

Whoever Has to Drown¹

¹ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 52). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Valentina

The delicate shell smashed in two as she swung it against the bowl. She hadn't needed nearly that much strength, but she hadn't noticed. The egg slid, exposed, down the inside of the bowl.

Her dark eyes flicked back and forward between the clock and the bowl. The silver hands of the modern clock seemed to slow the more she looked at it. Each tick of the second hand coming later and later than the one previous. The rim of the clock caught the sun and sent light spinning around the room. She closed her heavy eyes for just a moment, until the light had passed, the sun once again hidden. Her eyes quickly darted back to the clock, she continued to track the second hand.

Her hand grasped an old wooden spoon too tightly. The aged wood bent just slightly. The colour in her knuckles was fading to a sickly white as her hands clutched the spoon, making angry circles in the deep bowl. Resting the pale blue ceramic bowl on the counter, she continued stirring. The flour, nearly mixed through, muddy. The thick batter swirling slowly. Valentina's hand continued, lined and relentless.

Her eyes still fixed on the ticking clock. With each minute, her stomach clenched, nerves almost too much. It was twenty-three minutes and fourteen seconds after four thirty.

Four thirty, that's what time Lucia had told Valentina she was going to be home. Twenty-three minutes and fourteen seconds late.

Don't worry about meeting me. I'll walk from the train station. Four thirty at the latest, I promise.

Her mixing continued. She knew exactly what would happen if she continued to mix. The rich chocolate batter would sink in the pan. She had made that mistake once before, years ago. So long ago she could hardly remember. Too experienced for a mistake like that now, she forced herself to stop.

In three long strides she crossed the stone kitchen and opened the overhead cupboard door. Every item in her kitchen was perfectly placed. Oven trays on the top shelf and her largest pot and fry pans. Below, the rest of the pots and the saucepans, in shape order. The bottom shelf held what she was looking for. She smiled. The cake at least would be perfect. But it was a worried smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. The clock ticking behind her.

The thick batter inched out of the bowl and into the tin. Twenty-eight minutes and forty-three seconds after four thirty. The laden pan slid onto the oven tray before being engulfed as the door shut swiftly behind it. *Click, click.*

The tired woman shot upright as she listened for the opening door. Her daughter's voice carried like a melody through the hall and into the kitchen.

"Mamma. I'm home. "

“Where were you, Lucia?” the sharpness of her voice unsettling.

“The train trip took longer than I had expected. It had to stop in Viterbo for a few minutes.”

The charm laced in Lucia’s voice was enough to make any other person believe any word that came out of her mouth.

Her mother took pride in the way she wasn’t affected anymore. In her youth, Lucia could squeeze anything she wanted out of her mother, but Valentina had grown accustomed to her power. A sudden image of Lucia flashed through Valentina’s mind, barely tall enough to reach her mother’s waist. Lucia’s dark waves fell gracefully to her shoulders, her green eyes wild. She had persuaded her mother that the mud stain on her new dress was from falling over, not from playing in the dirt, an activity Lucia had loved as a child. Valentina knew it wasn’t true, but the angelic child was too beautiful to contradict. Now, she could watch Lucia dangle a honey covered lie in front of her face, and bat it away as easily as a fly, where others would fall to their knees. She knew better.

Her daughter’s face was a sight she rarely saw anymore. She had thought she might never get Lucia back after the last trip.

“Have you eaten?” Valentina’s voice softening only enough to just pass as friendly.

“No... I... I’m starving.” Valentina knew it was a lie, but she was still a little grateful for it. She lifted the large black pot off the stove. Thick steam

billowed from the top. She carefully filled a large bowl to the brim and set down the steaming soup down in front of her daughter.

“Pasta Fagioli. Your favourite. And I’ve got a chocolate-almond cake in the oven.” She smiled hopefully at her daughter, who returned the smile, hesitating only momentarily.

They sat in silence while Lucia played with her soup. The tension in the room like a weight. Neither breathed deeply, in fear of breaking it.

“So... how is your aunt?” Valentina’s broke the silence.

“She’s good.” Lucia’s eyes remained fixated on her soup. Dragging her spoon through the dark liquid.

“I hope you took the opportunity to pick up some cooking tips from her while you were there. She is the best cook I know. I guess moving to Rome did help her in the end. Although I wouldn’t recommend it for most. It’s a big—”

“Actually,” Lucia’s voice interjected. “I didn’t spend a lot of time with Aunt Carolena.”

“And why not?” deep wrinkles formed on Valetina’s face. She hadn’t aged well. The lines on her face too deep for a woman of forty three.

“Well... how could I? Rome, I was in Rome, Mamma. You’ve got no idea what Rome’s like now. The art, the theatre, it’s breathtaking. God, imagine performing there, on a real stage. Maybe I could...”

Her eyes were brimming with a passion that her mother didn’t want to recognise.

A heat began rising in Valentina’s face.

"Out of the question. You are not going to perform. Put it out of your head."

Her voice was icy and sharp. Her eyes met Lucia's. Lucia's will was strong, but her eyes gave her away. Valentina slowly rose to her feet.

"Out of the question."

