

OLIVIA AND EUGENE

HERBERT MOROTE

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CHARACTERS:

EUGENE, 33 years of age. He has Down syndrome, wears good quality sport clothes and sneakers with velcro fasteners.

OLIVIA, his mother, between 50 and 60 years of age. An attractive middle-aged woman, very well dressed, elegant.

SETTING:

We see the back of a large television, a little side table with a telephone, and a chest of drawers or china cabinet. To the right is a card table with four chairs that are used as an informal dining set. Door to the guest bathroom, door to the kitchen and another door leading to the bedrooms. (Possibly a small staircase with a few stairs that lead to an attic from which Olivia's bedroom is visible. Another alternative is a partition that allows one to see part of Olivia's bedroom.)

ONE SOLE ACT

OLIVIA AND EUGENE

It's autumn. Ten o'clock at night. The lights are on throughout the entire house. Eugene is sitting on the sofa with big headphones on watching television. Sometimes he seems excited. All this is going on while the audience is coming into the theatre. The action begins when Eugene gets up, takes off his headphones and the music from the scene in the film "Titanic" of the people falling into the sea is heard very loud. Eugene moves constantly while watching TV. He gestures, raises his right hand palm down and violently pushes it downward, giving the impression that he is drowning in the sea. He makes noises with his mouth: pluff, bang, glug, glug, ugghh. He is agitated, sits down, gets up and then runs around the sofa. Olivia enters from the left with an elegant designer handbag. She shakes her head resignedly. Eugene doesn't notice her.

OLIVIA. (*Shouting*) Eugene! Eugene! For God's sake, lower the volume! (*She takes off her gloves and shawl, which she leaves on an armchair. She goes to the television and turns it off.*)

EUGENE – (*composing himself, he comes over to Olivia, hugs her and kisses her many times*). Oh, mommy, mommy. The Titanic. Pluff, pluff (with his hand he makes drowning gestures.)

OLIVIA – You've seen "Titanic" thousands of times, son. Don't you have any other video? Why don't you put your headphones on?

EUGENE – (*Complaining, as if she doesn't understand.*) Oh, mommy.

OLIVIA – It's so noisy, sweetie. You can hear it from the elevator. (*Pause*) Let's turn off the lights a little. It looks as if we were having a party. Don't you see that so much light shows up our defects? (*She turns off a few lights but the scene is still pleasantly illuminated*). Did Paula leave already? (*Eugene nods*). Of course, I came back very late, it's almost 10, what a! Have you eaten? Did Paula serve you dinner? (*Eugene shakes his head*). You haven't eaten anything, Eugene, nothing?

EUGENE – (*ashamed, in a low voice*) Chocate

OLIVIA – Oh, son, you're very clever for that kind of thing. So, you found the chocolates, eh?

EUGENE (*proud*). Yes, mommy, yes, mommy.

OLIVIA – Well that's very naughty of you. The doctor said that that's what causes your tummy aches.

EUGENE – Yes, mommy.

OLIVIA – Do you want something to eat?

EUGENE – Yes, mommy

OLIVIA- You're always hungry. I'm going to the kitchen to see what Paula left us. Well, pick up all your things and set the table. (*Olivia takes a medium sized plastic bag from her purse and puts it away in a chest drawer. She remains immobile for a few moments looking at the drawer. She feels her son's gaze upon her and she reacts.*) Don't touch any of this, OK? Don't touch it, Nasty. Do you understand? Nasty.

EUGENE – Yes, mommy. Nasty.

OLIVIA – Very good. *(Pause)* Tonight we have a lot to talk about, sweetheart. *(to herself as she goes to the kitchen)*. I don't know if I'll have the courage to do it. Oh, God. It's so horrible.

EUGENE – *(roguishly)* Mommy, you're forgetting your things *(and he gives her the gloves and the shawl she had left on the armchair)*.

OLIVIA – Thanks, Eugene. You keep track of everything, don't you? I don't know where my head is. *(She leaves)*

EUGENE – *(he gestures, resigned, as he shakes his head)*

Oh, Mommy, mommy. *(Then he picks up a big bag that is on a small cart that children use to carry their things, and very carefully begins to put his painting materials into it: colour pencils, drawing notebooks, colouring books, scissors, rulers. In the middle of this task he looks at the drawer where his mother put away the plastic bag. He comes closer. He opens the drawer and takes out of the bag several bottles of pharmaceutical products and examines them.)*

OLIVIA – *(from the kitchen)* Would you like some soup?

EUGENE – Yes, mommy, soup. *(Nervously, he takes a red coloured bottle and hides it with his painting materials in the sports bag. Then he returns and carefully closes the drawer.)*

OLIVIA – *(From the kitchen)* Do you want chicken fingers?

EUGENE – Yes, mommy, soup. *(He returns to the table and carefully finishes putting away his painting materials.)*

OLIVIA *(from the kitchen)* Are you setting the table, Eugene?

EUGENE- Yes, mommy. *(From a glass cabinet he takes place mats, silverware, napkins, glasses and plates for three people and places them on the table with painstaking care. His mother comes in and helps him finish the task)*

OLIVIA – Three always. Eh, always three. How can it be that after ten years you still set three places at the table? You never forget what you learn, do you? Or are you expecting your father to come and dine with us some day? *(Pause)* There was a time when I tried to teach you to set only two. But, no, you still kept on setting three places and you'd get angry when I would take away your father's place setting. *(Pause)* Yes, you used to get very angry. You'd go crazy. You would even threaten me. Yes, you. Who would have thought, right? With that angelic look of yours, but when you throw a tantrum, there's no one that can stand you. It's as if you turn into a monster. You actually scare me. *(Making believe that she is scolding him)* Yes, you. Don't pretend that you don't know what I'm talking about. *(Eugene smiles a little. His mother notices it and searches for his eyes)*. You understand everything I say, don't you?

EUGENE – Yes, mommy.

OLIVIA – No, son, I don't think you do understand me. If you did, you'd ask me a lot of questions that I wouldn't be able to answer. You'd ask me for example, why I got back home so late. And I would lie to you, I'd tell you that when I was about to close the gallery a very important client came in, someone from the Botín family who wanted to buy an artwork by Tapies. Oh, son, if I told

you the truth you'd die of sadness. You're so sensitive, my angel. *(Pause)*
What would you do if you knew what the doctor at the Ruber Clinic told me?
(Eugene has finished setting the table and looks at her anxiously). You're
aware of everything, aren't you?

EUGENE – Yes, mommy.

OLIVIA – *(sweetly)*. No, son. If only we could all be like you! *(Pause)* You really don't
understand, do you?

EUGENE – Yes, mommy.

OLIVIA – *(kisses him on the forehead)*. You're a little angel, Eugene! You're the best
thing that ever happened to me in my life. Sit down. I'll bring you the soup.

EUGENE – Mommy. *(He makes believe he is washing his hands)*

OLIVIA – Yes, son, go wash your hands and take the time also to comb your hair and
freshen up. Oh ... and if you want, you can change. Put on something nice.
Tonight is going to be What do you say we light some candles and put
on music to cheer ourselves up?

EUGENE *(Very happy)* Yes, mommy, candles, music, party. You and I?

OLIVIA – Yes, son, you and I. No one else.*(Eugene leaves)*. To start, I'll serve myself
a drink. I think I'm going to need it. *(She goes to the chest, opens the
drawer, and stands immobile looking at the bag that she had left inside. she
then turns brusquely to the liquor cart and picks up a bottle of whiskey and
pours herself a generous serving)*. I haven't had a drop of alcohol in ten
years.

(Aloud, as if she wants Eugene to hear. The lights dim. Only Olivia is illuminated). I

never drank a lot. Your father drank for all of us. At first he'd say that it was just with the gallery clients, but when I took over the business he couldn't use that excuse any more. He'd spend all his time at the golf club, at least that's what he made me think. Then he used to say that after playing golf he would have dinner with his friends. Later on he came up with trips abroad to buy paintings and he'd disappear for several days. Once two weeks went by before we knew where he was. Paintings? That's a lie! *(Silence)*. No, he wasn't spending time with women; impossible: he was never very good in bed. On the contrary; he was indifferent, lazy. He was so handsome and lively and yet so boring and bland when it came to making love. Who would have thought, no? *(Silence)* The first person to tell me about the casino was Antonio. Now that guy sure was a forceful lover! Oh son, what did you want me to do? I was young, beautiful, ready for anything. How could I deny my body such a basic need? If my husband wasn't up to it, then I had to ---- *(Pause)*. What I was never prepared to do was give up my femininity. Oh! That has such a fine ring to it! *(Pause)*. And I wasn't a whore either as your father once called me. No, I was exquisitely discreet at all times. But all it takes is sleeping with two or three men to be called any name under the sun. It's just envy. *(Pause)* The thing is that I didn't believe Antonio. You know: lovers lie as much, or more than husbands. Then I began to put two and two together and I decided to hire a private detective who confirmed what everybody except me knew. Your father was a compulsive gambler. Yes, he was hooked on betting,

