPHA We want to be part of that highway. But we need a wheel, man!

TOBIAS I'm in no position to offer you a wheel.

OMEGA No wheel? Really? (ALPHA, PSI, and OMEGA move in unison, with lightning speed. In an instant they have wound scarves around the wrists of HELEN and MELINA. The hands of DEMETRI are pulled behind his back. A scarf is wrapped around the neck of TOBIAS).

ALPHA We were willing to purchase the damn thing.

PSI (Tightening the scarf around the neck of TOBIAS). But you, being the prig you are, wasn't willing to sell.

ALPHA Looks like we'll just have to take the damn wheel. (Tears down wash line. Pushes DEMETRI to TOBIAS. Forces them to sit, back to back. Ties them together). Damn. We are having a nice friendly conversation, then you have to go and ruin it. A man needs to show a little consideration to his troubled mate. (Backs MELINA against the cart). How about you? Are you going to show a little consideration?

HELEN Leave her alone.

ALPHA (Rubbing pelvis against MELINA, addressing HELEN). I'm looking for consideration here, misses.

HELEN Let her be!

DEMETRI Please, mister.

HELEN My daughter is sickly. Take me.

ALPHA I like my pussy young.

DEMETRI You're terrifying her. Don't you have a sister?

ALPHA (To DEMETRI). What's with this family? Nobody has consideration. (Crosses to TOBIAS and places a scarf over his eyes. PSI places scarf over mouth of DEMETRI).

HELEN We've been squatting on this patch of land for weeks.

ALPHA You think I give a shit?

HELEN Knowing there are fools like you on the loose, I hid our valuables in the woods. (PSI and OMEGA begin to remove wheel).

ALPHA What are you saying?

HELEN Jewels. Worth more than your fucking jade. Hidden. In a place nobody knows but me.

ALPHA Now that's the first show of consideration I had all day. What do you think, gentlemen? Is the bitch serious?

HELEN Let my daughter go and they're yours.

ALPHA (Rubbing against HELEN). You're lying. It's a trick.

HELEN Hang me with your scarves, if it isn't true.

ALPHA This could be our lucky day, boys. (Grabs HELEN). Let's have a look.

HELEN Not until you set my daughter free.

ALPHA If we be chasing wild geese, I'll take my trade from you. (Crosses to MELINA). Me and your mamma have a business transaction in the woods. (Frees MELINA). Scoot! (MELINA exits. PSI and OMEGA continue to remove the wheel, while guarding TOBIAS and DEMETRI. ALPHA and HELEN exit together).

PSI (To DEMETRI). Don't be casting me the evil eye, boy. We have one mission, me and my buddies. That mission is to find a wheel for Master Polo so he can get his ass to Venice and sell his wares, otherwise, how are we gonna get paid? Buying and selling. It's the language of the world. Even your mother understands that!

OMEGA (To PSI). Take it easy!

PSI I'm not fond of the way he's looking at me. It's like he's marking my features, drawing

me in his head.

OMEGA Maybe he thinks you're pretty!

PSI (With malice). Of the lot, I do have the most winsome face.

TOBIAS (Still blindfolded. This speech contains several sustained pauses). Melina? Are you there? Can you hear me? Helen? Demetri, can you see? What's going on? Talk to me. (DEMETRI, gagged, is unable to speak). Take the whole cart. Everything. Supplies and all. Just don't harm my wife and children. Please. Don't harm my family. Have you not heard the story of Prometheus? He stole heaven's fire and was captured. Chained to a cliff. "Behold the torture I endure, eternally, paying for the crimes of my youth."

OMEGA Are you forgetting? His friend, Hercules, frees him.

ALPHA (HELEN and ALPHA return). Well, gentlemen. The wench kept her word. (Displays jewelry. Throws a piece to PSI and OMEGA).

HELEN My son needs a drink. And take that blindfold off my husband.

ALPHA (Pockets largest piece of jewelry) Bind her. We don't need the cunt trailing us. (OMEGA removes the gag and blindfold. PSI ties HELEN to the cart. ALPHA rummages through a chest. Takes several items). Compensation for the scarves. (ALPHA, PSI, and OMEGA exit with wheel).

DEMETRI (After a pause). Mom, are you okay?

HELEN I'm fine, son.

TOBIAS (After a long pause). I had no idea you brought your jewels.

HELEN You never give me enough credit, husband.

TOBIAS I'm sorry.

HELEN Hush!

TOBIAS In Athens, I knew how much they meant to you.

HELEN Don't quibble. They aren't *all* gone.

TOBIAS There's more?

HELEN Do you think I'd hide our valuables in one place!?

DEMETRI Where's Melina?

HELEN I wager she's nearby. Watching. Waiting.

DEMETRI Mom. I never heard you swear before.

HELEN Dear, that were nothing. Don't go taking liberties now, because of me.

TOBIAS Did he?

HELEN What difference does it make?

DEMETRI I'll kill him.

TOBIAS From the beginning, I should have said, "Take the damn wheel. Just take it!"

HELEN We are through talking!

DEMETRI I think Melina went to town.

HELEN Try to loosen the cord.

DEMETRI It'll be hours before help arrives.

HELEN You don't know your sister at all. Melina's here.

TOBIAS Helen, I'm sorry you had to part with your family heirlooms.

HELEN Stones can be found anywhere.

DEMETRI (Explodes). Nobody ties me up! This wouldn't happen in Athens!

HELEN Don't be daft. Maybe bandits didn't roam the streets of Athens, but they sat in the senate, pilfering all the same, filling their pockets with our possessions.

MELINA (Returns in a state of shock, incapable of speech).

HELEN Honey, are you okay? (MELINA frees HELEN. They untie TOBIAS and DEMETRI). Don't worry, Melina. We're leaving.

TOBIAS I can fashion a makeshift wheel.

HELEN We haven't time. We'll use a branch to keep the cart upright.

TOBIAS (Holding MELINA). You're a brave daughter.

HELEN           Everybody. Pack! We're going into town.  
 TOBIAS          They're gone.  
 HELEN           Everything's going to be fine!  
 TOBIAS          They're not coming back.  
 DEMETRI        No! They will. They're travelling west; they'll return. Let's wait here and kill them.  
 HELEN           There won't be any killing over a wheel and lost stones.  
 DEMETRI        I'm not talking about wheels or stones!  
 HELEN           Find a branch, Demetri, while I get the other keepsakes.  
 TOBIAS          Melina, speak to me.  
 DEMETRI        Dad! You're going to let them get away?!  
 HELEN           (To DEMETRI). He didn't rape me.  
 TOBIAS          (Knows his wife is lying). You heard your mother.  
 HELEN           (To MELINA, touching her face). Sweetheart, I wasn't raped! Dear. There's a mark. By your ear. Red. Like a fingerprint. How did that happen?  
 MELINA          (Shivering). I want to go home. Please, Papa, I want to go home.

SCENE FOUR – THE ROAD OF PROMISE – FRANCE - CIRCA 1958 AD

(Using a branch to levy the cart, it is turned around and moved to a new location. The branch is used to prop up the cart. TOBIAS exits and returns with a new wheel that does not match the old one. MELINA is arranging her hair. HELEN is grinding spices with a mortar and pestle. DEMETRI is polishing a sword. TOBIAS begins to install the new wheel).

TOBIAS           I wish you'd tell me how you got that sword, Demetri.  
 DEMETRI        I bought it . . . by selling a painting.  
 TOBIAS           Such a weapon invites trouble.  
 DEMETRI        A fist is just as much trouble. If not more.  
 TOBIAS           Will no one forgive me my fiery temper?  
 MELINA          I like having the sword, Demetri.  
 TOBIAS           Your grandfather was one of Athens' finest soldiers.  
 DEMETRI        I know the story.  
 TOBIAS           He died by the sword.  
 DEMETRI        I'm not going to die.  
 TOBIAS           I wish he were here to teach you.  
 MELINA          Can you picture grandpa with a Howitzer like the one we saw in Belgium?  
 DEMETRI        He'd massacre anyone who crossed him.  
 HELEN           Oh, hush, you two! Can't you find something better to talk about!  
 DEMETRI        Melina, who's your date tonight?  
 MELINA          None of your business.  
 HELEN           Whatever happened to Philippe?  
 MELINA          Philippe was in love with Philippe. I told him, too.  
 HELEN           One of these days you'll sass the wrong man and get your heart broken.  
 MELINA          Don't worry about me. (Gets guitar).  
 HELEN           If you find your Orpheus, what happens when your father's path takes us to another time or place?  
 MELINA          If I fall in love? Is that what you're asking?  
 HELEN           What happens then?  
 MELINA          I'll make my home with Orpheus.  
 HELEN           You'd say goodbye to your family?  
 MELINA          He'll be my family.  
 TOBIAS           There. That's the eighth wheel to grace this cart.

