

THE GREATEST PERFORMANCE

(Dramatic Version)

By

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PERSONAE

ROSA and MARIO. They are both Cuban American, gay, and in their mid-thirties. ROSA is a brunette of medium height. She is a college teacher. MARIO is slim, has a fair complexion and light brown hair. He is an artist. They are friends.

SETTING

Seal Beach, Southern California.

TIME

1988-1989.

MUSIC

Suggestions are given throughout the text for musical themes: disco and salsa numbers, Spanish ballads, boleros, and the traditional Cuban song "Guantanamera." The actors should feel free to improvise, however, singing verses from popular or parodied songs whenever the mood seems appropriate.

ROSA has a weakness for ballads with melodramatic, boisterous endings in crescendo. When sung by the character, these songs must always be rendered with exaggerated mannerisms. I suggest the style and histrionics of European stars of the late 1960s: Raphael, Massiel, Tom Jones, Charles Aznavour, Sarita Montiel.

MARIO acquired his musical repertoire on the disco dance floors of the 1970s. He grew up listening to Donna Summer, Barry White, Gloria Gaynor, Bette Midler, the Bee Gees, and Bronski

Beat. The songs he enjoys have catchy, sensuous melodies, repetitious lyrics, and hard-driving rhythms.

PROPS

- * An old photo album.
- * A large Cuban flag and a flag bearing a hammer and a sickle.
- * A fifties style rose-colored suitcase containing the following items: a long, wavy, auburn wig, a girdle and stockings, spike-heel pumps, a makeup kit, a pink fur coat and a black, strapless evening gown, gaudy costume jewelry.
- * Rum and Coke bottles, and cocktail glasses for Cuba Libres.
- * A drawing pad with an assortment of crayons.
- * Appliances and ingredients for a meal of chicken breasts, cooked carrots and a potato salad.
- * Spanish record covers from the late sixties: Raphael and Sarita Montiel.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

There are three performance areas: ROSA's condominium, a discotheque, and a beach park. The discotheque is downstage right. There is a circular dance floor surrounded by several tables with chairs. A disco ball hangs from the ceiling. Extreme right of the dance floor, there is a standing microphone where ROSA will do her storytelling/comedy performances.

ROSA's condominium comprises most of the stage. Upstage center is the living room, skillfully decorated in art deco. The

place looks stylish but not very welcoming; much of it could be painted on cardboard to give the impression of irreality. There is a state-of-the-art entertainment center and a variety of furniture. The only comfortable piece is a long couch with several pillows. Two large watercolors in the style of Georgia O'Keeffe are displayed on the back wall. A hyperrealist painting of MARIO and another man in the nude will eventually appear between the watercolors.

Extreme downstage left of the living room area, there is an oblong-shaped full-size mirror. The object seems to be floating in midair. The kitchen is at a slightly elevated second story level, behind the living room. It contains a stove, a sink and a counter. Most gadgets and appliances are painted on cardboard. The room looks fake and uninhabitable in spite of its verisimilar touches.

One of the walls in the kitchen will serve as a screen for the projected slides; it will be draped with a white canvas when needed. (Several images will be projected, all illustrating the characters' memories and/or fantasies.) At the left end of the wall-screen there is a staircase which leads to the living room and the beach.

The beach is represented by a sandy area downstage center of living room and left of discotheque. There is a large beach towel laid out on the floor, and a park bench.

TITLES

Each of the following titles will be projected on the screen,

announcing the corresponding performance. The lettering should be done in rose color Savannah type on a dark gray background.

Lights will fade to black at the end of each performance.

ACT ONE

The Accomplices

The Riot Act

Guantanamera

One Huge Cemetery

The Test

High School Days

Carnival Queen

Total Physical Response

Man of the House

Drawing

ACT TWO

A Healthy Meal

The Baby Lesbian

Toy Brothers

Trashy Memories

The Truth

The Kiss

Salty Tears

Human Form

Ten Years of Bar Hopping

Rosamarino

ACT ONE

PERFORMANCE 1

The Accomplices

A strident instrumental version of "Guantanamera" resounds, as an overture. The voice of an MC announces: "The Rosa Rodríguez Comedy Hour"! Applause. Spotlight on the microphone. ROSA enters, bows, and wields the microphone with a flourish. She is clad in a charcoal gray, loose-fitting men's style suit. Her white cotton shirt is unbuttoned at the top. She is also wearing a Virgen de la Caridad medallion on a long gold chain. This is the way she will dress for most of her monologues.

