

# Trio for Mother, Daughter and Grand Piano

by Ignacio Apolo

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**The original script ('Memory Blank') was translated by Rebecca Morahan and Ignacio Apolo**

Av Santa Fe 5355 1° D  
C1425BIC - Buenos Aires  
ARGENTINA

TEL: (54 11) 4774 62 99

[iapolo@fibertel.com.ar](mailto:iapolo@fibertel.com.ar)

# Trio for Mother, Daughter and Grand Piano

(Original title: *Trío para madre, hija y piano de cola*)

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## CHARACTERS:

*A grand piano.*

*A house, around it.*

*Malva.*

*Amanda.*

*Zoe, Malva's daughter, twenty-five years old.*

## MUSIC:

*Those moments when Malva plays the piano are indicated on the right margin. It's also indicated when she exits and when she enters.*

*A piano.*

*The piano is ubiquitous, and the rooms of the house are organised spontaneously around it.*

*The piano has a theological relationship with the house: it is in each and every one of its rooms.*

*Perhaps it is in more than one space at the same time. Perhaps it is also in the same space, in more than one period of time.*

*The scene changes occur in the same way as scenes change in a memory: as we feel one scene fading away, the next one appears.*

## **Zoe's refrain**

*Malva is at the piano.*

*SHE BEGINS TO PLAY.*

***Morton Feldman. Piano Piece 1952.***

*Zoe and Amanda enter and exit several times. Images are composed as a kind of anticipation of different scenes of the play.*

*MALVA FINISHES.*

*Zoe, seated, has her arms around her knees, which are grazed.*

## **1. Grapes and Strawberries**

### **I.**

*Covered patio at the back of the house.*

*Amanda cleans Zoe's knees.*

**Zoe:** *(To Malva)* Yes Mum I know; it'll burn. I remember. I think I remember. You blow on it. *(She licks a finger and touches the graze)* What did we use to call this thing that stays there? We had a name for it.

*(To Amanda)* Ouch! What did we used to call them, Amanda?

**Amanda:** 'Strawberries'<sup>1</sup>.

**Zoe:** 'Strawberries? What a stupid name. Ouch! *(Smiles)* It's burning.

**Amanda:** Let me blow on it. *(She blows on it)*

**Zoe:** I'm sorry. I don't know what I did.

**Amanda:** You didn't do anything, Zoe.

**Zoe:** It's like fainting. (*Amanda puts plasters on her knees*) I start to panic when I feel it coming; I don't know when it's going to happen.

*Amanda puts the things away.*

**Amanda:** Do you feel nauseous?

**Zoe:** No. That would be normal in my condition.

**Amanda:** Right.

**Zoe:** I don't want to talk about it now. You can go now, Amanda; mum's going to stay with me.

*Amanda exits.*

*MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY.*

***Franz Schubert. Grosse Sonate (postum) in A Dur (Andantino): fragments***

**Zoe:** Did I do anything weird, mum? What did I do? (*Pause*) I've got this problem; when did it start? Did it ever happen when I was a child? When I lived here. I have no memories of being a child. It's as if I've never had them. A blank space in my memory; a nothingness.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** The vertigo is exhausting; everything spins round me and I feel weak. (*Pause*) I told Amanda that I'm pregnant.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** The combination of symptoms is a nightmare.

*Pause. She puts her arms round her knees.*

*She releases one leg and then the other.*

*She stands up, stiff.*

*MALVA STOPS PLAYING.*

**Zoe:** Its bed-time. I'm going to close my eyes, mother. Instead of sleeping, I'll think of a story, as if I were in it and it was happening to me. Dreaming on purpose. The copy of a dream.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Frutillas' in the original. Argentine word for 'strawberries', called 'fresas' in other Spanish speaking regions. Also what children call scabs/grazes on their knees.

Because I get scared if I feel I'm falling asleep. Now I'm here with you, mother; can you tell me a story? Not a story to send me to sleep: one that will stop me sleeping, which holds my attention and makes me want to know what's going to happen next. A made-up story, a tale.

Can you lie to me, mother?

*She closes her eyes.*

*Amanda brings a bowl of grapes, a jug, glasses, an ice bucket.*

*She puts the things down next to Zoe. She sits down beside her.*

**MALVA FINISHES PLAYING**

## II.

*Covered patio at the back of the house.*

*Silence.*

*Amanda and Zoe eat grapes.*

**Amanda:** It's hot!

**Zoe:** Yes. I'd like to wash my hair with cold water. I'd like to have a cold bath, and then stay naked, wet, all night long... *(She splashes Amanda with water from the ice bucket)* Get a bit wet.

**Amanda:** No!

**Zoe:** Hey, mum! Finish what you're doing and come out here and eat grapes with us. We're going to sit and gossip about the neighbours.

**Amanda:** What have you come here for, Zoe?

**Zoe:** It's my birthday tomorrow.

**Amanda:** Yes.

**Zoe:** Well, I've come to celebrate my birthday.

**Amanda:** OK.

**Zoe:** What do you want to know?

**Amanda:** Nothing, Zoe.

**Zoe:** Do you really want me to tell you? OK. I'll tell you what for. For you to clean my knees up, OK? To drive you insane with my fits and shouting. To not let you sleep. To spit seeds on your floor, to throw up on your floor, to smash my head open on your furniture, and then shoot myself in the bathroom so that you find me and can do nothing about it.

