

THE L.A. SCENE

A One-Act Musical

By

Elías Miguel Muñoz

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*To Tede Mathews, beloved
friend. In Memoriam.*

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PERSONAE

JULIAN TOLEDO, 29, a Cuban-American musician.

JOHNNY TOLEDO, 26, an engineer and a Jehovah's
Witness. GENEIA TOLEDO, 13, a Cuban-American "Valley
Girl." ERIKA JOHNSON, a rock star.

THE REPORTER, someone looking for a story.

SETTING

A recording studio in Los Angeles.

TIME

1986

PROPS

- A guitar.
- A standing microphone with headphones.
- A Walkman.
- A music stand with sheet music.
- Posters of rock bands bearing the following names: WACK!,
JULIAN AND THE L.A. SCENE, EATING HUMANS, MEN OUT OF WORK,
VULTURE CLUB, DUNCE DUNCE.
- Several high stools.
- A pocket cassette recorder.
- Notebook and pencil.

MUSIC

As in most musicals, the songs performed in this play are an integral part of the story. They not only provide insights into the characters but are also depict fragments of JULIAN's career. He is a musician and a recording artist. This work tells the story of his family as it enacts the production of a record album. The play is an anthology of memories set to music.

JULIAN sings five of the seven songs. "Once Upon a Time In the City of Angels" and "L.A. Boulevard" are cuts from his Platinum Album. These numbers have a sophisticated studio sound. "Once Upon a Time" is the show's main theme and needs a hard-driving disco beat. "L.A. Boulevard" starts out as bounce rock, breaks into salsa, and goes back to rock at the end. The salsa bridge must feature some of the following instruments: maracas, clave, bongos, palito, güiro.

There are three songs that depict the Toledos' exile with melancholy and nostalgia: "Sugar Cane Drinks," a bolero that has a merry-go-round feel to it; the folksy ballad "Returning," which is the character's tribute to Tomás, his grandfather; and "Song for a Little Sister," a ballad with a catchy, melodious refrain and a tropical rhythm.

"Always See the Light" is a lullaby which could have minimal accompaniment (only a guitar or a lush orchestration of piano and strings. It is performed with artistry and feeling by GENEIA. "Spring" needs a soulful sax, a piano, and powerful vocals. ERIKA puts her soul into this performance. She becomes a Fifties torch

song singer, an enticing retro fantasy.

Except for "Spring," all musical numbers have a distinctly Latino flavor.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Most of the stage represents a recording studio. Upstage center there is a cubicle featuring a plate glass window where intricate equipment is seen or suggested by a painting. A microphone equipped with studio headphones, the type normally used in recording sessions, stands downstage right.

GENEIA's room is downstage left of the cubicle. Record covers, magazines, and a Walkman are strewn on the floor. And there are posters of rock bands on the walls. One of the posters is of JULIAN AND THE L.A. SCENE. It features a close-up of JULIAN at the piano and three other Cuban-American players in the background. One of them is playing the bongos, another an electric bass guitar, and the third one plays a trumpet. Their image is casual and Latino, but without a clichéd mambo or salsa look.

There is a spectral light in the cubicle that creates an intimate and at times surreal atmosphere. When it shines on the characters, this light accentuates all expressions of emotion. Anger, disappointment, love, pain, nostalgia, happiness pour through the glass. The cubicle is the past, the present, and the future. It is, ultimately, the passage between fantasy and life.

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THE L.A. SCENE was performed at Duo Theater in New York City on February 15, 1990 with the following cast:

JULIAN..... Humberto Alabado
JOHNNY..... Agustín Rodríguez
GENEIA..... Laura E, Delano
ERIKA..... Sara Weaver
REPORTER..... Pamela Scott

It was directed by Mary Lisa Kinney. The artistic director was Michael Alasá. Musical direction was by Bronwen Jones.

The following songs were performed:

- ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE CITY OF ANGELS (Lyrics by E.M. Muñoz, Music by Bronwen Jones.)
- * SONG FOR A LITTLE SISTER (Lyrics and music by E.M.Muñoz.)
- * SUGARCANE DRINKS (Lyrics by E.M.Muñoz, Music by J. Mirkin.)
- * L.A. BOULEVARD (Lyrics by E.M.Muñoz, Music by Bronwen Jones.)
- * RETURNING (Lyrics by E.M.Muñoz, Music by J. Mirkin and E.M.M.)
- * ALWAYS SEE THE LIGHT (Lyrics by Virginia Muñoz and E.M.Muñoz, Music by Curt Smith.)
- * SPRING (Lyrics and music by E.M.Muñoz.)

SCENE 1

Dark stage. The instrumental version of "Once Upon Time in the City of Angels" resounds, and it gradually fades as lights go up on JULIAN. He sits on a stool, playing the guitar. He is wearing black jeans, a silk shirt, a leather vest, boots, and dark-tinted sunglasses.

JULIAN: *(To the audience)* It seems to me I have two choices. I can either sit in the dark feeling sorry for myself, or I can play some music. Songs from my Platinum Album, "Once Upon a Time in the City of Angels." *(He plays and stops abruptly, facing the audience.)* Who are you, anyway? Are you fans of the hottest group in town? JULIAN AND THE L.A. SCENE! Well, have I got news for you... Old news? Bah! You probably heard about it already. *(The intro to "Once Upon Time in the City of Angels" comes on.)* Let's give you what you came here for. *(He takes his glasses off.)* Take it from the top!

JULIAN spins around, dances, gets into the driving disco rhythm and sings...

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE CITY OF ANGELS

Once upon a time in the city of lights
Once upon a time in the city of angels
Once upon a time in the city of lights
Once upon a time there were angels

When you're here
you will forget where you came from
You can be just who you wanna be
The time is right
if you can fly with the angels
Don't look back
the past is gone
Don't look back
you're a star!

Once upon a time in the city of lights
Once upon a time in the city of angels
Once upon a time in the city of lights
Once upon a time there were angels

When you're here
just play the game like we all do
You can fly if you can hear the beat
You'll have to find
your way some day to the angels
You must find
your way some day
like we did

Once upon a time in the city of lights
Once upon a time in the city of angels

Once upon a time in the city of lights
Once upon a time there were angels

Don't look back
the past is gone
you're in the city of angels
'Cause you're a star
and you're one of us
You're a star
You're a star and you're one of us!

JULIAN puts his glasses on and takes a bow.

JULIAN: I'm the Hispanic Rocker, at your service. (He laughs.) The best thing to come along since Babalú! (Euphoric) My sound is happening, man! It's maximum raging! (He spreads his arms, displaying himself sensuously.) Go ahead, pull my strings, I'm your creation. (He caresses his body seductively.) Strike my cymbals, my palito, my clave! Write my words! Make me sing! (He takes another bow. Pause. He will pronounce his name in Spanish first and then in English.) Julián Toledo... Julian Toledo, image of the Crossover Dream... (he takes his glasses off) doesn't know who the hell he is. (The intro to "Once Upon Time" is heard, faintly, as JOHNNY appears in the cubicle. JULIAN is dancing.) A bailar! A gozar! A gozar, caballero! (JOHNNY enters and sits on a stool, reading a comic book. He is clean-cut and dresses preppy. JULIAN stops dancing and points to him.) Alright, why not. Let's

begin the family album here, with my brother Johnny. When we were teenagers, and our sister Geneia was just a baby...

Black out.

