

GARIBALDI Dedicated to the garibaldine hero Antonio Fratti

A One Act Play
by Mario Fratti
© 2007

The Island of Caprera
Rustic ambiance

JOURNALIST: (*caressing Garibaldi's red shirt she is now wearing; smiling*) Thank you.
GARIBALDI: Red is very becoming to you... it is a color that enhances your beauty.
JOURNALIST: It has always worked for you. And now, I can also remember you without...
GARIBALDI: (*smiling*) Without?
JOURNALIST: The way you were a while ago, when you were enjoying the passion of that color.
GARIBALDI: My favorite.
JOURNALIST: ... The most beautiful hour of my life.
GARIBALDI: For me too.
JOURNALIST: You've probably said that 100 times.
GARIBALDI: (*teasingly*) Less... But at this moment it is true.
JOURNALIST: Wasn't it true the other times, with your other lovers?
GARIBALDI: Women. It's always true when you are together, when you are in love.
JOURNALIST: Are you in love with me?
GARIBALDI: Of course. You can only make love when you are in love.
JOURNALIST: Really?
GARIBALDI: It helps.
JOURNALIST: It is true. I don't love my husband. (*vague*) Therefore...
GARIBALDI: It's always different.
JOURNALIST: You, you are "different". (*a brief pause*) With the other women too?
GARIBALDI: Each woman is a special moment in my life.
JOURNALIST: Even me, today? Am I a "moment"?
GARIBALDI: It's always unique the moment when you discover a new truth, a new battle, a new woman.
JOURNALIST: Am I... a "battle" for you?
GARIBALDI: Anxiety, fear, victory.
JOURNALIST: Are you talking about us or about the battle? Am I a victory, for you?
GARIBALDI: With Anita, after a bloody, difficult battle, we celebrated the victory in our embrace. The two feelings blended. They complemented each other. A battle, victory, love.
JOURNALIST: Was she your greatest love?
GARIBALDI: We fought together, we suffered together.
JOURNALIST: I am ready to —
GARIBALDI: (*interrupting*) ... to everything, I know. You proved it today. Anita left her husband for me. You hinted you might do the same for me. It's a sacrifice I cannot accept.
JOURNALIST: Why not? Would you feel guilty?
GARIBALDI: Look at me. Think about it. Here I am on an island, old and in bad shape, with pince-nez glasses that don't fit, full of wounds, physical and psychological.
JOURNALIST: I love you the way you are. Perfect.
GARIBALDI: **You** came to me, smiling, **you** conquered me. I feel lucky today. For one day.
JOURNALIST: Did you feel guilty when Anita left her husband?
GARIBALDI: No... We were young... A great passion...
JOURNALIST: Different from ours?
GARIBALDI: Different, yes. I am much older and wiser, today.
JOURNALIST: Wise and serene. I felt protected and loved.
GARIBALDI: (*pleasantly surprised*) "Protected and loved". That's what Anita told me. Those same words.
JOURNALIST: Most women dream of that. When did she tell you?
GARIBALDI: After her escape from prison...
JOURNALIST: What prison? When? Did you help her in that get away?

GARIBALDI: (*avoiding because he did not help her in that circumstance*) They were difficult times... she was captured by Colonel Albuquerque. She was pregnant with our first son.

JOURNALIST: Menotti. In 1840. I read about it.

GARIBALDI: It was an unexpected joy. I didn't know I would be so happy and proud to be a father.

JOURNALIST: I am ready to give you a child.

GARIBALDI: (*ignoring*) We got married in 1842... Then we had other children, other joys. Rosita in '43, Teresita in '44, Ricciotti in '47.

JOURNALIST: A real "pater familias"... but... were you a faithful husband?

GARIBALDI: Of course. She deserved all my love. She accepted my choices. Battles and adventures—dangerous close calls. In Genoa, with our legionari, on the ship Bifronte... Nizza, Livorno—

JOURNALIST: She was always with you?

GARIBALDI: Always with me. (*continuing*) Florence, Genoa, Rieti... and then again, in Nizza. Always on the run, always hounded.

JOURNALIST: After so many children, did you have the same passion for each other, the same desire to...? (*vague gesture*)

GARIBALDI: Of course. For her and for Italy. Same ideas, same dedication. Our passion never died. We wanted to liberate Rome.

She was at my side also in the battle of Sant'Angelo in Vado and Monte Tassona, in the swamps of Comacchio...

JOURNALIST: Did you find the time to make love to her? to give her what a woman wants?

GARIBALDI: Always.

JOURNALIST: Even among corpses, the wounded, so much blood?

GARIBALDI: Near the wounded, our country's martyrs, the desire to live increased intensely. The desire to procreate.

JOURNALIST: Procreate?

GARIBALDI: Nature. You make love because you have desires. Children are the results.