*"Bernarda: I still have my wits, and I know exactly what I'm doing. Do not think you can get the better of me. Until I am carried out of this house feet first, I will make the orders around here. For all of us."*²

² Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 1, p. 18). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Lucia

She had never liked to lie, but sometimes, certain truths needed to be kept.

The bitter cold nipped at her ankles. It was December, but they hadn't had cold like this in years. Lucia had nearly fallen on her way out of her house.

Puddles were starting to turn to ice.

Despite this, the streets were full of people. Tourists hurried past frantically in search of dinner in any restaurant that provided an English menu. Locals scurried home from work, some getting in Christmas shopping. Lights sparkled above her. The rest of the world walked down the street in a daze, heads down, so intent they missed the lights that shone all along the street. They hung silently, dripping down from the wires that held them there. The grey stone buildings that lined the street were illuminated a brilliant yellow. The puddles trapped in the maze of cobblestones seemed to glow. The darkness of winter undercut by the beauty of light.

Lucia stopped, eyes full. She looked further down the street. Row upon row twinkling so far that if she looked far enough down, the rows blurred into one. A wall of radiant light hanging suspended over a bustling street. Just for a moment the whole street was gold and the bitter winter seemed to ease when she walked there.

She had never been down this particular street. A narrow alley off the illuminated main street. Lucia knew the name she was looking for, and the street number. The darkness began to envelop her as she left the glowing street behind. A different type of light drew her in. Two words were burning on the side of a building '*Teatro Goldoni*'.

The yellow building with its vivid green door stood beside its grey neighbours. For a moment she was frozen. *What would her mother think? What if she wasn't good enough?*

Little whispers swirling around in her head, planting her where she stood.

"Scusi! Theatre's closed," a voice called from a crack in the green door.

"Yes, I know but I'm here for the rehearsal. *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*."

Turning on her signature charm was difficult. Her stomach in knots. The man looked severely put out.

"What's your name?" She could just make out a pair of handsome blue eyes rimmed by dark glasses through the crack in the door.

"Oh... umm Adela, I think."

"No, no, not the character. Your name." His voice was laced with impatience.

"Oh, sorry. Lucia Esposito. I auditioned... in Rome." She stepped forward toward the door so the man could see her in the light.

"Come through." The man opened the heavy door. "You're early. The email said 7:30, no earlier. You're going to have to get times right, if we're going to get along, Miss Esposito." A tall, middle-aged man. He would have been very

handsome once. Now he had a bald patch in his black hair but she had been right about the eyes. Piercing blue. Dazzling.

"I'm Giancarlo. The director. I didn't see your audition in Rome."

He strode away from her through the foyer, toward the backstage area. Lucia hurried to follow. She tried to listen, but the beautiful paintings on the walls of the theatre pulled her attention. It wasn't until he came to an abrupt halt and turned to her to speak that she really heard.

"...but I was told about you. They said... talent... Let's hope they're right." His eyes surveyed her dubiously. A sudden pang of nervous energy hit her stomach.

The walk continued through the backstage maze of corridors and passageways. Lucia tried to make a map in her mind of the corridors but by the fifth change in direction, she was completely lost.

Through the last door, the mismatched pair came to a place with which Lucia was much more familiar. The high red curtains were drawn.

"Just stay here before the rest of the cast arrives." Giancarlo's rough voice interrupted her thoughts. "I have things to do. Don't waste time. Warm up."

He left her.

She looked at the glossy wooden floor of the stage, noticing the imperfections. She felt a pull in her legs and moved slowly. Yes, this is what she had wanted, did want.

Slowly moving centre stage, her breathing steady. Each step, measured. The stage lights were already lit. She turned out to face the audience.

There was only blinding light. It stung, but she liked the heat. There could have been thousands of people watching her, but she would have never known. The warmth filled her with confidence. Electricity rushed through her fingers and toes. She wanted to speak. 'Show her.' Her eyes shut. She drew in a long breath.

"Poncia: There's nothing I can do. I tried to put a stop to this, but now – it frightens me too much. Feel the silence? In every room, a storm is brewing, and the day it breaks, it'll sweep us all away."³

³ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 40). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Lucia

"I will be what he wants me to be. All the villagers against me, burning me with their pointing fingers, persecuted by those who call themselves decent people."⁴

She spat the last line at her sister. The sister who would never be as beautiful or strong as she was. The sister who could never fight their mother like she could. The sister who would never have the control over her own life that Adela had.

"You need to believe this girl has just admitted to sleeping with you fiancée, Adriana! If you don't believe it, I won't!" Giancarlo's booming voice brought them all back to reality.

"If you don't know your characters, if you don't believe their story, then how the hell do you expect your audience to buy into it?" He moved from his perch in the darkness to the stage. "I don't believe any of you yet..." He looked around the group of women, "Lucia over here." Her head snapped up from its downward gaze.

"Please, take your time." His words dripped sarcasm. "It's your own time you're wasting!" Lucia was beginning to despise these outbursts. She scurried to the stand next to him.

⁴ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 53). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

“Read those last few lines out to the front. Not to any of the others, just out into the universe. Take the time to understand each word... Feel the lines.”

She welcomed the bright lights on her face. That familiar warmth filled her with hope.