SCENE 2

Dark stage. A baby's cry is heard. Lights up on the two brothers. They are teenagers. JOHNNY is reading his comics. JULIAN stands by the cubicle, peeking in.

JULIAN: Hey, Johnny, she sure cries a lot.

JOHNNY: Babies are supposed to cry a lot, you idiot.

JULIAN: Yeah, I remember when you were little. I used to stuff your mouth with toilet paper so you wouldn't howl so much.

JOHNNY: You pig!

JULIAN: You didn't cry, no, you screamed. Like a goat. Beeeehhhh!

JOHNNY: Oh sure, and you were born singing, right? El Señor Canario! *(Whistling and flapping his arms)* A cute little bird.

JULIAN chases his brother, playfully. The baby is crying again.

JULIAN: *(Peeking through the glass)* Do you think she's ill?

JOHNNY: I don't know. Just don't sing to her; she'll get worse.

JULIAN: Not funny, little brother! *(He sings a heart-felt lullaby in Spanish; the crying stops.)* Arrurú, mi niña. Arrurú mi amor. Arrurú... *(To his brother)* See? It worked. Now you try it.

JOHNNY: I don't sing.

JULIAN: No, you just make stupid faces at her. *(He makes faces.)*
And you make her cry every time.

JOHNNY: Shut up!

JULIAN: Who wouldn't cry looking at you...

JOHNNY: You think you're so hot with all your music. A bum, that's what you are. *(He grabs the guitar, strumming wildly and parodying his brother's lullaby.)* Arrurú Bah duh duh...!

JULIAN: *(He takes the guitar)* Give me that!

JOHNNY: You're never home. You don't pitch in with any of the work!

JULIAN: *(Defensive)* I do what I can.

JOHNNY: Papi's right. You're mixed up with the wrong kind of people. *(As he exits through the cubicle)* And you're gonna get in trouble sooner or later.

JULIAN: *(Angry)* Who I choose for a friend is none of your damn business! *(He strums the guitar.)* You goat! Beeeehhhh!

GENEIA appears in the cubicle as lights dim to black.

SCENE 3

Lights up on GENEIA, in the cubicle. She steps out holding a bone-shaped biscuit for her dog, and singing. She is eight years old and is clad in a school uniform; her hair is in pigtails.

GENEIA: *(Entering her room)* Brown bear, brown bear, what do you

see? I see a little pink flower looking at me. Pink flower, pink flower what do you see? I see a little Princess looking at me...
(She prances and lovingly teases her pet, holding up the biscuit.) C'mon, girl, sit! Sit girl, sit! *(She crouches down and plays with the dog.)* Good Princess! *(Pause.)* I bet you want to know how I'm doing in school. Well, I'll tell you, girl, school is fine. It's the teachers that are retarded! I gave my homework to the Math teacher a week ago and just today she goes to me, "I can't find your paper, Geneia, and you're going to lose points." I felt like telling her, Ho! Wait a minute Gringa, I gave you the stupid homework! *(She pets the dog.)* I was so mad! *(JULIAN appears in the cubicle.)* The truth is, I'm in big trouble at school, Princess. They almost suspended me. You know why? 'Cause... 'cause I bit one of my classmates on the arm! *(She growls, acting out the biting.)* He was bugging me and taking my pencils and calling me Perra, Geneia the Dog. He said I barked just like a dog. So I showed him how much of a perra I could be. *(She growls fiercely.)* I bit him so hard I could taste his blood!

A dim light on GENEIA. She freezes.

JULIAN enters and walks to the mike. He puts on headphones and awaits directions from a sound engineer inside the cubicle.

Spotlight on JULIAN. He sings part of "Song for a Little Sister" as if in recording session. Then, on the line "We can't sing of the past," he takes the headphones off and approaches GENEIA, singing directly to her.

SONG FOR A LITTLE SISTER

When you slip away
through my fingers
When you smile
and you intrigue me
with your words
with your words
that are foreign
to my plight

When you slip away
through my fingers
When you smile
and you intrigue me
I deny
I deny
that the memory lingers

Let me sing a song
for you sister
little sister
Listen to your song
little sister
little sister

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We can't sing of the past
I can't sing of my heroes
But I will sing this song
Our love is strong
Our love is anchored
in bright mirrors

Come and hear your song
little sister
little sister
Listen to your song
little sister
little sister

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When you slip away
through my fingers
When you smile
and you intrigue me
I deny
I deny
that the memory lingers

But I'll sing this song
for you sister
little sister
Listen to your song

little sister

little sister...

born in this land

JULIAN returns to the mike and observes GENEIA, who resumes her monologue without noticing him.

Lights dim on JULIAN.

GENEIA: The teacher told Daddy that I need to see a doctor, Princess, one of those head doctors for children, for when you're kinda cuckoo, you know. She says I need lotsa help 'cause I think I'm a dog. *(She holds up the biscuit, making the dog jump.)* But I don't need a doctor! I just wanna be like you because... because you're my best friend, and I believe what you tell me! You have to defend yourself with your teeth when people are mean to you, right? *(She growls.)* Bite them and show them how strong you are. And when they're nice you stick out your tongue and lick them, no? *(JULIAN exits laughing. JOHNNY appears in the cubicle.)* I licked Grandma the other day and she gave me that look, you know, the serious look. *(Suddenly somber)* Grandma doesn't like you, Princess. She says you're dangerous like a lion. *(Proud)* And I say great. Be a lion!

Lights dim to black as GENEIA exits.

SCENE 4

Lights up on JOHNNY, in the cubicle. He is wearing a three-

piece suit and holding a Bible. He enters and stands downstage center, facing the audience.

JOHNNY: Abuelo, how are you? ¿Cómo tú estás? I'm gonna get married, Grandpa! Are you happy for me? Qué bueno, viejo. But first I have to go to school and then get a job. I'm gonna be an engineer, what do you think of that? It's a good profession for people with a mechanical mind, like me. And it pays a lot of money!

JULIAN enters. JOHNNY gazes at him, uneasy, and freezes.

JULIAN: *(To the audience)* Johnny has become a Jehovah's Witness. He claims he found "true" brothers in the Kingdom Hall. Guess that makes me "untrue."

JULIAN waves a hand for JOHNNY to go on. JOHNNY unfreezes.

JOHNNY: My girlfriend's Cuban, too, and she's a Witness. You'll get to meet her soon. I'm lucky to have found her, Abuelo. Yeah, she's gonna be a great wife for me. *(Holding up the Bible)* I know with the help of Jehovah I'll make her happy, and I'll find a job and we'll have children, at least five. *(Boasting)* Por lo menos!

JULIAN: *(To the audience)* By now I have flown the family coop and I've been around, doing gigs with my band. Weddings, Quinceañeras, New Year's parties... *(As he turns to his brother.)* My father thinks I'm wasting my time. *(Pause.)* And my mother... Mami's the same as she'll always be. *(Impersonating his mother)* I'm proud of you, mi niño. You're so young and already you're playing your music everywhere. *(Intimate)* Don't forget to eat well, Julianito, comida caliente...

JOHNNY: But let's talk about you, Abuelo. How are you feeling? You must be tired of sitting down all the time. Is Abuela making all your favorite food for you? *(As he walks into the cubicle)* She'd better be!

JOHNNY stands in the cubicle, his face in chiaroscuro.