*Amanda stands up.*

**Amanda:** I'm going to get your mother.

**Zoe:** I've already talked with mum. *(Pause)* I told her everything, though I said it all in a very cruel way, to make her feel guilty.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** What games did I play when I was a child?

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** You used to have a doll. A black one.

**Zoe:** How stupid.

**Amanda:** You also played ...

**Zoe:** What?

**Amanda:** You played...

**Zoe:** What?

**Amanda:** At...

**Zoe:** What, what?

**Amanda:** Calm down.

**Zoe:** *(Stands up)* I don't want to calm down!

**Amanda:** You had better go to bed.

**Zoe:** I don't want to sleep.

*She staggers. She holds on something.*

**Zoe:** Don't touch me! I can deal with this. Go away. Mum, mum!

*Zoe falls onto her knees.*

*She calms down and stands up.*

*There are grazes on her knees, blood.*

*Amanda bends down to clean Zoe's knees.*

**Zoe:** Yes, I know. I remember that. I think I remember. You blow on it. *(She licks a finger and touches the graze)* What did we use to call this thing that stays there? We had a name for it... What did we call them, Amanda?

**Amanda:** Shh...

**Zoe:** It's on the tip of my tongue...

**Amanda:** Yes.

**Zoe:** That's what I came here for. *(Pause)* You can go now; mum's going to stay with me.

*Amanda exits. Zoe puts her arms round her knees and lowers her head.*

**Zoe:** Tell me another story, mum.

MALVA STOPS PLAYING

## 2. Birthday

### I.

*Kitchen.*

*Amanda lights a birthday candle in the shape of the number 25. On the piano, a gift, wrapped, decorated with a bow.*

*Zoe tears open the wrapping paper.*

*It's an old metronome. She becomes serious.*

*She examines it.*

**Zoe:** I don't remember.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** I was so tiny. A microscopic, dark-skinned little baby. *(She turns the metronome on)* They told me that the day you first received me, mother, you laid me on the piano. Up on the keys. It was the first thing you did.

MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY.

**Helmut Lachenmann. Schattentanz (in Ein Kinderspiel)**

**Zoe:** They told me you laid me on the keys, and I made the piano sound with my little body. You started to play around me, and we made music together. That's how we introduced ourselves to each other, wasn't it? It was then that I was named Zoe, and that day became my birthday. Nice...

*She puts the metronome on the piano.*

**Zoe:** It was hot; and I was very dark, diminutive. They told me you'd never been so happy. That you'd never played nor will ever play better music. That everything you'd done until my adoption was a preparation, and everything you've done since has been a variation of the same refrain.

*She checks the wrapping. She finds a card; she doesn't read it.*

You said that as soon as you received me you understood 'what it is to be lonely and to not be lonely anymore, what it is to be bound to someone, what it is to feel the earth beneath your feet, what the earth is, and what it is to have received life'; that you understood 'when is the moment in which you accept this other life, even though you haven't carried it inside you, because it is everywhere, it vibrates in every part of you, as if you were made of the pure music of the piano, but full of life'.

*She crumples the wrapping paper and lets it drop on the floor.*

*She reads the card.*

**Zoe:** It says: 'Zoe, you resonate in every part of me, that's why I hold you like I do, daughter, and even when I'm far away, you continue resonating in me'.

*She turns off the metronome.*

**Zoe:** You had to write it didn't you?

That made-up story about the music we played together was good.

But now I don't know whether to believe you any more.

*She stands up and blows out the little candle. Exits. She leaves the metronome behind.*

*Amanda exits.*

*MALVA FINISHES.*

*She gets up from the piano and exits.*

## II.

*Dining-room. There is no one at the piano.*

*Zoe is wearing a birthday hat, drunk; she keeps drinking.*

*Amanda, drunk. They smoke grass.*

**Amanda:** And the girl behind the bar points out this guy to your mother, he's sitting in a corner wearing a hat and he makes a sign at us with the brim, like in the movies, and your mother gets nervous and asks the girl behind the bar for a beer. But I keep looking at him, and the guy comes over, very laid back, holding a kind of huge book. He says hi and something like 'can I show you?' And he opens the book and it's a catalogue of grass. So he starts giving us his recommendations, and I'm having a laughing fit, but Malva goes and tells him to 'give us something good'. And the guy says, 'Pakistani hashish'. And he kisses his fingers, like this (*she does it*).

**Zoe:** No way...

**Amanda:** I'm serious. And he asks us how much we want, and Malva says 'one joint', and the guy says that the minimum is I don't know how many grams, and we're a bit taken aback. And he tells us:

'buy some for your friends'. Well, I could see that he was going to give us a package like this (*she indicates the size of the package with her hands*). Well what were we going to do? 'I'll buy it', your mother says, 'but roll one now'. And the guy laughs and takes us to a corner, where there's this Japanese girl, who's I don't know, completely stoned, and she's looking at us the whole time. And we were right by the window that looked out onto the street...

**Zoe:** No way...

**Amanda:** Yes. There were police walking past, and the guy was laughing and saying 'it's ok, it's ok'. And he rolled a joint like this, this big.

**Zoe:** No way...

**Amanda:** I'm not joking. So we smoked this Pakistani thing, sitting in this corner and watching the police through the window, and when your mother stands up I can see that she's leaning to the right, like this. And it was having absolutely no effect on me.