“Don't touch me! My blood isn't yours anymore. There's no way out. Whoever has to drown will drown. Pepe el Romano is mine. He will carry me away to the reeds by the sea... I can't stand the horror of being under this roof anymore, not after tasting his mouth... and I will be what he wants me to be...”⁵

“That's enough.” Giancarlo's eyes on the floor. A sharp silence resonated around the theatre. “Ladies, take a break.” His eyes didn't leave his spot on the floor. Lucia turned to face the door before the calm voice stopped her.

“Stop. Turn.”

She did as instructed.

“Congratulations, Lucia.” She wasn't entirely sure what had merited the statement, but she felt a warmth build in her none the less.

“What for, Signor Rossi?” a wicked grin broke across his aging face.

“They were right... at your audition, ... some talent.”

⁵ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 53). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

*"Adela: Don't touch me! My blood isn't yours anymore."*⁶

⁶ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 52). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Valentina

Her knuckles rapped the dark table. A lump was building in her throat. Lucia hadn't been home two weeks and already Valentina could feel her slipping away. The story Lucia had concocted was that she had been seeing a friend she had met in Rome who was in Florence with her family. The story was simple enough. It wasn't true. Valentina didn't know where her daughter was, but she knew Lucia too well to believe her.

The habit of staying up until Lucia returned home was becoming a ritual. Valentina's dark hair was tied up tightly in a bun. Her grey eyes, tired. It was well past eleven, but she hadn't changed her clothes. The flawless black skirt fell like silk over her crossed knees. A large bowl sat in front of her. It's contents, long past being an edible temperature. She watched as the pasta sat, unmoving on the surface of the cold soup. The taste of anger built in her mouth. The bitter flavour familiar.

She pressed her fingertips to her temples. The slow soothing circles helped. A familiar sound reached her. The arrival of her daughter, trying to creep in undetected. Valentina's dark eyes darted to the small rectangular pieces of paper lying on the kitchen bench. She had been trying to ignore them. It was becoming difficult.

"I'm home." She called from the door.

"In the kitchen." It was the same answer most nights now.

"Mamma, not even in your pyjamas." Lucia attempted to sound concerned.

Valentina's eyes darted back to the rectangular paper.

"Darling, I have such a surprise for you. I just couldn't sleep." She stood up and walked to the bench where the paper lay.

"You've seen so much of your friend, but it is time for mamma now!"

She picked up the tickets and examined the writing on them very carefully. "A treat! Two train tickets down to Positano for two week, like when you were little. You love it there!" Valentina looked at her daughter. Daring her. Lucia didn't retreat.

"When?"

"Wednesday." Valentina searched her daughter's face. She knew the lie was hidden there, but she couldn't quite reach it.

"This Wednesday? Three days away?" Her panic evident.

"Is there a problem?"

"Mamma, I don't think... not now." She could taste anger again. Biting it down was easier said than done.

"Why not? As far as I can see, all you've been doing since you got home is showing your friend the city, for nearly two entire weeks. Forgive me if I do not see why that is so important."

"I just don't think..."

Valentina slammed the tickets down.

“Enough! The truth. Where have you been going?” Valentina insisted.

“I’ve been seeing my friend, I told you.”

“Oh please, Lucia. Don’t play me for a fool. We both know I’m not one.”

“I’m not playing you, I’ve been...”

“Don’t bother. If it’s the truth, you’ll come with me to Positano. I’m sure your friend will cope... or you can leave.”

Her voice was hoarse, but she looked composed as ever. Her stillness almost frightening.

Time stretched out. She picked up the tickets and raising her eyebrow offered them to her daughter.

“Positano sounds wonderful mamma. I’ll talk to my friend.” She took them in hand.

“Good girl. We’ll go out tomorrow and we can buy some new clothes for the trip. It should be much warmer down on Costiera Amalfitana...”

Lucia stood, sickened by the smell of the cold meal.

“I’m in a play mamma.” She couldn’t help but yell the words slightly.

“I beg your pardon?” Her mother’s voice quiet but contained.

“I’m in a play. Mamma, I’m good.”

Valentina stood. She took the bowl to the kitchen and poured it down the sink.

“Such a waste... Stop lying to yourself, Lucia.” Turning to face her daughter.

Black eyes glinting.

“No, why won’t you let me have this? You have to listen!”

"No, I don't. Your place is here. You know that... take the tickets." Valentina took one disgusted look at her daughter. She left the room.

*"Bernarda: You have the right to nothing except to do what I tell you. Do not tell me what I can and cannot do. Nothing happens in this house without my knowing about it"*⁷

⁷ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 2, p. 38). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Valentina

Colours flashed by the window. The world outside a blur. The green of the hills melted into the white and brown of the villages they passed.

The two women sat in silence. Valentina sat opposite her daughter. Lucia's face hidden by a magazine. She had been staring at the same page for the past twenty minutes. The gaudy orange glare of the sunset cast a sickly glow over everything. She looked down at her hands. The tangerine colour seemed to highlight every line and spot. Her red nails turning muddy in the light.

Valentina closed the blind casting the two women into semi darkness. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust. Lucia reached upward silently. The clean white light enveloped the tiny compartment.