JULIAN: *(To the audience)* My grandmother doesn't like what I do for a living. *(Impersonating his grandmother)* Two kids raised under the same roof, with the same love, and they're like day and night! How can that be? *(Resentful, pointing to JOHNNY)* He's day and I'm night. Right, Abuela? I'm the dark one! *(Pause. Lights down on JOHNNY.)* No, she doesn't like my singing anymore, but she used to love it. Whenever I sang the boleros that played in the kiosk, back in Camagüey, she'd take me in her arms. *(He revels in the memory)* Garlic and cilantro, manzanilla... Her hips would start moving, swaying. *(Embracing himself)* Her powerful body held me and she danced with crazy love...

He sings.

SUGAR CANE DRINKS

There was a kiosk
with a jukebox.
You'd buy sugar cane drinks
and black bean soup.

Music played while you drank.

Songs of never-ending blues.

There was a kiosk
with sugar cane drinks.

A woman danced.

She prayed to her gods
as she held me so tight
all through the night.

I believed in her dreams.
Always be there by her side.
I was her boy,
forever her child.

I've been hearing her voice
full of love, through the years.
It still rings in my ears
in the warm summer nights.

Tales of mythical worlds.
Tales of tropical skies.
I've been hearing her voice
all my life.

The jukebox's gone.
The kiosk is gone, too.

.....
But I still can remember
sugar cane drinks.

*GENEIA appears in the cubicle as JULIAN sings the last line.
He looks at her and exits.*

SCENE 5

GENEIA enters her bedroom. She is now eleven years old. She is carrying her Walkman, earphones on, and is dancing to fast-paced rock music (which we don't hear.) The T-shirt she is wearing bears the name of rock group: WACK!

GENEIA: (Excited, to her dog) You like my room, Princess? Isn't it the raddest, coolest room you've ever seen? Look at my posters, look! EATING HUMANS, WACK!, MEN OUT OF WORK, VULTURE CLUB, DUNCE DUNCE... Everybody's here! (She takes her earphones off. JOHNNY appears in the cubicle.) The poster of JULIAN AND THE L.A. SCENE is in the middle. (Pause.) The other day we were in the car, you know, and Julian's song came on, the one about the angels, and it was awesome. Julian, my own bro on the radio! Mami turned it on loud and Daddy got mad. (She turns to JOHNNY, who stands, disapprovingly.) He hates loud music. Or so he says. I think he just didn't want to listen to Julian. (She points to JULIAN's poster, throws it a kiss.) Isn't my brother cool, Princess? (She pets the dog.) Like you. (She tosses a biscuit.) OK, girl, now go

get it! Go!

Lights down on JOHNNY.

SCENE 6

In her room, GENEIA picks up a magazine and puts on the earphones. She sits, absorbed in her reading and the music.

JOHNNY enters.

JOHNNY: Hi, Sis!

GENEIA: *(Startled)* Johnny! Hi!

JOHNNY: What's up?

GENEIA: *(Taking earphones off)* Not much. Kicking back.

JOHNNY: *(Observing the posters)* And what's all that junk?

GENEIA: It's not junk.

JOHNNY: I say it is.

GENEIA: Yeah, but you don't know anything.

JOHNNY: I can't believe Papi lets you put all that stuff up there.

GENEIA: They're just my idols.

JOHNNY: *(Scrutinizing JULIAN's poster)* Julian and his bunch of locos!

GENEIA: *(Making a fist)* Get away from there! You say anything bad about Julian, and I'll punch you! *(She stands, protectively, in front of the poster.)* I mean it!

JOHNNY: *(Backing off)* Okay okay, chica! Coño, you've got the Toledo temper all the way.

GENEIA: Yes, I do.

JULIAN appears in the cubicle.

JOHNNY: And you're turning out just like Julian.

GENEIA: Good.

JOHNNY: *(Affectionate)* You don't have to be like anybody, Geneia.

GENEIA: *(Self-assured)* I am myself, right?

JOHNNY: Yeah. Just don't go into music, that's all.

GENEIA: And be an engineer, like you?

JOHNNY: No, but maybe a teacher.

GENEIA: No way. A songwriter, yeah, or an agent for rock stars...

JOHNNY: Fine. We'll see.

GENEIA: I'll write songs for Julian and his band.

JOHNNY: *(Pointing to the posters)* I can't believe you like to look at all those sickos.

GENEIA: Johnny, you're such a... You're so...

JOHNNY: *(Laughing)* Square?

GENEIA: Yeah.

Lights down on JULIAN.

JOHNNY: And... what about Julian?

GENEIA: He's cool.

JOHNNY: *(Pretending to be insulted)* Okay, that's it, I'm leaving.

(As he begins to exit) I'm going home.

GENEIA: *(Grabbing him by the hand)* Come back here, you bobo. *(She drags him back.)* I didn't mean it... I didn't!

JOHNNY: In case you didn't know, there are people out there who think I'm cool, too.

GENEIA: *(She hugs him)* And you are! In your own way...

JOHNNY: *(Laughing)* Okay, if you say so. You're the expert. *(He notices a pleasant smell.)* Mmm... that cafecito smells great!

GENEIA: Yuck!

JOHNNY: *(Kissing her goodbye)* You don't know what you're missing.

JOHNNY exits. GENEIA puts on her earphones.

GENEIA: I hate coffee!

GENEIA rocks to the music as lights dim to black.

SCENE 7

Spotlight on ERIKA, in the cubicle. She is blonde, slim, and beautiful in a non-binary way.

JULIAN enters, carrying the music stand and sheet music. The intro to "L.A. Boulevard" comes on. He approaches the mike and puts on headphones, ready for recording session.

JULIAN begins singing "L.A. Boulevard" and stops, starting the song over several times until he feels he is getting it right. Then he sings the song in its entirety, ERIKA harmonizing with him from inside the cubicle.

L.A. BOULEVARD

Life is

this L.A. boulevard.

Life here

is nothing but a ride.

Drive down

this L.A. boulevard

and you'll feel brave and strong

Drive on

Give it a try

She gave me the world *(with ERIKA)*

put it at my feet

She told me a dream

And now I can't see the morning

Move on

for the time of your life

Move on

if you can stand the ride

They'll sing you a song *(with ERIKA)*

and hand you a gun

They'll make you believe

that these streets

are really made of gold

Life is

this L.A. boulevard

Move on
for the time of your life

Burning the streets now
Feeling the speed now
Burning the streets now
Take my word for it
My word

These are your streets now *(with ERIKA the rest*
Take my word for it *of the song)*
My word

These streets
are really made of gold

Life is
this L.A. boulevard.
Life here
is nothing but a ride.

Drive down
this L.A. boulevard
and you'll feel brave and strong
Drive on
Give it a try!

Black out.

SCENE 8

Dark stage. Boisterous break dance music is heard. Lights up on GENEIA, in her room. She is fixing her hair and putting on makeup. She is now thirteen. The music fades gradually to silence as GENEIA finishes getting ready. She puts on dark-tinted glasses and performs a rap. Halfway through the number JULIAN enters without her noticing him.

THE "LITTLE G" RAP

My name is Little G.
I'm the best damn Cuban
there could ever be.
Cause see?
Cause see?
Others brag.
Others tease.
But nobody can compare to me!

Cause see?
I can rap.
I can dance.
You sucker MC's
don't stand a chance.

Cause you heard my name.

It's Little G!

Others brag.

Others tease.

But nobody can compare to me!

Woooooord!

JULIAN walks in, clapping excitedly.