**Zoe:** No way...

**Amanda:** Yes, your mother was completely stoned: she kept leaning to the right. And on top of that, she then insisted that she wanted to dance. Malva, exactly, who had never danced before in her life! And I was holding her and apologising to everyone, and the crazy woman kept pushing and shoving all over the bar...

**Zoe:** No way...

**Amanda:** I'm serious. Can't you say something else?

**Zoe:** No wa..

*They burst out laughing.*

**Amanda:** Ask your mother.

*Zoe is a bit dizzy, but she is able to control a wave of nausea. She breathes and smiles.*

**Amanda:** You shouldn't drink and smoke.

**Zoe:** Today is my birthday.

**Amanda:** (*Looks at the watch*) Not any more. It's over

**Zoe:** I hate you.

**Amanda:** Stop drinking and go to bed.

**Zoe:** Bollocks to sleeping.

**Amanda:** Well, I'm going then. (*Stands up*)

**Zoe:** I sort of hate you. Sometimes I hate you, I mean. Now for example (*She burps at her on purpose*).

**Amanda:** Give me the bottle.

**Zoe:** Come and get it.

*Amanda moves towards her.*

*Zoe drinks from the bottle and, her mouth full, 'offers' her lips to Amanda.*

*Amanda moves away from her, annoyed.*

**Zoe:** Let's dance, Amanda. Dance with me. (*Moves towards her, sensual and drunk; Amanda pushes her away*)

*Strong nausea.*

*Zoe takes a deep breath, calms down.*

**Amanda:** Give me a fucking break. Go and talk to your mother.

*Amanda exits.*

*Zoe sits down and is quiet, eyes wide open, staring ahead of her.*

*She controls her breathing, dazed.*

*Long pause.*

*MALVA ENTERS and sits at the piano.*

**Zoe:** You know what, mother? I'll tell you. I have no interest in what you do. And it's not that I would have been interested but wasn't able to reach your level. It's not that I always wanted to be like you and failed. I don't care about music: not what you say about music, not what you do with music, nor what you have done.

Your piano is just a piece of furniture, mum.

*MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY*

***Lachenmann. Guero (fragment)***

*Zoe undresses to take a bath.*

*She wraps herself in a towel.*

### **3. Bird**

*MALVA KEEPS PLAYING.*

***Schubert. Andantino... (fragment)***

*Bathroom.*

*Zoe sits down on the edge of the bath. She looks at her mother; then at the water.*

*She puts her hand into the water and moves it around.*

*MALVA CHANGES THE THEME*

***Jean-Philippe Rameau. Le Rappel des Oiseaux***

**Zoe:** We drank a lot last night, mother. I got drunk, and smoked a joint. I shouldn't have; I'm pregnant. I feel ill now. I've got a hangover, and I didn't even go to sleep. I do these things because I'm irresponsible. Was I always like this? Definitely. This didn't start yesterday. Or did it? Maybe it did start yesterday, yesterday, twenty-five years ago. Before that there is nothing.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Suppose that you're a bird flying at night who doesn't know it's flying, because it's a bird, and it's dark. And you fly through an open window into a room which is lit. Just for a moment, before going out again into the darkness, through the opposite window.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** And talking about music: a baby's body on the piano keys sounds very good, doesn't it? In words. A sweet image. But the sound doesn't fit. The physical, sonic fact of the vibration. (*She mimes playing music with her hands in the water*) Music could not have been made like that.

With my hangover and insomnia, I don't accept it.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Have you ever made love?

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Sound cannot be transmitted through a vacuum. According to the physical theory. I mean the vibrations. It's physically impossible for a vacuum to transmit sonic vibrations, in the same way as it's impossible for a baby's body on the piano keys to make music with its mother.

Now I am pregnant. That is physically possible. That lie about the music we played together was useful because it made me think. But I don't want to think anymore, mother. Did something happen? Did something happen to me? Ever.

*MALVA STOPS PLAYING.*

**Zoe:** I don't believe you anymore. I've come to decide whether I'm going to have this baby or not, mother. That's what I came here for. Guess what I'm thinking now.

*She takes off the towel and slowly gets into the bath.*

*MALVA STARTS PLAYING AGAIN.*

**Schubert. Andantino... (fragment)**

*SHE FINISHES.*

## Amanda's refrain

### 1. Past

*Malva's room.*

*Malva is sitting at the piano.*

**Amanda:** Look at me.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** We're not young any more, Malva, and we've been together for so many years now that you only have to look at me to know everything I'm about to tell you.

Look at me.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** Don't you feel it here, in your body?

Don't you feel it in every mark, every line and every deformity?

Don't you feel that every single thing is a mark of history; that we are ourselves a story?

You ought to feel it.

At least in my body, you ought to feel that. I feel it in yours too.

And our story is coming to an end, Malva.

Look at me, please.

*MALVA PLAYS.*

***Schubert. Andantino... (fragments)***

**Amanda:** Your daughter is coming today. Are you going to tell her about us?

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** What are you going to do with her, when you are alone?

Look at me.

*MALVA STOPS PLAYING.*

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** We are not young anymore, Malva. I won't ask you to do it for Zoe.  
 Look at me.  
 Fine; you asked for it.

