

**Scene iii**

(PERÓN sits at his desk drinking brandy and reading a newspaper. He is agitated. He is pacing and waving the newspaper.)

PERON

Of course. But of course. The good President Lanusse announces elections and then realizes he needs Peron.

(To newspaper.)

Of course you need Peron, you ridiculous ape. You are an idiot. Idiot! Do you wear clip-on ties? Millions of women in Argentina knew how much you needed Peron before you did.

(To EVA.)

It hurts me, Eva, to see my homeland in the hands of dilettantes and half-wits. Count yourself lucky that you are dead and cannot read this tripe.

(ISABEL and REGA enter with newspaper.)

ISABEL

Husband. I have something you should read.

PERON

I am a bit weary of reading right now, my dear. Perhaps later.

REGA

I think you will find this important enough. The New York Times –

PERON

The New York Times? This? Is this it, Rega? This absurd, self-important bit of blathering here? You think this is important? Did you think I would not find this on my own? What do you think you know that I do not, Rega? Hmm? What?

ISABEL

Peron. Juan. I found the article. I do not read English, but Rega explained it to me. I thought it was something you needed to see.

PERON

I have seen it. I have read it, and the two of you have become tiresome.

(To ISABEL.)

It was more peaceful around here before you became so interested in politics.

(To REGA.)

Tell me, Senor Rega, what did you explain to your mistress about this rot?

ISABEL

He said it was an interview with President Lanusse.

PERON

Very insightful.

ISABEL

I already knew that Lanusse had called elections and I knew that he set terms that made it impossible for you to run.

REGA

That you had to be living in Argentina as of August 25th.

ISABEL

But we live in Madrid, and Lanusse knows that. Why would Lanusse tell the Americans that he wants to negotiate with you. Why would he not send a letter? Or call?

PERON

Because he is illiterate? Because he is too stupid to operate a phone? Rega, you explained it all, why would Lanusse do these things?

REGA

Because he cannot win the election without you, so he cannot afford for you to refuse him.

PERON

I am stunned. Your simple insights do include some truth. He cannot. Why tell an American newspaper?

ISABEL

So the Americans would call?

PERON

Lanusse knows that I will read this article. He also knows that the people of Argentina will not, so it gives him the opportunity to come bowing and scraping before Peron, to beg like a dog in the streets without the people ever knowing about it. And that is what he is. A dog. A cur. A mongrel begging for scraps from my table. Do you know what this interview truly says?

ISABEL

I don't read English.

(DR. ARA enters.)

PERON

Don't worry about English. Read the man. I can return to Argentina, I may take up my presidency any time I please, and Lanusse only now understands this.

ISABEL

I thought you had missed the deadline. President? Argentina? Why have you kept this from me?

PERÓN

Yes, doctor?

DR. ARA

I heard voices... yes, well, I just heard... did someone call me?

PERÓN

We did not, but please come in. This conversation suffers from too many uninformed opinions.

DR. ARA

Yes, I could see that...mine isn't one of them, is it? Are you sure no one called?

PERÓN

I have been discussing a return to Argentina with the underinformed here.

ISABEL

I don't understand. I thought you couldn't run. I did not know we could even set foot in Argentina. Why have you kept this from me?

PERÓN

I have kept nothing from you. It is not my fault you did not know. You see, my dear, I can choose whichever candidate I see fit. It is that simple. I cannot run directly, but the people understand that a vote for the candidate I choose is a vote for Perón.

ISABEL

How will that make you President? If you choose another man he may do as you ask, but isn't he still the President?

PERÓN

Let us make this simple. As the two of you have recently been so interested in politics, I am sure you have heard and read many names. Who are they? Who might be the Perónist candidate for president?

(PERÓN crosses to his desk, sits down and begins searching for something, which will eventually be his sidearm, his General's hat and an ashtray. He also straps on a shoulder holster.)

REGA

Certainly Antonio.

ISABEL

Laskey. Ricardo Balbín. And what about the union leader...mmm...Ortiz?

PERÓN

Well-thought. You have been studying.

DR. ARA

I'm impressed.

REGA

General Taiata. Ramirez.

ISABEL

Would you consider Lanusse?

DR. ARA

Nice man. He always made fine tea.

PERÓN

I would not consider Lanusse. There are only three Perónist candidates.

(PERÓN points the gun at them.)

The first is General Taiata.

(PERÓN lays the gun on the desk.)

All of the candidates have their own strengths and weaknesses. The General is obviously the military candidate. If one believes that might makes right, he is right. Certainly it is not possible to rule without the military's support. To do so would be to invite another coup.

(PERÓN holds up the hat.)

The second candidate is Balbín.

REGA

He's a Marxist!