gambling. They knew him in every casino here, in Montecarlo, Baden Baden, Evian, What a stupid vice! I would have preferred it if he had been a drug addict. That wouldn't have been so costly. I'd tremble every time the bank called: overdrafts, huge withdrawals, and of course, your father's long explanations that you couldn't make head or tail of. We lost our big house in La Moraleja, the one with the pool, gym, and music room. It was so horrible. *(Taking a big swallow)* Oh, look, son, the truth is that if your father hadn't had that heart attack we would have gone bankrupt. Totally bankrupt. *(Pause)* Once I threatened to divorce him and he agreed to undergo treatment. We checked him into a clinic in Marbella that cost us an arm and a leg. After a few days they called to tell me that your father had left. For several weeks we didn't know where he was. I was sick with worry so I called the Civil Guard. It was horrible. When they found him in the red light district of Barcelona he was a wreck. Now he had a problem with alcohol and cocaine. *(She puts several candles on the table and lights them)* I don't know how I could have lived like that. What was the use of divorcing him if the gallery was in his name? No, I preferred staying as we were. After all, his absences gave me more freedom. *(Pause)* And to avoid setting a bad example, I sent your brother to study in London, but I couldn't send you, dear, anywhere. Well, you went to your special school every day. *(Pause)* It never ceased to amaze me that every time you saw your father you'd hug and kiss him as if he had come back from the war. Of course, you didn't see anything bad in him; you adored him more than anybody. You didn't care what he looked like when he arrived, or what he smelled

like. You'd bring him his slippers, his robe, you'd light his cigar, and put ice cubes in his drink, and then you'd run his bath. The Prince of Wales would have been fortunate to have a valet like you. *(Pause)* Then you'd take him to his room and you'd fall asleep next to him. You didn't care where he had been, what he had done, nor that he was ruining us. *(Pause)* I admit that your father also loved you a lot. I think that was his only virtue. *(Pause)* He loved you from the moment you were born. *(Pause)* Eugene! What are you doing? Come here, son. *(To herself)* Oh my angel, you too know what it's like to suffer. I know you miss your father. Once I saw you crying in front of the picture of him that you have in your bedroom. I didn't interrupt you. I left you alone with your sorrows. To suffer in silence is a person's inalienable right. Once I asked you, what's wrong, son, why are you sad? And you pretended to have a cold, and you said, sniffles, mommy, sniffles. You're so good and so sensitive that you hide your pain so that I don't feel bad too. *(She drinks a little whisky)*. Eugene, why are you taking so long, son?

EUGENE – *(From inside)*. I'm coming, mommy.

OLIVIA – Hurry up. You know something, son? You didn't cry when you were born; they had to slap you a few times on your tiny behind until you finally let out a little moan. You began to breathe and we all felt relieved. It's remarkable: even at the moment of your birth you didn't cry. You've always been happy and you've made us happy ever since your arrival on this earth. *(Long pause)* Well, I'm embellishing because the truth is we were very worried when you were born: you had a very strange bluish colour. The doctor said that they were going to put you in an incubator with oxygen. He told me that

I shouldn't worry. But, how could I not worry? They took you away at two in the afternoon, and a minute didn't go by that I didn't ring the bell to ask about you, and I did that constantly until I drove the nurses crazy and they ended up giving me something to help me sleep. *(Pause)* When I woke up night had fallen and the room was full of flowers and people: grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, Susana, the González Uriarte family, some friends of your father's, all my girlfriends. What a lot of people! They had to take turns coming in. They didn't give me a chance to ask about you. Everybody was talking at once; it was insane. They congratulated me: "another man in the family", "you look great," "nobody would think you've just given birth." And of course, they'd ask what your measurements were, how much you weighed, what we were going to call you. That was an easy one. At that time your father and I were great theatre fans and we had agreed to name you Eugene, after Eugene Ionesco or Eugene O'Neill. Besides, we had seen in a dictionary of names that Eugene comes from the Greek and means "the well born one". Eugene! Eugene! Come on, son! Hurry up! Come and see all the candles lit up!

EUGENE – *(From inside)*. I'm coming, mommy. I'm trying to look nice.

OLIVIA- You always look nice. You're the handsomest of all the boys. I swear; it's the truth. I think that you're so good looking. Hurry up because otherwise you're going to find me dead drunk and tonight I must be very alert. *(Looking at the drawer)*. It would be a pity if in the end I couldn't do it. *(Takes a swallow*

of the whisky). The thing is that when the visitors left I demanded to see you and what happened was that instead of bringing you to me Doctor Solís came in with a very long face that boded no good. As he gazed down at the floor he said to me, “Olivia, you have to be strong. I have to give you some bad news.” Has he died, doctor? Is he dead? No, he’s healthy, Olivia, but he was born with Down’s syndrome. I didn’t understand a thing. Well, syndrome yes, but not the other. What kind of syndrome? Down, Olivia. I was still out of it, I couldn’t even pronounce the term. What’s that? Is it something bad? Is he going to die? Instead of responding, the doctor beat about the bush talking about genetics, odd and even numbers, and I don’t know what else. Everything he told me sounded strange. At that time nobody knew about the Down thing, and on and on he went with that damn word; we felt like killing him. Until finally he said something we understood: mongoloid. OH NO, DEAR GOD! IT CAN’T BE! ARE YOU SURE! I couldn’t believe it. Your father couldn’t either. There hadn’t been anyone in my family or in his. At least, that’s what we thought. Then I found out
(Pause) You have no idea the amount of specialists that your father consulted with those first few days. They all said the same thing. (Pause.
Raising her voice) Eugene, sweetie! Hurry up!

EUGENE- (*From his room*) I’m coming, mommy. I’m putting on my *shows*.

OLIVIA – Come here, son. I’ll tie your laces for you. (*Drinking a little bit of whiskey*).
As soon as the doctor said all that I tried to see you. They put me in a wheelchair and we went with your father to the ward where you were. We

weren't allowed to go in. We saw you from behind a glass window. You had a needle in your scalp through which you received serum. You were calm and your eyes were closed. You still had that bluish colour, but not as much as before. We didn't say a word. We were speechless. Your father took my hand and I squeezed his tight, as if I were going to crush it. *(Long pause)* I don't know how long stayed like that. Finally, they took me back to the room, and I went to bed and I asked them to turn off the lights. You can't imagine all the horrible thoughts that ran through my mind. They were a mixture of rage, sadness, grief. Andwhat was worse *(sipping some more of the whiskey)* ... look I've never said this to anyone. *(Pause)* I was never able to, or rather, I've never wanted to remember what went through my mind during those few hours. *(Pause)* Let's see if I have the courage to do it tonight. *(Pause)* Well. Here goes: I confess to you, dear Eugene, that a terrible shame came over me; shame at having given birth to a son like you. Shame, not so much because of you or me. Worse than that: I was ashamed of what others would think *(Taking another sip)* Oh, I thought that I'd never be able to admit to this. *(Pause)* Do you know what worried me? *(Pause)* I'm so despicable! What worried me most was how I was going to explain it to people, what I would say to those who came to see you and to congratulate me. I imagined the faces of those relatives and friends who when they looked at you would hide any sign of revulsion before saying "What a cute baby." *(Pause)*. No, son, at this stage in life, I can't lie to you. It was a very hard blow. Very hard. Why did I conceive a child like you? I was young, I had finished my doctoral degree in art, I enjoyed a good

position in society. I owned a prestigious gallery, I still had a good husband, your older brother was very healthy. And then suddenly, a terrible misfortune: a mongoloid son. Let's be honest: nobody can accept such a tragedy happily. That's the raw truth. You would be a stain on the family. *(Silence)* I'm sorry, son. That was my reaction when you came into the world; I would have liked to disappear, to never have been born. I felt beaten down, defeated... *(Raising her voice)* Eugene! Why are you taking so long? Come on, son. *(Takes a swallow of the whiskey)* You know? Those thoughts lasted the entire night. I'm sorry, son. I had to tell you. *(Pause)*. That night I prayed for the first time in many years; I asked God that to let me find a healthy baby when I awoke, and realize that everything had been a bad dream, a horrible nightmare. *(The phone rings. The scene is illuminated once more. Olivia reacts with annoyance)* Hello. Oh, it's you Daniel. I haven't heard your voice for so long, son I've been busy too, but I called your mobile many timesI don't like to leave messages ... No, nothing's wrong ... Your brother's fine too. I called you simply because I wanted to know how you and the kids were.... To be frank I could care less about your present wife. I've lost track of your marriages, son.... No, I'm not exaggerating. Four? ... Oh, only three. Well, you're not counting your girlfriends ... Listen, son, I don't call her nor does she call me. It's better this way. I appreciate her silenceNo, I didn't need anything. Look, the only one who calls when he needs something is you... But, it's the truth, son. For example, what do you want now?... *(Nervous)* No, tomorrow Saturday we're not going to be home. Don't even think of coming; we're going to be

out the entire weekend.... And what do you care where No, I didn't mean to be rude, but you don't phone for several months and then when you do phone you want me to be at your beck and call ... Do you know what time it is? Tell me the truth, what's this about? How much do you need? ... It's that I know you very well, son. ... Yes, I know that you love me, and I love you very much too, how could I not? ... But that's got nothing to do with it. Tell me, sincerely, how much do you need?... How much? ...Listen, son, that's a lot! No, save yourself the trouble. Don't tell me what it's for and least of all, don't say that you're going to pay it back right away ... Let me think about it over the weekend and drop by on Monday (*while his mother has her back to him, Eugene has returned dressed in a white dinner jacket; he approaches his mother on tiptoe, puts his index finger on his mouth indicating to someone to be quiet*)well, bring all the papers you need me to sign... very good, I'll give him a kiss from you... I love you very much too, son. (*Hangs up*) .He's going to have a big surprise on Monday! (*From behind Eugene places his hands over her eyes*).