*Exits.*

## 2. Interval

*Hall.*

*Zoe is dressed up to go out. Her suitcase is on the floor, by her side.*

*Amanda, standing in front of Zoe, is looking at her as if she were suspended in time.*

**Zoe:** *(Opens her arms, with a broad smile)* Hey! Here I am!

*They hug. Zoe rocks from side to side and spins her round.*

*Zoe runs to the piano, and rests her elbows on it, facing Malva, looking at her.*

**Zoe:** Mother.

*MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY.  
 Schubert. Andantino... (fragment)*

**Zoe:** Mummy, mummy, mummy, mummy.

**Amanda:** *(Lifts the suitcase)* We've got your room ready, Zoe. Shall we go up?

**Zoe:** *(Runs to Amanda)* I'm coming!

*She takes the suitcase from her and exits running.*

*Amanda stays. She looks at Malva, serious.*

**Amanda:** Do I have to ask you again?

*Exits*

*MALVA STARTS PLAYING AGAIN,  
 AND FINISHES.*

## 3. Present

I.

*Malva's study.*

MALVA PLAYS.

**Claude Debussy. Voiles- Prelude2, volume I (fragment)**

*Amanda enters; she's wearing light clothes, she brings a bowl of grapes and a jug. She places them on the piano for a moment.*

**Amanda:** Your daughter is going to leave. She's not going to have that baby. And you'll be stay alone.

But it doesn't make any change.

Because I'm not just your shadow.

*She drinks.*

**Amanda:** What you feel is not fear, of course. You believe that the only thing that matters is the present time and, meanwhile, here we are, the three of us. But that's an illusion. The illusion of being able to remain in the present, no matter what.

I see you. You believe that you have a present.

As if you can eliminate the past, or gather it whole in an instant, and explore every inch of a single moment.

*Pause*

**Amanda:** You won't use Zoe to make me stay.

I'm leaving when Zoe's birthday is over.

MALVA FINISHES.

II.

*Bathroom.*

*Zoe sits down on the edge of the bath. Amanda hands her towels.*

MALVA PLAYS.

**Arnold Schönberg. Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke op 19 (Stück n.2) (Fragment)**

**Amanda:** When you where little, you were frightened of silence. Your mother would play the piano at night and you would sleep enveloped in sound. You had your black doll, and you didn't want any other. You didn't want any other dolls; you used to say it was unique and you wouldn't share it. We thought you were very fragile. We thought that the love we were able to give you would hardly be

enough. I wasn't born to be a mother. And sometimes you complained and cried for some reason, some whim: you didn't want to be shared; you didn't want another baby to come, you didn't want there to be anyone else. Once, you woke up and cried a lot, and begged your mother not to abandon you, and when we wanted to know why you imagined she could abandon you, you said that your doll had died.

I never knew where that doll ended up. That's all I can tell you.

I'll miss you.

*Amanda returns to the piano.*

**MALVA FINISHES**

**III.**

*Zoe wraps the towel around her and sits on the edge of the bath.*

*In the study.*

**MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY.**

**Lachenmann. Filter – Schaukel**

**Amanda:** But let me tell you.

Once, when we were young, I have the same illusion.

You never knew it, but I left you.

*She sits on the piano.*

**Amanda:** You had gone away on your own for a few weeks, in the middle of a tour, and left me alone, in a horrible country, with no friends and nothing to do. I've never told you what happened during that time.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** At that time I felt I had no story. I was not bound to anything, I mean... not bound to you. And after a few days I stopped waiting for you.

I went to the tourist area. I didn't need to talk to people; we understood each other very well.

I also lived that illusion of the pure present.

*Zoe gets into the water. She takes her plasters off, painfully, and closes her eyes.*

**Amanda:** I don't hold onto many memories of what I did. No faces; no names... But I do hold onto the sensation.

I went to the station several times, but I didn't go to wait for you. On the international train platform, where everything crosses and everything is expanding, I stood choosing destinations. I could decide at any moment where to go, which train to take, and not care about the destination. I was not bound, Malva.

I had left you.

*Long pause.*

**Amanda:** But one day, a day like any other, you came back.

I saw you arrive without you seeing me. I saw you twice. You only saw me once.

The first time you were a girl alone, like me, but anxious about something, or confused. You were expecting something, searching for something (*smiles*), one thing... that should have been there.

And I didn't want to give it to you.

But I looked at you again. And the second time, when I saw you, you became an identity card that I accepted. And I made myself visible, and you saw me. And I smiled at you.

*Zoe climbs out of the water and dries herself. She covers her grazes.*

**Amanda:** I'm not talking about love, Malva; I'm talking about acceptance. You stopped in front of me like a train which I might perfectly well have not taken.

But I did take it, and it has brought us here.

Now I am getting off onto the platform again; but you can't get off. You said that when you adopted Zoe: this is a bond. Because your daughter is not another destination; she's an origin.

*She eats a grape.*

**Amanda:** My hips are aching, Malva. And I've got a lot of work to do.

*She picks up the bowl and the jug.*

*Zoe, dressed, sits down in the back yard.*

**MALVA STOPS PLAYING.**

*Amanda goes out into the back yard with the things, puts them on a little table, where there are glasses and an ice bucket. She sits down beside Zoe.*

*Silence.*

*Amanda and Zoe eat grapes.*

*Long pause.*

*Zoe spits seeds.*

## Zoe's refrain (part two)

### 1. Memory

*Bedroom.*

*Malva at the piano.*

*Zoe opens a box that contains old letters and souvenirs; takes out a notebook and starts reading it..*

**Zoe:** (reads) 'My name is Zoe, and I am nine years old. Zoe is a Greek name. It means full of life. Mum's name is Malva. Malva is a plant'. (She laughs)

*MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY.*  
**Carl Ruggles. Evocation n. 1**

**Zoe:** (reads) 'My birthday is on the 20<sup>th</sup> January, which means it's always summer and it's always hot. Amanda's name is Amanda, and it doesn't mean anything. Because I already know how to write well, and I'm on holidays, I'm going to write the story of my life. I don't like sleeping in siesta time. When I was little I used to like it. I used to have a black doll that got old because I played with her too much, but she helped me to sleep. I don't remember her name. The doll died and I couldn't sleep anymore. It's siesta time now. I'm awake. The longer I wait to get sleepy, the less sleepy I get'.

