

“The land of hope”

Characters:

Man

Woman

Boy

Girl

Setting: a parallelepiped structure resembling a container, also used as a screen on which various images and sequences are projected. A few scene objects are already present, resting on a chair: newspaper cuttings, old suitcases, letters with their envelopes, a folder containing other letters, a couple of balls of red wool, a washbasin, a large white sheet.....

SEQUENCE 1

The four characters enter the scene: a woman, a grown man, a girl and a boy. The girl and the woman are holding a suitcase. The woman puts down the suitcase.

LEOPARDI – NIGHT SONG OF A WANDERING SHEPHERD OF ASIA

Man: Why are you there, Moon, in the sky? Tell me why you are there, silent Moon.

Woman:

You rise at night, and go
contemplating deserts: then you set.
Are you not sated yet
with riding eternal roads?
Are you not weary, still wishing
to gaze at these valleys?
It mirrors your life,
the life of a shepherd.
He rises at dawn:
he drives his flock over the fields, sees
the flocks, the streams, the grass:
tired at evening he rests:
expecting nothing more.
Tell me, O Moon, what life is
worth to a shepherd, or
your life to you? Tell me: where
does my brief wandering lead,
or your immortal course?

Woman: We only have until tonight, either we close the script or we quit, but then we all stay home. Let's get on with it.

Boy: I think we should first organise the story by separating those who left a hundred years ago from those who are leaving today.

Woman: No, no, we're not separating anyone, we have to make it clear that they're all connected.

Man: I'd start with the man who hits on Cesira.

Girl: Sorry, I don't follow you.

Woman: Yes, don't worry, slowly.

Man: We want to deal with a difficult subject

Woman: Telling about migrants is difficult. Migrating is difficult.

Woman approaches man. The lights dim a bit, only the man and the woman remain in evidence.

Donna: What? I am happy to be here. Did you read the article about the woman who hid her son in a suitcase to get him across the border? We could put it in.

Man: No, but what were you thinking, involving two such young actors? What do they know about who was leaving? A hundred years ago, a twenty-year-old not only had a moustache, but often a wife and children too. Today, boh ... at the most, they've been to London and they tell you they used to eat Saikebon.

Woman: What's that?

Man: It's canned spaghetti.

Woman: Give them confidence, we all started. You're an example to them, you never stopped.

Man: We waste time. Lately I've been telling myself: slow down, nobody's following you. Enjoy this walk and don't think about anything, you have time for that.

Woman: Can you?

Man: No, not at all. This morning I woke up from playing football alone on the field and never passing the ball to anyone.

Woman: If it's any consolation, you're a great passer on stage.

Man: I could have been a doctor. At least I would have done something useful.

The woman takes the suitcase.

Donna: I don't understand you, I'm really happy to be here, I don't dream of other lives, I dreamed of being an actress. When I left for Rome to study, my grandmother would hide money in my socks for fear I'd miss it, and she'd say to me: "You'll do well as an actress, you're the daughter of separated parents, you've been packing your bags since you were a little girl". When I came home, I would meet other people's grandmothers and, with the excuse of theatre and acting, they would tell me some of their stories... For me, that's the beauty of our job.

Man: Here's a good show about the beauty of our job, going on tour, the stories, other people's grandmothers, the money in the socks ... what you were saying.

The woman goes to sit on the cube, next to the man..

Woman: I want to tell the story of a migrant from the Marche region, called Cesira! A family found an entire epistolary in the attic. In those letters there's the whole life of a woman emigrating to America, a simple woman but proud as a hyena.

Man: Come on, call the others and let's start.

The woman walks towards the girl

Woman: Let's rehearse! You are Concetta, a friend of Cesira's. Cesira is a wealthy woman and you help her with the house.

Girl: Has this Cesira done something important?

Woman: Yes, ... no, I mean...she wasn't a heroine, to be clear.

Man: She was put in a convent to study.

Woman: To study. She didn't eat much.

Man: Very badly indeed.

Music accompanies the dressing of the characters.

SEQUENCE 2

The woman receives the object from the man, the girl from the boy. The woman and the girl enter the container-shaped stage.

Girl: Miss Cesira... I'm sorry to bother you. But I have to give you an embassy and a gift. The photographer is late, and this (*video projection of the red thread*) is an auspicious gift for your departure.

Woman: But... what departure?

The woman looks confused. She struggles to understand.

Girl: Your departure as a bride Miss Cesira. Everyone's talking about it. Or have you reconsidered?

After a moment's bewilderment, as if she were only then immersing herself in the part, the woman regains control...

Woman: Concetta! I still have to find a husband, take pictures, write a letter... It will take time. Then I've never knitted: in the convent it was only religious practice and chores.

