

PART TWO: LORENZO'S ASHES

This opera is a memory play, an endless rehearsal of the dead spirits' living passions. As such, the set is minimal and abstract, more or less resembling D. H Lawrence's Kiowa ranch some miles outside of Taos, New Mexico. But we seem to be inside the ranch house and also inside the memorial chapel that was built next to it; and yet at the same time we are outside in the open air of the Southwest desert. Stage right there is a table, cluttered with boxes, bottles, drinking glasses, books, and manuscripts. There may be chairs. At center stage we see the beginnings of the as yet unfinished altar to D. H. Lawrence and next to the altar site there is a wheelbarrow full of wet cement with a shovel stuck in the mix. On the opposite side from the table there is an unfinished window painting for the memorial, the painting which looks less like a phoenix(which in the living world it actually had been) and more like one of the naked passionate men depicted in Lawrence's oil paintings. There is loose gravel and dirt on one part of the floor, enough to fill a small box with fictitious ashes.

As the opera begins MABEL, BRETT and FRIEDA are already positioned by the altar, barely visible but holding the same poses in which they will find themselves at the opera's end.

ANGIE enters, intently perusing the large book he holds open in his hands. He seems to be hoping to find something in the writing. At some point he realizes that that which he is seeking is not to be found in the book. He stops, looks at the three women, then slams the book shut, almost with a sigh. He turns, and addresses the audience.

ANGIE

No-one reads anymore
long books full of sex.
You have uses for your texts
more immediate.

There are urges of the flesh
that no tweet can express,
that to masterful prose
grow obedient.

We are ghosts of the past
caught in passions that last
long as mesa and river endure.

ANGIE (continued)

We repeat like a sentence
of cyclic* repentance
a longing to do it once more.

Our tale begins thus: D. H. Lawrence --

{* Pronounced "sick-lick"}

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

Lorenzo!

ANGIE

The writer whose theme was passion,
The writer whose passion was life.

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

Lorenzo!

ANGIE

Author of that obscene novel
Lady Chatterley's Lover,

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

Oooo!!

ANGIE

Husband to Frieda, the German,

FRIEDA

Hoiya ta ho!

ANGIE

Beloved of Mabel, the American.

MABEL

He's mine!

ANGIE

Soul mate to Brett, shy Lady Brett, the Brit.

BRETT

I am yours.

ANGIE

D. H. Lawrence was dead.

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

Oh woe! Oh woe!

Our Pan is dead!

MABEL

Upon the mesa a plume of smoke,
pale and blue, rises, wavers
on the desert air
like a serpent in sorrow,
like a finger of bone
pointing, pointing

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

to the Old World where our young man died.

BRETT

The full moon rises silently
over the silent canyon.
In a kiva in a cavern
that hides behind snow
a small flame
flickers, flickers

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

and fails like the Old World where our young man died.

FRIEDA

The mountain is colored like the blood of Christ
but it holds to older gods
rejoicing in life
regarding our death
with the cold eye of the stars
with the steel gaze of an eagle
that soars

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

ignoring the Old World where our young man died.

Oh woe! Oh woe!

Lorenzo, are you there?

When you reach Palos Verdes take care
to proclaim that the Great God Pan is dead.

FRIEDA

Right up to the last he was alive like a man.
He faced the end so splendidly, so like a man.

ANGIE

They had a simple cheap funeral in France beneath the Alps.

MABEL

She would have made it cheap.

BRETT

He would have liked it cheap.

MABEL *[catty, but in an off-handed, habitual fashion]*

How would you know what a man would like?

The average nun has known more men than you.

BRETT *[baffled, but suspicious. She has known MABEL and her attitudes a very long time.]*

What's that? What's that?

You know I can't hear.

You need to speak into Toby.

MABEL

[speaking directly into BRETT's ear trumpet]

He never liked his women cheap.

[Back out to audience]

Why would he like such a funeral?

I could have made it wonderful.

I am rich enough to give a man whatever he wants.

BRETT

Except monogamy.

FRIEDA *[annoyed with both of them]*

And a moment's peace and quiet.

I made him the artist he was born to be.

BRETT

You made him a harpist?

FRIEDA

I made him an artist!

BRETT

An artist!

And if it required you
to abandon in England
your husband and all your children,
So what? All for art.

MABEL

Spoken like the virgin that you are.

Husbands ought to be changed
as often as the heart grows cold.