She had finished her magazine.

She turned it back to the beginning and started again. A bored voice came over the loud speaker.

"Saremo arrivare a destinazione finale, Roma, in venti minuti."

They would arrive in twenty minutes.

Her daughter had barely spoken to her for two weeks. She agreed with everything Valentina had suggested; gone everywhere she was told, but

wasn't really there. Keeping up the appearance of the façade. Absolute submission.

It had been sunny. Warm. *La chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta* had been the worst. The ancient church was set in the middle of the city, almost touching the vast ocean. Valentina had suggested they walk there. Lucia didn't object. Just nodded and waited for her mother to take the lead. The colours of the city shone in the spring sun. Everything seemed to breathe new life. The people included. They called to each other in the street. The silent women walked.

The enormous tiled dome towered above them. It made the church surprisingly cool. The shadowy building was lined with paintings and statues. Lucia stood before a black figure of the Madonna. Taking in her beauty. Her gold garments shone. Her gentle face quietly watching over her church.

Valentina drew close to her daughter.

"She's beautiful."

"Yes."

Valentina strode away from her daughter. Examining another statue. The apostle, Luke. A soft noise carried through the church. A whisper on the air.

A whimper.

Valentina watched her daughter wipe her face with her sleeve. Fixated on the glorious statue.

But Valentina knew it wasn't over.

Lucia would want to go back. Valentina wouldn't be able to keep her away.

"Lucia, look at me." She raised her eyebrows behind her magazine. She noise she made indicated that she had heard.

"Look at me, Lucia." More firmly this time. She slowly raised her eyes to face her mother. A vacant expression.

"I've had an idea, Lucia." Valentina smiled. Her daughter stared. Unblinking.

"This is the part where you ask me what it is, Lucia." She held an air of amusement at her daughter's lack of response.

"What was your idea, Mamma?" Her voice was horse.

"Since this play means so much to you, why don't I meet your director?"

Lucia raised her eyebrows. Genuine intrigue etched into her face. As much as she tried to conceal it, Valentina knew she had won. Lucia couldn't resist the idea of being able to talk her mother into support of the play.

"... yes... umm alright."

"Wonderful!" Valentina's wide smile was contagious. Lucia's lips stretched into a strained smile.

"Saremo arrivare in cinque minuti."

*“Bernarda: The day my daughters break free they will climb to the rooftops,
but I will throw stones at them to get them down.”⁸*

⁸ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 2, p. 34). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Lucia

The warm house was filled with the smell of food. The smell of roast chicken and potatoes hit her full in the face. She stopped, only for a moment, before crossing the threshold. The slightly balding man with piercing blue eyes followed cautiously. She took in another breath trying to recognise all the different smells. Her stomach growled its displeasure at being teased like this.

"Mamma!" Almost instantly the figure of her mother appeared around the door.

"Lucia, darling," she kissed her twice before turning to Lucia's companion. "And you must be Signor Rossi." She held out a long elegant hand to take his. Her nails a deep red. Giancarlo's mouth hung slightly open. Valentina seemed pleased about this effect. There was something about her. She was an attractive woman. Her tall slender frame had always seemed to bring stares, but this was different. Lucia didn't know this woman. Her black dress falling gently above her knees. Her dark hair, normally tightly wound in a bun, free, long and shiny. A blood red smile broke across her painted lips.

"Come through, I've just finished dinner." The woman in black led them through to the dining room. The table was dressed in white. Its surface laden with plates. The delicate detail of the china glinting. The spice infused air

filled Lucia's mouth and nose. It choked her. Excess wasn't unusual for her mother. Valentina seemed to glide to her seat. Her painted smile flashed at them again.

"Please, do sit down." She indicated two other chairs at the full table. Lucia cautiously took her place at the head of the table. The balding man sat opposite Valentina. His eyes transfixed. As though he had never seen anything so fascinating in his life. He was trying to dislike the woman. Lucia could tell. But it was a struggle.

'I can make her see reason,' he had told Lucia triumphantly. 'I have a way with people.' Lucia had wanted to laugh at this. Thinking back to their first encounter, Giancarlo's 'way' had been less than warm. She had never thought undermining someone's confidence was the way to make them work harder, but then, surprisingly, it had worked on her.

Long slim legs crossed at the knee. Leaning forward slightly, she placed an elbow gently on the table. The lines of her collarbone slightly protruding. The smallest glimpse of cleavage from behind the cut of her top. The smell of her perfume mixed with the overpowering smell of food. Her nails brushed the side of her face. She let her head rest on her palm as she surveyed the man sitting opposite her. He didn't return her gaze. In an obvious attempt to seem professional, he kept his eyes on the food.

"This all looks wonderful, Signora Esposito" Giancarlo croaked, apparently transfixed by a single piece of carrot in the nearest steaming bowl.

"Mamma why have you done all this?" She couldn't help but feel suspicious.

"All what?" a feigned air of confusion didn't convince her daughter.

"You told me you wanted to meet Signor Rossi, you never said anything about..."

"What better way to meet people than over dinner?" Her bright complexion didn't match her icy voice. Lucia knew defeat. "Wouldn't you agree, signor Rossi?" Flashing a brilliant smile in his direction.