JULIAN: Bravo!

GENEIA: Julian! How are you, Big Bro?

They give each other a high-five.

JULIAN: Not as great as you, Little G! The best damn Cuban there could ever be!

GENEIA: *(She takes her glasses off)* Are you making fun of me?

JULIAN: I wouldn't dare.

JULIAN looks around the room, pleased to be there.

GENEIA: *(Coquettishly)* Hey, Julian, you wanna know a secret?...
I'm in love!

JULIAN: I don't believe it. What's his name?

GENEIA: Roberto, but I call him Betico.

JULIAN: Does Papi like him?

GENEIA: Yeah, 'cause he's Cuban just like us. But Daddy doesn't know that Betico and I are... you know. He thinks we're just... friends.

JULIAN: How do you know you're in love with him?

GENEIA: Just because... we break together. He's a great breaker! I also like it when he kisses me...

They throw each other a noisy kiss.

JULIAN: Azúcar!

Silence. JULIAN picks up a magazine and flips through it.

GENEIA: Hey, Julian. Is your band gonna do rap some day?

JULIAN: Why not. We've done everything else.

JULIAN seems suddenly worried, in another place.

GENEIA: Are you all right, Big Bro?

JULIAN: *(Forcing a smile)* Yeah, I'm all right.

She drapes her arm over his shoulders.

GENEIA: You don't like it here, do you?

JULIAN: I like to be with you and... with Mami.

GENEIA: But not with Daddy.

JULIAN: Right...

GENEIA: You guys never got along, eh?

JULIAN: We did, some times.

GENEIA: *(Unconvinced)* Sure. Like when?

JULIAN: *(Reminiscing)* In the evenings, we'd sit on the porch, and Papi would sing all the hits that played on the radio. Even Beatle songs, in English! *(They laugh.)* I loved the way he sang. Once in a while I'd join him. Can you imagine us the Two Cubanos doing "A Hard Day's Night"?

They do the song' refrain with a heavy Cuban accent.

GENEIA: Daddy hardly ever sings anymore.

JULIAN: Mami told me once that a record producer heard Papi when he was a little boy, and the man loved his voice...

GENEIA: For real?! Daddy never told me.

JULIAN: This man asked Grandpa Toledo if he'd let his son go to Havana and sign with a record company.

GENEIA: What happened?!

JULIAN: Nothing. Toledo said no; he bought Papi a bicycle instead.

GENEIA: That was stupid! Daddy could've been famous.

JULIAN: (*Ironic*) Yeah, he could've been a star ... (*Pause. Pensive*) Papi tried to do to me the same thing his father did to him. He didn't want me to be a musician.

GENEIA: I know. (*Enraged*) What's wrong with those men?!

JULIAN: My big problems with Papi started when I told him I wanted to take piano lessons.

GENEIA: What did he say?

JULIAN: (*Parodying his father's macho voice*) Boys aren't supposed to play the piano. Go outside and play baseball, muchacho!

GENEIA: Well... you got your way, anyway.

JULIAN: You know, when I'm here... I feel like I'm Papi's kid again. (*He hugs her.*) And I hated being his kid.

Silence.

GENEIA: Hey, I wanna show you some pictures! (*She brings out a pocket photo album.*) Look, that's my Princess.

JULIAN: (*Laughing*) She looks like you. Puppy-dog eyes, droopy ears...

GENEIA: Very funny.

JULIAN: Got any pictures of Johnny's kids?

GENEIA: Yeah! Look how big Tony's getting. Aren't they cute?

JULIAN: They are.

GENEIA: Laurita's learning how to talk and she can walk already.

JULIAN: How are you getting along with Johnny?

GENEIA: *(With a shrug)* Fine, I guess.

JOHNNY appears in the cubicle.

JULIAN: He lets you spend time with the kids, no?

GENEIA: Well... yeah, though he thinks I'm a bad influence on them.

JULIAN: You're what?!

GENEIA: He says the same thing about you. He doesn't want his children to grow up to be like us.

JOHNNY exits. ERIKA enters the cubicle.

JULIAN: What does that mean? Like us?

GENEIA: You know, "artistic."

Black out.

SCENE 9

Lights up on ERIKA and JULIAN as they enter. ERIKA is going over some sheet music.

ERIKA: Your lyrics are wordy, Julian. We'll have to rewrite them.

JULIAN: The guys don't like some of your rewrites.

ERIKA: What about you? Do you like them?

JULIAN: Maybe you're changing too many things.

ERIKA: *(Caressing his face)* For the better.

JULIAN: We don't sound Cuban anymore.

ERIKA: That sound never got you anywhere.

He holds her sensuously, kissing her.

JULIAN: And where am I now?

ERIKA: In the mainstream.

JULIAN: Was that supposed to be my goal?

ERIKA: You know how many people get as far as you've gotten in this business?

JULIAN: That's what music means to you, doesn't it? Business.

She breaks away from his embrace and glances over one of the sheets. He sits on a stool.

ERIKA: Look, Julian, your music's good, but you can't expect people to buy it just because it's honest and artistic.

JULIAN: You've gotta sell it.

ERIKA: You need to make them hear you, no matter what it takes.

JULIAN: And if I don't?

ERIKA: Then you're nothing.

JULIAN: Then... I guess I'm nothing.

She kisses him, letting him wrap his legs around her body.

ERIKA: Too late for that, my love. You may not know who the hell you are. But like it or not, you're famous.

JULIAN: I have no choice, is that it?

ERIKA: Admit it. You don't fight it at all. Fame is your weakness.

JULIAN: We were doing okay before I met you.

She pulls away, defensively.

ERIKA: You were a pitiful party band. The four unknown "Salseros."

JULIAN: I was playing my music...

ERIKA: You were singing little ditties about your family's exile.

You were playing for yourself, doing your artsy thing in private and then going out there and beating the bongos and the congas for fat salsa mamas. You call that success?

JULIAN: I had an audience.

ERIKA: Sure. How big of an audience?

JULIAN: A lot of people listened...

ERIKA: Yes. I'm sure you loved the cheap gigs, seeing your first two albums collecting dust at the record stores.

JULIAN: (*Pensive*) My "ethnic" albums. Yeah. We wanted to make our statement...

ERIKA: Writing songs about your family's soap opera conflicts, keeping yourself at their disposal, not venturing too far. And for what?

JULIAN: You don't understand.

They stand face to face.

ERIKA: In spite of all your "Cuban" loyalty and your "statement," you continued to see yourself the way your family saw you: as a worthless oddball... A man who had to apologize for who he was, who had to constantly explain and defend his talent.

JULIAN: Erika, you've got it all wrong.

She cups his face with her hands.

ERIKA: You're not their child anymore, Julian.

JULIAN: You don't understand.

ERIKA: What is there to understand? (*He pushes her away.*) What is there to understand?! That your father's a tyrant? That your grandmother's nuts? That your mother's a pitiful slave?

JULIAN: You have a name for everything, don't you?

ERIKA: Everything has a name.

JULIAN: What am I supposed to do? Tell those people, forget you all, you're no longer my family!

ERIKA: So instead you run to them whenever they call you.

JULIAN: I don't run to them.

ERIKA: No. You crawl, like a baby.

JULIAN: *(Defensive and cornered)* It's not that simple!

Silence. He sits, facing the audience.

ERIKA: *(Affectionate)* This time there's a valid reason; your grandfather's dying. *(She kneels by him.)* But you know what's going to happen. They're going to try to keep you there, like they always do.

