

who've been taught how to speak and know what to say. When my husband, Evaristo the Birdman, first came to my window ... Hahaha.

MARTIRIO. What happened?

PONCIA. It was very dark. I saw him coming closer and when he arrived, he said to me: "Good evening." "Good evening," I said to him and we didn't speak for more than half an hour. The sweat was running down my entire body. And then Evaristo came closer and closer as if he was trying to squeeze through the bars and said in a very low voice, "Come here, I want to feel you!" *(They all laugh. Amelia gets up, runs and looks through the door.)*

AMELIA. Ay, I thought Mother was coming!

MAGDALENA. What she would have done to us! *(They go on laughing.)*

PONCIA. And then after — he behaved himself. Instead of going to someone else, he started breeding canaries until he died. All of you are single, but you may as well know that fifteen days after the wedding, the man leaves the bed for the table and then the table for the tavern, and any woman who doesn't accept this, rots away crying in the corner.

AMELIA. You didn't accept it.

PONCIA. I could handle him.

MARTIRIO. Is it true you hit him sometimes?

PONCIA. I did: Once, I nearly put out one of his eyes.

MAGDALENA. That's how women should be.

PONCIA. I'm from the same school as your mother. One day, he said something or other to me — I can't remember what — and I killed all his canaries — with a hammer. *(They laugh.)*

MAGDALENA. Oh, Adela, you shouldn't miss this!

AMELIA. Adela! *(Pause.)*

MAGDALENA. I'm going to go see. *(She goes out.)*

PONCIA. That child is sick.

MARTIRIO. Of course she is, she hardly sleeps.

PONCIA. What *does* she do?

MARTIRIO. How would I know what she does?

PONCIA. You'd know better than me, since you sleep with just a wall between you.

ANGUSTIAS. Envy is eating her up.

AMELIA. Don't exaggerate.

ANGUSTIAS. I can see it in her eyes. She's getting to look like a madwoman.

MARTIRIO. Don't talk about madwomen here. This is the one place you shouldn't talk about that. *(Magdalena and Adela enter.)*

MAGDALENA. Didn't you say she was asleep?

ADELA. My whole body aches.

MARTIRIO. Didn't you sleep well last night?

ADELA. Yes.

MARTIRIO. *(With intention.)* Well then?

ADELA. *(With force.)* Leave me alone! Asleep or awake it's none of your business. It's my body and I'll do what I want with it.

MARTIRIO. I was concerned about you.

ADELA. Concerned, or nosy. Weren't you all sewing? Well, continue! I wish I was invisible so I could pass through a room without people asking me where I'm going all the time.

MAID. *(Entering.)* Bernarda's calling for you. The man with the lace is here. *(All but Adela and La Poncia go out, and as Martirio leaves, she looks fixedly at Adela.)*

ADELA. Stop looking at me. If you want, I'll give you my eyes, they're brighter than yours and my straight back to replace your hump. Just turn the other way when I go by!

PONCIA. Adela, she's your sister and the one who loves you the most.

ADELA. She follows me everywhere. She sneaks in my room sometimes to see if I'm sleeping. She won't let me breathe. And always: "What a shame about the face ... What a shame about the body ... it won't belong to anyone." But that's not going to happen. My body will belong to whoever I want.

PONCIA. *(With intention and in a low voice.)* To Pepe el Romano. Is that right?

ADELA. *(Startled.)* What did you say?

PONCIA. You heard, Adela.

ADELA. You shut your mouth!

PONCIA. *(In a loud voice.)* Do you think I haven't noticed?

ADELA. Lower your voice.

PONCIA. Kill those thoughts.

ADELA. What do you know about it?

PONCIA. We old women can see through walls. Where do you go when you get up at night?

ADELA. I wish you were blind!

PONCIA. When it's about what this is about, my head and both my hands are full of eyes. I want to know what you're planning. Why did you stand half-naked at the window with the light on the second night Pepe came to talk to your sister?

ADELA. That's not true!

PONCIA. Don't be a child. Leave your sister in peace! If you love Pepe el Romano, hold it in. *(Adela begins to cry.)* Besides, who says you can't marry him? Your sister Angustias is sickly. She won't survive her first birth. She's narrow in the hips, old, and in my experience I can tell you, she'll die. And then Pepe will do what many widowers around here do, he'll marry the youngest, and the prettiest, and that's you. Feed that hope, or forget about him, whatever you want, but don't go against the law of God!

ADELA. Shut your mouth!

PONCIA. I will not shut my mouth.

ADELA. Mind your own business. You sneak! Traitor!

PONCIA. I'll be your shadow.

ADELA. Instead of cleaning the house and going to bed to pray for your dead, you root around like an old sow drooling over other people's affairs.

PONCIA. I keep watch so people won't spit when they pass our door.

ADELA. Why have you suddenly developed this great affection for my sister?

PONCIA. I feel no affection for any of you. But I want to live in a decent house. I don't want to be disgraced in my old age.

ADELA. Your advice is useless. It's too late. I wouldn't just walk over you, you're only a servant, I'd walk over my mother to put out the fire that's running through my legs and burning in my mouth. What could you say about me? That I lock myself in my room and don't open the door? That I don't sleep? I'm quicker than you. See if you can catch the rabbit with your bare

hands.

PONCIA. Don't defy me Adela, don't you defy me. Because I can shout, light the lamps, and make the bells ring.

ADELA. You can mount four thousand bright yellow flares on the walls of this house. No one can stop what has to happen.

PONCIA. You want that man so much?

ADELA. So much! When I look into his eyes it's like I am slowly drinking his blood.

PONCIA. I can't hear you.

ADELA. Oh, but you'll have to. I used to be afraid of you. But I'm stronger than you now. *(Angustias enters.)*

ANGUSTIAS. Always arguing

PONCIA. Of course. She wants me in all this heat, to go and get her I don't know what from the store.

ANGUSTIAS. Did you get me that perfume?

PONCIA. The most expensive one and the face powder. I put them on the table in your room. *(Angustias goes out.)*

ADELA. And keep it shut!

PONCIA. We'll see. *(Magdalena, Martirio and Amelia enter.)*

MAGDALENA. Did you see the lace?

AMELIA. The pieces for Angustias' wedding sheets are beautiful.

ADELA. *(To Martirio, who is carrying some lace.)* And these?

MARTIRIO. Mine, for a nightgown.

ADELA. Well, it takes a sense of humor.

MARTIRIO. For me to look at. I don't have to flaunt myself in front of anyone.

PONCIA. Nobody sees you in a nightgown.

MARTIRIO. *(With intention, looking at Adela.)* Sometimes ... But I love underclothes. If I was rich I'd have it all made from Dutch linen, all imported from Holland. It's one of the few pleasures I've got.

PONCIA. This lace would be nice for babies' caps and christening gowns. I couldn't afford it for mine. Maybe Angustias will use it for hers. When she starts having babies, you'll be sewing morning and night.

MAGDALENA. I don't plan to sew a stitch.

AMELIA. Much less take care of someone else's children.