In a Glass Cage

By Agustí Villaronga
"Dear Mom and Dad...

since Klaus' accident
things have worsened.
He hardly speaks--
and more than his wife,
I seem his slave.
I think that I must
hire a nurse.
I'd like her to be
from our country--
people here are awful.
You could speak
to our old doctor--
the one who helped us bring
the iron lung to this country.
He helped Klaus experiment
on children during the war.
He owes him favors.
He'll help you.
I need help badly.
With this paralysis
caused by his fall,
Klaus could go on living
for years
always dependent
on the machine.
I need time
for myself and Rena.
I worry about her.
She should be going to school.
Since we went into exile
eight years ago
we've been shut up
in this house.
I have never felt worse.
At times, I think it would be
better if he died.
Thanks for the money you sent
to us. Don't forget the nurse.
Love, your daughter,
Griselda.
Mom.
Ma'am!
Ma'am, come here!
Where are you going?
Ma'am!
- What is it?
- Like the devil himself.
- Who?
- He went inside.
- Where?
- In your husband's room.
Rena--
get some cigarettes.
Klaus--
Are you all right?
Hush up.
Tell me who's inside.
- I don't know.
- Is it a man? A woman?
I don't know.
I'll get the other key.
Time is running short.
You must decide.
It's up to you
to give me the job.
After what I've told you,
you should take me.
Who are you?
I'm a nurse.
I've heard he was sick
and I've come...
to take care of him.
Is this the way
to ask for a job?
In any case,
we don't need anyone.
I think that your husband
needs me.
We met in the town hospital
before you came here.
No, I'm sorry.
Griselda...
I want him to stay.
I don't think...
Leave us, please.
What is it?
I'd like him to stay.
He's much too young,
don't you think?
I prefer someone
who is young.
We don't know
who they would send us.
Someone better
than that idiot.
Besides, I've written--
Send them a cable today.
Yes, but it's not that.
Griselda,
I'm the one who's sick.
No. I don't see.
- Griselda.
- What's his name?
Angelo?
Mom says for you
to come and eat.
- It's pretty.
- It's Mom's watch.
What happened to your eye?
Nothing.
There's always food ready
on the stove.
The maid comes
three times a week.
You just have to reheat it.
Eat whatever and whenever you
want to as long as you do your work.
Everything must be neat.
You'll wash him daily.
Sometimes more if need be.
You understand me?
You must amuse him.
Eat.
The machine
works on its own.
Make sure the battery
is always charged.
There is a small gas tank
underneath.
If all else fails, 
do mouth-to-mouth respiration. 
You push on his ribs. 
Anyway, 
you must know how. 
I'll explain 
in detail tomorrow. 
Good night. 
Rena? 
Time to go to bed. 
It must be pretty boring 
for you. 
It's like being 
in a glass cage. 
But don't worry. 
I can do 
many things for you. 
I can tell you about my walks. 
I can bring you things. 
I can describe a movie. 
I can do everything... 
except thinking for you. 
Today the sun is shining. 
The sea is quiet. 
There's a dog... 
close to the trees. 
A little further... 
a bit further... 
a man wearing a raincoat 
walks with a child. 
He wears a raincoat 
in this heat? 
People are very... 
strange. 
He's offering 
a cigarette to the child. 
The boy-- 
yes-- 
takes it. 
It seems that 
they've made friends. 
They're leaving. 
Anyway, I'd better finish. 
Look.
Blood.
Angelo?
Come with me, please.
You must give a shot
to the maid.
But I'm not finished.
It doesn't matter,
you'll do it later.
It won't take you long.
But I must wash him.
I said, later.
The needle is boiling.
I was going to do it,
then I thought about you.
I mean, it's your job.
You do it then.
I want you to do it.
- It's boiling.
- Lean over here.
- Will it hurt?
- Don't worry.
No alcohol first?
And the air bubble?
You finish,
I don't feel well.
You've never worked
in a hospital.
Tell me the truth.
I know you haven't.
You've never given a shot
to anyone.
I was nervous.
Besides, I didn't give shots
in the hospital.
I was an attendant.
What does that mean?
Nothing.
Angelo...
why does my husband
want you to stay?
I took very good
care of him.
They even told me--
Enough.
I can't believe your lies.
But I need to work.
Well...?
What about that shot?
I'm sick of that boy.
I'm throwing him out.