EUGENE- Guess who, Mommy.

OLIVIA – Who can it be? Are you Daniel? No you're not Daniel. Are you Paula? No, not Paula. Peter? No, you're not Peter either. I wonder who you are. It's so hard to guess. And you smell so good! You emptied the entire bottle of cologne, dear. Oh, now I know who you are. You're Eugene! (*Turning around*) Yes, you're Eugene. What do you know! And so handsome! So elegant! (*Helping him with his tie and shoelaces*) Let me help you with your

shoe laces. Why did you get all dressed up, Eugene? Why did you put on your dinner jacket?

EUGENE – Candles, party, dinner jacket.

OLIVIA – No, son. The candles were just a fancy of mine, a whim, to have a good time before*(Pause)*. We're not having a party today.

EUGENE – *(disappointed, a little sad)* We're not having a party?

OLVIA – Anything but. Today we should be in mourning. Well, not us ... Later, the others can do that ...

EUGENE – *(sadly)* Should I change, Mommy? We're not having a party?

OLIVIA – No, don't change, my angel. Stay as you are. You look so handsome. *(Pause)*. Look, I'm going to put on something nicer too, and we'll have a big party. The best we've ever had. We already have candles. I'll bring champagne.

EUGENE – Champagne? *(makes believe he is removing a cork)*. Pum!

OLIVIA – Yes, champagne. Let's put on some music. Yes, we'll have a lovely party, Eugene. A party. You and I.

EUGENE. *(Happy)* Party, you and I. *(he kisses her)*

OLIVIA – Come on. Put on a nice CD. I won't take long. A nice CD, Eugene *(she leaves)*.

EUGENE- *(He looks for a CD, then looks at the drawer where his mother put away the bag. He comes closer, opens the drawer, and takes out the pharmaceutical products once again.)*

OLIVIA- *(From inside)* Eugene! Put on some dancing music.

EUGENE- Yes, mommy. *(Nervously. Some of the products fall on the floor)*

OLIVIA –Eugene, what are you doing, son?

EUGENE:-Nothing, mommy. *(He feels found out. He leaves the products in the drawer but not inside the bag. He goes to the CD's and takes the first one. He puts it in. It's the Spanish Christmas carol "The Fishes in the River")*

OLIVIA- *(From inside)*. Not that one, son. That one's for Christmas. Put on something prettier.

EUGENE *(He puts on another CD. The music comes on and he begins to dance alone. The lights darken and the music is barely audible as the lights begin to illuminate the spot where Olivia is standing)*

OLIVIA *(Part of the scenery moves and Olivia becomes visible. She has taken out a low cut black gown. She stands in front of a big mirror and changes... She begins speaking to herself)*

I don't know how Eugene manages to get me to do this. Putting on a gown was the last thing I wanted to do today. *(Looking at herself in the mirror)*. The truth is that it still looks good on me. You're always elegant in black dress. But to take it off in front of a man requires being even more elegant. Ha, ha. I can't believe what I'm saying at times like these. I should be crying, sick with fear, but the truth is that it will be so liberating... I can't imagine going through operating rooms, undergoing chemotherapy, radiation, tests and more tests, and in a case like mine It would have been better to have a heart attack... But him, he sure was lucky. First of all he won the lottery when he married me. I say it in all sincerity; no one's going to accuse me of modesty at this stage in my life. But the big prize came when he died in his sleep. We gave the official cause of death as a

heart attack, but it was a cocaine overdose. Of course there wasn't an autopsy –what are friends for? There are some things that it's best not to know. *(Pause. Putting some make-up on her face)*. A little bit of make-up wouldn't be a bad thing. I have to give some colour to my cheeks. I'll leave my hairdo as it is, but perhaps I could use some cheery accessory, a flower *(putting on a jewelled pin)* Well, this doesn't look too bad. Perhaps I should disconnect the phone so no one bothers us. They'll find out soon enough on Monday. A little lipstick and I'm ready for my beau! *(the lights in the bedroom dim until it disappears)*

EUGENE – *(While his mother was speaking, and with the music barely audible and the lights dimmed, Eugene has continued to dance and play the maracas. When he sees his mother coming, the lights and music return to their normal level but without harshness)* Pretty, pretty. Mommy, you're so pretty. *(He goes to her and greets her ceremoniously kissing her hand)*.

OLIVA – You're such a gentleman, Eugene.

EUGENE – Mommy, you're so pretty.

OLIVIA – And you, you're the most elegant young man in the whole world.

EUGENE – Yes, mommy.

OLIVIA – Sir, I grant you the next dance.

EUGENE – Yes, mommy.

(They dance a modern piece with fruition. Then Olivia becomes tired. She is a little dizzy and sits down on the sofa.)

OLIVIA – Turn the music off, Eugene. I feel a bit ill.

EUGENE – (*Eugene turns off the music, sits very close to her and, worried, touches her forehead*). Fever?

OLIVIA- No, son. I don't think I have a fever.

EUGENE – (*Touching his throat*). Sore throat?

OLIVIA – No, son. I don't have a sore throat. It's only I don't know how to explain it to you, Eugene.

.EUGENE – I know, Mommy. Your tummy!

OLIVIA – No, sweetie. Don't worry. I'll take a Tylenol and I'll feel better soon. Bring me my purse, please. It's on the bed.

EUGENE – (*runs inside, brings her the purse, and then a glass of water from the table*)

OLIVIA – (*Takes out a tablet and swallows it*) Thanks, son. You like taking care of me, don't you?

EUGENIO- Yes, mommy.

OLIVIA- Come, Eugene. Stay with me until I feel better... You know, son, I don't know if it was God, or what it was that caused my attitude to change completely when they put you in my arms the day after you were born. You were half asleep. You weren't crying. You seemed to me a beautiful baby, with almond-shaped eyes, chubby, a little ball of fluff. When I held you to my breast I saw that you were marvellous; as you nursed calmly and delicately I forgot everything. Eugene, you brought me the peace that had been lacking in my life. You were a little angel. Who was going to tell me that you weren't normal? For starters, who can say who's normal. Nobody's normal,

sweetie. Do you think, Eugene, that your cousins are normal? What about Luis and Teresa? What are they like?

EUGENE *(He gets up and puffs up his cheeks and moves his arms to indicate a large belly.)*

OLIVIA – Exactly, they're obese like the majority of young people today. What do you expect, if they stuff themselves with Coca Cola, hamburgers and french fries, of course they're going to look like pigs. You run, swim and play tennis way better than they. And they do so poorly in school. They're pitiful; I think the fat goes to their heads. On the other extreme there's our neighbour next door, the anorexic girl. What a shame. Do you think it's normal to be so thin?

EUGENE- *(Sucks in his cheeks and elongates himself)*

OLIVIA- They need to send this girl for treatment, but her parents are clueless. They're happy buying her expensive designer clothes, as if luxury items could hide her tiny bones. But there are people who are even more abnormal. Do you think the Dorantes Revilla's children are normal when they go on drunken binges every weekend even though they're so young? Yes, I mean those youngsters who think that chugging down those big bottles in the streets is a great pastime. It makes me ashamed to see them stagger back home in the morning running into their parents who are off to play golf.

EUGENE – *(picks up a bottle and staggers)*

OLIVIA – Exactly. Tell me what you think, son. Are Irene’s druggie classmates more normal than you?

EUGENE – (*Pretends he is snorting a line of cocaine*).

OLIVIA – You’ve seen that on TV, haven’t you? Well, those drug addicts would be lucky to be like you. Eugene, they sent Mercedes’s brother to reform school because he held up gas stations and phone centres. Yup, the kid was a mugger.

EUGENE – (*makes believe his hand is a pistol*) “Your money or your life.

OLIVIA – You do that really well, son. But let’s go on. Eugene, do you think that the people who drive drunk and kill not only themselves, but innocent people as well, in horrible accidents are more normal than you?

EUGENE – (*moving his arm*) No, mommy, no.

OLIVIA – Of course not, son. And remember that these things happen every weekend, and even then there are thousands of abnormal people who don’t learn their lesson and still drive drunk. Oh, it’s so frustrating! Well, none of these people who drive and drink can be considered normal. They number well into the hundreds of thousands. I’m not exaggerating one bit, Eugene. And what about those youngsters who don’t leave the house because they’re glued to the computer. Yes, those kids who are white as a sheet because they never out into the sun. Do you think that they’re more normal than you are?

EUGENIO- (*Pretends he is typing on a keyboard with his face up against the computer screen*) No, mommy. No.

