Death and the Maiden

By Ariel Dorfman

ANNOTATIONS:

1. Make 5 **connections** to the story. Put these in the margins or at the bottom. Label them with a C
2. Ask 5 **questions**. Put these in the margin or at the bottom and label them with a ?
3. Highlight 3 sentences that reveal **characterization**. Label these with a ☺ and tell what they show.

**Act I, Scene 1**

*Sound of the Sea. After Midnight*

*The Escobar’s beach house. A terrace and an ample living/dining room where dinner is laid out on a table with two chairs. On a sideboard is a cassette recorder and a lamp. Window walls between the terrace and the front room, with curtains blowing in the wind. A door from the terrace and the front room, with curtains blowing in the wind. A door from the terrace leading to a bedroom. Paulina Salas is seated in a chair on the terrace, as if she were drinking in the light of the moon. The sound of a faraway car can be heard. She hurriedly stands up, goes to the other room, looks out the window. The car brakes, its motor still running, the lights blasting her. She goes to the sideboard, takes out a gun, stops when the motor is turned off and she hears Gerardo’s voice.*

GERARDO (voice off): You sure you don’t want to come in? Just one for the road (muffled reply)… Right then, we’ll get together before I leave. I gotta be back by… Monday. How about Sunday? (Muffled reply)… My wife makes a margarita that will make your hair stand on end… I really want you to know how much I appreciate… (muffled reply) See you on Sunday then. (He laughs).

*Paulina hides the gun away. She stands behind the curtains. The car drives off, the lights sweeping the room again. Gerardo enters.*

GERARDO: Paulie? Paulina? *He sees Paulina hidden behind the curtains. He switches on a light. She slowly comes out from the curtains.*GERARDO (cont’d.): Is that…? What’re you doing there like that? Sorry I took this long to… I….
PAULINA (*trying not to seem agitated*): And who was that?
GERARDO: It’s just that I…

PAULINA: Who was it?
GERARDO: …had an—no, don’t worry, it wasn’t anything serious. It’s just that the car—luckily a man stopped—just a flat tire. Paulina, I can’t see a thing without… *He puts on another lamp and sees the table set.*

GERARDO (cont’d): Poor little love. It must’ve got cold, right, the—

PAULINA (very calm, till the end of the scene): We can heat it up. As long as we’ve got something to

celebrate, that is. (Brief pause.) You do have something to celebrate, that is.

GERARDO: That depends on you. (*Pause. He takes an enormous nail out of his jacket pocket*.) You know what this is? This is the son of a bitch that gave me a flat. And do you know what any normal man does when he gets a flat? He goes to the trunk and he gets out the spare. If the spare isn’t flat too, that is. If his wife happened to remember to fix the spare, right?
PAULINA: His wife. Always got to be the wife who has to fix everything. You were supposed to fix the spare.

GERARDO: I’m not really in the mood for arguing, but we had agreed that…
PAULINA: You were supposed to do it. I take care of the house and you take care of—

GERARDO: You don’t want help but afterward you…

PAULINA: —the car at least.

GERARDO: …afterward you complain.

PAULINA: I never complain.

GERARDO: This is an absurd discussion. What’re we fighting about. I’ve already forgotten what we…

PAULINA: We’re not fighting, darling. You accused me of not fixing your spare…
GERARDO: My spare?

PAULINA: —and I told you quite reasonably that I—

GERARDO: Hold it right there. Let’s clear this thing up here and now. That you didn’t fix the spare, our spare, that’s open to discussion, but there is another little matter. The jack.

PAULINA: What jack?

GERARDO: Right. What jack? Where did you put the car jack? You know, to jack the—

PAULINA: You need a jack to hold up the car? He embraces her.

GERARDO: Now, what the hell did you do with the jack?

PAULINA: I gave it to mother.

GERARDO (letting go of her): To your mother? You gave it to your mother?

PAULINA: Loaned it. Yes.

GERARDO: And may I ask why?

PAULINA: You may. Because she needed it.

GERARDO: Whereas I, of course, we… You just can’t—baby, you simply cannot do this sort of thing.

PAULINA: Mom was driving down south and really needed it, while you…

GERARDO: While I can go fuck myself.

PAULINA: No.

GERARDO: Yes. I get a telegram and I have to leave for the city immediately to see the president in what is the most important meeting of my whole life and—

PAULINA: And?

GERARDO: …and this son of a bitch of a nail is laying in wait for me, fortunately not on my way there and that—and there I was, without a spare and without a jack on the goddamn road.

PAULINA: I knew that you’d find someone to help you out. Was she pretty at least? Sexy?

GERARDO: I already said it was a man. PAULINA: You said nothing of the kind.

GERARDO: Why do you always have to suppose there’s a woman…

PAULINA: Why indeed? I just can’t imagine why. (*Brief pause.)* Nice? The man who…?

GERARDO: Great guy. It’s lucky for me that he…

PAULINA: You see? I don’t know how you do it, but you always manage to fix things up so that everything turns out right for you… While mom, you can be sure that if she had a flat some weird person was going to stop and—you know how much mom attracts the craziest sort of—

GERARDO: You cant imagine how ecstatic it makes me to think of your mother exploring the south with my jack, free of all worries, while I had to stand there for hours—

PAULINA: No exaggerating now…

GERARDO: Forty-five minutes. Exactly forty-five. The cars passed by as if I didn’t exist. You know what I began to do? I began to move my arms around like a windmill to see if that way—we’ve forgotten what solidarity is in this country? Lucky for me, this man—Roberto Miranda—I invited him over for a—

PAULINA: I heard you.