BRETT

Or as often as the old bed needs to be made,
whichever comes first.

FRIEDA

Some find the one that fits their soul
in childhood or in youth
and marry for the years to come
the forty, fifty years to come
in comfortable companionship.

MABEL

Others need to seek and share their love
with two men...

BRETT *[Correcting MABEL. She can be catty, too.]*

... Four men!

FRIEDA *[She can trump them both]*

Seven!

MABEL *[ignoring the interruptions]*

before they find a mate that fits
their oversoul and makes them whole.

BRETT

And still not monogamous!

FRIEDA

So I have returned, a widow.

ANGIE *[Brightly. He pops up whenever he is needed and rather likes the attention.]*

With a friend!

MABEL *[dryly]*

It's good to have a friend.

FRIEDA

I shall live with my friend in my cabin.

BRETT

I shall sit quietly nearby and paint.

MABEL

I cannot sit quietly.

To be still is to be dead.

To be alive is to strive.

BRETT

And you certainly cause a good deal of strife.

FRIEDA

I shall wake and ride my horse Azul across the mesa.

The mountains and the river

are diminished

because he is not here.

Lorenzo!

Come home to me

to the only home you ever owned

come home to Kiowa Ranch.

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

Come home. Come home.
Come home to Kiowa Ranch.

BRETT

She sends her friend.

MABEL

She sends her lover.

MABEL & BRETT

She sends her friend who is her lover
to France to exhume her husband's grave
like a dog digs up an old bone.

*[ANGIE moves stage right, pantomiming his journey to France. But he stops up short with
offended pride when he is compared to a dog.]*

ANGIE

I am an Italian Captain.
I don't get my hands dirty.

BRETT & FRIEDA

He hired a crew of Frenchmen who
dug up Lorenzo's body.

MABEL

Then off by train to Marseilles
to have the bones cremated.

ANGIE

We made it! Me and the ashes
ready to cruise to New York.

BRETT

Except for a bit of clerical work.

[ANGIE picks up a pile of forms from the table]

ANGIE

Forms to fill and charges to pay.
I am an Italian Captain
I don't usually work this way.

*[ANGIE nonchalantly rips the forms in half and tucks them in at the bottom of a pile of papers
on the table. So much for paperwork!]*

FRIEDA

Bring Lorenzo's ashes home.

[ANGIE slowly exits as the women sing.]

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

Come home. Come home.
Lorenzo, come home.
Come home to Kiowa Ranch.

FRIEDA

I will build you a memorial here on my ranch.

MABEL

It used to be mine.

BRETT

I have been living here most of the time.

FRIEDA

Here on my ranch an altar will greet
your ashy remains.

MABEL

Do you have anything to eat?
The trip here was famishing
I need my strength...
I intend to psychically traverse the length
of America, the Atlantic, and most of France
with magic I learned at an Indian dance.

[MABEL prepares herself for her psychic exertions with comic pseudo-spiritualist gestures. Then she strikes a pose most medium-like.]

MABEL

Come, Lawrence! Come Lawrence! Come Lawrence, come!
Come back to Taos, to Taos come. Come!
This is not a prayer, but my magic command!
My will is far stronger than you understand.

BRETT

Oh dear God, she's off again
to her voodoo cuckoo land:
chakras, mantras, yogis, fakirs
dumber than she understands .

FRIEDA

Crap and folly!
Too much money.
curdles the brain
and kills the body.

One part Shiva,
three parts Kali.
she thinks she's the Gandhi
of Taos valley.

[BRETT and FRIEDA take center stage to perform the "Mabel Town" number]

BRETT

Artists who have not yet found
great acclaim or world renown
get the chance to party down

BRETT & FRIEDA

Here in Mabel Town

FRIEDA

Starving artists, learn the drill.
Let her shape you to her will.

BRETT

Join the stray cats on her sill.

BRETT & FRIEDA

Here in Mabel Town

BRETT

Sunning with an open view
from her bedroom porch with you.
Often thoughtless...

FRIEDA

...Topless too!

BRETT & FRIEDA

Here in Mabel Town

FRIEDA

Meet her in some secret nook.

BRETT

Snuggle till your juices cook.

FRIEDA

She 'll tell it all in her next book!

BRETT & FRIEDA

Here in Mabel Town! Here in Mabel Town!
Here in Mabel Town!

[spoken] Her town!

MABEL

Haven't you something better to do?
(to Brett) You, go paint a window.
(to Frieda) You, go meet the train.