Valentina reached into the pocket of her navy jacket. The small rectangular box had been a stranger in their household for the past ten years.

"You don't mind, do you darling?" Lucia had assumed the question was directed at her. Though, given her mother's behaviour, she wasn't entirely surprised she had aimed the question at Giancarlo.

"Of course not, my dear." The tone in which he responded indicated he was overcoming his initial fear. Lucia sat between both of them. Her mother lit a cigarette and held it to her parted lips. Her willowy hand curved gently to accommodate the small object. Her breath came without noise. The smoke rushing into her lungs and billowing out as quietly as it had entered. Their two

bodies seemed connected. Only held together by a look, but so intimate, Lucia felt like she should look away.

“So...,” Her mother purred. She tilted her head back and blew wisps of smoke toward the ceiling. “Why is it that you want my Lucia to be in your little play?” Lucia knew her mother knew the answer. Giancarlo cleared his throat.

“Well, I think she has talent, and it’s my job to help develop it.” He switched on his signature determination. More difficult, now that a beautiful woman sat in front of him.

“Talent? Signor Rossi, there are lots of people with talent. I’m sure there are girls more talented and far more beautiful than Lucia out there. Come now, we know what some of those girls will do to get ahead”

Her cold chuckle seemed to bounce around the room.

Lucia stared down at the empty plate in front of her. No one had touched the food.

Giancarlo stretched his hand across the table toward Valentina’s.

“My dear, your daughter is not one who will need to. She is a very gifted girl.”

He smiled at her. A smile she seemed to laugh off. A light, dismissive laugh.

She tapped the end of the cigarette lightly on the edge of her pate. The ash rolling down into the middle of the empty dish.

“Signor Rossi, I don’t need you to tell me that my daughter is gifted. But she has better things to do with her talents.” Another long deep breath in, the grey smoke licking the edges of her lips. Giancarlo opened his mouth to

argue. The words stuck. Her stilettos dangling at the end of her crossed legs. He looked down at them. Shiny and spindly. Almost dangerous.

“Signor, I’m intrigued, what possessed you to give your life to the entertainment industry?” She took another long drag. Tapped her shoes. Waited.

“Is it fulfilling?... Does it satisfy you?”

His eyes had turned glassy. He seemed unable to make any sound. Valentina leant slowly across the table for the vegetables. Her loose shirt gaped around her chest, exposing a flash of olive skin.

“I... I love the thrill of it... of acting.” It wasn’t entirely clear if acting was what he was talking about.

Lucia felt sick, watching a pantomime she could neither enjoy nor partake in.

“Come now, that can’t be it.” She leant over further. More dark skin on show.

“Tell me, what was it that made you start acting? There must have been something. Some moment, some epiphany, that made you dedicate your life to...” A drag. An exhale. A pause. “a small town, relatively unsuccessful theatre company.”

Their eyes locked in a silent battle, so intimate, Lucia had to look away.

The colour in Giancarlo’s face slowly drained. Valentina looked unwaveringly at the whitened director. He – ghostly in the low light of the dining room – had no answer.

"I...I...umm." His eyes didn't leave Valentina's. She could see thoughts flashing through his mind. What did she know? How could she know?

"Was it a person who... inspired you? Who you looked up to? Maybe who you aspired to be like?" Her fake curiosity was failing. Now only an accusatory tone filled her words. He was trapped. Victim to the black widow spider. Caught forever in her intricate web.

"Well?"

"No...I...I just wanted to." A reply seemed beyond him. Valentina's relentless gaze silenced him. She had won.

He made one last feeble attempt but they both knew.

"Forgive me for speaking out of turn, but I don't think you realise what this girl could achieve."

"This girl', Signor Rossi, is my daughter. I know what she can do. She can do what I tell her to do. And let me tell you, that she is not coming back."

Valentina smiled menacingly. Wisps of grey smoke trickling out of her mouth and toward the sky.

*"Poncia: It's better to turn your back on the raging sea, rather than try to face
it"⁹*

⁹ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 49). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Lucia

Her hands twitched nervously. Wringing her fingers together in her lap. Her eyes never leaving them. A shiver creeping over her body, she pulled her jacket closer around her. The familiar rumble of Giancarlo's voice boomed from the closed doors. It was probably the final scene, they could never get the integrity of it quite right.

Well, it wasn't to be her problem any longer. Her left knee bounced relentlessly. The lobby seemed colder than normal, despite the coming spring. She pulled at a thread on her coat. The seam unravelled so easily. Every stitch that came unpicked inched it closer to falling apart all together. She kept pulling, transfixed by how easily she could undo it.

*"Adela: My blood isn't yours anymore..."*¹⁰

The doors flew open. Her eyes stayed fixed on the seam just for a moment, before turning to face the piercing blue eyes.

"Nice of you to join us, Lucia." He didn't move from the doorway. Indignant and determined. "I thought you were going to deal with our obstacle." A pang of anger and guilt rose in her stomach as she listened to him dismiss her mother as a mere obstacle, easy to do when she was not before them.