OLIVIA- As you can see, Eugene, the world is full of abnormal persons who are not in jail or in an insane asylum, but who brazenly walk the streets. Eugene, do you know who's probably considered a normal family?

EUGENIO- No, mommy.

OLIVIA- I think that a lot of people consider the González Uriarte's to be a normal family. Oh please! He's a fool whose favourite thing is wearing black turtlenecks to look cool and intellectual, even though his only topic of conversation is soccer. And her ...? Well, even though you may not believe it, my friend Jimena wasn't always a silly girl. No, when she was young she was rather bright. Imagine, she loved reading the classics! And now, the only thing she reads is *Hello! Magazine*, that is, when she's not glued to the TV watching those trashy shows. I really wonder what happened. I find it more and more trying to go out with her. There's nothing to talk about except bits of gossip that don't interest me. Of course, with parents like that it's no wonder that the son has been looking for work for eight years ever since he graduated from college, and that the daughter who's a perennial student of languages, has had two abortions. Is that a normal family, Eugene?

EUGENE – I don't know, Mommy.

OLIVIA- Everybody thinks that the González Uriarte's are normal and have a good life. A good life? Well if that means having a huge mortgage on their house, still paying off their two automobiles, and credit cars that are maxed out, then sure, they have a good life. They're a normal family. What do you think, son?

EUGENE- I don't know, mommy.

OLIVIA- Well, I do. Those people aren't normal, and there are millions like them who aren't any more normal than you. Do you think it's normal to be a drug addict?

EUGENE- You already said that, mommy.

OLIVIA- ¿I did? Well, here's another one. Do you think it's normal to be a fascist and beat up any black person who crosses your path?

EUGENE - What?

OLIVIA- Yes, do you think that those guys who beat up on blacks and beggars are more normal than you?

EUGENE - No, mommy, you shouldn't hit anyone.

OLIVIA- Of course not, son. Of course not.*(Pause)* Come on now, just for a break. Answer this: do you think it's normal not to cheer for Real Madrid?

EUGENE- ¿What?

OLIVIA- Ha. ha. I caught you, Eugene, I caught you. It was a joke. I was talking about soccer.

EUGENE. Oh, soccer. *(He takes a t-shirt of the Spanish team out of the drawer)* Raúl, mommy, Raúl.

OLIVIA- Sure, Raúl is one of the few normal ones. And not cheering Real Madrid can be normal too. But do you think, Eugene, that you are less normal than those guys they call hooligans? Yes, the ones that get drunk before the game begins, come in and throw bottles onto the field, and who break everything in sight after the game ends?

EUGENE- ¿The ones who break the shop windows?

OLIVIA- Yes, the ones who break the shop windows.

EUGENE- I don't break shop windows, mommy.

OLIVIA- Of course not, son. You're normal. So, what's the difference between normal people and the abnormal ones?

EUGENE- I don't know, mommy. I don't know.

OLIVIA- That's OK, son. I don't know either. But what I am sure about is that pimps, muggers, hired assassins, kidnappers, and narco traffickers are all abnormal. And I'm also sure that pederasts are disgustingly abnormal, and, watch out, a lot of them are priests. How horrible. And I didn't even mention those who beat their wives or abuse their children because it's obvious that they're abnormal and that they would be only too happy to be like you.

EUGENE- *(Throws out his chest with pride)*

OLIVIA- Absolutely, son. You're right to be proud of what you are, and I'm proud of you too. *(Pause)* Now, an easy one, Eugene. Do you think that corrupt politicians are more normal than you? Isn't it true that they're not? And talking about politics, do you think that Bush was ever normal? Well, no, son. Killing thousands of people just to get control of oil makes him a dangerous, abnormal person. The surprising thing is that there were millions of people who re-elected him. Do you think that those persons are abnormal too?

EUGENE- I don't know mommy.

OLIVIA – Perhaps they are, Eugene. But the ones who are abnormal beyond any doubt are those Palestinians and Israelis who hate each other to death and don't want to find the way to live in peace. Do you know the only thing that would make them happy?

EUGENE – No, mommy.

OLIVIA- The only thing that would make them happy would be to see the other side disappear. To think like that is typical of abnormal people. And I didn't even mention the Irish because they're the most abnormal of all. Come on, how is it possible that they've killed each other when they're all of the same race and they're all Christians? And even if they weren't, a people shouldn't kill another because they're not like them. Don't you think so, Eugene?

EUGENE – I don't know, mommy.

OLIVIA- Well, I do, son. Killing another person isn't normal. *(Pause)* The worst thing, Eugene, is that there are persons who think they're normal and they're really monsters. For example, killing innocent people doesn't matter to terrorists. And it's not only the terrorists who are abnormal, but anyone who supports them. Believe me, Eugene, any mother of a terrorist would be grateful to have a son like you.

EUGENE – I'm not a terrorist, mommy.

OLIVIA- Nor will you ever be, son. Ever. *(Pause)* What you read in the newspaper is horrible, Eugene. There was an article the other day about some terrorists who hid explosives inside the waistbands of two young girls who had Down syndrome. Then they sent them off to a big market. Since they looked so innocent, the guards at the door waved them in. Once they were inside those damned terrorists detonated the dynamite by remote control killing

dozens of their compatriots. (*Pause*) The ones who planned that were definitely abnormal. Only the girls' heads remained, Eugene.

EUGENE. (*who has become sad, dries his tears*) It makes me very sad, mommy.

OLIVIA- (*Hugging him*) I'm sorry, son. I shouldn't have told you about these savage, abnormal people. (*Happy*) let's change the topic. I feel better now. In the end, the only thing that I want to tell you is that the most normal family I know is ours, with your father who was a drug addict and a compulsive gambler, your brother, who at 37 has already been married three times, and me with this merciless illness that's making me do things that I don't want to. Yes, we're a normal family. And the most important thing is that you, Eugene, are the most normal person in the world. You are so good by nature, the most honest and the happiest of anyone. (*long Pause*). Now I feel better. I'm done.

EUGENE- You're done?

OLIVIA- Yes, son. I've finished.

EUGENE - Can you make me some soup, mommy? I'm hungry.

OLIVIA- (*Laughing*) You're right, son! With so much gabbing, I forgot about the soup.

EUGENE- *(Comes closer to the drawer, opens it, and looks inside)*

OLIVIA- *(From the kitchen)* Do you want chicken fingers?*(Eugene doesn't respond)*

Eugenio, do you want chicken fingers?...Answer me, son.

EUGENE- *(Closes the drawer quickly and goes to the table)*

OLIVIA- *(Sticks her head out of the kitchen doorway)* What's wrong, son? Why don't you answer? Do you want chicken fingers?

EUGENE – Soup, soup, soup.

OLIVIA- *(goes back into the kitchen and calls out)* Be patient, son, I'm bringing it right now.

EUGENE. *(Sits down, puts on his napkin, picks up the spoon and shouts)* Soup, soup, soup.

OLIVIA- *(Enters with the soup bowl)* Here you are. It's the kind you like: chicken soup with vegetables and noodles.

EUGENE- Oh, mommy, how delicious.

OLIVIA- *(serves him and serves herself a little)*

EUGENE- (*Tastes the soup hungrily*)

OLIVIA- Is it good?

EUGENE- Very good.

OLIVIA- (*While Eugene eats his soup*) You've always had such a good appetite, angel. It's fantastic to see you finish everything on your plate. Imagine, if we had followed that doctor's advice I would have missed out on the happiness that watching you eat day after day has brought me for thirty years. (*pause*) Do you know what the doctor recommended the week after you were born? You can't begin to imagine. He said that we could send you to a residence where you would be taken care of for life. That is, we would leave you in this place, and we we'd never have to worry about you. The doctor brought several leaflets for residences for children like you; some were abroad and looked like luxury hotels. I asked about the price. They were expensive, very expensive, but with some effort we could manage to pay for it. The doctor told us that it was worth it because a child like you disrupts the dynamics of a normal family, and it was better to act as if you had never been born. Afterwards it occurred to me that the doctor must have received a commission for each child that he sent to one of these places because you have no idea how much he insisted about the issue. He said that they would be able to treat you better than anyone else could: feed you, educate and entertain you **for your whole life and in a perfectly legal way**. That is,

erasing you from our lives did not violate any laws. Making you disappear was legal. *(Pause)* Do you think I could have allowed that? Do think that after giving birth to you and breastfeeding you I could abandon you forever? Your father also rejected the idea. He had many faults, but he wasn't heartless, and least of all with you. I think that you were the sole reason that our marriage lasted for as long as it did. *(Looking at Eugene's plate)*. You're finished. Do you want chicken fingers, son?

EUGENE- Soup, mommy, soup.

OLIVIA- Have mine, son. I'm not hungry. *(They exchange plates and she gives him a little more soup from the tureen)*.

EUGENE- Thank you, mommy.