JOURNALIST: (*looking for a confirmation*) She was your only great love?

GARIBALDI: Anita was an incredible woman... Twelve days after Menotti's birth, she found herself surrounded by the imperial troops in Mortasa. She succeeded in fleeing, half naked, on a horse, with a baby in her arms. For four days, I looked for her everywhere... I thought I had lost her forever. Then finally, ...

JOURNALIST: What happened? Where was she?

GARIBALDI: In the woods where she fed herself with roots and fruits, to breastfeed our Menotti.

JOURNALIST: Do you think you loved her more than the other women in your life because you suffered so much together?

GARIBALDI: Because we fought together for a just cause, for a country finally united: Italy.

JOURNALIST: Not only for Italy...

GARIBALDI: What do you mean?

JOURNALIST: What about the beginning? You were fighting for Uruguay, against Argentina.

GARIBALDI: We were getting ready for the future battles in Italy. We were preparing and waiting for the right time.

Anita was at my side also in the battle of San Antonio del Salto when, with less than 200 men, we defeated 1500 Oribisti soldiers. She was a wonderful nurse, when necessary, encouraging and taking care of the wounded. And later, in the two naval battles at Imbituba and Barra, she was encouraging everybody, setting the example. At Barra, alone, under the enemy fire, she brought us ammunitions. In dangerous seas, she brought us what we needed.

JOURNALIST: Alone?

GARIBALDI: Can you imagine? She was isolated, in a small boat... 12 incredible, miraculous trips. She saved that battle. She was the one who encouraged us and solved problems in crucial moments. Even at the battle of Santa Vittoria. We were 500 against 2000 imperial troops. She was always on the front line. The courage of a lioness.

JOURNALIST: The two of you—lions.

GARIBALDI: Yes, a few times they did call us a couple of lions.

JOURNALIST: Lions against black sheep. I have read that you always hated the priests.

GARIBALDI: I dislike priests only because they hinder the unity of Italy. And because... they are responsible for Anita's death.

JOURNALIST: How so? Why do you feel they are responsible?

GARIBALDI: For how much she had to suffer. Continuous deprivations. In '49 we were defending the Roman republic against the Neapolitans and the French who wanted to give Rome back to the Pope. It was July, a very hot month. She was exhausted and ... she left us.

JOURNALIST: She died.

GARIBALDI: I don't like that verb. She left us.

JOURNALIST: In '49.

GARIBALDI: You know so much about us. What about you?

JOURNALIST: I know just a few things, what they wrote about you... My life... I'm embarrassed to tell you... the easy life of a journalist... Travels, some adventures... Not like yours of course. I love Italy and I admire what you did, all of you. *(after a brief pause)* After Anita, Was there ever another great love?

GARIBALDI: No. It's impossible to find one like her.

JOURNALIST: But for sure, much later...

GARIBALDI: *(confessing)* After a few years... Yes, there was a woman I loved very much and from whom I learned...

JOURNALIST: In bed?

GARIBALDI: No. Our relationship was platonic. Great respect, a great friendship.

JOURNALIST: You were a young widower. There was passion. Desire to... *(vague gesture)*

GARIBALDI: *(admitting)* It almost happened... a romantic ride through the woods in Sardinia... There was admiration and attraction...

JOURNALIST: Like ours? ...

GARIBALDI: *(ignoring)* Unfortunately...

JOURNALIST: Unfortunately?

GARIBALDI: She broke her leg. She was stuck in Rome.

JOURNALIST: Why didn't you go to her, if you were so much in love?

GARIBALDI: There was a death sentence on my head. The priests didn't forget and forgive. We tried to take Rome away from their dominion.

JOURNALIST: So, who was this woman?

GARIBALDI: Speranza von Schwartz, a generous refined lady. I learned a great deal from her.

JOURNALIST: What?

GARIBALDI: The art of diplomacy, political savoir-faire, courage in difficult situations. We had a dangerous collaboration. She smuggled secret political messages from us, for us. She was even captured and locked in a squalid jail, her, a sophisticated aristocratic English lady.

JOURNALIST: Was it because of you? Your fault?

GARIBALDI: She was accused of collaborating with us. It was true. She was never discouraged. She started sending me beautiful letters. I warned her to avoid delicate details. The Pope's police was censoring all letters.

JOURNALIST: A brave woman...

GARIBALDI: And incredibly generous. She did a great deal for Anita.

JOURNALIST: *(surprised)* Anita?

GARIBALDI: Yes. Battistina's daughter.

JOURNALIST: Who is Battistina?

GARIBALDI: A young girl who lived here on this island... She took care of the house, of all my needs...

JOURNALIST: And she was Anita's mother? Was Anita your child?

GARIBALDI: My daughter. Then Battistina left the island and Speranza took care of Anita's well being. Education, school, anything she needed.