PERÓN

Thank you, Rega. That nearly escaped me. Most of the country is Marxist now. Balbín is a radical, a man of the left, but also a man of the people. Very, very intelligent. Shrewd. Certainly, if someone were to need to adjust to the job quickly, he has the capacity.

(PERÓN holds up the ashtray.)

The last candidate is Hector Campóra.

ISABEL

Who is Hector Campóra?

REGA

The dentist?

PERÓN

He was a dentist. Now he is a Perónist. So, we have our three candidates. Who to choose?

DR. ARA

I like the ashtray.

ISABEL

General Taiata?

PERÓN

Why?

ISABEL

You said he controlled the military.

PERÓN

I did not. I said only that he is the military candidate. A General is accustomed to power and would think nothing of becoming president. If I were to be president, I could control the military on my own, but it would be very difficult to actually remove a military man from office. Dangerous. I prefer to keep power like this closer to me.

(PERÓN picks up the gun and holsters it.)

Now then, Balbín the Marxist. He represents intellect, he is the Che Guevara of modern Argentina, a vital man to have around, but idealistic. The country would wither under his reign, for he lacks pragmatism. Idealists always do. This is a man I choose to keep as a friend and ally, but not to allow too much latitude.

(PERÓN places the hat on his head.)

Ah. Then there was one.

DR. ARA

As I suspected. It was the ashtray.

PERÓN

The ashtray. Hector Campóra. Campóra is a loyal Perónist, as are the other two, but Perónism means something different to everyone. Perónism means, literally, under Perón. Campóra understands this and wants nothing more.

REGA

So Campóra is the easiest to control?

PERÓN

Precisely. But easy to control men cannot be left to their own devices for too long because they might wander astray for anyone to control. The thing that Taiata and Balbín (PERÓN touches the gun and hat.) have in common is that they will not easily give up their power.

(PERÓN stands up and holds up the ashtray.)

Campóra wants nothing more than to cede his presidency to Perón.

(PERÓN puts the ashtray in his pocket.)

And that, my dear Isabelita, is how I become president. Thank you for asking.

DR. ARA

Nice how the ashtray fits in your pocket.

PERÓN

Isn't it? You knew it was Campóra all along. How?

DR. ARA

I have never known you to have a fondness for hats or sidearms...but you have always liked that ashtray.

PERÓN

You are wise in strange ways, doctor.

(PERÓN removes his hat and puts gun and holster and ashtray on the desk.)

ISABEL

(Jumps into action.)

I never thought. I never considered. I have so much to do. So much to pack. There's the house to take care of. Rega, we must begin immediately.

(ISABEL crosses to EVA and kisses her on the forehead. ISABEL goes as if to exit.)

PERÓN

I did not say we were returning to Argentina. I merely answered the question of how I would resume my presidency.

ISABEL

If you can become president again, then why would you not? If everything is truly as you think it is, then why /would you not seek to...

PERÓN

/Truly as I think it is? And who are you /to tell me how it is otherwise?

ISABEL

/Juan. Juan, I did not mean it like that.

PERÓN

(Going into dementia.)

Do not ever presume to call me Juan! I am President Peron. General Peron. Even as I am a man of the people, nobody but my wife could ever presume to call me Juan. Juan! As though I am still a boy in short pants playing football in the street...

ISABEL

I don't think Perón is feeling himself.

PERÓN

(Snatches up *New York Times* from his desk.)

Right here they call me a fascist and a murderer – do you not have to kill people in order to be a murderer? They do not even have enough honor to come up with a single person I supposedly killed. Goddamned slander!

DR. ARA

Of course, President Peron, goddamned slander.

(To ISABEL.)

Has this happened before?

ISABEL

Sometimes, when he gets excited...

PERON

How is it possible to rule a country and still be at the mercy of these libelous vermin?  
How is it possible –

REGA

(Crosses to PERON and speaks soothingly.)

General Peron.

(Taking the paper from him.)

I will personally see to it that these vultures will pay for writing these lies.

PERON

(Does not recognize REGA.)

Will you? You...

REGA

Ramirez, sir. General Ramirez. Your one true friend.

PERON

(Relieved.)

Of course. My friend. Of course.

(Looks around and sees DR. ARA)

Dr. Pedro Ara! General Ramirez, do you know who this man is? The great Dr. Ara. This is the man I was telling you about, this is the man who embalmed Vladimir Lenin. The Soviets' greatest national treasure, to this day on display in Red Square. The work of this man right here. Welcome, Doctor.

DR. ARA

Well, thank you. So glad to see you again, President Peron.

ISABEL

Is there anything you can do for him, Doctor? Please?

DR. ARA

I know of a medication that can help with these episodes, at least temporarily. If you like, I could contact a friend of mine in Berlin. I am fairly certain he could acquire it.