Girl: I know, I know. But that's not for knitting, you keep one yarn on the bridge and the other is kept in the hands of the leaver. It's a good luck ritual. And when the ship of wives leaves port I want you to remember me and maybe find me a husband across the sea.

Woman: Weren't you already making love to Antonio the blacksmith's son?

Girl: He doesn't have a party card and doesn't want one. My father says I must forget him like a drowned man. There are seven of us at home and I don't want to be given to the first fascist passing by. They are always dressed in mourning with limp plumes on their heads and I think that if one's head is limp, the plume that God gave you is also limp. Help me.

Woman: Yes, but what can I do for you?

Girl: You know I can't write. Will you write me a letter? *(video on the letter)*

Woman: Ok, but I have little time, I have to take pictures. Hurry up.

Girl: Five minutes, I promise. "Dearest..."she" " *(video projection of letter)*

Woman: "She" can't be used anymore, the regime doesn't want it. My dearest "you".

Girl: Dearest you who read me, I am a good woman, almost a saint.

Woman: That's a bit demanding, Concetta. Let's write something about you, about your family.

Girl: You're right, one can see that you've practiced the benches and not the floors like me! Then, just a moment, just a little patience Miss Cesira. I've got it: "I Concettina from Pietro, from Giuseppe, from Pietro again... from Giuseppe again... then was Pietro again... was Giuseppe again..."

Woman: Adam was the first.... It was Pietro your father, all right. What do you wish Concettina from this man across the sea?

Girl: I wish he's not afraid of hard work like me and that he loves me and everyone, not just me.

Woman: First you, then others.

Girl: But if he only loves me, the first time he shows up at home and sees all the boors we are, we're back to square one. No, I need someone who loves everyone.

The woman keeps writing.

Woman: (*dictating to herself*) ...love everyone...

Girl: Weren't you married to Christ, madam?

Woman: Yes.

Girl: Then what do you want to know about men? If you don't give them something to hold they find themselves with a closed fist in their hand and they have to do something with it. One war has just ended and now you see that someone is about starting another one. I want a man who loves everyone. I want someone who makes peace.

Woman: Do they exist?

Girl: My brother cousin, I mean second cousin. If it weren't for the fact that he's blood of the blood, and then the children come out with two heads...

Woman: Concettina

Girl: His name is Nazareno and that's how he is, if it wasn't blood...

Woman: ...Blood

Girl: That your children come out with two heads, I would have written to him. Actually, you know what? That I give you Nazareno's address...

Woman: And why me?

Girl: Because if I may say so, madam, you're a bit skinny and you've even left the convent, which should be a cause for scandal, but no, you're special. Lucky, the man across the sea who marries you.

The woman closes the curtain..

Woman: You're wrong, I'm nothing special. I have a mirror at home and I know that I am skinny. In fact, in my letter I'll write that I won't bring the dowry of good

looks. But is it so important Concetta? We women are always trying to be beautiful or to be alive but..., don't life and death make us equal to each other? And people who survived a war, will they seek beauty or, as you say, peace? No one believes that our people go in peace, abroad they say that they go for the "Black hand*" and they don't want to let them land.... I read their letters: people working in the mines and at night they struggle and thrash about in their sleep, they dig up the sheets, but they laugh, because work, even if it is very hard, can be a dream. I want to find beauty on the road, or rather at sea, Concettina. I want to see with my own eyes if there is someone or something on the other side of the sea that can explain to me why we are so afraid of others.

Girl: But... don't you want to meet my cousin Nazareno?

Woman: Alright, give me his address and we'll see if he answers me, and I'll take care of your letter...

They go out.

* **Black Hand** (Italian: *Mano Nera*) was a type of Italian extortion racket. Originally developed in the eighteenth century, the Black Hand extortion came to the United States in the later nineteenth century with immigrants.

The Black Hand was a method of extortion practiced by gangsters of the Camorra and the Mafia. U.S. newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century sometimes made reference to an organized "Black Hand Society", a criminal enterprise composed of Italians, mainly Sicilian immigrants; however, many Sicilians disputed its existence and objected to the associated negative ethnic stereotype

MUSIC – STEAMSHIP NOISE – VOICES ON THE SHIP - VIDEOPROJECTION

The boy enters, followed by: the woman, the girl and the man.

Woman: Write to me, tell me many nice things.

Girl: Greetings and kisses

Man: Take care of yourself, love, here we toil from morning till night.