OLIVIA- *(While Eugene eats his soup)* The truth is, Eugene, that I didn't always accept you as you are. There are times, when I see you: entirely focused on your drawing, or swimming, or simply sleeping like a log, that I wonder what you'd be like if you hadn't been born like this... I imagine all the girls crazy about you: handsome, intelligent, happy. You could be a famous actor, a star; you'd perform in the best theatres; they'd offer you juicy contracts for roles with important film directors; your picture would be on the cover of every magazine... No, even better: you'd be a broker in a famous bank, the kind that manages millionaires' fortunes and who could become a millionaire himself. What do you think? A millionaire! ... No, better to be a prestigious doctor, a genius at plastic surgery, the kind pursued by all types

of artists and celebrities so that he can get them to look a few years younger. Yes! That's it! You'd be a talented surgeon: famous, elegant, rich. How does that sound, Eugene? You'd drive a Mercedes convertible that would show off your Caribbean tan. Yes, son, you'd have a very expensive sports car.

EUGENE – *(He sets aside the soup and makes believe that he's driving a car)*

OLIVIA – And you'd also have a six-cylinder motorcycle so you could take a spin on Sundays, with your motorcycle boots, and your aerodynamic helmet, and your leather suit with cool designs on it. A motorcycle, Eugene.

EUGENE- *(makes believe he's riding a motorcycle)* ¡Pruun! ¡Pruun!

OLIVIA- And you'd go skiing in the Alps.

EUGENE- *(Makes believe he's skiing)* ¡Cisss!, ¡CISS!

OLIVIA- Horseback riding in England, in a very select club. You'd love horses, Eugene.

EUGENE- *(Makes believe he's riding a horse)* Po, pon.Po, pon. Po, pon.

OLIVIA- You'd scuba-dive in the Cayman Islands.

EUGENE- *(makes believe he's scuba diving)*

OLIVIA- And you'd speak at least four languages.

EUGENE- I don't know about that, mommy. *(He sits down and goes back to his soup)*

OLIVIA- It doesn't matter, son. We're just day-dreaming. You'd be the Christian Barnard of the twenty-first century: invited to important medical conferences, and part of the international jet-set. *(Long pause)*. Oh, sweetie, but then I wonder if the movie star, the brilliant executive, the millionaire broker, or the famous surgeon would be happier than you are. I'd bet my life that they wouldn't. The race to fame means dodging envious colleagues, betraying people, being disappointed. When we read the biographies of the people we admire, we find out that their private lives have been full of misfortune. If people knew the cost of success, many of them would give up the struggle to attain it. Famous people don't have real friends, and their family life is a nest of intrigue. Nobody cares about their feelings. They just care about them because of what they do, or what they have. On the other hand those you love you, my son, love you as you are, without expecting anything in return, in a way that is natural, spontaneous and voluntary. No one can love you any other way. Isn't that true, Eugene?

EUGENE- Yes, mommy. *(Continues sipping his soup)*

OLIVIA- But since we want to be realistic, son, it would have been more likely you would have turned out like the majority, and this wouldn't have been good for you since, except for very few cases in which people are content with their lives, most people aren't. You'd be frustrated by the inability to achieve what you aspired to. The money you had wouldn't be enough, you'd have to endure useless or annoying bosses, and you'd be in constant fear of being fired either because the company merged, or wanted to reduce the number of employees. Meanwhile, your family –thank you very much—could care less about you and they'd demand more money, more attention, more time, more everything. Like a wise man said: “Not even the Holy family”: nosy mothers-in-law, disrespectful children, spouses who don't understand you. My God, what a living Hell! I wonder how many projects, dreams, and ambitions die out over the years... (*Silence. She gets up while he continues eating*) Life, Eugene, is continuous loss, you lose your health, your energy, your friends, your family. Look at me. Since it seems it wasn't enough to lose my appendix, my tonsils, my gall bladder and my womb, next Wednesday they want to take my breasts too, son. And if, in addition, I've had some hair loss, lost some eyesight, and a good amount of hearing, I could conclude without any exaggeration that life has wiped me out. But these aren't the worst losses, Eugene. The terrible thing is that my youth has flown by without my realizing where, how or when. I woke up one day and discovered another woman in front of the mirror. That face full of wrinkles wasn't mine. I couldn't detect in my arms or legs the smoothness

and firmness of before. Now they were flabby limbs full of cellulite. I won't go on so as not to get more depressed than I already am. I'm only confessing to you that the image I had of myself vanished in a flash. All of a sudden I was a caricature of the vivacious university student, the precocious gallery owner, of the woman handsome men lusted after. It's all over, but I refuse to give my friends the pleasure of witnessing my decline. *(Pause)* Nature is perverse, evil; it should be content to simply eliminate old people and not vent its cruelty by making us unrecognizable. Sure, I say "nature" rather than God, for it is He who ridicules and makes fun of older people. Using diapers, drooling, shaking, bleary-eyed and toothless. It's neither necessary nor fair. *(Pause)* I haven't only lost my figure, the worst thing is that I've lost everyone who ever truly loved me: my parents, my brothers and sisters. It's not just death that has deprived me of the people dear to me, it's also this crazy life style that's distanced me forever from countless people whom I could have sworn would be inseparable friends. I wonder where they are now, what they're doing, what my girlfriends from school and the neighbourhood, my college classmates, my playmates at the beach are up to? *(Silence)* But you know, Eugene, of all the persons I've lost, the ones I miss the most are a few lovers whose kisses and caresses I still feel on nights that I'm in a romantic mood. *(Pause)* As you see, my son, I've lost a lot, a whole lot. The truth is, the only thing that I have to drink a toast to is the final voyage. *(Pause, caressing him)*. So you see, dear Eugene, I have nothing to toast. Yes, nothing at all.

EUGENE – *(finishes his soup)* A toast? Let's toast with champagne, like on the Titanic.

OLIVIA – Whaaat? What toast are you talking about, sweetie?

EUGENE- On the Titanic everyone toasts with champagne, mommy.

OLIVIA- You're right. As the ship was sinking there were people who, either resigned or clueless, cheerfully drank champagne. That's what it means to have a lot of class. *(Brief pause, laughing)* I don't know how you do it, Eugene, but you always find a way to cheer me up. That's what we'll do. I'll bring out a bottle of champagne and we'll raise a toast. Go get the glasses. *(Goes out)*

EUGENE – *(Goes to look at the bag in the drawer, looks at it for a few moments, then goes to the glass cabinet and takes out three champagne glasses)*

OLIVIA- *(comes back with a bottle of champagne, trying to open it)* I know whom we're going to drink a toast to. It'll be to you, because I've been so incredibly lucky to have a son who doesn't change as the years go by. You are and always will be my eternal baby. You're the only thing that I haven't lost in life. On the contrary, you make me feel useful, young, and alive with each day that goes by. *(Pause)* You don't see my defects, or my wrinkles. You don't reproach me for my mistakes. You don't complain about my manias. I'm your heroine, your immortal fairy godmother. *(She continues to*

try to open the champagne bottle) This cork is really stuck. I'm sure, Eugene, that many mothers are jealous of me; you don't cause me any problems, while they, the poor things, spend the entire day wondering: what's happened to my son, why is he so late? Or why does he get such bad grades on his exams? And when their kids get to university it's even worse. You can't tell them what to do: they think that they're so independent and wise. Then come the real worries: will he get a good job, will he have a happy marriage, will he show the mettle and strength necessary to withstand life's injustices? While, you, Eugene, you're the greatest. Your life is totally predictable. Whenever I come back home you're always so happy to see me and welcome me cheerfully. You jump up and down and shower me with kisses until I'm exhausted.

EUGENE- *(Kisses and hugs her)*

OLIVIA- I'm the luckiest mom in the world. Let's drink to that. Oh, son, I can't open the champagne bottle. I'm so useless.

EUGENE- Me, mommy. *(Eugene takes the bottle but can't open it either)*

OLIVIA- Leave it, son. What do you say: why don't we toast with soda?

EUGENE – Yes, mommy, with Coca Cola.

OLIVIA- Terrific, bring a Coke from the fridge and a bottle opener.

EUGENE- Yes, mommy. *(Leaves)*

OLIVIA- *(In a loud voice)* You know, Eugene, before, they'd keep boys like you locked up in their houses. What nonsense! Don't you think? It was a taboo subject. Nobody talked about them, and look out, as many were born then as now, about one in every eight hundred births. I don't know why, but people hid them as if it were a tragedy, something to be ashamed of. We never did that. In this, your father the compulsive gambler, behaved really well. Even better, I think that he liked for you to be seen everywhere: at the club, in restaurants, at soccer matches. I think that if they had allowed you into the casino, he would have taken you there too. And your brother was never ashamed of you either. Sometimes he'd take you to his school so that his classmates could meet you. And you know? No one ever made fun of you. On the contrary, they loved playing with you. It's true. I have to admit that people' reactions were terrific. You only had to give them a chance to know you. Everybody likes you. They respond when you greet them; they laugh with you. The times anybody was unpleasant were so few, it's not even worth it to remember. It's that you're an angel, son. And like the angel you are, you love to hug everybody –a rich person as well as a poor one, a black person or a white person, an old guy or a child. You don't discriminate against anybody. If everyone followed your example, what a better world this would be. You can't imagine how much prejudice is out there, son. Just

having a different accent, dressing differently, or being of another color, puts others on the defensive or ready to act aggressively. Foreigners, the poor, native peoples, blacks are discriminated against. So are women, people of other religions, or those with different political views. You, on the other hand don't notice a thing: you say hello and hug everyone with the same spontaneity. You never look down on anyone. It's because you don't notice a person's exterior; you don't care if they're ugly or good-looking. To you everyone is your neighbour, a person of worth. They should elect you president of Amnesty International!