You can't convince me.
He's never been in a hospital.
Why do you want him?
I'm sick and tired
of this life--
isolated here,
ever seeing anyone, alone.
I can't stand it
and he isn't any help.
Don't you understand?
I want him to stay.
Why?
I see.
You prefer a moron
who can't even care
for a sick man
in your state.
Very well.
I want him to stay,
is that clear?
It is.
What is it?
I heard the pump stop.
- Rena, can you help me?
- I can't reach it.
Hurry, we'll all fall down.
It smells good.
Let's dry him.
Careful.
Please, Angelo,
can we play with it now?
All right.
You and Dad against me.
- No. Me against you two.
- All right. I'll start.
This one's going to jump.
I hide.
This one will get you.
This one helps the other.
Now he's got us for sure.
Tic-tac-toe. I won.
Rena, stop being silly
and go to your room.
I'll be right there.
- But, Mom--
- To your room.
Every time I have fun,
you stop me. It's not fair.
Do you get it now?
Be quiet.
Pick this up.
It's not a pleasant sight.
"It was night."
As usual, that morning
they had brought
a trainload of boys
between 6 and 12.
We were supposed
to analyze their blood
to divide them
according to blood type.
But most of them already
showed signs of contagion.
We simply eliminated them.
My assistant
tied them to chairs
with large leather straps.
Then, I'd fill
a syringe with gas--
war shortage of course--
and stick a long needle
in their heart.
I had never felt anything
special while doing it.
Later,
I understood why.
I never looked
into their eyes.
I had never bothered
to watch those long agonies
that could last
five whole minutes.
Horror, like sin... can become fascinating.
I still had not discovered it.
That night, three boys were still alive.
I don't know why, but they were.
Motionless, tired.
The youngest one, perhaps His frightened eyes were inside of me.
I felt uncomfortable, yet, it was also pleasurable.
I separated him from his companions, and took him to another room.
It was small.
- I closed the door and--"
- Angelo, stop it.
I know a lot, don't I?
I took it the day of the accident.
I also hid the boy's body.
Ever since, I've spied on the house as if--
This is not a game.
At least, not to be talked about.
Only you and I know it.
Unless your wife--
She knows nothing.
We never saw each other during the war.
When I went into exile...
I managed, even if not completely--
at least to stop-- killing.
- Don't you think about it?
- Always.
If you could, would you do it again?
I don't know.
Wouldn't you like to do it again?
I could do it for you.
I'm not in a glass cage.
I could be
what you used to be.
Do you understand?
Don't--!
No, Angelo-- don't.
I want to learn.
I want to be like you.
I like what you were.
- But you, you--
- Shut up!
You're no longer a child,
Angelo.
No...
you're the child now.
"He stared at me.
His frightened eyes
were inside of me.
I felt uncomfortable, yet,
it was also pleasurable.
I separated him
from his companions
and I took him
to another room.
It was small.
I closed the door
and cornered him.
I began to take off
my clothes.
The child did not move.
First, I took off
my white coat,
then my uniform.
Slowly, I unbuttoned
my shirt, my pants.
He looked at me confused
and expectant
as he would a madman.
I supposed he waited for the
needle as he had seen done before.
But no, I didn't
want him to die.
'You want a cigarette, kid?"
I wanted pleasure.
'You need money?
I can give you some.'
The raincoat--
His eyes were
two endless tunnels."
She did it.
"I came up closer. I was naked."
It was her,
she tried to kill you.
She wanted to kill you.
"I grazed his neck
to better feel his fright."
She-- she must go.
She's going, isn't she?
Then we'll be alone.
We'll go on together.
We will start again.
"I continued caressing myself;
my hands leveled with his eyes.
He squinted slightly
as he watched.
She must go.
We must be alone.
I only look for you.
"I masturbated on his face.
I felt his loathing invade me--
giving me pleasure."
She must die.
"Want a cigarette, kid?
Do you?
Do you?"
Yes?
Your husband wants to see you.
Clean him up.
I never want to see you again.
You'll leave tomorrow.
No, not I.
Good night.
Angelo?
What happened?
Nothing.
Your mother left.
I'm scared.
Sleep with me tonight.
Of course.
- Please?
- Of course.
Come.
Taking some fresh air?
I'd better put this away.
Fridays are worse.
I have to bring more food.
I'll go down to the cellar
to fix the olives.