FRIEDA

The train! The train is coming
with Angelo and the ashes!
[to MABEL]
Keep that concrete wet.
I will pour it for the floor
of his memorial. Lorenzo!

[FRIEDA dashes off stage.]

MABEL

Off she goes to join her hon.

BRETT

Why does Frieda get all the fun?

MABEL

How's that?

BRETT

Sorry. I was speaking to Toby.
I wonder what her lover's like.

MABEL

An Italian. Like pasta, he's thin and gets sauced.
I prefer an Indian spouse.
He's seldom around the house
and when he is he is as quiet
as a ghost. You should try it.

[MABEL examines the window BRETT is painting]

Old maid art is what it is.
But it lacks that certain fizz
that male energy can give it.
But to paint it you must live it.

BRETT

Am I to take instruction
from a patroness of destruction?
You went through your men like Kleenex.
Now you think to work on me next?

MABEL

I admit I don't know paint.
But I understand what makes men faint.
I remember meeting Lorenzo.
A broth of a boy with a sauerkraut of a wife.

Cozy in her happy flesh,
loud and brash,
comprehending only sex,
Frieda, the mother of orgasm.

The moment I met Lorenzo
my womb was roused to reach out and take him.

BRETT

Do I really need to know this?

MABEL

I know you felt it in him, too.
Lorenzo, the groping, suffering, tragic man.
His spirit sought for the sex behind mere sex,
that force that marries mountain to the sea,
mesa to the stars.
This is what he wanted.
This I could have shown him.

BRETT

But she had him.

MABEL

But we knew him.
Now she struts around like a gay widow.

BRETT

She is the widow only of his flesh.
She was married only to his meat and bones.
Let me tell you what Lorenzo and I only knew:
I was the wife of his spirit.
The mate to his deepest sympathies.
In the womb of my spirit I bore him
a thousand children.

MABEL [*drolly*]

You don't believe in family planning?

BRETT

Our children are my paintings, my art.

[MABEL examines BRETT's window again.]

MABEL

Despite his charm, his electricity,
I wonder did he ever know
that he had a vulgar nose?

Now he will repose
in this shack of a temple?
Wouldn't he prefer something more simple?
Trapped inside this concrete shrine.

Lorenzo, you are mine!

BRETT

Mine!

MABEL & BRETT

Mine!!

[FRIEDA and ANGIE enter a bit tipsy. ANGIE carries a bottle]

FRIEDA

Hoiya ta ho!

ANGIE

Pronti!

MABEL AND BRETT

Welcome home! Welcome home!

ANGIE

Chianti for everyone!

[ANGIE pours a slurp of Chianti into four glasses on the table and gives one to each.]

ALL

Hurray!

MABEL AND BRETT *[raising their glasses to make a toast]*

You've brought back Lorenzo's ashes!

FRIEDA

Yes! The ashes! The sacred ashes!

[She waits a second for the ashes to appear.]

Give them the ashes, Angelo dear.

ANGIE

I gave them to you when I got off the train.

FRIEDA

Then I gave them back again.

ANGIE

I thought you had them

FRIEDA

I thought you had them.

ANGIE *[in his most endearing cute little boy manner]*

Whoops!

BRETT

What foolishness!

MABEL

And at what cost!

MABEL AND BRETT

D. H. Lawrence has been lost!

FRIEDA

Let's retrace our steps.

ANGIE

Let's rethink our drinks.

FRIEDA

We had a cocktail

ANGIE

We had two.

FRIEDA

With Witter Bynner.

ANGIE

Then shared a brew
with your little friend....

FRIEDA

Tinka Fechin.

ANGIE

Yes! We had a little drinka with Tinka.

MABEL

This story begins to stinka.

ANGIE

We must retrace our journey.

MABEL

I'm calling my attorney!
The greatest genius ever here by far
Abandoned in some grim tequila bar.

BRETT

As cheap a funeral as he got
at least in France he had a plot.
Now Lorenzo's in a cardboard box.
Burial most unorthodox.

FRIEDA

Keep your pants on Mabel.
And Brett,
loosen yours a little.

Angie and I will be back in a flash
with the box of Lorenzo's ash.

[to BRETT] Haven't you finished the window yet?
[to MABEL] Mabel, keep that concrete wet!

ANGIE

We will be back!

[ANGIE and FRIEDA exit hastily.]