'I've been thinking. What am I going to tell my life story for, if it's already happened? Besides, my life when I was younger wasn't as exciting as it is now. For example, my mum had a machine that was called a metronome. One day, I broke it. I used to like taking it and putting things on it to see how the machine made an effort and moved them. It was a clock that made beats, which are things that make a regular noise. It broke. And mum mended it and hid it. And after that only she used it, and I didn't know where it was anymore. I got very angry, and now I don't know why. Those are the sorts of things that make you angry when you're little. What am I going to write about them for?'

*She closes her eyes; controls a wave of sickness.*

**Zoe:** 'But today I saw the metronome. Mum left it on the piano.  
I looked at it and it meant nothing to me. I think that when I was little I could be very silly.'

*Her head falls forward. She starts, frightened. She quickly turns a few pages.*

**Zoe:** 'Mum hit me today. Mum is horrible. I've already stopped eating. I'm not eating anymore; I'm not going to eat again until she begs me pardon on her knees'.

*Her head falls forward again; she rests the book on her lap.*

*Pause.*

*She slaps her face; shakes herself.*

**Zoe:** *(to Malva)* What was I saying...?

*She falls asleep.*

*MALVA FINISHES THE PIECE.*

## 2. Sleep/dream

*Amanda enters.*

**Amanda:** She's asleep. Let's leave her; I'll take her to her room later.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** Malva, your daughter's birthday is over now.

*She cries.*

**Amanda:** Let's talk about something else.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** I'm a fool. Because I think you can't manage without me. I've sorted and labelled your papers, I've prepared a new address-book for you, without my abbreviations; it has the full words, and... Well, you'll see.

*She looks at an envelope beside the box. She is surprised.*

**Amanda:** You kept this test. You couldn't go on with that pregnancy. I supported your decision.  
*(Pause)* Have you already shown this to Zoe?

*Her hands are shaking. She leaves the papers beside the box.*

*She is about to leave.*

**Amanda:** I'd better leave you both alone.

*She stops.*

**Amanda:** Do you want me to stay?

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** Did I tell you that I'm going to go on a trip before I start teaching that course? I don't know if I'm going to be in the mood to visit friends. But I'm going to buy myself some dark glasses and a hat to visit the pyramids.

*Zoe wakes up, agitated.*

**Zoe:** I don't want to...! (*Looks around her*) I fell asleep. I don't want to stay asleep. I was reading the notebook. I kept on reading the notebook, I kept reading it and you were inside the notebook, because I was reading it. I was inside the notebook, and I couldn't stop reading it because if I did, we wouldn't be here any more.

And I didn't want to read it any more, because it made me sleepy, but I had to go on reading it (*she stands up*), and we were saying goodbye to everything; I didn't want to, but I couldn't do anything, it was inexorable, and it made me very sad, and it made you very sad, I felt it: I felt your sorrow, I felt it in me, and that made me very sad too. I'm sleepy. I don't want to sleep.

*She sits down.*

**Zoe:** I don't want to.

*She falls asleep.*

*Amanda stands up and goes to Zoe.*

**Amanda:** I'd better take her to bed. (*Lifts her in her arms*) Come on, my baby...

*She takes her out.*

*MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY.*  
**Schubert. Andantino... (fragment)**  
*HER MUSIC BREAKS DOWN.*

## Amanda's refrain (part two)

I.

*MALVA STANDS UP FROM THE PIANO AND EXITS.*

*Zoe enters with the envelope. Reads the paper.*

*Amanda enters.*

**Amanda:** This is your mother's stuff.

**Zoe:** I know.

**Amanda:** Old papers.

**Zoe:** I know.

**Amanda:** I don't know why she kept them.

**Zoe:** I know.

*Pause*

**Amanda:** Your mother couldn't...

**Zoe:** I know.

**Amanda:** ...go on with that pregnancy.

**Zoe:** I know.

**Amanda:** It would have been crazy.

**Zoe:** I know.

*Pause*

**Amanda:** It was a short story, a fling.

**Zoe:** I know that.

**Amanda:** You were too young.

**Zoe:** I know that.

**Amanda:** I supported her decision.

**Zoe:** I know that.

**Amanda:** Zoe...

**Zoe:** I know that.

**Amanda:** What game are you playing?

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** I don't know.

**Amanda:** Are you doing this to me on purpose?

**Zoe:** I don't know.

*MALVA GOES TO THE PIANO AND SITS DOWN.*

**Amanda:** You know what I'm talking about.

**Zoe:** Yes.

**Amanda:** You had a story, an acciden...

**Zoe:** No... I don't know.

*MALVA PLAYS.*

*Johannes Brahms. Intermezzo op 119 (fragment)*

**Amanda:** Enough.

*MALVA FINISHES.*

*Amanda puts the papers back on the music stand.*

**Amanda:** I wasn't born to be a mother. You'd better talk with her. I'll leave you both alone.

*Exits.*

## II.

*Malva; Zoe.*

**Zoe:** I want to forget about this. I want to make up a story of my own, mum. I want to choose for myself what I forget. Because I hate you from the deepest place that one can hate, I hate you from the empty black hole that you took me from.