- There's no need.
- What?
- To fix olives.
- Why not?
- When did she leave?
- Yesterday.
Just like that?
She showed me
what to do first.
She'll be back
in a couple of months.
Those foreigners.
She said that there was no need
for you to come meanwhile.
- Who'll do the shopping?
- I will.
And who'll take care of him
when you go?
No problem.
If I can't, Rena can do it.
Anyway, it's their business.
By the way,
they owed me two weeks.
Yes, you're right.
How much is it?
Of course.
She left me the money.
Go to the kitchen,
I'll be right back.
Morning.
Hi.
Where's the curtain?
Well, if you don't want
to answer me--
Rena tore it down playing.
I'll hang it later.
Sweet Lord.
You'll break your neck one day.
Show me how the stove works.
Come along.
I've told the maid to leave.
I need money.
Tell me where it is.
I did it for you... and Rena.
Please.
In my desk
in the right-hand drawer.
But it's probably locked.
Where's the key?
Griselda wore it on a chain
around the neck.
- What are you doing here?
- Nothing.
Leave me, please.
Well, I'm off.
I'm glad
to have worked for you.
And when the lady comes back
just call me.
And if you need
anything at all, well--
just let me know.
Lord.
It's that machine--
it makes me so nervous.
It's like being at the movies.
Well, I'd better leave.
It's getting late.
It gets dark.
I could fall down
and who'd find me?
Goodbye.
Don't be so serious, sir.
It can't be that bad.
"Fire. We were late.
Nervously,
I played with my stick."
We crossed
the barbed wire fence...
from right to left.
We did it quickly.
Further away,
the bonfires smoked.
Smoke also came out
of a nearby barrack.
We finally reached it.
Some 20 children
were waiting for us.
They looked like all
the others-- endless copies.
My work bored me.
I felt like leaving
to have some coffee, anything.
Those children
already knew death.
They had seen it
play with their families,
with their friends.
The whole place
smelled of death.
They were neither
sad nor scared--
just like animals
whose feelings cannot be read.
Then, I saw his tiny bright eyes.
Everything in him was small.
He was staring at an apple
left on the table.
I went up to the table.
He looked at me.
His eyes seemed to laugh.
I sent the apple rolling
to the floor.
Several children jumped on it
but he grabbed it. I knew he would.
Some boys tried to take it
but I pushed them away
and took him to the small room.
He didn't even glance at me.
He ate very slowly.
I made him sit down
and told him
to take off his shirt.
First, I went for my bag
and the leather straps.
The other children
were being tied.
It all went so fast.
I glanced at the flames
through the window.
I came back to the small room.
He was sitting down...
completely unconcerned.
Just eating.
I told him
to take off his shirt.
He obeyed me mechanically,
absent-minded.
He was still eating.
I tied him down.
He still ate
as much as he could.
I prepared the needle
in front of him.
He would glance up,
not at all worried.
He still ate.
Then, I went up to him.
I raised the needle
in front of his face.
He looked at me briefly.
I didn't understand that look.
Rage invaded me.
I sunk the needle in his chest.
The apple slipped from his hand
onto the floor.
I sat down at the table
and watched his agony.
Never before
had I felt such pleasure.
It was as if I was intimately
joining death."
Won't Daddy be angry?
I'm not angry.
- Yes, but--
- Rena--
  I'm your father.
  Anything wrong?
- What's with your shoe?
- Nothing.
  Show me.
  Well, too bad.
  You--
  want a cigarette?
  I don't smoke.
  Me neither.
  Want to earn some money?
  All right.
  Help me take this stuff
to the foreigners.
  Come in.
  Leave it
on top of the table.
Did you bring my crayons?
Here they are.
- Who is he?
- A kid. He gave me a hand.
  He looks dumb.
  Can you do me a favor?
  Go to the cove
and collect some sea urchins.
You'll have time to pick up
enough before sunset.
I'll see to your father.
Can I use the gloves?
Yes, they're behind
the staircase.
- Are you hungry?
- I've got to go.
  Bye.
  Come.
  I'll show you something.
  It's upstairs.
- What's that?
- A sick man.
You have company.
Like him?
Where are you going?
Home.
Can I have my money now?
In a minute.
I'll be right back.
What are you doing?
Tell the boy to undress.
You're insane.
Tell him to leave.
It's too late now.
Tell him to undress.