¹⁰ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 52). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

"It's not as simple as that." She mumbled, her eyes retreating to the floor. Fastening her hands back around her loose thread.

"Well, why not? This is your life, is it not?"

She unpicked another stitch. And another.

"It's not as simple as that." Her dark eyes met his. She could feel the frustration radiating from him.

The cherubic figures painted on the ceiling stared down at them. They had seen much over the years. The gold detail was dull. She hadn't noticed this when she first came there.

*"Bernarda: Stop this! Oh, how I wish I could make lightning strike this house."*¹¹

He strode towards her, obviously finding it difficult to keep himself from raising his voice. He took the seat beside her. His voice dropping. Suddenly quiet.

"Well, it would seem you have your whole future ahead of you. But perhaps it isn't here." Her eyes began to blur, water filling them. It overflowed and began to trickle down her face. The warmth stung.

¹¹Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 56). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

*"Bernarda: And I want no tears. Tears are for when you are alone. We will all
of us drown in a sea of mourning."*¹²

"It's too late." He stood up suddenly. He stiffened and moved quickly back to the door.

"You are no longer welcome here. You're interrupting our performance." Why was he saying this? Wasn't he meant to convince her to stay?

The heavy doors thudded closed.

Lucia didn't hear Giancarlo's booming voice commanding the rest of the cast. Her ears were ringing. The silence pressed down on them.

She unpicked another stitch. And another.

¹² Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 61). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

“Adela: It’s too late. Whoever has to drown will drown.”¹³

¹³ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 52). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Lucia

“Mamma, I’m home.” The ritual greeting sung through the house as Lucia closed the front door.

“In the kitchen.” The ritual response. She sashayed through the house. Humming the tune to *Strada facendo* she made her way into the kitchen.

Steam was billowing out of a large pot on the stove. As usual, Valentina was preparing more meals at once than should be humanly possible. The woman stirred a thick dark soup with ferocity. Lucia stood behind her mother. She wrapped her arms around the woman’s waist. The stirring stopped.

The two women stood intertwined.

“Did you have a good day, my little one?” Valentina held onto her daughter’s arms. Lucia’s head rested on her mother’s shoulder.

“It was interesting.” The pasta cooking on the far right stove burner boiled over. Valentina swiftly turned the switch on the top of the cooktop. The water receded.

Interesting indeed.

“Why, what happened?” Valentina questioned turning back to her daughter. Lucia moved to the head of the dining table. She gestured her mother to do the same as she sat.

“Work was nothing special. My shift at the restaurant finished at four thirty. So I started to walk home. I was only walking five minutes before I ran into someone.”

A small smirk broke Lucia’s lips. Valentina shifted uncomfortably.

“This is the part where you ask me who it was, Mamma.”

“I don’t have time for games, Lucia.” She raised from her chair in one quick movement.

The kitchen billowed steam from her many gleaming pots. The whole room seemed to be covered in a haze. A gleaming film.

“Ask me who it was, Mamma.” Lucia insisted. Her voice barely a whisper, but with enough authority for her mother to stop.

“Alright, who was it, Lucia?”

Satisfied at her mother’s obedience, Lucia adopted a lighter air.

Lucia crossed her legs and leaned back in her chair. The long wooden table was already perfectly set. Lucia unraveled the navy scarf from around her neck and laid it on the table in front of her. She breathed in the highly seasoned air.

“I’m so glad you asked, Mamma.” Her words dripped sarcasm. “It was Signor Rossi. Do you remember Signor Rossi, Mamma? It would have been a long time since you saw him. Four years I think.” Lucia rose from her chair and drew herself up to her mother. “I haven’t seen him since he kicked me out either. Not since he fired me from his play.”

Valentina smiled.

“And what did Signor Rossi have to say for himself, after all this time?”

She and her daughter faced each other. Neither wavering.

“Oh, not all that much, Mamma. Just that he was sorry for letting me go like he did. That he didn’t want to, but that he was... pushed.”

Her mother let out a laugh.

“Ah, shifting the blame for the pain he caused onto someone else. I think Signor Rossi is in the wrong profession. Maybe he should have been... a politician.”

Lucia bit down the rage pooling inside her.

“And what exactly did he say was the reason for his abrupt decision?”

Valentina picked up the scarf and hung it over the back of a chair. She began perfecting the table. Not that it needed any adjustments. Lining up the already straight cutlery. Refolding the already immaculately folded napkins.

“He didn’t, but I couldn’t help thinking about the dinner we had.”

Valentina strode back into the kitchen to save her bubbling sauce, Lucia in her wake.

Lucia watched as her mother flitted around the kitchen. She lowered the temperature on the sauce. It had to simmer. Pasta boiling away next to the sauce. *Ragù alla Barese* simmering in a frying pan. The leg of lamb slow roasting in its own juices. Valentina checked on the *Cassata siciliana* in the freezer. The fruit to complete the dish was already cut up. The crispy

Arancini balls hissed violently as Valentina rolled each one in bread crumbs and dropped them into the hot oil.

"Why would you think of that?" Valentina feigned an air of curiosity.

"Mamma, look at me." She continued stirring and checking on her many meals.

"Look at me!" She screamed at the woman in front of her. Valentina turned slowly. A triumphant smile lit up her face. Lucia's, red and blotchy.