HELEN  
MELINA Which of your boys did you torment for the guitar?  
It wasn't like that, Mom. I was washing windows in San Sebastian. Remember? There was a repair shop for musical instruments. Its proprietor, Pablo, always came outdoors to watch me work, clutching a rag, trying to wipe the stains from his hand. One day he invited me inside. "Do you play any musical instruments?" he asked. I shook my head. "Everyone must have a way to make music," he said, "no matter how simple the tune." He pointed to an old guitar and said, "It's an outcast, lonely, wanting a companion. Every week, after washing windows, I'll teach you a few chords." Every Thursday I learned a new set. One day I was struggling to play F sharp and Pablo said, "It's yours." I said, "No, no, I can't. I'd owe you something in return." "Can't I just be a friend?" he asked. "Can't I give you a gift without expecting a favor?" "That's not how it works," I said. "Nothing is free." He placed his hand against the strings, to silence them. "Okay, Melina," he said, "for this guitar, you owe me one kiss. Anything more would jeopardize my marriage." He got his kiss. Nothing more. I got a guitar. Stop thinking the worst of me, Mom.

PSI (Enters with OMEGA. PSI is seated in an old-fashioned wheelchair. It has large wheels, a cane seat, and a high back. One leg support is raised, so this leg of PSI is extended rather than bent at the knee. A large wicker basket, filled with supplies, is attached to the wheelchair. OMEGA is wearing a white nurse's uniform. She carries a hand bag). Comrades! What's the prognosis on this god-forsaken day in hell? Why the scowl?

TOBIAS I've never seen such a contraption before.  
PSI It's the single most ill-conceived, irksome machine ever manufactured. Whoever designed it should be expunged.

OMEGA Give him a moment. His spirits are agitated. It's time for his medicine. (Prepares to give PSI a shot). In no time he'll be singing hymns and telling foul jokes.

PSI This is my nurse, Carlisle. Nastiest critter you'll ever meet.  
TOBIAS My name is Tobias. This is my wife, Helen. My children, Demetri and Melina.  
PSI Fill the syringe, Carlisle. Happy juice for everybody! (Exposes arm). Open the pipes! (Receives injection).

MELINA Doesn't that hurt?  
PSI Of course, it hurts. It stings like hell. She deliberately chooses the most sensitive spot.  
OMEGA See what I have to put up with? (Prepares to take the blood pressure of PSI). For all his braying, the man's a wimp!

HELEN Where are you going?  
PSI I have an appointment with two gentlemen on the rampart, just over the hill.  
OMEGA Everyday he vows to see them, then changes his mind. Hold still.  
PSI Nagging cunt. The woman has plans to amputate my leg.  
OMEGA Oh, go on, you soggy old fart.  
PSI I'll see them tomorrow.  
HELEN Yesterday we passed two men bantering by the road. Maybe they're the men you plan to see.  
PSI You strike me as a perceptive woman. I'm sure they're the ninnies! Would you rub my back?  
OMEGA He likes to be stroked.  
PSI Not one to leave the poor boobies stranded, I sent a messenger, a young boy, to tell them our rendezvous has been delayed.  
HELEN A youngster with curly blond hair?  
PSI No. My boy has shit-brown hair. When the lad returns, we will compare notes. Crack this enigma. (OMEGA disconnects bag filled with yellow liquid). My gift to earth.

(OMEGA exits with bag). Watch. Someone will come along and build a shrine on my piss. (Beckons MELINA). Melina. That is your name, isn't it?

MELINA Yes.

PSI Melina, would you be my nurse? Give Carlisle the boot?

MELINA I don't know . . . .

PSI There's good money in it for you.

MELINA I don't know the first thing about being a nurse.

PSI Can you push a chair?

MELINA But . . . .

PSI I'm in no danger of dying! Come, come. Give the old man a thrill. Say "yes."

MELINA I will be occupied...with other matters

HELEN What do you mean?

MELINA I'm sorry, Mother. I should have told you.

HELEN What, child?

MELINA I'm pregnant.

PSI Congratulations! The world must be inhabited. Morons and all!

HELEN Where did this happen?

MELINA In Pakistan. I think.

HELEN Tobias. Did you hear? Your daughter's pregnant again!

PSI My condolences. Prison awaits. Motherhood is a life sentence.

TOBIAS A new member of the family? I'm sorta thrilled.

HELEN What good are you!

PSI Do I sense a little unease among the tribe?

TOBIAS This one will thrive, Melina.

PHI Come, Melina, a pox on the child. Be my nurse! I'm in pain. Spoil me!

OMEGA (Returns. Addresses MELINA). Did he ask you to be his nurse? Did he beg you to kill me?

PSI (To OMEGA) Don't be catty, love.

TOBIAS What do you think, Demetri? Are you eager to be an uncle?

PSI To hell with all of you! Tomorrow I will make the journey myself. I'll traverse the hills in my chair alone if I have to. (Does a little jig on his wheelchair). This buggy is the best thing ever conceived; without it I'd be consigned to crawling on my knees.

DEMETRI Another mouth to feed? We barely have enough for the four of us.

HELEN Demetri! What an awful thing to say. We will welcome your sister's child!

PSI I can imagine their faces. I suppose I'll greet them with a kiss. Followed by a long, wet hug. Or I may strike them. Who knows? They deserve a good whipping. Imbeciles! To their credit, they've kept the faith. Stupid clods. Waiting in the ditch, year after year, craning their necks, trying to see through the muck. Demetri, did you ever kill a man?

DEMETRI No.

PSI You're not smitten with love for your fellow man, I hope.

DEMETRI I've wanted to.

PSI I hate people. Worthless insects! Would you go with my emissary tomorrow and kill those buggers? I'm sick of entertaining an appointment with them.

DEMETRI You're kidding.

PSI Not at all! Talk to Carlisle. She can tell you how to kill a man. I love that woman. No matter what shit she slogs through, her uniform is always white! She's an angel, that one. A walking angel. Give me a kiss, Carlisle. And give the old leg a yank. Aren't you all precious to entertain me.

TOBIAS Demetri, we've seen enough of your sword today. My son is not killing anyone.

PSI I'd say take a swipe at me. But you won't draw blood. Where's the fun in that?

OMEGA The man's impregnable.

PSI I'll live forever.

OMEGA That's my baby.

PSI (Singing). I got the whole world . . . in my hand, I've got the whole wide world. Your carriage could use some armor. Protection against the impending inferno.

TOBIAS You predict a disaster?

PSI Catastrophes are imminent. Of course, when the final battle commences, steel will be pointless.

TOBIAS The final battle?

PSI The end of the world.

TOBIAS A fireball from another galaxy?

PSI Not at all! A fireball crafted by man.

TOBIAS I've met numerous people. From many countries. In different centuries.

PSI As have I.

TOBIAS For the most part, people are decent.

PSI Then I take you for a fool.

TOBIAS They are not capable of inflicting such a fate on themselves.

PSI Not only are they capable of it; they choose it.

TOBIAS I don't believe you. I don't believe we could be so savage.

PSI What do you say to the seventy million corpses in the last war?

TOBIAS I missed that.

PSI Where were you?

TOBIAS In another century, I suppose.

PSI Ah! The beauty of selective memory!

TOBIAS It's not something I pushed out of mind. I wasn't present!

PSI I don't accuse you! Who doesn't relish the ability to ignore irksome facts?

TOBIAS I know the allure of replacing fact with fantasy. My fellow dramatists were superb at it.

PSI You write? For the stage?

HELEN Don't get him started.

PSI I hope your plays aren't filled with sentimental drivel. Good triumphs over evil. Boy gets girl. Pain leads to enlightenment. Aromatic shit the audience so loves.

MELINA Dad is an excellent writer. His plays were produced in Athens at the festival of Dionysus.

PSI That was theatre! Crowns of fire that consume their victims. Virgins sacrificed on alters built by fathers. Those were thumping good times. I didn't require a rolling jig then.

TOBIAS Tell him the truth, Melina.

MELINA The judges hated his plays.

PSI A compliment, I'm sure! Here comes my messenger. Isn't he angelic? He'll do whatever I ask.