Can I go now?

*Exits.*

## III.

*Hall.*

*Zoe sits with her arms round her knees, which are bleeding. She is rocking herself.*

*Amanda stands in front of Zoe, with a suitcase.*

**Amanda:** I'm leaving.

**Zoe:** *(Without standing up)* I'll come with you.

**Amanda:** You're not going anywhere.

**Zoe:** I know. That's why. Take me away from here and leave me wherever you want. *(She dabs her finger in the blood and tastes it.)*

**Amanda:** No.

**Zoe:** I was traumatised.

**Amanda:** You were not traumatised.

**Zoe:** There are some things I don't remember. A blank space in my memory.

**Amanda:** That's not important.

**Zoe:** I didn't ask you anything.

**Amanda:** Of course you didn't.

**Zoe:** It wasn't my fault.

**Amanda:** No.

**Zoe:** So many perfect stories... Why did she never tell me this one?

**Amanda:** Zoe, your mother was too young... It was an accident...

**Zoe:** And what about me?

**Amanda:** She chose you.

**Zoe:** Ha! And now she wants me to leave, as long as you're leaving.

**Amanda:** What are you talking about?

**Zoe:** She hasn't asked you to stay either.

**Amanda:** What did she tell you?

**Zoe:** That she did it for me.

**Amanda:** What did she say about me?

**Zoe:** She doesn't talk about you.

MALVA PLAYS

***Brahms. Intermezzo... (fragment)***

*Long pause.*

**Zoe:** What's happening, Amanda? Why does Mum expel us from her story?

*She scratches her grazes.*

**Zoe:** Is it love? Is it old age? Is it her memory?

*She gets blood on her hands.*

**Zoe:** What's it like being a mother? Is it like expelling something?

*She hits herself on the stomach.*

**Zoe:** Do you have a skewer or a knitting needle? I'll pierce my uterus here and now and I'll die from all the blood I lose, so that at least it's mum who'll have to clean it up, since you're leaving...

**Amanda:** That was unnecessary, Zoe.

**Zoe:** Oh, please, Amanda. You must have even wiped her arse...!

**MALVA STOPS PLAYING**

*Amanda slaps her face.*

**Zoe:** Forgive me.

**Amanda:** There's nothing to forgive.

*Pause.*

*Zoe contains her tears; she cleans one of her hands.*

**Zoe:** What did you used to play when you were little?

**Amanda:** Being a pianist.

*Pause.*

*Tears roll down one of Zoe's cheeks.*

**Amanda:** Well, it's getting late.

**Zoe:** *(She stares at her)* Don't go...

**Amanda:** You'll be fine. Your mother is staying with you.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Amanda. I don't know how to tell you ...

**Amanda:** I love you too, Zoe.

**MALVA PLAYS**

***Brahms. Intermezzo... (fragment)***

*Zoe, from the floor, raises her arms to Amanda.*

*Amanda hugs her.*

*She picks up her suitcase and leaves.*

**MALVA FINISHES.**

## **Malva's refrain**

### **1. Remembrance**

*Amanda appears at the back of the stage; she looks younger.*

*She speaks to Malva across a distance.*

*Zoe takes her black doll, plays with it and falls sleep.*

*MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY*

***Charles Ives. Concord Sonata (The Clusters of Hawthorn – 2<sup>nd</sup> movement)***

**Amanda:** Zoe is very young, Malva. Very fragile. And this story of yours was a mistake, an accident. Your daughter is your priority. When you adopted Zoe, you accepted a responsibility. It's not for me to tell you this; I wasn't born to be a mother. But you said it in that way when you received her. You said 'this is a bond'. And you put her on the piano, and you made music together. Zoe is still very young, Malva; too young. You can say 'no' this time, and stay only with her. I'll support your decision.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** Love? We have so much love to give! But how far would she be able to understand? She's a spoilt little girl; she's selfish. Everything for her, always; she is always the only one. She's learned to scream and hurt herself on purpose. She wouldn't be able to understand.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** There's nothing to forgive, Malva. I know it was an accident.  
Look at me.

*Pause.*

Look at me, Malva.

With my hand on my heart I tell you: there's nothing to forgive.