The hot kitchen was becoming stifling. Lucia's nose and throat were coated with the spiced air. The smell was suffocating.

"You knew something about him. Something he didn't want you to know. He felt threatened. So he retreated." Her voice broke to a whisper. "You did this, didn't you?"

Her mother smiled. Stirred. Salted. Peppered.

"Yes."

The gleam of the silver salt and pepper shakers reflected into Lucia's eyes.

"What did you know?"

Valentina returned to her cooking.

"Nothing."

Lucia leaned against the kitchen bench. She had to be strong. She slammed her hand onto the granite surface.

“Don’t lie to me.” She tried to scream at her mother. Her voice broke on the words. A familiar blur clouding her vision.

Valentina lifted the saucepan full of pasta off the stove. In one swift movement she took it to the sink and tipped its contents into a colander. Steam exploded from cold surface as the boiling water hit it. It hurtled toward the ceiling.

“Actually, I am not lying to you, Lucia.” Lucia searched her mother’s face for any sign of remorse. There was none.

She stirred the ragù slowly. She lifted the spoon to her lips. Perfectly composed and content, she pondered the flavour. She reached again for the salt and pepper. Gently tapping on each, finding the ideal balance.

“I didn’t know anything about Signor Rossi’s past. I tried doing a bit of digging, but there wasn’t much I could find. All I knew was that he had a controversial start into the business. Something about cheating someone out of a job...”

Valentina waved the thought away. Her Cheshire cat smile still etched into every line of her face.

"Isn't it funny how people react when they think they've been found out?" She let out a laugh.

"Bizarre."

Valentina opened the oven door. She barely blinked as she lifted the dripping meat from the oven. She stirred the sizzling liquid in the bottom of the pan. The meat glistened as she poured the hot liquid back over it. The haze in the room was thickening.

Lucia turned away from her mother. The blur had taken over her vision. She tried to choke out a response.

"You took it... I was happy... you took it."

"Shh, darling. It's for the best." She lulled her.

Valentina reached out her arms and wrapped them around her daughter.

"He could have fought for me. Why didn't he?" Lucia whimpered. The two women stood intertwined.

"Maybe you weren't talented or beautiful enough to fight for."

Valentina disengaged from her daughter. She lifted a large knife from the bench. She carved the meat. It seemed to fall off the bone.

Valentina watched her daughter. Broken.

She stirred the bubbling sauce.

*"Bernarda: I want no tears. We will all drown in a sea of mourning."*¹⁴

¹⁴ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 61). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)

Reflection Statement

*"The very process of baking the cake is metaphor is on different levels, all having to do with cultural transformation and survival as well as the conflicted relationship between mother and daughter"*¹

My Major work 'Whoever has to Drown' explores the concept of the conflict between personal artistic freedom and passion versus tradition. This is explored through the power struggle of Valentina and her daughter Lucia. My story is aimed at publication in the University of Monash's annual short story anthology "Verge", in particular their issue focusing on art and freedom, due to both its style and content

My concept arose during the Preliminary extension 1 English course and my study of the Faustian contract. Through an in depth study of the play Dr Faustus, I came to the idea of exploring the way in which Valentina "sells her soul" in order to uphold the beliefs she stands for. Valentina willingly gives up a relationship with her daughter in order to keep her structured traditional life and maintain control. While Dr Faustus regrets that he is damned to hell in the end of the play, the twisted nature of Valentina's character is explored through her joy that she has trapped her daughter in her Lucia's own personal hell. *"Valentina reached out her arms and wrapped them around her daughter. The two women stood intertwined. Lucia's face, soaking."* I also drew on elements from the Advanced course, in the form of the trouble

relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude. I hoped to reflect the struggling relationship between Hamlet and his mother.

“Gertrude: Hamlet, you have your father much offended.

Hamlet: You have my father much offended.”²

The complexity and duality of my characters' conflicts was what I hoped to present at key moments in my story. Hamlet's desires a relationship with his mother, however, in order to put his own mind at ease, needs to carry out a deed that will hurt her, the murder of his stepfather. Similarly, Lucia's desperate desire to fulfil her own life leads her to disobey her mother's wishes and go against what Valentina stands for, but ultimately she surrenders, wanting her mother's approval more than a career on the stage.

My independent research informed both my style and structure. My original plan for the form of my piece was a script and as a result, through my research, I found Federico Garcia Lorca's play The House of Bernarda Alba. The tyrannical mother, Bernarda uses force and manipulation to gain control over her household. I played with using excerpts to form both an intertextual element and provide an underlying structure based on the analogy suggested in Diane Lefer's 'Breaking the "Rules" of Story Structure'. *“A jazz musician may seem to go all over the place in a musical improvisation, but there's always an underlying structure to return to.”³*

Similarly, I have explored the concept of bribery and manipulation to create conflict between the two women. My title, 'Whoever Has to Drown' is the key symbol

of eventual submission. It explores a similar desperation to that of my characters; a desire powerful enough to make the women accept that someone or something must die in order to reach equilibrium. While it is literal in The House of Bernarda Alba, I feel this parallels with the death of Lucia's spirit in my story.