ALPHA (Enters. Addresses the group). Hello.

PSI How was your journey?

ALPHA Very good, Mr. Godot.

PSI How were the juiceless sots?

ALPHA The same, Mr. Godot.

PSI They expressed hope in their wretched state?

ALPHA Oh, yes, Mr. Godot.

PSI You're willing to diddle them tomorrow?

ALPHA Yes, Mr. Godot. If you like, Mr. Godot. Whatever you wish.

PSI Carlisle, I hear dusk approaching. Let's push off! (OMEGA and PSI exit).

MELINA (Approaches ALPHA). Would you like a treat?

ALPHA Thank you. Madam.

MELINA What's your name?

ALPHA I don't know.

MELINA You don't have a name!

ALPHA I belong to Mr. Godot.

MELINA (Hands ALPHA an apple. Brushes the side of his face with her hand). Well, you be careful, boy.

ALPHA Who do you belong to?

MELINA No one

ALPHA Mr. Godot says we all belong to someone.

MELINA Well, then, my family, I suppose.

ALPHA Are they a nice family?

MELINA Boy, you ask too many questions.

ALPHA They seem nice.

MELINA Next time you see Mr. Godot, tell him you want a name.

ALPHA Okay.

MELINA Go on, now.  
 (ALPHA exits. MELINA places a hand over her stomach and looks into the wings, watching the boy walk away. HELEN watches MELINA, who then exits in the opposite direction from ALPHA).

DEMETRI I think Mr. Godot would make an interesting character in one of your plays.

TOBIAS I found him bleak.

DEMETRI Our world is bleak.

TOBIAS Son, what can I do to help you see the good around you?

HELEN Demetri, come here. I want to have a look at you.

DEMETRI Oh, Mom!

HELEN Close your eyes.

TOBIAS What's wrong?

HELEN There's a mark. On his eyelid. A red mark.

TOBIAS Does it hurt?

DEMETRI No.

HELEN Have you noticed it, Demetri?

DEMETRI It's nothing.

HELEN How long has it been there?

TOBIAS Would you like some salve?

DEMETRI That's for gout, Dad.

TOBIAS Demetri, with a child on the way, Melina needs us more than ever.

DEMETRI You don't mind that she's pregnant?

TOBIAS What's done is done.

DEMETRI She doesn't even get a lecture?

TOBIAS I'll hold my judgment - for something more grievous.

DEMETRI I got lectured. Lots.

TOBIAS It's true. I was quick to protest in my younger days. Thespis was right. My perspective was limited. For that, I'm sorry. What's bothering you, Demetri? Why are you so against this unborn child?

DEMETRI It's so easy for Melina. People like her. She never wants for friends.

TOBIAS You're feeling left out?

DEMETRI Every few months we stumble into a strange, new world. How is it possible...to not be alone?

TOBIAS I can't change our situation, Demetri.

DEMETRI We're victims of a curse.

TOBIAS (Incredulously). A curse?

DEMETRI Brought on by you.

HELEN If that's your view, that our fate is a curse, I fear for you.

DEMETRI Tell me it isn't true! Tell me you never felt this way! That we live a damned life!?

HELEN Son, how long will you hold on to this fury? Is that the world you want to live in? Where's your power to forgive? (Pause). Take a walk, son. Measure your words. And rejoice for your sister. (DEMETRI exits).

TOBIAS Was Demetri right? Did you ever feel that way? Has being my wife damned you?

HELEN Of course. (Pause). But that's the demons talking. Mostly, I feel blessed.

SCENE FIVE – THE ROAD OF ESCAPE – FRANCE - CIRCA 1892

(PSI is seated on a stool, facing his easel and the audience. He is painting).

MELINA (Enters. She is very pregnant and observes PSI at work. Calls off stage). Demetri! Hurry. Come look!

PSI Please! Exercise a measure of control!

MELINA I'm sorry.

PSI You'll rouse the Standards! Their children will come running and throw stones!

MELINA The people are purple. The clouds are green. The buildings have no windows.

PSI Are you a messenger of God?

MELINA No.

PSI You sound like one. (Mocks MELINA). People aren't purple. Clouds are not green. Houses have windows. I hear your condemnation, admonishing me to follow directions, obey the rules!

MELINA Oh. You're just being silly.

PSI (Slowly, with force). Don't . . . call . . . me . . . silly.

DEMETRI (Enters). Hello. What magnificent colors!

PSI Oh, the perceptive one.

MELINA My brother is a painter, too.

PSI We all have mad relatives.

DEMETRI (Referring to the painting). The sun is like a witch in the sky, casting a spell on the village.

PSI How refreshingly curious. Are you one of us?

DEMETRI One of us?

PSI Someone touched. By phantoms.

DEMETRI Phantoms?

PSI From the outer rim.

MELINA I envy people with imagination!

PSI Yes, but if you look closely, a chain is attached to my ankle.

MELINA A chain! I don't see a chain.

PSI It takes perception – to see these things.

DEMETRI Where did you learn to paint?

PSI From my roommate at Common Sense. He had exceptional sense, but there was nothing common about him at all.

DEMETRI Your roommate?

PSI There were never formal lessons. But he let me observe. If he lacked canvas, he quartered his bed sheets. When he needed paint, he cut his veins.

MELINA Really? With a knife?

PSI Oh, dear, the sane have such little imagination. Artists are visionaries. We try to capture the heartbeat of a thing, not the literal husk. Do not hold me to facts.

DEMETRI Do you ever sell your paintings?

PSI No one will buy them. Too degenerate, I'm told. So I give them away. To my Pacifier.

MELINA Your Pacifier?

PSI A nurse at Common Sense. Her daughter owns a miniature theatre. She uses the paintings as backdrops.

DEMETRI Common Sense?

PSI A sanctuary for misfits. Officially called Saint-Paul-de-Mausole Sanatorium. Fully certified. Staffed by Standards. You probably passed it. Trees lining the entryway. Utterly functional.

DEMETRI Did we pass a sanatorium, Melina?

MELINA Yes. (Whispers). The man at the gate exposing his parts . . . .

PSI That would be Dyson. If you pull his pecker he recites the commandments.

MELINA Really! You expect me to believe such a tale!

PSI There you go again! Are you going to judge my every word against some book of mindless logic?

MELINA But the things you say . . . are beyond reason.

PSI My dear, after all your years of righteous reason, doesn't life ever leave you wanting?

MELINA Of course.

PSI Fill the gaps with fantasy, I say! Of course, *too* much fantasy lands one in a straight jacket at Common Sense. Where is your home?

DEMETRI We're on our way to Nimes. Their bishop needs men to repoint the cathedral.

PSI The house of hypocrites. They champion fantasy...and condemn it...at the same time.

TOBIAS (Enters). We need your help, children. The hill's too steep to manage on our own.

MELINA Father, look.

TOBIAS Are you Mr. Van Gogh?

PSI No! But how astonishing. He was my roommate and mentor.

TOBIAS Van Gogh?

PSI Yes! How do you know his work?

TOBIAS I've seen it. In museums.

PSI That's impossible! My friend only sold a few paintings...to his brother.

TOBIAS Well, they're going to be immensely popular in the future. Come, children.

PSI Wait! Are you a prophet?

TOBIAS No.

PSI The future? My fantasy doesn't reach that far.

TOBIAS It's an odd situation. All I can say . . . eventually . . . the paintings of your friend will command a very high price.

PSI Maybe the world isn't as warped as it appears. Perhaps Standards *can* embrace color. Take me with you! Into the future!

TOBIAS That is not possible.

PSI I don't belong to this time. Now is not my home.

TOBIAS My family and I travel alone.

PSI At night my room becomes a prison. Help me escape.

TOBIAS I'm sorry. No.

PSI Van Gogh felt the same way. He killed himself. I'm afraid I may do the same.

TOBIAS You can't come with us!

PSI Please! I shall go mad!

DEMETRI Let me buy your painting.

PSI (Gathering up his supplies). I don't accept charity.

TOBIAS My son means no disrespect.

PSI If you've been to the future, why did you come back?

TOBIAS It's not our choice.

MELINA Sometimes we crest a hill and see -- in the valley below -- a city of polished steel and strange, unfamiliar sights.

DEMETRI Sometimes we emerge from a forest path and find ourselves in a forgotten era.

TOBIAS           The road is not our choosing.  
 PSI               Imagine! Van Gogh redeemed! The poor, tortured sap - revered and vindicated. Happy day!