JOURNALIST: Were you in love with this Battistina?

GARIBALDI: *(uneasy)* She was a good woman, she was in love with me. In the same house, diligent, active, generous... Alone at home... Those things happen.

JOURNALIST: *(ironical)* Things happen. Other women, other children?

GARIBALDI: Please, darling, we had a wonderful night of love. Let us not spoil it with embarrassing questions. Delicate ones.

JOURNALIST: Women are curious. The eternal question. Why do men need so many lovers?

GARIBALDI: Many? Who told you that?

JOURNALIST: Experience. You live and learn. I did.

GARIBALDI: *(careful, slowly)* It happens in life that you meet... admirers. They think you are a hero, a God... They want to make love to you.

JOURNALIST: And you?

GARIBALDI: I'm human and vulnerable. Like so many. At times...

JOURNALIST: At times?

GARIBALDI: Let's talk about you... You are much younger than me... Curious, loving... You came to visit me—

JOURNALIST: Just to visit you, for an interview. You are the one who ... began. (*vague gesture*)

GARIBALDI: Me?

JOURNALIST: The first caress, you.

GARIBALDI: One sees a beautiful, slender hand ... poetically pale... One feels the need to kiss it. Are you sorry we... ?

JOURNALIST: Oh no, it was wonderful. Notwithstanding the presence of ... (*indicates a corner of the room*)

GARIBALDI: Of whom?

JOURNALIST: That woman who is spying on us.

GARIBALDI: Francesca. She's very good. She keeps everything in order, a perfect housekeeper.

JOURNALIST: Another... Battistina?

GARIBALDI: More or less...

JOURNALIST: Other children?

GARIBALDI: (*uneasy*) Yes... Clelia.

JOURNALIST: Your child?

GARIBALDI: Yes.

JOURNALIST: And she's not jealous of me, of all the women who come to visit you?

GARIBALDI: She's human... She's probably jealous... But she's patient and wise... She hopes ...

JOURNALIST: For what? ...

GARIBALDI: A future, with me.

JOURNALIST: A marriage?

GARIBALDI: Perhaps. It's human to hope... But there are problems; I'm still married. They have not annulled my 1860 marriage.

JOURNALIST: Oh yes. The young Marchesina Giuseppina Raimondi. The greatest disappointment of your life—some say.

(*Garibaldi stares at her; he doesn't like the subject*)

JOURNALIST: You were 53... She was 18. Where was your wise friend Speranza? The one with good advice?

GARIBALDI: It was a huge mistake, I know. I shouldn't have done it. But she seemed so deeply in love. It is difficult for a man to resist that temptation... the great love, the impossible dream.

JOURNALIST: And when you discovered she was pregnant—

GARIBALDI: Too late. Dumas told me at the last moment. I couldn't stop the ceremony.

JOURNALIST: Wasn't Luigi Caroli the father? The young—

GARIBALDI: (*angry, determined*) That's enough. Did you come here to remind me of a defeat?

JOURNALIST: It's better to face the truth. What she did to you, what you suffered—

GARIBALDI: (*interrupting*) In life, we must only speak about positive things, glorious moments. In 1860, a few months after that unhappy wedding, I called to arms one thousand red shirts. We disembarked and conquered Marsala. It was a triumph. It's what counts in life, when you love your country. We defeated 3000 Borbonic soldiers. It was there that they crowned me Dictator of Sicily. I accepted in the name of Victor Emanuel II. It was at that point that I was convinced that only Monarchy could at that moment unite Italy. Mazzini's dream of a republic was losing ground. Then, conquest of Palermo, march toward Naples where Sardinian troops joined us and helped us. Our dream was becoming a reality. You see, these are the moments we must remember. Love for Italy.

JOURNALIST: (*very feminine and coquettish*) You called me "Italia" when... at the moment of your intense pleasure inside me...

GARIBALDI: It happens now and then. For me, love for a woman and love for Italy are a magic, wonderful blend.

JOURNALIST: "At times" ... Did it happen with your first lover, Emma Roberts, in 1856?

GARIBALDI: (*irritated, losing his patience*) When are you leaving? I'll tell them to prepare the boat.

JOURNALIST: (*timid and coquettish*) Two more days, please... (*a silence*) at least one.... You're my hero. I've always dreamt of you. I just can't leave now. I haven't finished the interview.

(encouraged by his silence) Your wound at Aspromonte, how did it happen? In what battle?

GARIBALDI: A misunderstanding... General Cialdini sent Colonel Pallavicino with the regular army to stop our advance in Calabria. They shot at us, our volunteers... It was a brief skirmish. I ordered my soldiers not to shoot back at regular soldiers, Italians like us, our brothers. I was wounded in that skirmish.

JOURNALIST: Gravely?