She rests her head on his lap.

JULIAN: And I'll escape, like I always do.

ERIKA: Yeah, with your head all screwed up.

JULIAN: Erika, I just can't break away.

ERIKA: Not even when you do your music?

JULIAN: No, coño, I do break away when I play.

ERIKA: So then, who cares if you don't sound "Cuban" anymore? People are listening to you now. You can play all you want.

JULIAN: *(Caressing her)* People are listening to you, my love. *(Like a music critic)* Her voice burnished to a warm, grainy rasp, she breezes through the lyrics in total control... Erika Johnson's melodic vision sees the album through.

ERIKA: They like your solos. They praise your Caribbean touch.

JULIAN: Sure! I'm the Hispanic Rocker.

ERIKA: No, You're an American star.

JULIAN: Yeah. You have a name for everything.

Black out.

SCENE 10

Lights upon GENEIA, in the cubicle.

GENEIA: *(Agitated)* No, Mami! Don't tell Daddy, please! Don't! *(She enters.)* Princess won't do it again, I promise. *(To the dog)* Sit! Sit! Why did you have to make Grandma fall?! *{Laughing}* Abuela flat on the floor and your two big paws all over her. Don't worry, you didn't hurt her. Just a couple of scratches, really. She was more scared than anything. *{She turns to the cubicle, as if reacting to a comment}* No! My dog is not a killer! She's just... young. *(To the animal)* I know you don't like Grandma. How could you? She's such a pain in the butt, always complaining about the way we behave and making us do stuff we don't wanna do.

(Impersonating her grandmother) You're not supposed to be running around like a boy with that beast! Stay home and help your mother with the chores! Don't talk so loud, you're a young lady! *(She pets the dog.)* I know what you mean, Princess. It's better to be a lion than a lamb, right? Better to fight back than let people walk all over you...

Silence. GENEIA is deep in thought. Her brothers appear in

the cubicle.

GENEIA: Stay still for a minute, Princess. Listen to me. Listen carefully! *(Pause.)* They want to take you away. Daddy says he'll try to find a nice home for you. But I won't let them, I promise! Why should you have to live somewhere else? This is your home, Princess, the only one where you belong. *(She hugs the animal.)* Don't worry, girl. We'll run away together if we have to. I'll take care of you and you'll take care of me. *(Trying to contain her tears)* We'll be free, Princess... Free lions!

Lights dim as JOHNNY and JULIAN enter.

SCENE 11

Intimate lighting. GENEIA is downstage center, JULIAN on her left, JOHNNY on her right. They face the audience.

GENEIA: Grandpa? Abuelo. How are you viejito? You're feeling better? Yes. What is it? What are you looking at?

JULIAN: What do you see out there, Tomás?

GENEIA: It's just a wall, viejito. Look, I'm touching it, just a wall. Don't be afraid.

JOHNNY: Abuelo, you know who I am? I'm Johnny, your grandson.

JULIAN: *(Holding an imaginary machete)* This is a machete, Tomás. Here, hold it. Raise it high!

JOHNNY: Abuelo, remember when we'd go fishing? We'd get up real early in the morning, at five, and we'd go to the Hermosa pier...

GENEIA: *(Looking up)* What do you see up there? Oh, the clouds!

They look like people, no es verdad? And animals! That one over there is a dog...

JULIAN: Higher, Tomás, far away from your face!

JOHNNY: We caught a lot of fish every time! Didn't we, Abuelo? Then Abuela would cook them..

GENEIA: And that cloud over there looks like Grandma. *(Laughing)* Yeah, fat like her!

JULIAN: *(Cutting sugar cane)* You strike low, a clean blow. There, you see? You peel it with your knife, down and down. Then you can eat it...

JOHNNY: You liked the beach 'cause you could check out the women, verdad? Yeah, some of them were beautiful...

GENEIA: After the stroke you started singing. How strange, we thought. You'd never sung before. And then you started rhyming. Everything you said, you said in a rhyme, like a poem.

JOHNNY: Huh? What's that, Abuelo? Speak up! No te entiendo! What are you saying?

GENEIA: You didn't grump around complaining about this country and the Gringos. You smiled a lot and told jokes. Until one day...

JULIAN: That sugar cane is sweet. Can you taste it, Tomás? Can you taste it?

GENEIA: You wanted to leave. You said your father was waiting for you in the thickets, by the royal palms. En la manigua. You had to go and meet him in a hurry, or he'd leave without you. In the middle of the night, you'd be trying to get the door open so you could run away...

JOHNNY: Huh? I don't understand what you're saying. What about the women? Speak up, Abuelo!

JULIAN: Hold the machete, Tomás. Raise it high!

JOHNNY and JULIAN freeze.

GENEIA: They told us about this great place for old people. It was called City Gardens. Expensive. So we all went to see it. We figured, why not, maybe they'd take better care of you in one of those homes... From the outside the building looked so nice, with flowers and palm trees and everything. But inside it smelled terrible, Grandpa. You would've hated it. A smell of urine and cheap soup. The viejitos looking up at the ceiling with their sad faces. And all the machines... You would've hated it, Abuelo.

Lights dim. The intro to "Returning" is heard as JOHNNY and GENEIA exit.

Spotlight on JULIAN. He sings...

RETURNING

And then we dreamed
And then we dreamed
And then we danced
to a different beat

We dreamed of apples
and chewing gum
We dreamed of leaving

and Northern skies

Away from those eternal summers
we would no longer have dark skin

Away from those unending fields

Away from life as it was known

to you and me

And then we dreamed

And then we danced

to a different beat

Y el sueño aquel

de regresar

se hizo tu obsesión

y nunca más

te escuchamos hablar

Lo tuyo era soñar

con el regreso

con el regreso

Lo tuyo era soñar

About returning

About returning

And you began to dream...

Lights dim gradually to black.

SCENE 12

Lights up. JULIAN enters, pacing. He is being followed by JOHNNY.

JULIAN: Get lost! Déjame en paz!

JOHNNY: I'm not gonna leave until you hear me out.

JULIAN: *(Sarcastic)* Okay, let's have it. The latest episode of the Johnny Toledo Saga! *(He sits.)* I'm ready.

JOHNNY: I'm sick of dealing with all the family problems while you're having the time of your life.

JULIAN: Yeah, that's all I ever do. *(Emphatic)* I have fun. *(He stands up.)* You, on the other hand, you're so hard-working.

JOHNNY: Come home and help us out with Abuelo!

JULIAN: *(To the audience)* He was cleaning tables at a restaurant when he was only thirteen. Now look at him, El Señor Ingeniero.

JOHNNY: Cállate la boca!

JULIAN: He has a home in Palos Verdes, not too far from his parents. And he never misses the Kingdom Hall on Sundays.

JOHNNY: At least I have a religion.

JULIAN: Sure. Aren't you going to quote something from the Bible? Not today? *(With mock gravity)* Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar and the Lord what belongs to the Lord! *(Face to face with JOHNNY)* Your religion is money.

JOHNNY: You're richer than I am.

JULIAN: Yeah, I have a condo of my own in West L.A. But you won't find a nice little Cuban family there.

JOHNNY: Cubano resentido. Big snob. You think you're better, don't you? Or different...