TOBIAS           Children, your mother's waiting.  
 PSI               If not the future, can you transport me to the past? I wish to tell Van Gogh his efforts were not in vain.

TOBIAS           We are not conduits for stargazers...or those who wish to reclaim the past. We are a simple family, trying to find our way through a complex world. Come. We've kept your mother waiting too long.  
 PSI               (Hands painting to DEMETRI). The paint is wet. Hold it by the edge. (Exits).  
 DEMETRI         Dad. You broke the rule.  
 TOBIAS           The man needed solace. Have I done any harm?  
 DEMETRI         That's not the point. You made us promise not to discuss our situation with anyone. Now, you reveal it to a perfect stranger.

MELINA           It's not the first time.  
 DEMETRI         What do you mean?  
 MELINA           Dad broke lots of rules. (A pause as DEMETRI and TOBIAS look at MELINA confused). For starters, loving you more than me.

TOBIAS           I beg your pardon.  
 MELINA           A father should love his children -- equally.  
 TOBIAS           I have. I do.  
 MELINA           No. You've always loved Demetri more.  
 TOBIAS           That's simply not true!  
 MELINA           It doesn't matter. As long as we're telling secrets.  
 TOBIAS           You're wrong.  
 DEMETRI         Dad, I've sensed it, too.  
 TOBIAS           There is no difference how I feel about my children! I would give my life for each of you.  
 MELINA           I don't mean your feelings. How you treat me.  
 TOBIAS           Of course I treat you differently. You have different needs.  
 MELINA           You expect less of me. (Pause). Demetri can disappoint you. I embarrass you.  
 TOBIAS           I'm sorry you feel that way.  
 MELINA           You take pride in Demetri's accomplishments. You're surprised by mine.  
 TOBIAS           There's something to what you say.  
 MELINA           Let's go.  
 TOBIAS           What must I do? For you to know my love has no bias?  
 MELINA           Measure us by the same standards.  
 TOBIAS           What about your mother? Does she show a preference?  
 DEMETRI         She's irritated by us -- equally.  
 TOBIAS           Her birthday's coming. What should we do?  
 HELEN           (Enters). For my birthday...you could strap a throne to our cart, give me a crown, and pull me back to Athens. (Pause). Until that happens . . . can everybody march back down the hill and give our house a push?!

SCENE SIX - THE ROAD OF FAITH – ENGLAND - CIRCA 1608 AD

(The cart is pushed onstage. MELINA is no longer pregnant. Weary from traveling, they pause).

HELEN           Demetri, would you get your mother a glass of water, please? What's wrong, Tobias?  
 TOBIAS           I'm feeling old today.  
 HELEN           It was the boat ride. You don't have a stomach for the sea.  
 MELINA           That's not it.

DEMETRI Father, there's a play tonight in Canterbury. Would you like to go?  
 HELEN It's a wonderful idea, Tobias.  
 DEMETRI What do you say?  
 TOBIA Can we afford the fee, Helen?  
 HELEN We have the money.  
 MELINA Can we skip the play and spend the night here? (Gets guitar, sits in the shadows, plays).  
 DEMETRI (Serving water to his mother). Are you disappointed I haven't made anything of myself.  
 HELEN I'm not the ambitious one. Ask your father.  
 DEMETRI Father?  
 TOBIAS I should put the question to you, son. Are you disappointed your father hasn't made something of himself.  
 DEMETRI Look what we've seen. Not many people can say the same. No, Dad.  
 TOBIAS That's very very sweet. (Pause). That's a change.  
 DEMETRI I used to hate you.  
 TOBIAS I know.  
 DEMETRI It's different now.  
 TOBIAS What happened?  
 DEMETRI Maybe I took a lesson from Mom. She's changed, too.  
 TOBIAS There's something you're not telling me.  
 DEMETRI (After a pause). We were in Cracow. I saw two young men grab the tallith of an old Jewish man. One, laughing, held up the garment and began shredding it with his knife...and so I hit him, with the broad side of my sword. They fled. I picked up the tallith and handed it back to the astonished man. He looked at me...with gratitude...and I felt grateful ...truly grateful...to be given the chance to defend him. It was as if the curse on our family, at last, had a purpose. (Pause). It was inevitable...that I'd be found and arrested, but the following morning we woke up in Istanbul.  
 TOBIAS Now that's a reason to hit a man.  
 DEMETRI Why can't we stop? Choose a place and call it home?  
 TOBIAS For me, there is only one home: Athens. Only when we're transported there will I stop.  
 DEMETRI So, we'll see the play?  
 TOBIAS I don't think your sister's up to it. (Brief pause). Of all of us, she's the least suited to this life.  
 OMEGA (Enters with PSI and ALPHA. They are dressed like hags and speak in crackly voices). Hello! (MELINA rises).  
 PSI Have you seen the Slyten Lizard?  
 ALPHA We're quite desperate to find one.  
 TOBIAS What do they look like?  
 PSI Red eyes.  
 ALPHA A horn.  
 OMEGA They congregate in this area in spring. To bear their young.  
 ALPHA At dusk they can be heard singing.  
 OMEGA A mournful sigh.  
 TOBIAS No. I would remember such a creature.  
 PSI (To MELINA). Would you like me to foretell your future?  
 MELINA Another time.  
 PSI I could tell you the sex of your child.  
 MELINA How did you know I'm pregnant?  
 OMEGA We see what others can't.  
 HELEN Again, Melina? Oh, dear god!  
 DEMETRI Madam! Something inside your pouch moved!  
 PSI That's Titus.

OMEGA Our latest catch.  
 PSI Would you like to see?  
 OMEGA He's a shrew . . . attempting to chew his way to freedom.  
 PSI We are making a concoction.  
 ALPHA To cure a dear friend.  
 OMEGA Which is why we need the lizard.  
 HELEN You cure illnesses?  
 OMEGA With unbridled success!  
 PSI Melancholy.  
 OMEGA Malaria.  
 ALPHA The shakes.  
 OMEGA (In unison with ALPHA and PSI). We tackle it all!  
 PSI (To DEMETRI). Would *you* care to know your future? Strike me dead if I'm wrong.  
 There are days your vision fails you.  
 HELEN Is that true!  
 DEMETRI It's nothing, mother.  
 HELEN You don't deny it?  
 DEMETRI Once in awhile, I have a little trouble seeing clearly.  
 HELEN When did this start?  
 DEMETRI It doesn't happen often.  
 HELEN Why didn't you say something?!  
 PSI Perhaps we could help.  
 ALPHA My sister is marvelous at removing curses.  
 PSI Sadly, her remedies are not free.  
 OMEGA The recipes are quite involved.  
 TOBIAS This is contemptible . . . an outrageous fraud!  
 PSI Oh, no!  
 ALPHA Not at all, sir!  
 OMEGA We divine the future.  
 PSI It's our gift.  
 OMEGA We were born on the seventh day of the seventh month.  
 ALPHA Among us, we have seven eyes.  
 OMEGA We possess the *Book of Seven Charms*.  
 ALPHA Its secrets known only to us.  
 HELEN Our daughter suffers from a withered uterus. She has never held her child.  
 PSI I'm sure something can be done.  
 OMEGA We could evoke a spirit.  
 PSI Utter a charm.  
 ALPHA Perform an exorcism.  
 PSI Nothing is beyond us.  
 TOBIAS Helen. No!  
 OMEGA We need a lock of hair.  
 TOBIAS Helen. Please.  
 PSI A drop of blood.  
 ALPHA A few coins.  
 HELEN Demetri. Get my purse.  
 TOBIAS Nothing will come of this!  
 HELEN Melina, get a pin.  
 MELINA What?  
 HELEN To prick your thumb! (MELINA crosses to the cart, out of the earshot of her parents).  
 TOBIAS You will get her hopes up. All for nothing.