GARIBALDI: No. They took care of my wound at Varignano. I was their prisoner, but they treated me with respect. After a few weeks, I was able to ride again.

JOURNALIST: There was hope in the revolutionary "carbonaro" movement, in Mazzini's "Giovane Italia" when they elected the new Pope in 1846. Pius IX. Were you hopeful, you too?

GARIBALDI: For a few days. One has hope in the wisdom of a Pope who says he loves Italy. What Italy? The one without Rome and Venice?

JOURNALIST: How is your relationship with Mazzini?

GARIBALDI: I have a high regard for him. Even if he made a serious mistake with the Mantua plot and the failed revolution in Milano in 1853. We told him it was a premature conspiracy. And it cost him Cavour's protection, who started to persecute him after that.

JOURNALIST: And your relationship with Cavour?

GARIBALDI: He gave Nizza, the "italianissima" Nizza, the city where I was born, to the French. I can't stand him.

JOURNALIST: What about the French? You collaborated with them in 1859 against the Austrians.

GARIBALDI: They didn't allow our troops to wear the red shirts. Those shirts reminded them of the battle for the defense of Rome, the battle we almost won. They forced us to wear stiff military uniforms. I felt I was suffocating without my red shirt.

JOURNALIST: What's your opinion of the English?

GARIBALDI: They always accepted us and treated us with respect. They helped our struggle against France and Austria. In 1864, I met the Prime Minister Henry Palmerston in London, and I gave him a message for Queen Victoria.

JOURNALIST: What message?

GARIBALDI: "Queen, you who are so good, order the end of that massacre. Crete is becoming a cemetery." I begged her to help the people of Crete who were being murdered by the Turks. England is the only country with a fleet and a strong army. The only one that should intervene.

JOURNALIST: Did they send help?

GARIBALDI: Unfortunately, no. I sent 500 volunteers led by my son. They stopped them.

JOURNALIST: What do you think of the Americans?

GARIBALDI: Good people.

JOURNALIST: Did they help you?

GARIBALDI: Meucci hired me in his candle factory. I worked for him. In that country, only those who work, eat. They call it "Protestant ethic". I learned it from the Masons.

JOURNALIST: Are you religious?

GARIBALDI: There is always faith in the hearts of those who love. But you can be really religious only when you see that the church is not at the service of the rich and the powerful.

(singing) "Va fuori, o straniero!" Get out, enemy of Italy! Those who work against the unity of Italy are enemies. Out!

JOURNALIST: Is it true that at the beginning of the Civil War in America, in 1861, President Abraham Lincoln invited you to be one of his Generals?

GARIBALDI: It's true.

JOURNALIST: Why didn't you go?

GARIBALDI: I put down a condition he was not ready to accept at that moment. He had to abolish slavery.

JOURNALIST: *(indicating)* I see that black flag with a volcano at the center, what kind of banner is that?

GARIBALDI: The flag that moves me the most when I remember. We used it in Uruguay, during the war against the Argentinian dictator Juan Manuel De Rosas. Black represents Italy in mourning. The volcano is the symbol of the power of the revolution. A volcano that will free Italy.

(declaiming) From Trapani to Isonzo, from Taranto to Nizza! Italy, free and united!

JOURNALIST: Do you still have hopes for Nizza?

GARIBALDI: I still hope. I always hope. I will always be at the head of my beloved red shirts.

JOURNALIST: *(timidly)* How come in all wars, it's the soldiers who die and never the generals?

GARIBALDI: *(surprised)* A strange question...

(searching) It's the duty of the leaders not to die.

JOURNALIST: What do you mean?

GARIBALDI: A General is also a symbol.

JOURNALIST: What symbol?

GARIBALDI: Father, leader, protector. He must keep that aura. He must seem invincible, to encourage those who are defying death.

JOURNALIST: What about him? Does he defy death?

GARIBALDI: Of course... in some cases, in many moments. But only if it is absolutely necessary, to avoid a possible defeat.

JOURNALIST: Why don't you write the beautiful things that you say and live so intensely?

GARIBALDI: I'm writing now "The Priests' Government", a novel that describes them. Later, I'll probably write the story of the "One Thousand Red Shirts".

She approaches him and would like to caress him; he indicates with his eyes, a corner of the room.

Be careful... She's watching...

JOURNALIST: *(looking at the corner indicated by Garibaldi)* I see, I see...

She looks like a ghost...

Still there, spying on us...

GARIBALDI: Ignore her... *(softly, moved)*

She gives me a feeling of tenderness...

She loves me and wants to protect me... A tender mother...

JOURNALIST: Mother? She's younger than you, and she's not beautiful.

GARIBALDI: She will never leave me. *(a brief pause)* Perhaps...

JOURNALIST: Perhaps?

GARIBALDI: ... I'm going to marry her...

They look at each other, motionless.

Blackout.

The End