JULIAN: Hey, haven't you seen my picture in the magazines? *(He grabs one of GENEIA' magazines.)* Listen, listen to what they're saying about me! *(Reading)* "City of Angels" is without a doubt one of the best record productions of the year. Julian's piano and guitar solos are masterful and sensitively woven. He has the Latin rhythms and the Cuban spice, but the essence of his style is as American as apple pie. *(He tosses the magazine with a flourish.)*

Welcome to America, Julian!

Silence.

JOHNNY: Bottom line is, "Julianito," that you weren't even born in the United States.

JULIAN: True. But get this through your head once and for all. I am not like you.

JOHNNY: Deep down inside you are. And you hate it.

JULIAN: Okay. So you think you've got me all figured out.

JOHNNY: *(Laughing)* Yeah. You're the Hispanic Rocker, no? Better than Babalú!

JULIAN: Yes. And it all began with my agent. He said we were his young Latino group. *(Pause. Reminiscing)* Here I am with him, in Hollywood, stoned out of my brain...

JOHNNY: *(Pacing)* I don't care!

JULIAN: I'm in this lush bungalow with a man of about thirty. He's stripped to the waist, barefoot...

JOHNNY: Shut up!

JULIAN: We're drinking Black Russians and listening to Pink Floyd and he's telling me the Hispanic scene is *in*. That Spanish culture is getting to be quite a business, he says. You Latinos really follow the Lord's word, you're multiplying!

JOHNNY: *(He begins to exit)* I have to go.

JULIAN: *(Grabbing his brother by the arm)* Hey, I'm not finished! Let me give you the real scoop. *(Pause.)* You see, it all started with my agent... He said he'd come up with some gigs. The New Year's Cuban dances, when the Cubanos got down and... *(singing, dancing)* Una dos y tres, qué paso más fuerte, qué paso más fuerte!! *(Pause.)* Gigs all over L.A., and he'd produce our first album. But only if we were good and dedicated. *(He unbuttons his shirt.)* And... only after we'd paid our dues.

JOHNNY: I've heard enough!

JULIAN: *(He sits)* So here I am, asking this incarnation of Warren Beatty what he means by "pay our dues." And here he is, telling me that he really gets a kick out of breaking in new talents, opening doors, giving young people a chance to express themselves.

JOHNNY: *(Angry)* You sold your ass for fame, didn't you? Maricón!

JULIAN: *(He claps, laughing)* I paid the price willingly, little brother. No one twisted my arm.

JOHNNY: Faggot!

JULIAN: *(Sensuously)* He leans forward and kisses me. Then his

hand grabs the back of my neck and he licks my face and my chest with his tongue...

JOHNNY: Papi was right! A boy shouldn't spend all his time in his room writing songs.

Silence. JULIAN stands and faces the audience.

JULIAN: The minute I started showing signs of "artistic" behavior, they took me to a doctor. *(Laughing)* But the doctor didn't find anything wrong with me. He just said I had overgrown testicles, a common occurrence in Caribbean children of very young parents.

JOHNNY: Writing songs is for queers!

JULIAN: They gave me hormonal injections. Hormonal fluid never hurt anybody, said the doctor, and the shots might help me grow lots of hair and become a real Macho Cubano. *(Touching his biceps)* And that's what I've become. I even have a girlfriend!

JOHNNY: *(Mockingly)* Erika Johnson. A Gringa. Flat front and back.

ERIKA appears in the cubicle.

JULIAN: Yes, she doesn't have a Cuban ass, no big tits, so what?!

JOHNNY: What do you see in her, anyway? Que mal gusto, coño!

JULIAN: Erika's helping me fight!

JOHNNY: For what?

JULIAN: For a name.

GENEIA joins ERIKA in the cubicle. They chat, at ease with each other.

JOHNNY: She's using you! And she's a bad example for our sister.

JULIAN: Geneia can take care of herself.

JOHNNY: She's weak, like you.

JULIAN: She's stronger than any of us!

ERIKA gives GENEIA an earring; the girl puts it on.

JOHNNY: Just don't bring Erika to our home, okay?

JULIAN: Not to worry, little brother. Erika's not part of your story.

Lights dim.

SCENE 13

Intimate lighting. ERIKA and GENEIA enter and stand by the cubicle. JOHNNY steps back, watching his brother scornfully. JULIAN turns to them and then to the audience.

JULIAN: Hear the music? *(He plays an imaginary piano.)* I'm free! You can't get to me here. My hands take me to a place you'll never know. *(Spotlight on him. He spreads his arms. The REPORTER appears in the cubicle.)* To the center, in full force. Under the spotlight and it's fantastic! *(The REPORTER enters. She is a young woman with trendy look. JULIAN points to the audience as he turns to her.)* And they're curious about me. They want to know what I'm thinking!

All four characters surround JULIAN, forming a circle around him. ERIKA, JOHNNY and GENEIA will echo the REPORTER's questions. Their voices gradually merge in a maddening crescendo.

REPORTER: Tell us, Mr. Toledo, what do you want to accomplish with your music?

JULIAN: (*Unsure*) I would... I'd like to...

REPORTER: Go ahead. We're listening.

ERIKA: Go ahead.

GENEIA: We're listening.

JOHNNY: We're listening!

JULIAN: I'd like for people to look back at my songs, say a hundred years from now, and I'd like for those songs to tell them stories about us...

REPORTER: Anything else?

ERIKA: Anything else?!

JULIAN: Yes. I'd like for those songs to describe for them who we were... who I was.

REPORTER: And who are you, Mr. Toledo? Who were you?

ERIKA: Who are you?

JOHNNY: Who were you?!

JULIAN: I am...

REPORTER: Go ahead. We're listening.

GENEIA: We're listening.

ERIKA: Listening!

JOHNNY: Who are you?!

ERIKA: Who were you?!

JULIAN: (*Cornered*) I was...

REPORTER: We're listening!

ALL: Listening! Listening!!

JULIAN: (*To the audience*) I am a fucking star!

Black out.

SCENE 14

Dark stage.

GENEIA: This is ridiculous! Hell, is it my fault that there's no one in this house to talk to? *(Lights up. She enters her room.)* Darn! Absolutely and totally ridiculous! *(Under a spotlight, she fixes her hair and puts on makeup.)* Hey, Julian, I thought of an awesome name for my band. 'Cause I'm gonna have a band, you know, just like you. Ready? THE CONSPIRACY! We're gonna do pop and rap and rock and even salsa! Say, by the way, what was the name of your group before you started doing stuff in English? I can't remember. *(She picks up a magazine, leafs through it.)* Hey, I saw your picture in a magazine! *(Reading)* They say you have a Hispanic sound but that you're also a rocker. *(Trying to contain her giggles)* A Hispanic Rocker. *(She bursts out laughing.)* Sorry, Big Bro. I know you hate that label but it sure is catchy! *(Proud)* They say that your band has a nice blend of Cuban and American. Well, that's what we are! *(Coquettishly)* A nice blend. *(She puts on JULIAN' vest.)* You wanna hear one of my songs? It's like, like the mushy, mellow type. But I hope you like it. "Always See the Light," by Geneia Toledo. Dedicated to Anthony, my nephew.

She sings...

ALWAYS SEE THE LIGHT

Don't listen to the ones who say

I'm wrong.
Just listen to,
Oh listen to my words.
They speak of love.
With love you'll always see the light.

When you go to sleep
afraid of night,
just think of you and me,
look to the sky.
You'll see us in the light.
With love you'll always see the light.