*Exits.*

*MALVA FINISHES.*

### **2. Music**

*MALVA PLAYS A PIECE OF MUSIC AND EXITS*

***Brahms. Intermezzo op. 118***

## The name of Zoe

*The piano stands alone, in an indefinite place.*

*Zoe walks around the space, in silence. She tries not to make any noise.*

*She moves towards the piano, caresses the keys.*

**Zoe:** Hello, piano. What have you done with my mother? *(Pause)* D'you know what? A while ago, I looked up the meaning of my name. "Zoe is a Greek name, it means full of life"; I wrote that when I was nine years old. That was what I was told. But it was true. That is where it comes from, and that's what it means. *(She presses a key)* More or less. It's always more or less with words, anyway. And what's more, words are like very short stories that are handed down through time. They vary a bit, but finally no one is responsible. *(She presses hard on another key)* See, piano? I teach you things. *(She looks around her)* What have you done with my mother? *(Pause)* Well, we were talking about names. I started thinking about it again recently. I read an encyclopaedia which interpreted my name. *(She sits at the piano)* There were five points, and a zoological entry. *(She examines the keyboard carefully)* The definition was the same: 'Zoe, life'. But the first point said: "animation, spirit or vitality: full of life". *(She plays a chord)* The second point said "strength or freshness". *(She moves up and down the chord)* Do they both mean the same? Could I be two in one, like one of those shampoo-conditioners? Strength and freshness. *(Pause; she looks at the keyboard, her hands suspended over it)* And also: "someone's character or way of being". *(She plays the same chord, short and sharp)* But the fourth is my favourite: "to recover consciousness". *(She plays a new chord, with both hands)* To come round. Zoe, Zoe. *(She moves up and down the chord)* How beautiful. *(She plays it backwards, twice; the second time, slowly)* And the last one: "the interval of existence"; life, piano: the interval. We already said it; imagine a bird which is flying at night and comes in through a window. *(She smiles)* The bit about the window was my idea.

*She starts to leave, but stops for a moment. She looks at the piano.*

**Zoe:** Oh yeah, I told you there was a zoological entry at the end. It doesn't mean much. It says: 'larval form of certain crustaceans'. And while we're on that subject: what have you done with my mother? I couldn't find her all day.

*She exits.*

## Biographies

*Living-room.*

MALVA PLAYS.

**Henry Cowell. *Aeolian Harp* (fragment)**

*Outside the house, Amanda reads letters.*

**Amanda:** 'Dear Malva, I am so glad that Zoe has accepted to stay with you for a while. She's not so fragile, our little girl. She has got you, and you have got her. Because, let me tell you: despite having done it for Zoe, this is also good for you. I am so happy you are not alone.'

*Zoe enters the living room and remains standing.*

**Zoe:** I'm failing, mum. Everything has been a failure. I have found nothing, I've got nothing back again. Nothing has appeared, except for mistakes. *(She touches her belly)* I don't feel well. I've never felt like this before. What's wrong with me, mum? I feel invaded. I want everything that is strange to get out of my body. *(She presses and twists her belly)* Did I like fruit when I was little? Did I like melon, and cream?

I threw up all over your study yesterday. I ate things that made no sense to me.

I got terribly angry. I got terribly angry with you, and then I fell over and grazed my knees again.

I threw up things that I thought I liked.

What's wrong with me, mum? I don't recognize myself.

**Amanda:** *(reads)* 'Dear Malva, it seems I don't do anything but write to you. But look: if only I had known, I would have left you all my recipes. Smashed potatoes, Malva, or pumpkins. Zoe was sick. Don't you remember how I used to make it for her when she was a baby? Oh, Malva, Malva. And I wasn't born to be a mother... I'm sending a few recipes.'

**Zoe:** Who can understand me now? Amanda has left. She felt lonely and I couldn't comfort her.

Amanda is like the stork: she leaves us at home and goes back to Paris. She keeps nothing for herself, the poor little stork, so hard working, so industrious; that's what I call a sad story. Does anyone feed the stork so she can fly back to Paris? Does anyone care about the poor little stork?

Does it bother you if I talk about her? But mum, you don't understand anything. I am experiencing a regression. I am regressing to a made up story that I was never told. Its better than regressing to nowhere. And preferable to going anywhere. The stork doesn't exist, but you let her go without giving her anything, mum, does that seem fair to you?

**Amanda:** *(She reads)* 'It was my decision too. I'm not just your shadow; I can also say yes, and say no. I am fine. The point is Zoe now. She can do what she wants to, she can leave or stay, she can

go on with her pregnancy or not. The only thing you have to do is to be with her. To be with her. To be with her. *(She continues, quietly)*

**Zoe:** I'm sorry. I had actually come to apologize. I don't like apologizing, but my tastes are changing. I wish that all this was already over. I'm not on speaking terms with my body. Can you forgive me, mum?

**Amanda:** 'I've already told you many times, there's nothing to forgive. Nothing to forgive...'

**Zoe:** Ok. In that case...

*Painfully, she gets on her knees.*

**Zoe:** I've already stopped eating; now, I am going to beg you on my knees, until you forgive me.

*MALVA STOPS PLAYING AND EXITS.*

**Amanda:** 'Dear Zoe, I wasn't born to be a mother. I was with Malva when she adopted you, I was with her when she decided to abort. I've been with her so many times, so long... But that's our story, Zoe, it's our business. You were so little. We thought you wouldn't be able to understand. That it would be too much for you. I know you have talked with your mother. Don't blame these old women for our silence. I'm happy you both are together now. That is all I can tell you.'

*Zoe stands up. Her legs are shaking.*

**Zoe:** *(She contracts her body)* Some of your notes vibrate through me, mum. I can't tell you which ones, I can't tell you why... But they do. That's it, mum. That's it. It's those notes. It doesn't matter what they're called; they vibrate through me. My tastes are changing. When I grew up I stopped liking your music, but now my body... Ah... Mum. I was apologising to you.

*She closes her eyes and moves closer.*

**Zoe:** What are you doing? It's magnetic, mother.

*She moves closer to the piano, her eyes closed, with her hands over her womb. She gropes for the piano, led by her belly.*

*She finds the piano; she leans her belly on the resonating body of the piano.*

**Zoe:** Keep playing, mum. I hate your music, but my body loves it.

*She spreads herself across the piano, climbs onto it.*

**Zoe:** Is this my body, mother? Will I ever go back to being Zoe again? I want to go back, mother, I want to go back...