The postmodern use of pastiche was a result of allowing the piece to suggest its own form through several drafts. *"An alternative structure usually appears naturally as a story develops – because it has to. I may not even recognise the controlling metaphor until I start revising."*⁴ My controlling metaphor of the title encompassed the duality of a close family relationship and polar opposite paradigms. At the commencement of the course, I had intended to present my concept in the form of a theatre script. However, I found through experimentation with both styles, that the short story form enabled me to explore the larger world within the story while playfully creating intertextual allusions. While the original ending of my piece saw Lucia finally standing up to her mother, I decided the entrance into a state of bitter submission would be a more shocking ending for the reader. "Shh, darling. It's for the best." She hissed through her malicious smile." While the reader will hopefully want Lucia to confront her tyrannical mother, Valentina's victory over her will hopefully leave the reader with a more painful, but intriguing and unsettling ending.

The use of a fragmented dual narrative is directly linked to the switching of power throughout the story. Through each scene, the power shifts between the women but ultimately resides with the mother. Nam Le's short story collection, The

Boat was of particular interest to me in exploring the father son relationship in his story 'Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice.' The boundaries that Nam's father crosses in order to get what he wants out of his son is an idea that held true in the relationship between my two characters. I drew particularly on the line, "*My father was drawn to weakness, even as he tolerated none in me.*"⁶ While I have examined an inverted view of this quote, "*my mother was drawn to power, even as she tolerated none in me*", I feel the original still impacted my story a great deal. Nam's bitter acceptance of what his father has done when he destroys his story also leads him to enter a state of submission, as does my own character.

I hoped to explore the notions of art and freedom in the story through the motif of theatre and light. This influenced my choice of names, as Lucia's name means 'light' in Italian. Lucia, though trapped by the confines of her mother, finds freedom on the stage. She is able to experience true freedom when she becomes another character on stage. The play I have chosen to intersperse and that she had the lead role in ends with Lucia's character taking her own life. While this character, Adela, is able to ironically experience freedom from her mother through death, Lucia's removal from the play means she will never be able to experience this freedom, or escape.

I playfully incorporated the stereotypical Italian trait of mothers cooking and baking as a key trope. I have used cooking in an ironic fashion as a symbol for Valentina's hold over her daughter. Valentina cooking frames the entire story in the

first and last scenes. I wanted this to show Valentina's power over her daughter and how this cooking keeps her daughter in check while connecting her mother to traditional roles. An excess of food leads to feelings of guilt on Lucia's part, causing her to be trapped. The tradition of Italian mothers cooking is a convention that Valentina uses to get what she wants and I hoped my reader would enjoy the texture and taste this peppered the story with. This symbolic bribery is then heightened until it is so great that it has to become real, in the form of train tickets.

Through my investigation of the short story form, I was able to tighten the focus of my own story. Additionally, Richard Ford's article on short story writing was of particular interest as it explored the notion of wide reading to influence your own story and better your understanding of the form, and also a confidence in the short story form. He stresses that a writer shouldn't be too ambitious and set out to write more than a short story if that's not what they are intending to write. "*I begin thinking short: limiting the number of possible characters, the number of incidents, the fictive time the story will take up, imagining what an ideal length might be.*"⁶ Keeping all these in my mind was vital for my creative process as my stories often have the tendency to be far too ambitious. It helped me restrain my story to the dynamics between three main characters.

As mentioned earlier, my use of intertextuality helps in weaving my story together. The quotations used at the end of each scene are direct quotes from the character Lucia plays in her The House of Bernarda Alba foreshadow the events and power switch in the coming

scene. The most poignant, "*My blood isn't yours anymore*"⁷ and "*In every room in this house, a storm is brewing*"⁸ highlight the difficult family dynamic and the power struggle occurring between the two women, and the inevitable outcome.

I believe overall I have achieved my intent to realise a short story that presents a layered and complex look at *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *Dr Faustus*.

*"Adela: There's no way out. Whoever has to drown must drown."*⁹

¹Lefer, D. (1994). Breaking the "Rules" of Story Structure. In J. Heffrom (Ed.), *The Best Writing on Writing* (p. 17). USA: Story Press.

²Shakespeare, W. (2004). Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (act 3, scene 4). Mestas.

- ³ Lefer, D. (1994). Breaking the "Rules" of Story Structure. In J. Heffrom (Ed.), *The Best Writing on Writing* (p. 18). USA: Story Press.
- ⁴ Lefer, D. (1994). Breaking the "Rules" of Story Structure. In J. Heffrom (Ed.), *The Best Writing on Writing* (p. 16). USA: Story Press.
- ⁵ Le, N. (2008). Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice. In *The Boat* (p. 24). Australia: Canongate.
- ⁶ Ford, R. (2010). A Short Story. In J. O. Krstovic (Ed.), *Writers on Writing: The Art of the Short Story* (p. 12). Detroit: Cengage Learning .
- ⁷ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 52). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)
- ⁸ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 40). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)
- ⁹ Lorca, F. G. (1993). *The House of Bernarda Alba* (M. Dewell, Trans., act 3, p. 52). Farrar, Straus, Giroux. (Original work published 1936)