

# A Play About the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo

by Alisa Palmer

*Ce texte, extrait d'une pièce de théâtre, est présenté sous forme d'une série de lettres qu'une mère écrit à sa fille disparue. Pendant quinze ans, pour garder un semblant de contact avec sa fille, la mère écrit ces lettres qu'elle ne sait où adresser. Puis un jour, elle reçoit une lettre d'une femme du Canada qui croit avoir connu sa fille en prison.*

## Scene 2

*Dolores goes to the table in her room and takes up a letter she has been writing. The musicians begin to play during the letter.*

DOLORES: My dearest Teresa, another day is passing. The sun is setting and it is dusk here at home. It is the time of day you love so much. I am sitting here at my little table, as I always do, with my legs curled beneath me. The cat is sleeping and the only sound is the clock ticking. Every day, every hour, every minute I think of you. I went to the market today as usual. I got some lovely ripe pomegranates and some fresh irises for your room. I know what you're thinking, but it's worth the money to try and keep this place up. Besides, Mrs. Ragne needs it more than we do these days, with those grandchildren underfoot. Always pulling at the petals of her poor daisies, or throwing up. Lord knows, I'm not a judgmental person, but I wonder, what is she feeding those kids? Unless it's nerves. It can't be any picnic all of them cooped up in that little shop all day. Christmas holidays and all this heat. And no sign of their mother. Mrs. Ragne insists her daughter's gone to the States to study hotel management but the whole neighbourhood knows. Now some people treat her like a stranger. True colours really show through at times like this. I'm not saying I think that what her daughter did was right, but I figure the further away she is the better for everyone. I ran into Mrs. DeLuz today. She looked well, and was pleasant, in her own way. She had something stuck in her throat again. She couldn't say anything more than hello. It seems to



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Artist: Anne S. Walker

happen every time I bump into her these last months. She really should have it looked after. Her son is a doctor, after all. Although not a particularly good one, so I've heard. I don't miss chatting with her, we never were very close, but she had that terrible pitying look in her eye again. I think it would make everything a lot easier for both of us if she would just ask after you. But then, she doesn't speak to Mrs. Ragne either. I am sure, deep down she truly cares. She has been so fond of you, always saying what a fine young woman you have become. Too bad her own daughter is such a mess. That's not very generous of me, but I know you understand what I mean. Time is passing by. I'll just finish this off and get on with my things. It's not easy to keep things clean here when the wind brings in so much dust. There seems to be more dust than ever this summer. Your room is just as you remember it.

And the garden is still in bloom. I hope it will last. You must think I am a crazy old woman stuck to a writing desk writing letters without any idea where to send them. Maybe you're right.

## Scene 9

*Dolores stands outside of her home.*

DOLORES: Everything was very very bright. They drove me back to my neighbourhood and when I heard them drive away I took off my blindfold. The sun had just come up. The wounds burnt under my clothes. My eyes stung. I began to sweat. I knelt down and placed my hands on the pavement of the street. It was still cool from the night. All I wanted to do was get to my room and sit at my table and write to you. They took all the letters I had written. That's all right. They'll be bored to tears after the first two. I never was much of a writer. But when I sat down to begin, I picked up my pen, and, I couldn't....I couldn't. Your face. I

remember, I heard your voice one night when they had me there, clear like a little bird in the blackness, but your face...is no longer clear...it is no longer alone....I see many other faces....The face of the son of Azucena, so broad and dark. I will need a picture of Azucena, now she is gone too. And Adela. And Maria. Once upon a time there was a hero. And that hero could not die. She could suffer. She could collapse. She could be ridiculed and punished. She could weep blood from every lonely pore, like a miraculous ceramic Virgin, but she could not die. The hero was cursed with resilience. She could not die because worse than death was the end of the story. The end decides what the story means. And if the end of the story is perfectly placed, the end can be a beginning. This story is no longer a fable. It's a ghost story. A ghost story which comes from the minds and souls of those who are looking

DOLORES: I don't know what good it is doing. The Generals are free, and laws have been invented to ensure that they can never be tried again. I come home alone Thursdays after the Plaza. My feet swelling up. Fewer and fewer people go. Some of us can't go on much longer. Soon it will be a cavalcade of wheelchairs and crutches. Some people say we should stop. Some of the Mothers have already left. They feel enough has been done. I'm not sure. I'm not ready to take off my kerchief yet. I wore it when the generals were tried, and I didn't take it off when they were charged. I wanted to wait and see what would happen next. Good thing too, because I wouldn't have had time to take it off and put it back on again before they were pardoned. I was still wearing my kerchief when that box of bones arrived with your name printed on the label. And I wore it when I took the box back, and put it in



*This story is no longer a fable. It's a ghost story.  
A ghost story which comes from the minds and souls  
of those who are looking to heal an old wound.*



to heal an old, old wound. Good and bad are confused. God is challenged by what the earth has swallowed and spit back up. Restless souls walk in circles looking for justice. Death is not the end of life. The dead tell the living what to do. Dear Teresa it is dusk. The Mothers are waiting for me at the Plaza. There are now fifty-two of us.