*She lays face down on the body of the piano.*

**Zoe:** Why did you never talk to me like this, mum?  
Why did you never talk to me?

**Amanda:** 'Dear Malva. I won't come back. It doesn't matter whether Zoe is leaving or staying with you: I won't come back. It's your daughter, your choice, your bond. Just leave me alone.'

*Zoe raises her head.*

**Zoe:** It's my decision now, isn't it?

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** It's my turn.

*MALVA ENTERS AND PLAYS.  
Schubert. Andantino... (fragment)*

**Zoe:** But I say nothing. It has no words, mother. Our story.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Play it again, mum.

*Zoe laughs.*

*She rests her head on the piano, as if it were somebody's chest, and strokes it.*

*She closes her eyes, smiling and breathes peacefully.*

**Amanda:** '...and of course I find it hard to forgive myself for many things, Malva. Not having spent more time with Zoe is one of them. I miss Zoe so much. I'm feeling old. I miss you too, but I'm not talking about us. This is another theme...'

*She folds the paper. She puts it in an envelope and seals it.*

*MALVA CONTINUES PLAYING  
AND SLOWLY FINISHES.*

## Malva's Refrain (part two)

### 1. Crustacean

*Study.*

*Malva is alone. Zoe enters.*

**Zoe:** I dreamt of Amanda. She was alone, in a train station in Eastern Europe. She was looking at the departures board. She could go anywhere, but she decided to go to a place where I could find her. That seemed very sweet to me.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** I haven't had an episode for the last two days; I think at this stage I would call them 'accidents'.

*MALVA STARTS PLAYING.*  
**Schönberg. Sechs Kleine... (fragment)**

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Will they come back? The fainting and insomnia; and Amanda. I miss them; I don't feel myself. Well, let them come back if they want to; that wasn't what I wanted to talk about. Amanda left a letter for me. She says that you've got power over the present, and that you prove that by doing what you do, and that you can eliminate the past or gather it whole in an instant and explore every inch of a single moment. She says you can shove your present up your backside.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** She says that, exactly.  
I had to tell you.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Well, I'll stop bothering you. And I'm leaving tomorrow; I wanted to tell you that too.

*Zoe scratches her leg, carelessly.*

**Zoe:** I leave you alone.

*Exits.*

*MALVA FINISHES..*

## **2. Platform**

*Amanda is outdoors. Wears a hat and sunglasses.*

**Amanda:** How beautiful, the pyramids.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** I should have come before.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** A long time ago.

*Pause.*

**Amanda:** With Malva. And Zoe.

*She looks at his watch.*

*She examines some travel papers.*

*She picks up her suitcase and exits.*

## **3. Andantino**

*MALVA PLAYS A PIECE OF MUSIC.*

***Schubert. Andantino... (complete)***

## **Mora's Refrain<sup>2</sup>**

*Malva is seated at the piano.*

*Zoe is dressed to go out, very beautifully. She puts down her suitcase beside her.*

**Zoe:** Yesterday, I thought about the fact that you had me at my age. You received me at my age. You accepted me. You might not have done it. But you didn't.

Otherness is darkness.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** The scabs have fallen off; I've got no more 'strawberries'.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** I'm going to be a mother, mum. Mum. I might never have become a mother, and things would basically be the same. I'm not thinking about that any more. *(She touches her belly)* I made up my mind during the last few days. Some day I'll tell her. Did you know she's going to be a girl? A baby woman.

*She looks down at her belly.*

**Zoe:** I talked to her today and told her that I've changed my diet. So as not to throw up. She already has a name. You didn't know that.

*Pause.*

*MALVA BEGINS TO PLAY.*

***Schubert. Andantino... (fragment) and then Lachenmann. Hänschen klein.***

**Zoe:** And I say to myself now that she's already heard your music; the other day, when we forgave each other. I introduced her to you, mother. *(Playing talking to her flat belly)* 'Mora, this is Malva, my mum. Mum, this is Mora, your future granddaughter. Mum plays the piano.'

Granny plays the piano, can you hear her? *(She pushes her belly towards the music)* I think she can, she can hear you.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** I've called her 'Mora'. Because she's like a little black-berry. Dark, like me. And sweet and strong... Strong, like the taste of strawberries; and she's also a plant, like her granny.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Mora' is both a blackberry and a girl's name.

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** Mora lives<sup>3</sup> inside me. How lovely that there's music at this moment, mum.

*Long pause.*

**Zoe:** We are going to be alone for the next few months; Mora and me, I mean.

*Amanda enters through the front door, carrying a suitcase.*

*She stays in the hall.*

**Zoe:** Things could be different, Mum.

You could come and visit me too, when you want to.

*She picks up her suitcase, but waits for a moment.*

**Zoe:** *(She listens with attention)* Mother, you're never going to change that refrain, are you?

*Pause.*

**Zoe:** I like it. It calms me. But I don't understand it.

*She leaves, without registering Amanda's presence.*

**MALVA FINISHES.**

*Amanda enters.*

**Amanda:** Just you and me again.

*Amanda puts down her suitcase and sits down.*

**Amanda:** Please tell me about Zoe.

**MALVA PLAYS THE FINAL PIECE.**

**John Cage. 4' 33' (3<sup>rd</sup> movement)**

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<sup>3</sup> The original Spanish text says: '**Mora mora** en mí'. The verb 'morar' means *to live in certain place*.