They may take you away from me.
They say I'm not teaching you right.
But I love you Baby Anthony,
and that will always be,
as long as you remember,
as long as you can hear
these words.
They speak of love,
my love.
They bring you closer to the light.

Go to sleep now,
I'm by your side.

Don't fear the night,
my baby Tony.
Look here.
You see?
A tiny
loving
flickering light.

Gradual black out.

SCENE 15

Spotlight on JULIAN. He stands downstage center, holding the microphone. ERIKA's silhouette is seen in the cubicle. The scene has the feel and mood of a dream.

JULIAN: I grab the mike with my right hand and lean forward, right? I reach out with my left hand, pointing to an imaginary lover in the crowd...

ERIKA: No! *(She enters.)* No. Your hand is pointing to the face of an old woman. A woman who only taught you fear.

JULIAN: A woman who loves me.

ERIKA: Your hand is striking the face of a tyrant.

JULIAN: The man who brought me to freedom.

ERIKA: A tyrant who didn't want you to become who you are!

JULIAN: The man... who loves me?

ERIKA: Stand up to him!

JULIAN: What for? It's an old story by now.

ERIKA: (Grabbing him by the shoulders) But it has to end.

Silence. Lights dim. JULIAN will incarnate the memory of his father. ERIKA will impersonate his mother.

JULIAN: God damn this kid! What's wrong with him?!

ERIKA: Leave him alone!

JULIAN: What the hell is wrong with him?!

ERIKA: Nothing! He's fine. He's a fine boy.

JULIAN: (*Scornful*) He wants to go to school to study music.

ERIKA: (*Defiant*) If that's what he wants to do, you must let him.

JULIAN: How is he going to support a family with "music"?!

ERIKA: Maybe he doesn't want a family.

JULIAN: Well, he's going to have one if it kills me!

ERIKA: Or if it kills him.

Silence. JULIAN presses his hands against his temples, covers his ears.

JULIAN: (*Screaming*) What did I tell you?! They won't let me hear the song! (*Singing loudly*) The time is right if you can fly! (*He paces.*) God damn this kid! What's wrong with him? (*He sings*) If you can fly with the angels! (*Shouting*) What the hell is wrong with him?! (*To ERIKA, desperate*) They won't let go!

ERIKA: Go back to the song, Julian. Try to remember the words!

JULIAN faces the audience. He is suddenly self-assured, in control.

JULIAN: The Latin Bridge, that's what the song needs! The get-down part, when the group becomes one voice. And it's that voice and the congas, the cymbals, the palito, the güiro, the clave... And we make this "Once Upon a Time" sound like salsa, merengue, plena, mambo, rumba, bembé! *(He directs the band.)* The brass, good, blow it, yeah, give it to me, that brass. Now the bass. And the strings, you hear them? Pizzicato...

ERIKA: *(Directing JULIAN)* Lower your body now. *(He obeys.)* Bend your knees. Hold the mike close to your lips. Yes! Then come up, bringing from the lowest of lows that crisp...

JULIAN: Once upon a time!!

ERIKA: *(She sings)* In the city of lights!

BOTH: Once upon a time in the city of angels!

ERIKA: Yes! Now your lungs, your guts, your throat support the last cry in crescendo.

JULIAN: In the city of lights!!

ERIKA: *(Applauding)* Bravo!

JULIAN: *(Relieved)* That felt... good.

ERIKA: It felt fantastic. *(She gives him a passionate kiss.)* You've broken away, Julian. This is freedom. Everything else is painful, unreal...

Silence.

JULIAN: *(Pointing to the audience)* Listen, listen to the clapping. And that other voice inside my head saying "You did it"!

ERIKA: That other voice is telling you the truth.

JULIAN: *(Unsure)* I... I did it.

ERIKA: You don't have to go back, Julian.

He walks slowly toward the cubicle.

JULIAN: I know...

ERIKA: Here's where you belong, with me.

JULIAN: *(As he exits)* It's not that simple.

Black out.

SCENE 16

Lights up on GENEIA. She is in her room, crying. JULIAN enters and gives her a long, comforting embrace.

GENEIA: Poor Grandma. She can't believe he's gone.

JULIAN: It's hard to let go...

GENEIA: She says she wants to follow him to Heaven.

JULIAN: I hope she takes her time.

Silence.

GENEIA: *(Pensive)* What do you think Heaven is like?

JULIAN: *(Jokingly)* Cuban food everywhere!

GENEIA: Sure! And Hell is full of Havana cigars for sure.

JULIAN: No. Hell is full of flames and evil creatures poking you eternally. *(He pokes her playfully.)* Los demonios!

GENEIA: Ouch!

Silence.

JULIAN: *(Deep in thought)* I learned about that horrible place when I was very little, thanks to Abuela.

GENEIA: It figures!

JULIAN: I had spent the night at her house, and when I woke up, I found this old print in my bed.. *(Pause.)* It was a picture of Heaven and Hell. All the good spirits sat peacefully beside an old man with a long white beard.

GENEIA: Typical!

JULIAN: And way down, below the old man, the sinners were frying.

GENEIA: Gross.

JULIAN: I ran and showed it to Abuela. I asked her, *(like a child)* Abuela, what is this? Who are all those people and why are they being burned? Abuela said, "Julianito, I don't know how that picture got there. It was probably an angel, your guardian angel, who put it in your bed..."

GENEIA: Oh, brother.

JULIAN: So that you don't end up in Hell like those poor souls. You have to be a good boy, very obedient, so that one day, when you die, God will take you up to Heaven with Him and his Saints.

GENEIA: What a trip.

JULIAN: *(Laughing)* Yeah. A hell of a trip.

Silence.

GENEIA: I hope there's music, wherever Grandpa is.

JULIAN: *(Jokingly)* If he can hear my songs, we know he's frying down below for sure!

GENEIA: That's not funny. He loved your singing.

JULIAN: Too bad I couldn't sing at his funeral.

GENEIA: *(Sarcastic)* Cubans don't do that sort of thing.

JULIAN: It's offensive! Disrespectful!

GENEIA: You should've done it anyway. You had a right to.

JULIAN: I didn't want to hurt Abuela.

GENEIA: Yeah. She hates your music.

JULIAN: Not really. She just doesn't understand it anymore.

GENEIA: Did she ever?

JULIAN: Yes, back in Cuba.

GENEIA: It figures!

JULIAN: *(Reminiscing)* Sometimes, when I stayed with her, she'd dress me in a guayabera and drench me in cologne. Then she'd have me stand in the middle of her living room and she'd say, "Now pretend this is the biggest teatro in Cuba. And all your pretty girlfriends are in the audience. I'm here, too, right up front, applauding... Canta, mijo!" *(Pause.)* She'd help me with the words, humming the beautiful boleros. And I'd sing my heart out for her.

GENEIA: *(She puts on JULIAN' glasses, laughing)* But now you're famous and you sing rock songs, so you're no good, Julianito!

They impersonate their grandmother.

JULIAN: Why do you wear those dark glasses inside the house? You are going to hurt your eyes, niño!

GENEIA: And look at those pants; they have holes in them!

JULIAN: When are you going to start working so you can buy some decent clothes?

GENEIA: How can I send my sister in Cuba pictures of you dressed that way? She is going to think that we're still poor!

Silence.

JULIAN: *(Reflecting)* Abuela had a hard life...

GENEIA: I know. She was a peasant.

JULIAN: We shouldn't be making fun of her.