#### Scene 11

DOLORES: The Mothers are celebrating their fifteenth anniversary. We will have a conference at the Ricoleta Cultural Centre. Who would have thought? The richest part of town. My life has taken a direction that I never could have imagined. I give lectures, I give interviews. I talk a lot. People want to hear the story, from all different countries. I tell them. There are streets named after us in three cities in Spain. There are parks named after us in Holland. And schools called the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. They are even building one in Argentina, in Lujan. We have received prizes for The Struggle, for Liberty, for Justice. People visit our office from all over the world, artists, lawyers, journalists. People write doctorates. Parliamentarians, church representatives, and women's groups. Human rights groups invite us to Europe. We have support groups in Spain, Italy, Germany, and Canada, who invite us to meet with them. We have edited three books of our own poetry. People have done operas and plays. Only one film, that I know of. Liv Ullman was in it. It was quite good. There was *The Official Story*, but that was about the Grandmothers. It was much too sentimental. What has happened should be public property. That is supposed to be the point.

*Dolores begins to open the box. As she speaks the following text she finds an old kerchief. She places it around her shoulders. She also finds packets of letters bound in red ribbon, like those she bound early in the play.*

the hands of that stranger who didn't seem to understand why I wouldn't bury them. I'm not ready to stop, but I forget sometimes why I should continue. I wonder what there is left to say that I haven't said already. Even most of this letter has already been published in one of our books. In a week it will be the fifteenth anniversary of your disappearance. (*She begins to set the letters in a circle around her on the floor as she did at the beginning of the play. The instrumental introduction to the first song, STABAT MATER DOLOROSA, is heard again.*) Around this time the other Mothers are always particularly patient with me. Especially Mrs. Ragne, who is such a lonely soul, in spite of all those grandchildren. I think in the end her daughter only made it as far as Peru. None of us know how they managed to track her down. You probably know. Mrs. Deluz was certainly quiet on the issue. That's no proof of anything, but the day I see her drag herself to the Plaza is the day I apologize for every bad thing I've thought about her. Teresa. I don't know if you would recognize me any more, except that I am more like you.

#### Scene 12

*The letter is spoken in Spanish by one of the musicians as Dolores reads the letter aloud in English.*

MARIA ELSA/DOLORES: Dear Dolores, I hope this letter finds you well. I hope this letter finds you at all. It is a real challenge sending a letter off into the void, not being sure if the person you seek is at the other end. This situation is stranger still because I am not even sure who that person is, but if you are anything like your daughter, I know you are someone I would consider a friend. I consider Teresa one of my closest and dearest friends. I never got a chance to contact you earlier because I left the country as soon as I was released. I had little choice. I have desperately wanted to communicate with you somehow over these last years but when

I left my home I brought a lot of fear with me. I didn't trust any borders to protect me. Now I hear that over there it's a time of uncovering, and unearthing parts of the past. I will add my letter to this process. I met your daughter in prison. I was in a cell next to her. I never saw her except on one occasion when my blindfold was removed briefly and a woman was led by my cell. I am convinced it was her, although I have no proof. We spoke to each other when we could. She was not always hopeful, but when I was losing myself in the constant darkness, I would hear her voice, quietly saying my name and repeating the names of the other people around us, over and over. She insisted that we remember each other. It will keep us alive, she said, no matter what they do to us, because whoever leaves will take the names with them. She said she was not a subversive until she was put in there. She said a society with no subversives is a society that has cut out the tongue of it's people.

*During this letter, Teresa has appeared, and with a peice of chalk has drawn a cell for herself with the number 1977. As the letter ends we hear her whispering names, the last of which is*

TERESA: Maria Elsa. Maria Elsa. Maria Elsa.

*Excerpted from A Play About the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, performed in Toronto at Theatre Passe Muraille in 1993.*

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Shlomit Segal, Georgia O'Keefe, Acrylic on Canvas, 1992

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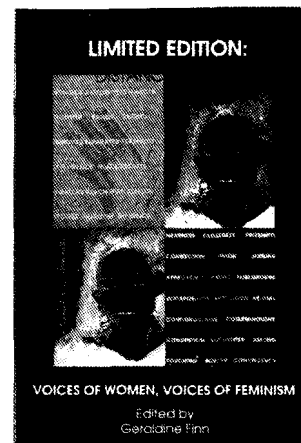
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