MABEL

Well! What more could you expect?
She always was terrifically suspect.
She wanted this cabin.
She wanted his attention.
Now she wants to own even his ashes.

BRETT

They aren't really ashes at all, you know.
The remains of cremation are more like the gravel
that's scattered around on the ground here.

MABEL

Don't be so punctilious.
You are more charming
when most vague.

BRETT

Beg? I never beg! I am a Lady.

MABEL

Vague!

Vague as your comprehension.

BRETT

My deafness, you mean.

A globe of silence surrounds me
gives me distance, detachment.

My burden. My gift.

But it has never made me cruel.

MABEL

This is not cruelty, this is truth.

Were I a man I would be called powerful and ruthless
but as a woman I am called a shrew.

To hell with all of you.

My will be done!

My will be done, forever and ever!

I thank the gods that be that I
was born with money enough to sneer
at those who call me names.

I do not care! My will be done!

BRETT

My will is the will of the wind.

My way is the way of water.

To yield, to bend.

How great are wind and water
beyond the contrivances of men.

MABEL

Precisely! Our Lorenzo should be one
with wind and earth and endless stream,
not boxed up in a concrete slab
for sickly undergraduates to fawn upon.
We must release Lorenzo!

BRETT

Yes, we must release Lorenzo.

But how?

MABEL

Ashes, you say, are nothing more
than gravel that's found on any floor?

BRETT

No difference to the naked eye.
An artist knows these things.

MABEL

Quick! Before Frieda returns help me scoop up
a box of dirt.

[MABEL picks up a box from the table and MABEL and BRETT fill the box from the dirt pile.]

MABEL

When she returns I will distract her.
That's when you must act.

BRETT

What must I do?

MABEL

Replace Lorenzo's ashes with this gravel.

BRETT

Yes! I will switch Lorenzo's ashes with this gravel!

MABEL & BRETT

Let her entomb the dirt from her own floor.
We will take Lorenzo's spirit and release him
to the mesa, to the lake, to the stars.

[FRIEDA and ANGIE enter, FRIEDA holding a small, plain cardboard box.]

FRIEDA

Success! Success!

ANGIE

Lorenzo has been found.
Strange that such a tiny box
could contain the remains of such vast genius.

[BRETT moves slowly towards the box in FRIEDA'S hands.]

BRETT

Oh my soul!
Oh my heart!

[BRETT collapses, overcome with emotion.]

FRIEDA and MABEL *[FRIEDA is truly alarmed. MABEL thinks that BRETT is only pretending.]*
Brett! Brett! Are you alright?

FRIEDA

Quick, Angelo, Quick! Go fetch Doc Martin.

ANGIE

Of course, my dear.

[to audience]

Angie come here! Angie go there!

Angie goes running anywhere.

Perhaps I do it for my honey.

Perhaps I do it for her money.

FRIEDA

Angie, be off!

ANGIE

You see?

[ANGIE exits.]

FRIEDA

Oh Brett, Brett, wake up!

[BRETT revives.]

BRETT

Was I in heaven?

I heard a voice. I felt a touch.

Oh Frieda ! it was too much
to see you enter with...that...box.

I must have fainted.

MABEL *[still thinking that BRETT is play-acting in order to deceive FRIEDA.]*

Poor dear. Poor dear.

We should give her some air.

BRETT

Please, may I hold it?

Please, may I touch
the box that holds his...

MABEL *[matter- of- factly]*

...Sediment?

FRIEDA

Of course, my Brett.

He was your friend.

He was always your friend, you know.

[FRIEDA hands the box to BRETT]

MABEL

Maybe we should let her be
for a bit, alone in peace.

BRETT

Yes, oh please.

A moment, please.

I will be well.

MABEL

Come, Frieda, let's track down your Angie
and bring him back.

[to BRETT]

We will be back soon.

You will have time to...do whatever you must do.

FRIEDA

Angie, come here!

MABEL and FRIEDA

Angie, come here!

Angie, come here!

[FRIEDA and MABEL exit]

[BRETT pours Lorenzo's ashes into another empty box on the table, then pours the ashes that she collected from the floor into FRIEDA's box.]

BRETT

Let her entomb the dirt from her own floor.

Lorenzo, you were meant for more.

Free as the breeze that lapped at your thighs.

Free as the light that shone from your eyes.

Free as the power, pure and male,
that sought to join that great female,
our great mother earth.

MABEL *[offstage]*

Brett, are you decent? Here we come!