OMEGA You are a fool to dismiss us.  
 PSI Our successes are well documented.  
 ALPHA Our reputation is without dispute.  
 PSI Recently we captured the fancy of an infamous wordsmith.  
 ALPHA We became a subject in his play.  
 OMEGA He called us . . . (In unison with ALPHA and PSI). The weird sisters.  
 ALPHA What was the name of his play?  
 OMEGA I can't recall.  
 TOBIAS (To HELEN, who has gotten a knife to cut off a lock of hair). Helen, don't do this!  
 HELEN What's the harm?  
 TOBIAS What will you say when she delivers another stillborn?  
 HELEN We have to try! (With great force). Can't you hope?! (TOBIAS retreats. DEMETRI gives one coin to PSI).  
 PSI The more coins, the heartier the remedy. (DEMETRI looks to HELEN for guidance. HELEN nods. DEMETRI gives a second coin. HELEN nods again. DEMETRI gives a third coin. OMEGA oversees the ritual. The blood and lock of hair are dropped into a small glass vial. Liquid is added. The vial is sealed with a cork. DEMETRI joins TOBIAS).  
 DEMETRI Mother just sacrificed half a year's wages to the crones.  
 PSI In three days, break the seal and pour the contents on a river stone.  
 ALPHA One final coin – to guarantee success.  
 TBOBIAS Enough! No more coins shall be wasted on empty promises!  
 ALPHA You mock us!  
 OMEGA (Breaks vial). You don't believe? I wish to prove you wrong! (Grabs the hand of TOBIAS and applies pressure to one area of his palm). Where do you feel my touch?  
 TOBIAS (A slight turn of his head). On my shoulder.  
 OMEGA When one of you commits murder . . . you'll remember I foretold it and . . . feel my hand upon your shoulder.  
 TOBIAS Murder?  
 OMEGA A deadly blow, struck in blind rage.  
 TOBIAS Who . . . murders who?  
 OMEGA Ever the skeptic...doubting...entertaining questions! Sisters! The hunt for lizards continues. (ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA exit).  
 TOBIAS Helen, that was hard-earned money!  
 HELEN It's a child, for god's sake. A child of our daughter!  
 TOBIAS You think . . . with alms . . . fate can be altered?  
 HELEN Melina! This falling in love with every man you meet must stop! (Turns on DEMETRI). And you! Why so proud? How long were you going to wait before telling us? Where is the honor in being silent?!

DEMETRI My eyes are fine!  
 HELEN We have met many good people on our travels. People capable of helping us. The nurse who attended Mr. Godot. What about her? She might have recommended something. You must let your needs be known!

TOBIAS Tell me, Demetri.  
 DEMETRI What?  
 TOBIAS What I've feared all along. The cause of this.  
 DEMETRI Dad. I don't know what you mean.  
 TOBIAS Did you allow them to touch you?  
 DEMETRI Who?  
 TOBIAS You know who I mean. The strangers with red hands.  
 DEMETRI I might have.

TOBIAS           And your sister, too?  
 DEMETRI        You'll have to ask her.  
 (TOBIAS has no more to say. He is heartbroken; tears are streaming down his face. In silence, he begins to pack the supplies. The family joins him in the task. HELEN begins to hum. TOBIAS takes the fire poker from the cart and hits the cart. He throws the poker aside, sinks to the ground, and sits with his back against a wheel. DEMETRI picks up poker and slowly returns it to the cart. HELEN shoos the children away; they exit. HELEN takes water jug, wets her skirt, kneels by TOBIAS. Dabs his forehead with the wet section of the skirt. Wipes his face. TOBIAS leans into her. HELEN, still humming, rocks him back and forth.)

TOBIAS           It's my fault. All my fault. (Pause). We had a normal, comfortable life in Athens...until I let my pride get the best of me.

HELEN            A predictable life is what we had.

TOBIAS           I took us out of our sanctuary, into a vast unknown labyrinth.

HELEN            There is no sanctuary. Anywhere.

TOBIAS           I've committed a terrible crime against my children. And you.

HELEN            What do you propose to do? Turn back the clock? Get your old life back? You can't do that, can you?

TOBIAS           That doesn't prevent me from wanting it.

HELEN            Don't lie to yourself. Athens was not the utopia you make it out to be. In many many ways you were unhappy.

TOBIAS           If I was, my unhappiness has been forgotten.

HELEN            (After a pause). On the road, I have come to know you . . . in ways that never would have been possible otherwise.

TOBIAS           What do you mean?

HELEN            In Athens we had slaves to do our work. Your duties kept us apart. Customs defined my place. We never cooked with one another. Cleaned. Made the bed together, that we then lied down in . . . *together*. (Pause). As for the children. they were attended to by servants, growing up, becoming themselves, without our knowledge. After we left Athens we lived as a family, as husband and wife. We lived in each other's vision. We have seen all the changes -- great and small -- between us and are closer for it. (Rises. Gets a small box from the cart and hands it to TOBIAS). Candied plums from Prague. There's a play waiting for you in Canterbury. I'll hurry along the children. When you're ready, join us. (Exits with cart).

SCENE SEVEN – THE ROAD OF OPPORTUNITY – GREECE - CIRCA 1803 AD

(TOBIAS and DEMETRI enter, with cart. A gun carriage is brought on stage by PSI and OMEGA; they wear British sailor uniforms. A large marble slab is resting, face up, on the carriage).

TOBIAS           Another war? Who is fighting who now?  
 PSI                This is a peacetime operation.  
 TOBIAS           Why the uniforms?  
 OMEGA           Sir. The military frequently oversees civilian affairs.  
 PSI                We are simply transporting cargo to Megara Harbor from Athens.  
 TOBIAS           I'm glad to hear there was no carnage.  
 PSI                The carriage. Property of the Third Infantry.  
 OMEGA           We. Subjects of His Royal Majesty's Navy.  
 PSI                The cargo: marble plaques . . . .  
 TOBIAS           My god!  
 OMEGA           Sir?

TOBIAS Is that . . . ?  
 OMEGA A worthless relic, in our opinion.  
 TOBIAS No! No!  
 PSI You recognize this?  
 TOBIAS This comes from the Parthenon!  
 PSI We don't know what it's called.  
 OMEGA We're British.  
 TOBIAS How did you acquire this?  
 PSI Perhaps you should speak to our commander.  
 ALPHA (Enters as LORD ELGIN). Mates. Is there a problem?  
 OMEGA This is Lord Elgin, the gentleman in charge. (PSI and OMEGA exit).  
 TOBIAS Your workers have a dim view of history.  
 ALPHA Our infantry are not paid to think.  
 TOBIAS This marble frieze is from the Parthenon, designed, sculpted by Pheidias.  
 ALPHA I didn't take you for an educated man.  
 TOBIAS I knew Pheidias.  
 ALPHA Knew him? My dear, dear chap, I must say, you have a fantastical view of history.  
 TOBIAS I'm telling you. We spent time together in the agora.  
 ALPHA Knocked it back? Twenty two hundred years ago? You've held up quite well.  
 TOBIAS What happened to the Theatre of Dionysus? How does it look today?  
 ALPHA Never heard of it.  
 TOBIAS Where are you taking this?  
 ALPHA To my home. In Scotland.  
 TOBIAS This is rape! Pilferage!  
 ALPHA I am an ambassador. My name is *Lord Elgin* and the goods were acquired through diplomatic means.  
 TOBIAS This artifact belongs to Greece.  
 ALPHA I was granted permission to remove the friezes. The operation is legal.  
 TOBIAS Permission? From whom?  
 ALPHA The Sultan of Turkey.  
 TOBIAS A Turk ordains the business of a Greek?  
 ALPHA Turks. Greeks. Serbs. They're all subjects of the same empire.  
 TOBIAS You are dismantling history! My history!  
 ALPHA On the contrary, I hope to preserve it.  
 TOBIAS And how will you do that?!  
 ALPHA By installing it in a museum that forks over the highest price. My name is *Lord Elgin*.  
 TOBIAS This is what the world has come to? Economics?  
 ALPHA It was always economics, sir. Always. (Exits).  
 DEMETRI If only we could return to Athens and salvage what's left of the past.  
 TOBIAS We are a lost voice, son. No one will heed our plea.  
 DEMETRI That doesn't sound like my father.  
 TOBIAS If this Lord Elgin is the harbinger of the future, I want no part of it.  
 DEMETRI You're upset. Not thinking clearly.  
 TOBIAS Though their names are different, it seems all we do is breed and breed and breed a pedigree of fanatics.  
 DEMETRI I think people are getting wiser . . . more tolerant.  
 TOBIAS You are youthful. Primed with hope. As it should be.  
 DEMETRI Dad, we can fight this thing. (ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA enter and remove the gun carriage. TOBIAS and DEMETRI observe. The trio exits). We can fight this!  
 TOBIAS I am losing the will to resist the tide.  
 DEMETRI You're giving up?!

TOBIAS           Son, I suspect our Lord Elgin has an entire army behind him. Not soldiers. Not guns. But a barricade of bureaucratic trappings so complex no one can maneuver around them.

DEMETRI        You won't even try!