GENEIA: Why not? She makes fun of us, of you especially.

JULIAN: She doesn't mean to.

GENEIA: *(Rebellious)* So, just because she was a poor campesina we have to put up with her old ideas?

JULIAN: You don't always have to do what she says...

GENEIA: Sometimes I do.

JULIAN: It's a small price to pay, don't you think?

GENEIA: For what?

JULIAN: For the love she gives you.

GENEIA: If you say so. *(She hugs him.)* You're the expert.

Silence.

JULIAN: Whatever Heaven really is, I'm sure Abuelo's there.

GENEIA: *(Laughing)* Eating Cuban food?

JULIAN: Smoking his tabacos.

GENEIA: I hope he can hear your songs!

Lights dim to black as the REPORTER enters the cubicle.

SCENE 17

Lights up on JULIAN and the REPORTER. JULIAN is sitting on a stool, headphones and glasses on. The REPORTER is watching him prepare for a recording session.

JULIAN: Alright, just the music. No words. Here we go...

The piano track of "Spring" comes on. JULIAN hums the melody as the REPORTER approaches him. She looks him over. He listens to the music without noticing her.

REPORTER: *(To the audience)* Cuban-born Julian Toledo, tall, well-built, handsome Latin features...

JULIAN interacts with the recording engineer, absorbed in his work. He sings the first three lines and then stops, facing his visitor.

JULIAN: "A distant time of dreams, of fears that never died. Hands full of love that couldn't be discarded..." *(He hums. Pause.)* Hold it! *(He takes the headphones off.)* Let's get this over with. *(To the REPORTER)* Welcome to my studio.

REPORTER: Thank you, Julian. Is that a song from your next album?

JULIAN: Yes, the title cut... "Spring."

REPORTER: It has a bluesy, mellow sound. I like it.

JULIAN: *(Curtly)* Thanks.

REPORTER: *(Business-like)* Have you read the reviews of your Platinum Album?

JULIAN: Some of them. They either claim we're the best thing to come along since Babalú, or they say we're just a lot of hype.

REPORTER: Oh, and you're not *just* a lot of hype?

JULIAN: *(Laughing)* We're part of a musical revolution!

REPORTER: *(Skeptical)* Yes, that's what one of your reviewers claims. But what is so revolutionary about your sound?

JULIAN: I don't know. That is just a label. Like all the other ones

we've been seeing... Hispanic Rock, the Latin Scene, the Spanish Fad, the Cuban Thing. (*Mockingly*) Our sound is raging!

REPORTER: (*Faking interest*) Ah, yeah. Maximum raging. (*She turns on her tape recorder.*) How did you and Erika meet?

JULIAN: At a party in Hollywood.

REPORTER: I understand she's had a lot to do with your success.

JULIAN: (*He takes his glasses off*) She has.

REPORTER: Tell me about her involvement in your group.

JULIAN: Well... The guys didn't like her at first. They thought she was... too different from us. But then she impressed them with all the fancy studio technology that she knows. And with her singing.

REPORTER: Erika's a great singer. (*Taking notes*) What else did she do for your group?

JULIAN: She laid out a plan

REPORTER: (*Suddenly very interested*) Erika's Master Plan...?

JULIAN: Step one, make a demo tape and give it to her friend Mark Davis, of the group EATING HUMANS. She said Mark could give us some feedback. And he did. He was very helpful.

REPORTER: So Erika was your liaison.

JULIAN: Yeah, she connected us with Davis, who introduced us to the person who'd eventually become our producer.

REPORTER: (*Taking notes*) I see.

JULIAN: And there wasn't a single detail she didn't plan. Sound, outfits, choreography...

REPORTER: Step Two?

JULIAN: *(He nods)* She didn't want us to look too ethnic. Our image was to be casual and retro... whatever that means.

REPORTER: Casual and retro...

JULIAN: She looked at my songs and rewrote some of the lyrics...

REPORTER: *(Interrupting)* Was there a third step in Erika's Plan?

JULIAN: Yes. The big record company. Our "new" band hadn't been together five months when our second demo was already going into heavy rotation. Less than a year later, JULIAN AND THE L.A. SCENE was signing with Novelty Records.

REPORTER: How did Novelty see you, potentially, that is?

JULIAN: As a true winner.

REPORTER: *(Taking notes)* A winner...

JULIAN: Actually...

REPORTER: Yes?

JULIAN: Novelty told us right off that in order for the group to make it, and before they'd sign us, we'd have to forget everything we'd done up until then.

REPORTER: Your... previous albums.

JULIAN: None of that would help, they said.

REPORTER: Obviously, Erika's Master Plan is working. Your music is being played by all the major rock and pop stations...

JULIAN: *(Unconvinced)* Yeah. We made it.

JULIAN interacts with the sound engineer.

REPORTER: Thank you for your time, Julian.

JULIAN: You're welcome.

The REPORTER gathers her things, getting ready to leave.

REPORTER: *(As she begins to exit)* I almost forgot to ask you...
Will your band ever play in Cuba?

JULIAN: I don't know.

REPORTER: Your style has a strong Cuban influence, doesn't it?

JULIAN: It used to...

REPORTER: Elaborate for me, please.

JULIAN: *(Putting on headphones)* Sorry, I've gotta get back to work.

ERIKA appears in the cubicle.

REPORTER: One last question, then. What about the rumor... that Erika is planning to go solo?

JULIAN: *(He turns to ERIKA)* That's all it is, a rumor.

Lights to black.

SCENE 18

Spotlight on ERIKA behind the mike, downstage center. She is wearing a black evening gown. There is a Fifties, cabaret look about her. The intro to "Spring" plays, and ERIKA sways to the music. She renders the torch song passionately.

SPRING

It's bright outside
and I'm a silhouette.

It's peaceful now
and I have no regrets.

Not because of the spring
that suddenly arrives.

Not because of this need
to be sharing my life.

A distant time of dreams,
of fears that never died.

Hands full of love
that couldn't be
discarded.

I never thought
I'd be a silhouette,
or that I'd feel the warmth
of your caress.

I never thought
one could sing of the spring
joyfully,
lovingly
again.

(Bridge)

It's bright outside

r

and I'm a silhouette.

I look at you.

I can't accept it yet.

I'm going now my friend,

a fading,

silly

silhouette.

r

I look at you,

and I remember when

I didn't have to face

the springtime in November.

It's bright outside

and I have no regrets.

ERIKA hums languidly under the spotlight. The REPORTER enters as JULIAN appears in the cubicle. He looks at ERIKA, his hand pressed against the glass, his face in chiaroscuro.

REPORTER: *(To the audience)* The band is rehearsing again for the next album and filming two videos for MTV. Julian continues to work as musical director for the group, although most of the songs and arrangements are now written by Erika. The three other band members didn't welcome Novelty's idea of dropping the word "Julian" from their name. The company reps were eager to point out that they needed something catchier, more all-inclusive. So the group became THE L.A. SCENE. All members were assured that

the contracts would remain, monetarily speaking, intact. The new name was a gimmick, a simple gimmick. Nothing more.

The brass resounds, weaving a jazzy, melancholy phrase. The REPORTER and ERIKA begin dancing in unison, swaying their hips, hands on thighs. Their movements are identical.

GENEIA joins JULIAN in the cubicle. They embrace warmly and turn to the audience, arms around each other. Their silhouettes are seen, as a final image, when lights dim gradually to black.

And the music lingers...

THE END