Boy: (*Initial voices*) Everybody hated everybody, just like yesterday, just like today. And in the end, we left, I said goodbye to all my friends and the one girl who kept me company, by her name only, for all the years that came afterwards. We are very high up in the ship. The quay is overcrowded with people, we talk but cannot hear each other. Slowly, the huge ropes come off, the space between the quay and the ship slowly widens, you can see the dark water, on land people start to move en masse, as if they were jumping into the ship. On board they cry and despair because they are still looking

for the face of their beloved one on the quay. (*Video projection of the red thread*)

All the ropes have now been let go, but on my right, at eye level, I can see a thin, red string, still taut. A young woman is holding a ball of red wool in her hand, the other end of which is being held by someone remained ashore; the ball is getting smaller as the boat moves away from the quay. When the ball of red thread is reduced to a single thread, the woman next to me holds it more tightly in her hand, then suddenly it escapes her, like a snake diving into the sea, it flies over the railing, and the woman screams and without any more restraint starts to cry. As the pier recedes from sight I no longer hate anything, I no longer hate anyone. We have left, America is waiting for us.

The woman goes to sit on the pier to write the letter to her parents. The man remains on the other side.

Woman: My Dear Parents

Since the steamship started its journey, my head has been spinning, but I'm not sick. I had lunch almost immediately after my father left, and I assure you that I ate, not a lot, but I ate. A few minutes ago a bachelor wanted me to come down with him to visit Naples, but I thanked him kindly and he went off on his own. Don't mind me on this point, that is, about honesty, which I shall be as proud as a hyena. My gold necklace broke again last night, the cross came off. Write to me, tell me many beautiful things, I want to know that you are calm and happy with me. After I parted from dad, I retired into the cabin for a while and cried, then I returned to the deck. If I can, I'll write to you from Gibraltar, but I'm not sure, so don't worry if you don't hear any news from me. The priest hasn't given me an answer yet, so I hope that everything will go well. I don't know what my Nazarene will be like. Many women say they had bad surprises.

Your daughter Cesira.

SEQUENCE 10

Woman: (granddaughter of Cesira, the little girl in swaddling clothes we will find later)

Nobody knows me. I have a normal life, made up of little things, I hardly ever go out, I still read the newspapers. I'm not a believer, I've always had a phrase stuck in my head which more or less said: 'If someone knocks on your door, be nice, they could be angels'. I go to the police station every week, the authorities turn a blind eye to my presence. They know I won't bother them. I meet immigrants,

refugees. They are hungry and thirsty. I buy sandwiches and water. I help those in need because many relatives of mine were immigrants.

Man: My name is.... I lived in Pakistan, I had a job and a family. I used to write, I always liked writing, I didn't want to be silent, silence scares me since I was a little boy. Until 2015, I didn't think I would ever move from Pakistan, I had no reason to. Like many, at some point, I took for granted the freedom to move, to express myself freely. I took my job for granted.

Woman: He worked for a daily newspaper. He was the most successful journalist of his age in Pakistan. Once he happened to notice something strange near his flat, ...people coming in and out. He made a call to the local police. They broke in and found weapons and explosives..., those people were planning a terrorist attack. Police asked him not to write anything, so he did. One morning his car was hit by gunshots, his driver died, while trying to protect him. He survived.

Man: There is no right or wrong way to help someone, there is only one way. When we seek help we trust, when we help someone we trust. I asked for a security escort, the police chief told me "no". And he told me "no" each subsequent time I repeated my request, threat after threat.

Woman: He's scared and moves to Lahore, secretly changes his phone number, but one day an anonymous call reaches him.

Man: "Wherever you go, wherever you hide, we will always be behind you, you have very little time on this world".

Woman: He tries escaping again. From Karachi to Europe in search of freedom. He crosses Iran and Turkey, where is sold to those who should have taken him to Serbia. They keep him segregated and put a dog on guard.

(cicada sounds)

Man: At first the dog growled at me. I knew I was close to where I wanted to be. Then I shared my meal with the dog, and gave it a name. One night the dog came up to my hands and it was dark, now he trusted me, we were friends, so I gave it the whole sandwich. I tried to take a few steps to escape, the dog looked at me, but instead of barking, it remained silent allowing me to escape.

Woman: He took a train to Austria and from there to Trieste, where he was blocked.

Man: I was exhausted, destroyed, but I met a woman who gave me a sandwich.

Woman: Like you had done with the dog a few days before. Humanity is the greatest religion in the world.

Man: Today I'm a refugee, you have to ask permission to talk to me. I write for a small local newspaper, in Marche region, I'm still close to the truth, like when I left.
(he pauses as he leaves)

It was not that sandwich that tamed the dog, but the fact that he had given it a name. Giving a name to a living being is enough to make him worthy, to live where he wants, to be who he wants, to remove him from the ranks of the dogs barking against the dark.

(End of cicada sounds).

The woman takes a letter from a suitcase and holds it in her hand. Then she addresses the audience.

Woman: My mother gave me the same name as my aunt, an emigrant. I reconstructed her story letter by letter. You know some of this story, the sea also knows some.

Preparation of the character with the initial music fading out on the first line.