EUGENE- *(Enters with a large soda bottle and a bottle opener)* Sure, mommy. *(He opens the bottle and pours the soda into three glasses)*

OLIVIA- To your health, son. To us.

EUGENE- To your health, mommy. To you and me. *(they clink their glasses together and drink)*

OLIVIA- You're such good company, son.

EUGENE- Yes, mommy.

OLIVIA- Are you comfortable, son? Do you want to change? If you like, put on your pyjamas.

EUGENE- And my bath robe, mommy?

OLIVIA- Yes, if you feel like putting on your bath robe son, go ahead. Whatever you want. We still have time.

EUGENE – Yes, mommy. *(He leaves)*

OLIVIA- *(Clearing the table. As if she were speaking to Eugene)* Oh, Eugene, please don't think that I'm crazy. No, I've thought about it for a long time, and there's no other way out for us. The best oncologist in the country has fully diagnosed my cancer, and two other specialists whom I consulted for a second opinion affirmed it. They're all in agreement about what has to be done: they have to remove my breasts, and if I come out if it OK, that is, if I don't die, I have to undergo chemotherapy and maybe radiation treatments for a long time in order to prevent the cancer from spreading. What all this means is dizziness, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, pain in my joints, rashes. I'll become completely bald, Eugene. I'll be a human wreck. I'll turn into somebody that requires special care. There will even be times when I'll need help to walk, to get dressed, to go to the bathroom. It's likely that I won't be able to drive or to play tennis for a long time. My quality of life will be reduced to unimaginable levels. *(Pause)*. No, I wouldn't be able to

endure that kind of existence. (*Silence*) The thought that I'll die as my mother did horrifies me, and she didn't even have cancer, but she had everything else: high blood pressure, sky-high cholesterol levels, arthritis, all kinds of infections, because if it wasn't her bladder, it was her kidneys, or her hearing, or her lungs. My goodness: I think the doctors made use of the entire geriatrics manual, but at ninety the poor woman was so attached to life that she always submitted to whatever treatment they proposed. Her last years were torture for her and for everyone. Her children took turns around the clock so she would never be alone. (*Pause*) Yes, Mother took over our lives. If we hadn't stayed to take care of her during the night, the first thing we did as soon as we woke up was call to see how she was, if she had gone to the bathroom, if they had changed her; we were always hanging on her condition. We couldn't do anything, couldn't travel, or take a break. No, she was the centre of our attention. She was a suffering tyrant, but a tyrant to the end. Her room was a hodgepodge of oxygen bottles, IV bags, syringes, crucifixes, holy pictures, and a constant coming and going of doctors, nurses, priests, and masseurs. And she didn't surrender one inch, enduring it all and only delaying the inevitable. In all sincerity, I didn't see her attitude as a heroic act, but rather as a foolish whim, a kind of meaningless masochism. And of course, the entire family was shackled to her. No, Eugene, I don't want to die like that. I don't want to be a burden on anyone, nor do I want people to breathe a sigh of relief when I pass away. No, I'd rather just cause them the slightest of inconveniences, just enough so that they see to my incineration. (*Silence*) Please understand, son. The

only option I have is to go away forever now that I'm still capable of making my own decisions. Like boxers say: you have to know when it's time to hang up your gloves. Yes, because once you start losing your faculties, you're forced to depend on others. *(Pause)* Believe me, Eugene, physical pain is what least concerns me. No, what terrifies me is that the time will come when I won't be able to think straight, discern things clearly, or be myself. *(Pause)* People aren't in favour of euthanasia until it happens to them. I never was. I even believed that you were supposed to go down fighting, and that you had no right to take your own life. So you see, your beliefs last only as long as they have nothing to do with you. In my case, it's very clear to me, son, and in yours too because I'm sure that your happiness would disappear as soon as my corpse was barely warm. Who's going to take care of you like I do? What will become of you? Yes, your brother loves you very much, but, as you can see, he has his own life, his own loves, his own business matters. However much he would like to take care of you, he wouldn't be able to. And I don't think his wife of the moment would accept your presence indefinitely. She'd get fed up with you very soon and wouldn't know what to do. You have to realize that she probably has her own problems and preoccupations. No, they wouldn't take care of you or appreciate you for what you are. Sooner or later they'd decide that it would be better to put you in an institution that would care for you for the rest of your life. And that's if your brother, who would become your guardian, is capable of paying for your board and hasn't squandered his inheritance, which is the most probable scenario considering his continual

bankruptcies. Of course, I could modify my will and name a bank as executor charged with watching over your personal situation rather than give money to your brother. Yes, I could take legal measures. I looked into that, but after speaking with the best lawyers I realized that I couldn't stick my neck out for any of them. Lawyers are basically merchants, just like doctors, or fishmongers. And nowadays the idea of trusting a bank has become a tasteless joke. Even the biggest ones go under, or trick you into exorbitant fees. But even if nobody were to rob you, I have no idea what your quality of life would be in an institution like that. Who would love you like I do? No, son, I can't leave you alone. You have to come with me. I've decided. It's what's best for both of us. *(Pause). Looking in her bag for a piece of paper)* I already know it by heart. "The 'Association for Death with Dignity' says that it never fails. *(Reading)* "Dear Olivia: As we agreed, we are sending you the pharmaceutical products for you and your son Eugene. Please read these instructions carefully, and if you have any questions, contact us as soon as possible. If you have understood everything, proceed to identify the substances that we sent for each of you: three tablets of Secfort, two of Nubiazor, and a red bottle that contains strychnine with barbiturates. Take them in this order: First, with water, swallow the three Secfort tablets to prevent vomiting and diarrhoea, and wait a half hour for them to take effect. This assures that your organism retains everything you ingest afterwards. Second, after half an hour place the two tablets of Nubiazor in your mouth. This substance is used by anaesthesiologists to induce deep sleep. The Niabazor will dissolve instantly in your mouth. Wait

exactly five minutes, or less, if you experience signs of sleep. Third, drink the contents of the red bottle containing strychnine mixed with barbiturates immediately. The 'Association for Death with Dignity' wishes you a peaceful and happy voyage." *(She finishes reading. Pause)* How easy it is to pass to the other side. The advances in science are amazing. *(Pause)* For a time I thought I was going to be nervous. But now that I'm about to do it, it seems normal, routine, simple. I think that it would probably be more difficult to follow a recipe for paella. Well, let's go step by step. First of all, I have to identify and separate the medicines. *(She goes to the drawer and shouts out in alarm)* EUGENE! Why did you open the bag! I told you not to touch it! EUGENE! Come here this instant!

EUGENE- *(Enters in pyjamas and putting on his bath robe)*

OLIVIA- Why have you opened the bag?

EUGENE. *(Looks down at the floor and busies himself with putting on his robe)*

OLIVIA- Why do you always have to snoop around, son?

EUGENE- *(Still busying himself with his bath robe)*

OLIVIA- Don't pretend that you don't know what I'm talking about. ¿Why do you always stick your nose into what's none of your business? Damn it!

EUGENE. You shouldn't say "damn," mommy. It's a bad word.

OLIVIA- What do you mean, bad words! I say whatever I want, damn.

EUGENE- Mommy, damn is a bad word. You shouldn't say damn.

OLIVIA- It's worse to poke your nose into what isn't yours. You exasperate me, son.

Let's see if everything is here. *(She examines the medicines and puts them on the table)* Six capsules of Secort, four of Nubiazor. Damn! One of the bottles of strychnine is missing! Damn! Eugene, where is the other bottle of strychnine, a red bottle like this one. Where is it, Eugene? Oh my God, did you drink it? Tell me, did you drink it?

EUGENE- No, mommy.

OLIVIA- Where is it then?

EUGENE- Guess if you can!

OLIVIA- *(Angry)* What! I'm not in the mood for games, son. Where is the red bottle?

EUGENE- Guess, mommy, guess.

OLIVIA- *(Desperate)* For goodness sake, son, I'm not in the mood for games. This is serious, damn it!

EUGENE- Mommy, damn is a bad word. You shouldn't say damn.

OLIVIA- (*Grabbing him by the shoulders*) Damn it, son. Give me that bottle. Don't you see that I can't do anything without it. Where is it?

EUGENE- Guess if you can!

OLIVIA- Damn it! Tell me where it is.

EUGENE – You shouldn't say damn, mommy.

OLIVIA- OK. you won. I won't say damn any more. Now tell me, where did you put a red bottle like this one?

EUGENE- Guess!

OLIVIA- (*To herself*) No, this can't be happening to me. I must be dreaming. It can't be. I could use this bottle for myself, but I can't leave Eugene behind. (*To Eugene*) Oh, son, I'm not up for games. This is very serious. It's a matter of life and death. A truer word was never uttered. Damn.