"They were neither
sad nor scared--
just like animals
whose feelings cannot be read.
- Then, I saw his tiny bright eyes.
- Let me go.
- Everything in him was small.
- Please.
He was staring--"
Tell him to undress.
Tell him.
Take off your clothes.
It wasn't like that.
Undress!
Which is it?
You see, Klaus...
I love death.
What are you doing?
It's to wrap around the columns
so the doves won't fly away.
The doves?
There aren't any doves.
But there will be.
- Will you help me?
- Of course.
Morning.
I don't feel well.
I'm very dirty.
Can't you at least
wash me today?
Not now. I've more
important things to do.
And Rena? Where is she?
Where is Rena?
What are you doing?
I'm going to paper this room.
I won't be long.
Rena, don't laugh.
He's going mad.
No, he isn't.
He's fixing the house.
He's put mesh-wire downstairs,
it's nice.
Mesh-wire?
Yes, for the doves.
We must do something.
Angelo doesn't take care of me,
he doesn't wash me.
When Mom comes back--
Do you want me to be sick?
No, Daddy.
I'm worried
about you and me.
But, Daddy, I'm just fine.
I really am.
He says that
now he's my father.
But I'm still your father.
I know, Daddy.
You want me
to be in this state?
No, but it's just...
he's had a lot of work.
Why doesn't the maid come,
in that case?
He doesn't want her to.
And neither do I.
What about me?
The wallpaper?
"In December,
we constantly heard the choir
rehearse in a nearby barrack.
Then I often isolated myself
with a child.
At times, I could hear
the soloist's voice
while watching a boy agonize.
There was a passage
that I liked most of all.
Unwillingly, I started to associate it with the pleasure death gave me. I discovered that hearing it excited me tremendously. At times, the panting of the boys before dying--seemed to be part of the song. It was as if they sang it. I don't know what gave me the idea--but I soon put it into practice. One day, while hearing the song I asked the boys who among them could sing. 'Who can sing?''"'Who can sing?' One of them stepped forward. 'Sing something.' He immediately started to sing. He had a beautiful voice. Fear made it even more so. I took his hand and led him to the choir's barrack. He was to be taught the passage. He came back a few days later. I took him to my room and made him sing. The blue distended veins on his neck moved me."

Enough for today.

Where are you going?
- To see Daddy.
- There's no need. Sit down.
- He'd feel better.
- I told you to sit down!
There's no need to worry about him.
And you-- don't worry.
I'll take care of you.
- What about him?
- I said not to worry.

Have you spoken again?
He'd like the maid
to come back.
Me too. I think--
If you continue,
you'll get in trouble.
I'm the boss here!
Angelo, if this is to go on
I'd prefer you'd to kill me.
- What do I care now?
- I know.
But I must think of Rena.
Someone will come...
to find out.
Maybe so.
We must hurry.
If you'd listen to me--
What?
Why should I?
I'm in this because of you.
I'm going to the village.
Take care of Rena.
Goodbye.
Where's the sick man?
Upstairs. Go on up.
- Have you eaten?
- I was about to.
- Later, go to your room.
- I don't want to.
Go to your room!
Please, let me go.
Open.
Sing.
Sing. He's sick.
I said, sing!
A child is born for us,
for us a child is born
For us a child is born,
for us a child is born
For us a child is born,
for us a child is born...
Sing.
Rena--
Angelo is insane.
Yes, Daddy.
Has he hurt you?
Yes.
I'm hungry.
Where is he?
I don't know.
I was shut up in my room.
Rena, we must do something.
Don't be frightened...
but he could hurt both of us.
But Daddy,
maybe he isn't feeling well.
No, Rena, he isn't.
He killed your mother.
Yes, Daddy.
You knew about it?
Yes, Daddy.
And the boys...
You knew it too?
No, I didn't know.
Rena, listen to me.
Take some paper.
You must take a letter
to the village.
Give it to the maid.
Ask her to come
and call your grandparents.
Yes, Daddy.
They won't hurt Angelo,
will they?
Rena,
if they don't hurt Angelo...
he will hurt us.
Ready, Daddy.
Rena!
Rena, come here!
I warned you.
Look.
Want a cigarette?
Want to make some money?
"...my wife's
and the children's bodies
will be found in the wine casks in the cellar.
Signed, Klaus."
Angelo?
Thank you, Angelo.