PERON

What are you talking about?

DR. ARA

Nothing, nothing. Petty things that should not worry a man such as yourself. Why don't you come with me, and let's run a few tests. Do you have the time?

PERON

Well...certainly. Yes, Doctor. If you think it's important.

DR. ARA

Oh, I believe time is of the essence.

(DR. ARA escorts PERON to the door.)

ISABEL

I hope Dr. Ara can help.

REGA

I hope not. Being a General suits me.

ISABEL

Rega, don't be calloused. I see how gentle you are with Peron when he is not himself.

REGA

It's easier to be gentle with him when he is somebody else.

ISABEL

You try too often to hide your kindness. You should let the rest of the world see you as I do.

(REGA crosses to ISABEL and kisses her. She responds warmly.)

REGA

As long as you see me.

ISABEL

Perhaps I will see you safe in Argentina.

(ISABEL smiles and exits. REGA crosses to PERÓN's desk. He sits down and pours himself a brandy.)

REGA

(Takes a drink and points sternly at the wall, mimics PERÓN.)

Right here they call me a murderer – do you not have to kill people in order to be a murderer?

(Takes another drink.)

Mother of God.

(REGA takes a cigar from PERÓN's humidor and smells it. He looks around for a light and finally notices EVA. He addresses her.)

This is your fault, you know. He was sane, or at least more sane, before you showed up. (REGA gets up and crosses to EVA.)

I guess it's time we got to know each other, since we've been living together all this time. Or, I've been living. So insensitive of me. Cigar?

(REGA puts the cigar in EVA's mouth. He makes several attempts before stuffing it down in the side of her mouth to get it to stay.)

There we go. I won't actually light it. These things will kill you. So, Señora Perón...oh, Eva? OK. So, Eva, what is it about you that drives men insane? I mean, really insane. Perón's crazy. Ara's definitely crazy. I'm sure if you could talk you would protest that he was crazy the day you met him. That may be, but God knows you haven't done the man any favors since then.

(REGA drains his glass, holds it high above EVA and scatters the last few drops over her and makes a half-hearted sign of the cross.)

Demons begone and all that. I've heard all the stories about your body, all the things men have done. No idea if those stories are true. You might be the only one who knows. All these crazy, crazy men. Are your feminine wiles still intact after all this time?

(REGA feels EVA's breast.)

Not my type, I guess. I imagine you were a bit more supple when you were alive.

(REGA rubs her breast again.)

I wish for great wealth!

(REGA stops and looks up expectantly.)

Hmm. Nothing. If you aren't going to smoke that, I'll take it back.

(REGA retrieves the cigar from EVA's mouth.)

All these things going on around you, and you just get to be dead. How do you feel about all this?

EVA  
(Animates.)

All what?

(REGA fumbles not to drop his brandy snifter. He controls it and casually backs away from EVA, who gets up and stands facing him.)

All what?

REGA

Are you talking to me?

EVA

(Seductively takes cigar from REGA and crosses to PERÓN's desk. She pours herself a brandy and puts her feet on PERÓN's desk.)

I don't see anyone else here. I'm sorry - would you rather assume the open position?

REGA

Is this why all those other men went crazy?

EVA

Crazy is such a subjective term. Aren't you the guy who was trying to get Isabel to talk to a dead woman?

REGA

Point taken. I suppose there's something in the brandy.

EVA

The brandy? It tastes fine to me.

REGA

Of course it does. You're not even alive. You are nothing but a bit of my subconscious, running amok in the parlor.

EVA

Believe whatever makes you happy. Do you have a light?

REGA

The doctor believes whatever makes him happy and look where it got him.

EVA

A fair point. I asked if you had a light.

REGA

No.

EVA

(Fumbling through the desk she comes up with a light.)

Never mind. I can find one myself. Perón used to always keep one...aha! Men never change. This is such a comfortable desk to sit behind, isn't it? Makes one feel very powerful, don't you think? Power is something that can be taken or given. Controlled. (Handing him the gun from the desk.) It feels good in your hand, doesn't it?

REGA

(Sets gun down.)

It feels artless.

EVA

Where is your sense of imagination, Rega?

REGA

I survive on imagination.

EVA

You are only limited by your own. Surely you have not already come to the crossroads in your life where you can not see that path before you.

REGA

I have no idea what you're talking about.

EVA

I think you do, and I think her name is Isabel. You have imagination, Rega, but no plan.

REGA

No plan? That's funny. The dead harlot wants to tell me how to seduce a woman. Maybe you should just watch me.

EVA

I believe I know how to woo her better than you.

REGA

What, a wager?

EVA

If you like.