EUGENE – You shouldn't say damn, mommy.

OLIVIA- (*Violent*) You drive me crazy, son. Tell me once and for all where you put the red bottle or I'll punch you in the face.

EUGENE- Guess, if you can!

OLIVIA- I give up. You're impossible. It's outrageous. You won, Eugene. So let's play.

(she begins to search in all the drawers in the living room and then in other places) Is it here?

EUGENE. Cold, very cold.

OLIVIA- How about here?

EUGENE- Colder, colder.

OLIVIA- And here?

EUGENE- Cold, cold. Ice, ice.

OLIVIA- I know, you took it to your bedroom. *(She leaves)*

EUGENE- *(He opens his bag of paints, takes out the bottle and puts it in the drawer where the bag had been. Then he goes towards the door of his bedroom and shouts)* COLD, MOMMY, COLD.

OLIVIA- *(Returning)* If it's not in your bedroom then it must be here. You hid it with your paints. It was simple. I should have guessed it from the beginning. I'm losing my reflexes. *(She opens the bag)*

EUGENE- Cold, cold, cold.

OLIVIA- It can't be. Oh, I know. It's in the bathroom *(Goes toward the bathroom)*

EUGENE Warm, mommy.

OLIVIA- *(Continues towards the bathroom)*

EUGENE- Cold, cold.

OLIVIA- That's odd. If it's not in the bathroom, it would have to be in the chest of drawers, but I've already looked in there. I think there's something tricky going on.

EUGENE. Hot, mommy, hot.

OLIVIA- *(She opens the drawer and takes out the bottle).*

EUGENE- You're burning, mommy. Bravo, ¡Long live my mommy!

OLIVIA- You're a rascal, Eugene. You tricked me. You moved the bottle. That's cheating, son. You shouldn't do that.

EUGENE. I'm sorry, mommy. I won't do it again.

OLIVIA- Oh, son you've worn me out.*(Laughing)* Although I have to confess that for a moment I was having fun. I felt as if I were a child again. You're not an angel, Eugene. You're a little devil.

EUGENE- Yes, mommy. *(Kisses and hugs her tenderly)*

OLIVIA- The truth is that you always win me over with your ways, Eugene. Come and sit down here, son *(they sit down in the dining room where the pharmaceutical products are)*. Look, we're going to take these pills that the doctor said are good for your tummy.

EUGENE- My tummy doesn't hurt, mommy.

OLIVIA- I know son. Mine doesn't hurt either, but we're going to take them anyway because the doctor says that they're good for you. Each of us has to take three. Three for you, and three for me. Look, they're not very big and you can take them with water. It's very easy, son. They're good for your tummy.

EUGENE- My tummy doesn't hurt, mommy.

OLIVIA- Yes, you already told me. But they'll help you digest the two bowls of soup you had, and before that you ate a lot of chocolates. Do you remember the chocolates you ate.

EUGENE- Yes, mommy. I promise I won't eat any more chocates.

OLIVIA- Very good, son. I know that you won't. But now you have to take these pills.

EUGENE- My tummy doesn't hurt, mommy.

OLIVIA- Look, if you don't take them, I'm going to get very angry.

EUGENE- Don't be angry, mommy. I love you very much.

OLIVIA- If you do what I say and take the pills, I won't be angry. Look, I'll take them first, OK? (*Ingests the tablets*). One. Two, Three. Do you see how easy it is? Now it's your turn.

EUGENE- My tummy doesn't hurt, mommy.

OLIVIA- I already know that son. I know. Look. Do it for me. Take your pills.

EUGENE- (*making faces while he ingests them*)

OLIVIA- One. Two. Three. Very good. Wasn't that easy? Now we have to wait half an hour for them to work. So we won't throw up or feel like going to the bathroom.

EUGENE- I already went to the bathroom, mommy.

OLIVIA- Very good, son. While we wait, I'll tell you what we're going to do later. Look, in half an hour we're going to put these two pills under our tongues so that they dissolve all by themselves, and then we'll drink the liquid that's in the red bottles. One bottle for you, and another one for me. This will make it possible for us to go on a long trip. You and me are going away on a long trip.

EUGENE- *(Happy)* ¿We're going on a trip, mommy?

OLIVIA- Yes, son. We're going far away, to a beautiful sunny beach.

EUGENE- To the sun? Oh, how nice, mommy. I love the sun and the beach. *(He gets up and goes towards his bedroom)*.

OLIVIA- Where are you going, son? Come back. I said, come back here. Are you going to the bathroom?

EUGENE- *(Turning)* No, mommy. I already went to the bathroom.

OLIVIA- Come here, son. We're going to sit on the sofa and watch a movie.

EUGENE. *(He doesn't pay attention to her and leaves)*

OLIVIA- Come back, Eugene! Come here! What a kid! He makes believe he's deaf when it suits him. But we have time. We still have half an hour. *(Looking at herself in a mirror)* What a shame, I was aging so well. My clothes cover whatever is unappealing to the eyes, and leave everything that's still attractive in me to the imagination. Yes, I still have a good figure, an elegance and savoir faire that many young people would envy. And my skin. Oh, my skin! It's remarkable how it withstands the passage of time. Of course, I've taken care of myself: creams, massages, a couple of liftings, but nothing more. The truth is that I had resigned myself to getting old. When you carry your age with class, people treat you with a certain respect, though not in the same way as in my parents' time when getting old was a sign of distinction. It's not that way now. I know of many older women who died alone and in dire poverty. Fortunately, that's not my case. Moreover, I'm aware that in recent years I'm treated with a certain deference and esteem. You're always grateful for that. What surprises me is that even older people speak to me with greater courtesy. Generally they're imperceptible details you can't miss, no matter how small they are: a gesture, a slight bow of the head, a hint of a friendly smile, a slowing down of speech to make sure that I understand what is being said to me. The piling up of years can't be all bad. *(the opening and closing of drawers can be heard)* Eugene, sweetheart. What are you doing? Come here to Mommy. *(Pause)* Eugene, come on, son. Don't leave me alone.

EUGENE- *(From inside)*Just a minute, Mommy.

OLIVIA- Hurry up. There's a lot of things we have to do.

EUGENE- *(From inside)* Just a minute, Mommy. *(One can hear drawers and closet doors opening and closing)*

OLIVIA- What are you doing? Come here I say. *(Looking at the pharmaceutical products)* My goodness. What a night. Well, it'll be a peaceful end to an agitated and restless life. Not even my glorious widowhood brought me happiness; I was almost fifty. At that time the gallery ended up taking over my life: meetings, invitations, openings. Social commitments absorbed me. In the end, others controlled my time, the way I dressed, how I behaved. Yes, I lived for my work, for my clients and my friends. I never had the time to do what I would have liked. And what would have I liked to do? Yes, what would it have been?

EUGENE- *(He enters dressed for the beach with sunglasses and a cap. He is carrying a sports bag)* My flippers, Mommy?

OLIVIA- Eugene, where do you think you're going?

EUGENE – To the beach. You and me.

OLIVIA- Oh, son. You didn't understand me.

EUGENE You promised to take me to the beach. My flippers, Mommy?

OLIVIA- Forget your flippers, son. First we have to take these pills and this liquid.

EUGENE- My flippers, Mommy?

OLIVIA- Come here and sit down. We're going to take these medicines.

EUGENE - My flippers, Mommy?

OLIVIA- Forget about your flippers I said. Come here, sit next to me.

EUGENE - My flippers, Mommy?

OLIVIA- You drive me crazy, son. I already told you that I don't know where they are.

Have you looked everywhere?

EUGENE – Yes, Mommy.

OLIVIA- Well if you can't find them, I sure won't be able to. You never lose anything.

You're always so organized. Come here and sit next to me because in a little while we're going to have to take this.

EUGENE- My flippers, Mommy?

OLIVIA- I already told you, son. I don't know where they are.

EUGENE- I'm going to look for them.*(Leaves)*

OLIVIA- I said come here. What a child. When he gets something into his head no one can stop him. *(Picks up the phone)* Paula? Sorry to phone you at this hour, dear, but we're thinking of going to the beach tomorrow and Eugene can't find his flippers. ... Oh, yes, yes, I remember now ... Excuse me, I don't know where my head is these past few days... No, don't worry about it, your son can keep them. I'll buy Eugene another pair. Don't worry about it ... You're welcome. Rather it's me who should excuse herself for having called so late. OK, see you Monday. *(Pause)* Eugene, Eugene, come here, son.

EUGENE- *(Enters)* I can't find my flippers, Mommy.

OLIVIA- Of course, son, they're not here. I just called Paula. It turns out that I lent them to her son because he's taking swimming lessons. I'm sorry, I forgot all about it.

EUGENE- Oh, Mommy, my flippers.

OLIVIA- I'm sorry, son. Look, as soon as we get to the beach I'll buy you prettier ones. What colour do you want them? Red, yellow, blue?

EUGENE- *(Thinking)*

OLIVIA- Do you want red, yellow or blue ones?

EUGENE- Red, Mommy. But I want them to be really big.