TOBIAS           Demetri, years ago I made a vow to myself. I will not set foot inside my city until I can offer Thespis a play . . . whose every word is based on truth. (Long pause). I have not yet written that play.

DEMETRI        Is it possible to write such a play?

TOBIAS           On that front, I'm still hopeful. Still fighting.

DEMETRI        Why . . . exactly . . . do you write?

TOBIAS           I think, in the past, I wrote to say, "Here I am." Now, it's to say, "Here we are." You. Your mother. Your sister. (Gestures). All this.

DEMETRI        What made you change?

TOBIAS           We were in Paris. Everyone was preparing for the third millennium. I was in a bookstore, observing the names of my fellow playwrights. Beaumarchais...Beckett... Brecht... (Pause). Sarte...Shakespeare...Shaw. And my name was not among them. I always thought I would be one of those authors, whose name was embossed on the spine of a book. Strangers would select a story by me. They would open the cover, the audience would grow quiet, and my characters would walk into the light. But my name was not there. I began to weep. Without knowing it, I sank to my knees, my arms outstretched, crucified against the wall of books. All my efforts – stillborn. No evidence in Paris in 1999 of my life. A clerk placed his hand on my shoulder. "Where is my name?" I asked over and over. "Where is my name? I have no name." He knelt by me. "Are you all alone in the world?" I shook my head, "I have a wife and two children." For a long moment, he didn't say a word. When he spoke, his voice was slow and disapproving. "Someone calls you 'son?' Your wife calls you 'husband?' A child calls you 'father?'" He stood up and walked away. I felt small and shamed and foolish... (After a pause). Why did you strike Sophocles?

DEMETRI        I was a coward. It was easier to malign him than myself. (Pause). You know what troubles me most?

DEMETRI        No.

TOBIAS           Your mother never had the chance to say goodbye to her parents. Often, I see the sadness in her eyes.

DEMETRI        What do you miss most . . . about Athens?

TOBIAS           The buzz.

DEMETRI        Me, too.

TOBIAS           (Rising). I suppose *Lord Elgin* has a different opinion.

DEMETRI        What's that?

TOBIAS           The buzz is money. (Places arm around DEMETRI and they walk off).

SCENE EIGHT – THE HIDDEN ROAD – GERMANY - CIRCA 1650 AD

(As TOBIAS and his family travel in one direction, they meet ALPHA (Henri), PSI (Paolo) and OMEGA (Yvette) coming in the opposite direction. The trio is dressed in worn clothes. One carries a barrel on his back. A larger barrel, equipped with handles, is carried by the other two).

TOBIAS           Sir, might I buy four drafts of your ale?

PSI                Although appearances say otherwise, we are not wine merchants.

MELINA         What's in your kegs?

PSI                Costumes!

OMEGA          Head dresses.

ALPHA          Masks.

MELINA Father! Did you hear!  
 OMEGA We're troubadours of the stage!  
 PSI Outlawed troubadours . . . with a price on our heads.  
 OMEGA Our performances are scandalous.  
 ALPHA We mock the king.  
 OMEGA Undress the clergy  
 PSI Rail at petty laws.  
 MELINA May we see a costume?  
 PSI Will you return the favor and attend our performance tonight?  
 MELINA Could we, father?  
 TOBIAS A forbidden show?  
 OMEGA In Herr Tuddle's barn. Just outside Bremen. (The lids are removed and the performers will extract beautiful, colorful costumes and exquisite commedia masks).  
 ALPHA Are you familiar with the eccentricities of the stage?  
 MELINA We are! Father especially.  
 PSI This is my favorite disguise.  
 OMEGA We stole it from a tailor in Milano.  
 ALPHA In truth, all the costumes were pinched.  
 OMEGA It would be ungodly to preach anarchy if we didn't practice it!  
 PSI (Placing a wig on DEMETRI). Now a staple of our inventory, this wig once belonged to King Louis XIV.  
 OMEGA (Displaying a half-mask). This is André.  
 PSI His life's ambition is to impale the nuns who raised him.  
 ALPHA (Holding up a second half-mask). Meet Sophia. Beware! She has a foul mouth!  
 PSI (Displaying a third half-mask). Welcome Giovanni. He served time in prison. He plans to burn the Courts of Justice.  
 ALPHA (Displaying a fourth half-mask). Violetta. She lost an arm in a dispute with her landlord.  
 OMEGA (Displaying a fifth half-mask). Inspector Voss. Defender of the law!  
 PSI Our troupe is international but our goal is singular!  
 OMEGA We ask peasants everywhere to rise up.  
 ALPHA Not that we advocate bloodshed.  
 OMEGA Just a redistribution of goods.  
 PSI Before joining the troupe, I was an accountant in Amsterdam.  
 ALPHA I was a Professor of Law in Padua.  
 OMEGA I was a courtesan in Paris.  
 ALPHA In the middle of a lecture on contracts and procurements, I abandoned my students and withdrew to the theatre.  
 PSI There, the professor witnessed a performance of *The Cuckolded Goy*, starring me!  
 ALPHA It was a spectacular event! I was instantly, as they say, stage struck.  
 PSI He begged to join the troupe and was hired as a dresser.  
 OMEGA Without any prompting he quickly learned every part.  
 PSI If an actor fell ill or succumbed to drunkenness - which was frequent - the professor substituted.  
 ALPHA Brilliantly, I might add.  
 PSI Within weeks he was an indispensable member of the company. A year later, its manager.  
 OMEGA So positioned, he revised the repertoire to include only plays that championed civil disobedience  
 MELINA (Including DEMETRI). May we try a mask?  
 OMEGA Be forewarned.  
 ALPHA Its spirit may overtake you.

PSI We cannot predict its effect.  
 ALPHA (Handing mask to MELINA). For you: the one-armed Violetta.  
 OMEGA (Handing mask to DEMETRI). Inspector Voss favors you. (MELINA and DEMETRI start to put on their masks).

ALPHA No! No!  
 PSI First, we set the scene!  
 OMEGA Inspector Voss, scouring the town late at night, comes upon this cart, hidden under a bridge. Violetta is sleeping below, under cover. (ALPHA hands DEMETRI a stick and gives a blanket to MELINA, who climbs on the cart and pulls the blanket over her).

ALPHA Are we ready?  
 DEMETRI What's this sorry, shameful-looking cart doing here? (Taps MELINA).  
 MELINA Ow!  
 DEMETRI It's past curfew. Why are you not indoors, in a proper home?  
 MELINA I have nowhere to go. I was put out by my landlord.  
 DEMETRI I don't recognize your tongue. Are you Turkish?  
 MELINA My landlord...(A momentary loss for words)...lives in Athens.  
 DEMETRI What's a Greek hussy doing in Germany? Are you here to sack our men?  
 MELINA No, only looking for work, sir.  
 DEMETRI We can barely keep our own people employed.  
 MELINA I'm willing to take on jobs most people turn down.  
 DEMETRI What's a lady with one arm gonna do? There's only one job I can think of.  
 HELEN (From the sidelines). Demetri!  
 DEMETRI Who took your arm? Were it cut off for stealing?  
 MELINA No! (Another momentary loss for words as she manufactures a story). I lost it...saving a child...who fell into a river... filled with savage fish...that had mouths like wolves....

DEMETRI Well, you're not wanted here, so take your fucking cart back across the border, or you'll be missing your other arm.

TOBIAS (Rises). Enough now!  
 DEMETRI (Continues, as if possessed). And on your way home, don't be shitting in our fields or drinking from our streams. God knows what kind of diseases you carry. I ought to burn your fucking soul to hell

TOBIAS (Outraged). Stop this! (He pulls the mask off DEMETRI).  
 HELEN It's supposed to be a play.  
 MELINA (Removing her mask). Why did you stop us? Demetri was perfect.  
 HELEN What you said was shameful!  
 MELINA I was about to cut off the inspector's balls with Demetri's sword!  
 ALPHA My apologies.  
 OMEGA Who can predict where the mask will take us?  
 ALPHA These bewitchings happen frequently.  
 PHI Your son is not to blame.  
 ALPHA Consider the scene a prelude to tonight's performance.  
 PSI Remember. Herr Tuddle's barn.  
 ALPHA Bremen.  
 OMEGA Sunset. (ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA exit).

HELEN I'm not at all happy about your choice of language, Demetri.  
 TOBIAS What you said was shameful.  
 DEMETRI Not me, Dad! Inspector Voss. (Short pause). Not me!  
 TOBIAS Inexcusable!  
 DEMETRI Maybe that was true of your characters in the past.  
 TOBIAS Oh?  
 DEMETRI You were unwilling to let them speak their minds.