REGA

I like stakes. But I wonder, what does the dead woman have to offer me?

EVA

What is it any woman could offer you?

REGA

Money.

EVA

Such simple goals.

REGA

Sex, then. Rarely simple.

EVA

Do you really rely only on women for such things? How provincial of you, Rega.

REGA

You'll need to do better than that to get a rise out of me. I thought you would know that much.

EVA

You know I have something to offer. Are you too proud to ask what it is?

REGA

Not at all. I am never too proud to look after my personal gain.

EVA

You know Isabel is your way out, but I wonder to what extent you realize it. You would be foolish to use her as a mere turnkey. It would be such a waste. There is much more there.

REGA

So, you're offering me Isabel? You'll have to do better than that, too.

EVA

How short-sighted of you, Rega. You may not recognize the full benefit of Isabel in Madrid; however, in Buenos Aires she will be more than you can imagine. It will be you who is lucky to have her. Even in your own opinion.

REGA

This is the idiotic sentimentality that keeps women from power. The answer is not love. The answer is almost never love.

EVA

I don't recall ever using the word love. I don't think you would know the value to such an emotion, anyway.

REGA

I would not. And you have nearly worn out your welcome. You may either offer me some actual benefit, or I will have to stop drinking.

EVA

You might as well keep drinking. It must make it easier to forget how close Senor Ibanez' hatchet men are to Madrid by now.

(REGA glares at her and pointedly puts down his drink.)

The world is not such a big place now, is it? Seems to be closing in around you. Where's your sharp tongue now?

REGA

Now the dead woman wants to lecture me about survival?

EVA

Touche.

REGA

What does the puppetmaster want out of all this? Even figments act out of self-interest.

EVA

How well you know your own mind. I never said I had any answers. Not me. I'm nothing but a cheap grifter's subconscious. I just thought, if I were you, I might want to be a bit more attentive to the idea of Argentina.

(REGA gets up to leave.)

So, I can assume this means you will remember our conversation?

REGA

Assume at your own peril, figment. Good bye.

(REGA exits and runs into DR. ARA who is entering the room.)

Doctor. She's all yours.

DR. ARA

(To EVA.)

Oh, hello.

EVA

How is Perón?

DR. ARA

Not well, but it changes, doesn't it? This is why I rarely consult with living patients.

EVA

Do you think he is up to a long trip?

DR. ARA

To be honest ...I don't think...well, no.

EVA

Then let me rephrase the question. What would you tell him if he asked you that?

DR. ARA

I don't know.

EVA

Why not just tell him what he wants to hear?

DR. ARA

I couldn't agree with you more. What do you think that is?

EVA

Perón wants to go back to Argentina.

DR. ARA

Argentina? You mean the Argentina far from here?

EVA

The one in South America, yes.

DR. ARA

I thought perhaps it was a street...but he could never survive a trip of that nature.

EVA

Are you sure?

DR. ARA

Well, one could never be one hundred percent certain when dealing with health, but there is a fair amount of risk involved. Yes, it would seem risky.

EVA

Would you really deny a dying man's greatest wish over a chance that it could kill him?

DR. ARA

I suppose it would depend on the wish.

EVA

Doctor.

DR. ARA

Yes?

EVA

Perón wants to go back to Argentina.

DR. ARA

Have you discussed this with him?

EVA

I know my husband. Will you tell him it's safe to travel?

DR. ARA

It's not actually safe, though. I cannot deny whatever he wants to do, but it's not safe, per se.

EVA  
(Playfully.)

Oh, come, doctor. Travel is safe. Everybody travels.

DR. ARA

But I only...my dear Evita...it's just not ethical...moral...

EVA  
(Pushes him into the chair.)

My strong, handsome, distinguished doctor...this isn't too much to ask, is it? For me? Can we just let Perón have his wish, to make him happy? Hmm?

DR. ARA

But it's not right...what if he doesn't make it? If he dies? I'll be...I'll be guilty...

EVA  
(Walks around behind DR. ARA, runs a hand down his chest and starts to tickle him a bit.)

No. No guilt. He's going to need the best medical care, you know. If there really is some risk...you will need work very hard to keep Perón healthy...and you know what, doctor?

(EVA moves around to DR. ARA's side and nuzzles his ear with her nose.)

DR. ARA

Umm...what?

EVA

I want to go, too. Will you come with us?

DR. ARA

I will follow you anywhere you ask. I suppose...yes. Whatever pleases you, pleases me.

EVA  
(EVA straddles DR. ARA.)

Oh, good. I'm so excited. You won't forget now, will you? Hmm? I didn't think so. I know you will do this for me after all we've been through together. I've always trusted you. Now you have to trust me.

(DR. ARA moans. Blackout.)