OLIVIA- Very good, son. I'll buy you the biggest and prettiest ones in the whole world.

How's that?

EUGENIO- *(jumping up and down with happiness)* Thank you, Mommy. Big red flippers.

OLIVIA- *(Looking at her watch)* OK, now sit down here because we have to take this very soon. *(She divides the pharmaceuticals into two lots. Looks at her watch)* Yes, we have to wait a little more. What can we talk about, Eugene? Do you want me to tell you a story, son?

EUGENE – I don't know, Mommy.

OLIVIA- Look, dear. After taking these pills and drinking this liquid, we'll sleep a lot and when we wake up we'll be in a beautiful place.

EUGENE- What beach are we going to, Mommy?

OLIVIA- (*Picks up the bottles, looks at them and in a calm voice, without enthusiasm, almost mechanically*) We're going to one that has very fine, white sand with palm trees and coconut palms.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Continues to play mechanically with the bottles*) There's a very pretty house that's by the sea.

EUGENE – Does it have a pool?

OLIVIA- (*Continues to play mechanically with the bottles*) It has everything. The pool is huge. It has a gym and a jacuzzi too. It's heaven, Eugene.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Continues to play mechanically with the bottles*) It has gigantic rooms with big picture windows.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Puts down the bottles but without taking her eyes off them. She speaks more emphatically*) It has a very big kitchen and a huge refrigerator.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Still looks at the bottles but speaks with more enthusiasm*) The furniture is big and comfortable. We'll put two hammocks on the terrace for taking naps.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Looks up, gesturing*) The sea is marvellous. As if it were freshly painted emerald, turquoise and aquamarine.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- The temperature of the water is so inviting it makes you want to stay there forever. We'll swim to a buoy and when we get back home we'll have delicious fruit juices.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- You'll have televisions in every room: in the living room, the kitchen, your bedroom. Each one with headphones so you don't bother anybody.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Gets up, more enthusiastic*) And we'll ride comfortable bikes on the embankment.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Enthusiastically*) we'll have guest rooms for all our friends who'll come visit sooner or later.

EUGENE- Can we invite Paula's son?

OLIVIA- Sure, Peter will visit us some day, of course he will. And you'll swim with him.
But Paula will probably come before he does. She's so nice and such a great cook.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Very animated*) You'll have a spacious room upstairs where you can paint without worrying about getting drops on the floor. (*Pause*). Hey, perhaps I'll decide to take up painting too. Really, I don't think I'd be bad at it. I'd like to paint like Mark Rothko or Esteban Vicente: colours, spaces, volume. No figures or lines. Only warm colours, like the ones that we see at sunset.
Would you like me to paint with you?

EUGENE – Yes, Mommy. Very much.

OLIVIA- Well, I would too, son. I've always wanted to paint, but I never fulfilled that dream because every time I studied a painting I always wanted to add something to it, or change a colour, or combine the colours in a different way. Now I'd rather just paint for myself and for you. I would like to bring to the surface the colours that are at the bottom of my soul. Wouldn't that be beautiful, Eugene?

EUGENE – Yes, Mommy, very beautiful.

OLIVIA- Very well. So, we're going to paint together. We'll have many canvases, all kinds of paints, and two good easels.

EUGENE – What else, Mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- You know, Eugene, after talking so much about the beach, the idea is very tempting. It wouldn't be a bad thing to have a house like that. If I sell the gallery and this apartment, we could buy that house and live there with whatever was left over. After all, we wouldn't have to spend very much. You don't need clothes at the beach. A couple of pairs of shorts, a few T-shirts and some good running shoes would be enough.

EUGENE – What else, mommy? What else?

OLIVIA- (*Feels discouraged*) Oh, son. How I'd love to do that! But we can't.

EUGENE- (*Alarmed*) We can't? Why can't we, Mommy?

OLIVIA- I can't explain it, Eugene.

EUGENE- (*More alarmed*) Why can't you explain?

OLIVIA- It's too complicated for you. Look, it's even complicated for me to understand. I just can't explain it to you.

EUGENE- Make an effort. Try, Mommy. Try.

OLIVIA- What did you say, darling? Where did you get that from?

EUGENE- You always say to me "Make an effort" when I can't do something. You say "Make an effort, Eugene, make an effort."

OLIVIA- (*Upset*) You're right son. You're right. But right now I don't have the courage to make an effort other than ...

EUGENE- ¿Other than what, Mommy? We're going to the beach, aren't we?

OLIVIA- (*Hesitating*) Yes, son, yes.

EUGENE- To that nice house with the pool.

OLIVIA- Yes, sweetie, yes.

EUGENE- To that pretty house with the Jacuzzi?

OLIVIA- *(About to cry and picking up the bottles)* Yes son, to that house with the pool and the Jacuzzi where we're going to paint together.

EUGENE- How nice, Mommy. That's so nice. I'm going to finish packing my suitcase, Mommy. *(He runs out)*

OLIVIA- Don't go, Eugene. Come back, son. *(Silence)* How horrible. I got caught up in my own words. I wonder if I'm chickening out, or if I really believe that we could live at the beach. Has anything changed? No, nothing has changed. The cancer will run its course. I can't stave it off with excuses, or turn it away with fantasies. It will come with all certitude, so what am I going to do? I have no other option, I must continue with my plan; there's no other way out. there's no other way out? Isn't there? What would happen if ...? No, no. But yes. What would happen if on Wednesday I undergo the operation and then follow the treatment? No, it can't be. I'm not ready to suffer. It would be torture. What would I gain? Yes, what would I gain? *(Pause)* Well, perhaps a few more months of life, or who knows, a few more years. Would it be worth it? I don't know. I really don't know. Would it be worth it to live a little longer? Eugene wouldn't care if he saw me bald and

thin. I'll always be loveable to him. Eugene would probably be the only one who isn't horrified to see me in a decrepit physical state. He wouldn't mind helping me to the bathroom, or giving me a hand to help me walk. I think Eugene is the only person that I wouldn't be embarrassed to see me naked. *(Pause)* Perhaps after the operation and the chemo I could recover somewhat, gain weight, and swim a little. Oh, I'd love to paint those pictures with the colours I've always wanted to see in a painting. Of course, after a time the illness would prevail, and there wouldn't be anything to do but prepare for the final voyage. But aren't we always on the road towards that final voyage? The only thing we can gain is a little time, only a little more time. I don't know. It's better if I stick to my plan. It's the best thing for Eugene and for me. *(Pause)* But, the beach? And the house by the sea? And enjoying my son as I've never done before? And painting? Yes, and what about painting? Oh, what a dilemma. I'm confused. What's clear though is that I'm no longer as sure as when I came home *(Pause)* No, I'm sure that I have to leave, but I think that what I'm no longer as sure about is when. Perhaps I can delay the final voyage a little more. After all, there's always time to die. Olivia, Olivia, you have to decide soon. It's half an hour since we took the pills against the vomiting. Well, nothing will happen. The first pills don't kill you, and I can keep the others for the day that I can't go on it any more. No, with Eugene you can't hide anything. He always finds things. The best thing would be to flush them down the toilet and when I'm really in a bad way I'll contact the "Association for Death with Dignity" so

that they send me some more. They'll understand. There must be many cases like mine.

EUGENE- *(Entering. He's dressed to go to the beach: in bermuda shorts, a shirt with palm trees on it, sunglasses and a cap. He's rolling a suitcase with wheels)*
I'm ready, Mommy. Are we going?

OLIVIA- You look so handsome, son. But now you must wait a little. I have to make some phone calls: first to the airline to see if they have seats left on the last flight tonight, then to the hotel to make reservations and arrange for them to pick us up. But there's something important, Eugene. We'll have to come back on Tuesday because the next day they're operating me in the hospital.

EUGENE – In the hospital?

OLIVIA- Just for a few days, Eugene. If you want you can stay to take care of me.

EUGENE- Yes, Mommy. I'll take good care of you. I've seen it on TV.

OLIVIA- Thank you, son. But don't worry. As soon as I've recuperated from the operation we'll sell this house and go to live forever by the sea. OK?

EUGENE – Yes, Mommy.

OLIVIA- *(Giving him a kiss)* Very good, son. Nobody is more understanding than you.

(To herself, as she takes the bag with the pharmaceuticals to the table)

First of all, this goes to the toilet. *(To Eugene)* Sweetie, I'm going to phone from my room, then I have to pack my suitcase.

EUGENIO- Do you want me to help you, Mommy?

OLIVIA- No, son. watch a movie if you want.

EUGENE- Can I put on "Titanic", Mommy?

OLIVIA- *(Going to the bathroom)* Watch whatever you want, Eugene. But put on your headphones. *(She goes into the bathroom without closing the door, and running water is heard. Then she goes to her bedroom)*

EUGENE- *(Looks for a video and puts it on. The sound of the film comes on very loud).*

OLIVIA- *(Shouting from inside)* Eugene, put on your headphones. Put on your headphones, Eugene.

EUGENE- *(Engrossed in the film)*

OLIVIA- (*Shouting from inside*) Eugene, put on your headphones. Put on your headphones. Eugene!

CURTAIN