[FRIEDA, MABEL and ANGIE enter.]

ANGIE *[to the audience]*

A man could grow dizzy
obeying the tizzy
of orders from these girls.

MABEL *[to FRIEDA]*

Would you like to say a few words
over the ashes?
Then Brett and I will go
and leave you to your woe.

[FRIEDA places the false ashes upon the altar.

All gather around the altar for a long moment in silent contemplation]

FRIEDA

This is not Lorenzo.

[MABEL is shocked, thinking that FRIEDA has discovered the switch. But, no...]

Only a marker
to show where he has been.
He has gone to some place darker.

His soul was a ship on a voyage
His life was an ocean of death.
Gaily we sailed on the surface
through waves of pleasure and chance
until came the day
the bright waves ceased to play
the black ocean opened beneath
singing:

Come home. Come home.
Come home to the nothing from which you were born.

On that last day I read to him
the story of Columbus,
the sailor whose soul was a voyage,
whose life was an ocean unknown.
He followed my voice until
he shuddered , he turned
to follow all those
who sailed on before him
to sink into the pointless sea.

He tried to turn again at the last
and speak to me, or to God, or to the sea.
He cried out "I do not know where I am!"

And then he knew.
And then he died.

BRETT

There was such manly energy in everything he did.

MABEL *[off into her spiritualist tizzy again]*

Male energy!

My mystical effluvium

vibrated to the soothing drum

of his sexual soul.

BRETT *[for the first time, BRETT finds she has a backbone]*

Oh , do be quiet!

For once stop talking, Mabel.

I cannot do it.

Frieda, I cannot do it.

FRIEDA

Do what?

BRETT

I must tell someone.

MABEL *[Thinking that BRETT is talking about the switching of the ashes.]*

Be quiet!

BRETT

No! For once you be still and listen.

No more of your fantasies now.

No fantasies here. This is the truth.

He could not be a woman's friend

with intellect alone

but wholly – spirit, breath and blood

and genital and bone.

It was years ago and we abode

in two adjoining rooms.

Two nights he came.

Two nights he tried.

Two nights he left me all alone

naked and a virgin still

a failure

and a shame.

FRIEDA

What are you saying?

BRETT

He could not love me.

[She points to the urn on the altar.]

And this is not him!

MABEL

No!

FRIEDA

What?

BRETT *[Revealing the box with the real ashes]*

Here are Lorenzo's ashes.

We planned to take them from you.

MABEL

You silly, stupid, pointless girl!

Confession does not become you.

[FRIEDA seizes the ashes.]

FRIEDA

Mabel, Mabel, Mabel

what made you think that you'd be able
to take my Lorenzo from me?

Silly, foolish, poor you.

He had no patience for you.

[Now in a wild passion.]

Angie, keep stirring that concrete!

You two thought that you would steal
my husband? my passion? my soul?

Here!

Let him become one

with his altar!

Extract the artist from his temple now!

[FRIEDA moves towards the wheelbarrow to cast the ashes into the concrete. Seeing what FRIEDA intends to do, MABEL and BRETT move towards her from opposite directions. As BRETT draws FRIEDA's attention, MABEL springs from behind and snatches the box of ashes. FRIEDA pursues MABEL who tosses the box to BRETT. BRETT stands motionless with the ashes, considering what to do. Then she gives them back to FRIEDA and together they pour the ashes into the concrete. Slowly their movements become more flowing, more dreamlike. They are all returning back to the beginning of their dream.]

MABEL, BRETT, FRIEDA

Oh woe! Oh woe!
Our Pan is dead!

[ANGIE has been here before. He picks up the novel from the table and begins perusing it.]

ANGIE *[to the audience]*

There is no use disturbing them.
They live on in this dream, though dead.
They burn with passions they could not refuse.

MABEL

My will!

BRETT

My shame!

FRIEDA

My memories!

ANGIE

These passions keep them
bound to repeat in
endless dreams
their endless schemes,
grasping at emptiness.
Unable yet to pass through the gate
Unable yet to pass through the gate.

ALL

The life we knew
when life was new
stands no chance of revival.

We who here
are made to bear
the solitude of survival.

Oh woe! Oh woe!
Lorenzo is dead.
Our Pan is dead!

[The women are in the same poses with which the opera began. ANGIE again has the open book in his hands and begins perusing it almost as though he were hoping that this next time the ending will be different.]

[END OF OPERA]