MELINA Trust us, Papa. We are not without imagination.  
 TOBIAS Helen, who's to blame when our children are so strong-headed? You or me?  
 DEMETRI You know it wasn't me speaking, Mother.  
 HELEN I suppose, yes.  
 MELINA What's wrong, Mother? You haven't been yourself lately.  
 HELEN Oh, it's nothing, really.  
 TOBIAS Melina's right. What's wrong, sweetheart?  
 HELEN Never mind. We all have our struggles.  
 DEMETRI "Where is the honor in being silent?" Your words, Mom.  
 HELEN (After a pause). Remember when we were camped outside Toledo, by the Tajo River. One evening I was following the river path home and on the opposite shore I saw a couple, old, quietly, gracefully stacking stones. I sat under a beech tree to watch. They worked, without speaking, placing one stone atop another, testing, adjusting, finding the right fit, always ready to catch the unbalanced stone. I sat there for over an hour, watching them build their village. Then they simultaneously stopped. They held hands and stepped back. They smiled, not to one another, but at their shared creation. After a brief pause, they walked away. The stacked stones remained, like little temples erected in the unsuspecting wilderness...temples reflected in the water...which reflected the sky.... (Pause). The following morning, on my return to town, the village had been destroyed. Someone – deliberately, maliciously – made a decision to topple the stones. (Pause). I began to look at others differently; I cannot help it. I cannot bring back that village.

SCENE NINE - THE OBSCURE ROAD – ITALY - CIRCA 1891 AD

(TOBIAS is writing. DEMETRI is painting; he only sees objects clearly when they are close to him).

TOBIAS What are you painting?  
 DEMETRI A scene from Athens. What I remember of it. What are you writing?  
 TOBIAS Describing this moment.  
 DEMETRI (After a pause). Where's Melina?  
 TOBIAS In town. Hoping to sell the berries she picked this morning.  
 DEMETRI And mother?  
 TOBIAS Resting.  
 DEMETRI Did you ever pick a place and say, "This is where I wish to be buried?"  
 TOBIAS Demetri, you're too young to have such thoughts.  
 DEMETRI "We are not without imagination." (After a pause). Do you pray?  
 TOBIAS Everyday.  
 DEMETRI What do you say?  
 TOBIAS "Thank you. Please. Excuse me. I'm sorry."  
 HELEN (Enters). Look at you. One would think it's a holiday.  
 DEMETRI There's something for you, Mother, on the toolbox.  
 HELEN What do you say to curry and lentil soup? (Picks up a painting that is resting on the toolbox. Astonished). It's a painting of mother.  
 DEMETRI You like it?  
 HELEN To have remembered her...so perfectly...after all these years. Yes. It's her. In every way.  
 DEMETRI It wasn't painted from memory, Mom.  
 HELEN I don't understand.  
 DEMETRI At the market in Vendome there was a vendor who looked exactly like Grandma – selling fruit. I walked by her stall several times. Everything about her seemed familiar. Finally, I stopped, bought a pear, and ask if I could paint her. "Why would you do such a thing, boy?" she asked. I said she reminded me of someone. She handed me a peach. "Who? The girlfriend who said 'I'm

not the marrying kind?” I laughed and said, “In exchange for the favor, I promise to spend a day picking pears.” She shook her head. “No green foot comes into my orchard, harvesting fruit. That job is reserved for me.” I started to leave and she called after me, “But I will let you have a painter’s look at me if you clean out the stable.” And that’s how I got Elba – her name was Elba – to pose, without knowing it, as Grandma.

HELEN This Elba, what kind of house did she keep?  
 DEMETRI Nothing like Grandma, if that’s what you’re asking. Elba had a flock of chickens and several goats that wandered everywhere.

HELEN They share appearances. I guess that’s where the similarity ends. My boy, it’s precious. (She kisses DEMETRI and exits, overcome with emotion, not wanting to be seen in such a state).

OMEGA (Enters with ALPHA and PSI. They are dressed entirely in black. OMEGA wears a veil). Hello!

TOBIAS Good day.  
 OMEGA If we’re troubling you, tell us.  
 TOBIAS Not at all. This is my son, Demetri.  
 OMEGA Are you an author?  
 TOBIAS I write . . . from time to time.  
 PSI How fortunate!  
 ALPHA We were conceived by an author!  
 OMEGA Years ago!  
 PSI We were born from his imagination.  
 OMEGA He gave us bones.  
 PSI Covered them with flesh.  
 ALPHA Assigned us names.  
 PSI Filled us with desire.  
 ALPHA Fashioned us into a family.  
 OMEGA Then he abandoned us.  
 PSI We’re lost.  
 OMEGA Quite, quite lost.  
 PSI We’ve no idea what to do.  
 ALPHA Where to go.  
 OMEGA How to live.  
 ALPHA Could you manufacture a plot?  
 PSI Complete our story?  
 ALPHA Commit us to the page, where we are meant to live!  
 PSI We called upon many writers.  
 ALPHA Poets. Playwrights. Scribes of prose.  
 OMEGA None will help us.  
 PSI Say you’ll help us!  
 TOBIAS I doubt you’d find me a satisfactory author. Have Demetri paint you.  
 DEMETRI A family, you say?  
 PSI Two brothers, so far as we can tell, and a wife.  
 DEMETRI I will try and do a portrait. (Rises, goes to cart to get a new canvas and a stool).

OMEGA At last! Someone who might make sense of us. (Lifts veil).

ALPHA Someone who may see us as we were intended to be seen.  
 PSI Perhaps now we will discover who we are.  
 DEMETRI (With stool. Places hand on shoulder of ALPHA, to seat him. DEMETRI, seeing the face of ALPHA more clearly, undergoes a change. DEMETRI returns to the cart to locate a knife. Hiding the knife from the group, DEMETRI approaches ALPHA from behind and slits his throat. ALPHA falls forward).

TOBIAS (Rises). Demetri! (OMEGA and PSI scream).

OMEGA No!

PSI (Kneels next to ALPHA). Oh, dear god.

OMEGA Murderer!

TOBIAS Dear boy, what have you done!

HELEN (Enters). What's going on?

PSI That monster attacked our companion.

DEMETRI He's the merchant from China! Who . . . who . . . .

HELEN My dear, that couldn't possibly be true.

DEMETRI It's him! The merchant who raped you.

HELEN You can't see clearly.

DEMETRI No!

TOBIAS You were betrayed by your eyes.

DEMETRI Mother, I swear it!

OMEGA (Produces pistol). You killed an innocent man! (Shoots DEMETRI. Exits with PSI).

HELEN (Kneels, kisses DEMETRI on forehead). I don't blame you.

DEMETRI I'm sorry.

TOBIAS (Has gotten a cloth to place over the wound. Kneels by DEMETRI). Demetri, we cannot go on without you...oh, dear gods, if ever there was a moment to be moved across time, to a new setting, now's that moment. Pick us up. Lay us down...in a hospital, in the arms of a nurse. I beg of you, do this! I give it all up...the written word...my need for fame...the prize of Dionysis...my very life...if it means my son can live.

HELEN My dear, dear, sweet boy. Don't leave us!

DEMETRI I saw what I saw.

HELEN I know. I know.

DEMETRI I saw what I saw. (Dies in the arms of his mother, TOBIAS by their side).

TOBIAS (Reacts as if touched on the shoulder). It was foretold.

HELEN Where's Melina? We must leave at once.

MELINA (Enters, holds at edge of stage). Everyone! Look! Five silver coins. And, Papa, I bought you a new pen in town. (Pause). What's wrong?

HELEN Pack! We're leaving!

MELINA I can't hear you.

HELEN We're leaving!

MELINA (By the body of ALPHA). Who's this?

TOBIAS Nobody.

MELINA Who?!

TOBIAS (Loudly). Nobody!

MELINA Is he dead? Where's Demetri?

HELEN Not now!

MELINA (Observing ALPHA). There's no blood.

HELEN What?

MELINA No blood.

HELEN (Rises, crosses to observe ALPHA). What's the meaning of this?

MELINA How did he die?

HELEN Your brother killed him.

MELINA Demetri? (Pause. Fearful. Horror). Where's Demetri?

HELEN He's dead!

MELINA Look at me when you speak!

HELEN Your brother's dead!! (Pause). He was shot down...for loving us...his family.

MELINA What?