GERARDO: How’s Sunday?

PAULINA: Sunday’s fine. *Brief pause.*

GERARDO: As we’re going back Monday. At least I am. And I thought you might want to come with me, shorten these holidays…

PAULINA: So the president named you? *Brief pause.*

GERARDO: He named me.

PAULINA: The peak of your career.

GERARDO: I wouldn’t call it the peak. I am, after all, the youngest of those he named, right?

PAULINA: Right. When you’re minister of justice in a few years’ time, that’ll be the peak, huh?

GERARDO: That certainly doesn’t depend on me.

PAULINA: Did you tell him that?

GERARDO: Who?

PAULINA: Your good Samaritan.

GERARDO: You mean Roberto Miranda? I hardly know the man. Besides, I haven’t decided yet if I should…

PAULINA: You’ve decided.

GERARDO: I said that I’d answer tomorrow, that I felt extremely honored but that I needed…

PAULINA: The president? You said that to the president?

GERARDO: To the president. That I needed time to think it over.

PAULINA: I don’t see what you have to think over. You’ve made your decision, Gerardo, you know you have. It’s what you’ve been working for all these years, why pretend that…

GERARDO: Because first—first you have you say yes.

PAULINA: Well then: yes.

GERARDO: That’s not the yes I need.

PAULINA: It’s the only yes I’ve got.

GERARDO: I’ve heard others. (Brief pause.) If I were to accept, I must know I can count on you, that you don’t feel… if you were to have a relapse, it could leave me…

PAULINA: And that’s what you told the president, that your wife might have problems with… *Pause*.

GERARDO: He doesn’t know. Nobody knows. Not even your mother knows.

PAULINA: There are people who know.

GERARDO: I’m not talking about those kinds of people. Nobody in the new government knows. I’m talking about the fact that we never made it public, as you never—as we never denounced the things that they—what they…

PAULINA: Only if the result was death, huh?

GERARDO: Paulina, I’m sorry, what do you—

PAULINA: This Commission you’re named to. Doesn’t it only investigate the cases that ended in death?

GERARDO: It’s appointed to investigate human rights violations that ended in death or the presumption of death, yes.

PAULINA: Only the most serious cases?

GERARDO: The idea is that if we can throw light on the worst crimes, other abuses will also come to light.

PAULINA: Only the most serious?

GERARDO: Let’s say the cases that are beyond—let’s say repair.

PAULINA: Beyond repair. Irreparable, huh?

GERARDO: I don’t like to talk about this, Paulina.

PAULINA: I don’t like to talk about it either.

GERARDO: But we’ll have to talk about it, won’t we, you and I? If I’m going to spend the next few months listening to the evidence, relatives and eyewitnesses and survivors— and each time I come back home I—and you wouldn’t want me to keep all that to myself. And what if you… if you… (He takes her in his arms.) If you knew how much I love you. If you knew how it still hurts me. *Brief pause.*

PAULINA (*Fiercely holding on to him):* Yes. Yes. Yes. Is that the yes you wanted?

GERARDO: That’s the yes I wanted.

PAULINA: Find out what happened. Find out everything. Promise me that you’ll find everything that…

GERARDO: Everything. Everything we can. We’ll go as far as we… (Pause.) As we’re…

PAULINA: Allowed.

GERARDO: Limited, let’s say we’re limited. But there is so much we can do… We’ll publish our conclusions. There will be an official report. What happened will be established objectively, so no one will ever be able to deny it, so that our country will never again live through the excesses that…

PAULINA: And then? (*Gerardo is silent.)* You hear the relatives of the victims, you denounce the crimes, what happens to the criminals?

GERARDO: That depends on the judges. The courts receive a copy of the evidence and the judges proceed from there to—

PAULINA: The judges? The same judges who never intervened to save one life in seventeen years of ***dictatorship***? Who never accepted a single ***habeas corpus*** ever? Judge Peralta who told that poor woman who had come to ask for her missing husband that the man had probably grown tired of her and run off with some other woman? That judge?

What did you call him? A judge? A judge? *As she speaks, Paulina begins to laugh softly but with increasing* ***hysteria***

GERARDO: Paulina, Paulina. That’s enough Paulina. (*He takes her into his arms. She slowly calms down.)* Silly. Silly girl, my baby. (*Brief pause*.) And what would have happened if you’d had the flat? You there on that road with the cars passing, the lights passing like a train, screaming by, and nobody stopping, did you think of what could have happened to you if you found yourself alone there on the road all of a—

PAULINA: Someone would have stopped. Probably that same—Miranda?

GERARDO: Probably. Not everybody’s a son of a bitch.

PAULINA: No… Not everybody.

GERARDO: I invited him for a drink on Sunday. What do you think?

PAULINA: Sunday’s fine. (*Brief pause*.) I was frightened. I heard a car. When I looked it wasn’t yours.

GERARDO: But there was no danger.

PAULINA: No. (*Brief pause*.) Gerardo. You already said yes to the president, didn’t you? The truth, Gerardo. Or are you going to start your work on the Commission with a lie?

GERARDO: I didn’t want to hurt you.

PAULINA: You told the president you accepted, didn’t you? Before you asked me? Didn’t you? I need the truth, Gerardo.

GERARDO: Yes. I told him I’d do it. Yes. Before asking you. *Lights go down.*