HELEN Love!!

MELINA What?

HELEN Love.  
 MELINA (Sees DEMETRI for the first time. Goes to him). It's not true.  
 HELEN Mother to god! None of this had to happen! (To TOBIAS). Why did you hit him? Why did you strike Sophocles?! (To MELINA). And you!! Had you and your brother not wandered off – dazzled and curious, into the night . . . seeking the company of strangers . . . none of this would have happened!  
 MELINA (Very softly). I can't hear you. I can't hear you. I can't hear you.

SCENE TEN – THE FORKED ROAD – SPAIN - CIRCA 1957 AD

HELEN (Knitting). You should throw those old shoes away. Buy a new pair.  
 TOBIAS (Mending a shoe). This soles are still good.  
 HELEN The leather's rotten! They won't be mended.  
 TOBIAS I'm saving money to buy a typewriter.  
 HELEN I was promised a broach.  
 TOBIAS A typewriter . . . *after* the broach.  
 HELEN A truck would be nice.  
 TOBIAS Fresh bones and a new back would be nice, too.  
 HELEN Tisk. Tisk.  
 TOBIAS I miss him a great deal!  
 HELEN I know.  
 TOBIAS Why didn't you leave me?  
 HELEN You're familiar.  
 TOBIAS That's not a compelling reason.  
 HELEN What do you want me to say?  
 TOBIAS (Teasing). That you find me irresistible.  
 HELEN Please.  
 TOBIAS (Serious) I find *you* irresistible.  
 HELEN Go on. I'm a cow.  
 TOBIAS An irresistible cow. Kiss me.  
 HELEN It's time to see an optometrist again.  
 TOBIAS Kiss me.  
 HELEN (Kisses him). There. Are you happy?  
 TOBIAS Where did you get the perfume?  
 HELEN Marseille.  
 TOBIAS If we could have settled down in one place, what would you have chosen?  
 HELEN I liked Florence, under the rule of Lorenzo the Magnificent.  
 TOBIAS Lovely, yes.  
 HELEN In spirit . . . it was most like my childhood. (Pause). And you?  
 TOBIAS Why, Florence, of course. If that's what you choose.  
 HELEN How's the writing?  
 TOBIAS Progressing.  
 HELEN Am I in your play?  
 TOBIAS You, my dear, are the heroine. (Pause). Something I wrote along the way. (Hands HELEN a small folded paper).  
 HELEN (Reads aloud). You took our home  
 in which time slips...or stalls  
 and became its door, its roof, its walls.  
 You took our children,  
 tender in their ways  
 and helped them navigate the maze.

TOBIAS You took a husband,  
HELEN bridled in his view  
and helped him see what is trite and what is and true.

TOBIAS (After a short pause). I mean every word of it. (HELEN takes his hand and kisses it).  
MELINA (Enters). Hello! (She is accompanied by ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA, who wear military uniforms. Their uniforms do not match; they are from different countries. ALPHA walks with crutches). Meet my new friends! (MELINA is completely deaf).

ALPHA We adore your daughter.  
MELINA They're in trouble, Papa. I said you would help. (Points to PSI).  
PSI (Speaks and communicates with American Sign Language). We're deserters.  
ALPHA If found, we'll be hanged for treason.  
OMEGA Melina said you have civilian clothes you might give us, so we can travel undetected.  
TOBIAS Why did you leave your posts?  
ALPHA I met an enemy soldier and fell in love with him.  
PSI War is getting in the way of playing the ukulele.  
OMEGA The military is not what the recruiting officer promised.  
TOBIAS We do have Demetri's clothes.  
HELEN No.  
TOBIAS They seem to be about his size, Helen.  
HELEN No, I said!  
MELINA What good are they stowed in a chest on the cart?  
HELEN Keep your hands out of my things!  
MELINA Mama, you could put them to good use.  
HELEN Why...have...we...not...yet...outlawed... armies?  
MELINA (To PSI). What is she saying? (PSI shrugs). Tell her.  
PSI Your daughter and I wish to get married.  
MELINA What do you say, Papa?  
TOBIAS (To HELEN). I think it's a fine idea.  
HELEN (Gestures to MELINA). Take a husband who's certain to be executed?  
MELINA He doesn't want to be a soldier.  
HELEN (Pantomimes). What does he want to be? (PSI signs to MELINA).  
MELINA A farmer. (HELEN turns to TOBIAS and sighs).  
TOBIAS I have no problem.  
HELEN (Sizing him up). Couldn't you pick someone a little less like your father?  
MELINA I love him.  
TOBIAS I see that. (Pause). I think he'll make a fine mate.  
HELEN (Goes to the cart and pulls out a trunk. Opens it. Pulls out clothes for ALPHA, PSI and OMEGA). Be careful. Don't go around brawling or primping in them. (Soldiers remove uniforms and put on clothes that belonged to DEMETRI).

MELINA Thank you, Mama. Will you and Daddy come to the wedding?  
HELEN (Gestures). Oh, darling. You know I can't promise you that. (Attempts several more awkward gestures). With your father, who knows? One day we're watching airplanes overhead, the next, we're trading coins with the imprint of Caesar. (MELINA gestures without speaking. It is a private, honest moment with her mother). I wish you could hear the wedding bells, too. (Kisses her).

TOBIAS (Takes out his watch. Gestures to be understood). I purchased this in Zurich. Remember? You picked it out. (PSI continues to sign to MELINA the words of TOBIAS). Before you go, there is something I want you to know. Throughout our travels, your mother kept detailed records. According to her calculations, you, dear Melina, were the wage earner of this family. How proud of you I am! (Takes her hand). You were never an embarrassment to me. (Gives her the watch). Until next time.

HELEN (Hands shirt and trousers to ALPHA). An extra set for your husband-to-be. Go well. (MELINA gestures “I love you” by pointing to herself, circling her heart, and then pointing to her parents. TOBIAS repeats the gesture back to MELINA. HELEN raises her arms, palms up, as if to say “What can I say, what can I do?” ALPHA, PSI, OMEGA and MELINA exit). We’ll never see her again, will we?

TOBIAS No.

HELEN You know she’s pregnant?

TOBIAS Yes.

HELEN She won’t survive this one.

TOBIAS Come, come.

HELEN It’s something a mother knows.

TOBIAS Nonsense. We should pack.

HELEN No. The road ends here.

TOBIAS No?

HELEN The journey is over. Not for you. For me. Go on.

TOBIAS Helen . . .

HELEN It’s decided. I die tonight.

TOBIAS Decided by whom?

HELEN Me. (Pause) I don’t wish to take another step.

TOBIAS Why do you say that?

HELEN There’s too much sadness ahead, around the bend.

TOBIAS You can’t know that!

HELEN If I travel on, my footprints would only echo of regret.

TOBIAS Life stretches ahead. It’s possibilities are endless.

HELEN I have no quest for adventure. What’s new is not for me.

TOBIAS Where am I in this decision? Don’t I have a say?

HELEN Please! My decision says nothing about you. And don’t call me selfish! Don’t say I’m weak. I’m full. I’m empty. I’m alone. I’m with you. It’s time to say goodbye.

TOBIAS This cannot be!

HELEN Go on, sweetheart. I’ll wait for you on another road.

SCENE ELEVEN - THE ROAD TO ATHENS – GREECE - CIRCA 2006 AD

TOBIAS (Alone, pulls the cart until he arrives at a tomb). Thespis, at last I return to the city of my birth. I barely recognize the streets. Though the people seem familiar, I know the divide between them and me is too great to be crossed; there is little we hold in common. (Gets a leather-bound script, kneels, and places it on the stone monument). Here is the script promised many many years ago. It is not my story. I put words on paper, yes. But my family . . . who is no longer with me . . . were the authors. They were the inspiration. Their speech was not embellished with poetic turns, but marked with simple, unvarnished words: “We are not without imagination.” “There is no sanctuary. Anywhere.” “Can’t we stop?” “I want to go home.” “The journey is over.” Their deeds were not grand, not witnessed by vast adoring audiences. They were small, simple gestures, executed in private, with great love: (Opens box. Extracts a flat pebble). A cool drink offered on a hot summer afternoon. (Stacks second flat pebble on top of first one). A son’s painting, as honest as a peach. (Stacks third pebble). The final, delicate note struck on a second-hand guitar. (Fourth pebble). A candied plum wrapped in silver foil. They taught me the greatest stories, though fraught with strife, are forged with love. (Places fifth, final pebble on top of the stack).