ROSA: (To the audience) Good evening! I am Rosa Rodríguez, your hostess for the evening. I thought I'd start with a little background info, so you know where I'm coming from. I used to think of myself as simply Cuban. But I've finally faced the fact that I'm here to stay... It took me long enough! So now I'm a Young Urban Cuban-American, a YUCA. The "yuca," by the way, is a starchy root that Cubans love to eat. You boil it and smother it with lots of hot oil and garlic, mmmm. Or you can fry it; that's the way I like it, yuca frita. Anyway, I find it in very poor taste when people refer to me as a YUCKIE, a Young Cuban-American Imbecile. The nerve! (Aside) I must confess the YUCKIE type does exist in our community... But I'm not just a YUCA; I'm a gay YUCA,

a lesbian, a dyke, (cringing) a Tortillera! There, I said it. Tortillera. That word still makes me cringe. (She pats her hands together as if making a tortilla.) It's so loaded with meaning! Don't you believe those Cubans who claim there are no gay YUCAS. Or those YUCAS who claim they don't eat the wonderful starchy root anymore because it's too fattening. The stories I could tell you about homophobic Cubans and renegade YUCAS!

Lights up on MARIO. He is in the living room, looking at old snapshots in ROSA's photo album. He is wearing tight-fitting blue jeans and a white tank top, his habitual outfit. The tank top will at times be replaced by a T-shirt.

MARIO: You're going off on a tangent again, Rosi...

ROSA turns to MARIO, surprised that he has been listening. Then she turns to the audience.

ROSA: You know how my story goes: Typical tale of a Cuban family of Gusanos, the Worms, a decent home being torn apart. Rosita Rodríguez, a little twirp from Guantánamo suddenly thrown into the world without her parents to protect her. It was nineteen sixty-eight. I was sent to Spain, alone, because I needed to be saved from the Red Monster! And because I had an aunt in Madrid who paid my way. Picture my parents looking up at the blue Cuban sky and asking themselves, Will we ever see our baby again? May the Virgin of Charity protect you, Rosi. May she help you find your way back to us, some day!

MARIO: And then what happened?

ROSA: (Turning to MARIO) It's a long story...

MARIO: I don't like long stories.

ROSA: I'll make it short. (To the audience) I was taken in by this Spanish aunt, Doña Lola, an old widow who was rich and stingy as hell. She kept telling me that I was fat and that I needed to go on a diet. So she starved me to death! She said she couldn't understand how a person could get so fat living in a Communist country.

MARIO: (Laughing) It took more than Communism to burn off your baby fat! Rosita la Gordita! Isn't that what they called you?

ROSA: (Slightly annoyed) Yes. Now can I go on? (To the audience) Doña Lola sent me to a co-ed school in a poor neighborhood of Madrid, around Lavapiés. (Reflective) As hard as I try, I can't remember anything I learned in my classes at that school, or any of the friends I made there. I do remember the songs that were popular, "Delilah," "Love is Blue," "Digan lo que digan." (She sings.) And the ones that made me cry, "Guantanamera" and "Cuando salí de Cuba", songs about missing your land, about having left your heart and your soul buried there. (She sings.) I remember the movies; my favorite was The Time Machine, which was dubbed in Castilian, of course. And the fashions! Those gorgeous bell-bottom pants and platform shoes. Wow! I felt so chic in Madrid. I loved my cheap boots and my brown fake-leather overcoat, my fashionable sunglasses, the "gafas"; my hair, long for the first time in my life, and wavy. My poise and my gestures had acquired a certain Spanish touch, (with a thick Castilian accent) "el toque castizo." I had surely become a perfect combination of Raquel Welch and

Ursula Andress and Sarita Montiel. (She turns to MARIO) But enough of my Spanish exile! I'm boring you to tears.

ROSA takes off her suit jacket and throws it over one shoulder, holding the collar between her thumb and index finger, a la Raphael. She enters the living room and sits with MARIO.

MARIO: How long were you in Madrid?

ROSA: About eight months. From October of '68 to May of '69.

MARIO: (With a smirk) Sixty-nine? Mmm... You certainly picked the right year.

ROSA: Yes. Now let's talk about you...

MARIO flips through pages, ignoring ROSA's request.

MARIO: These pictures are great.

ROSA: Yeah, I'm glad I got them out.

MARIO: Too bad there are so many of your parents.

ROSA: (Insistent) What happened to you after you left Cuba?

MARIO: (Teasing) Exciting things. (He hands ROSA the album.) But I want to hear all about you, first.

ROSA looks through the album until she finds the photo she likes. A black and white snapshot of ROSA and MARIO as children is projected on the screen. They are about twelve; she is chubby, he is very thin. They are smiling for the camera, holding hands impishly.

ROSA: This is my favorite picture of us.

MARIO: It's the only one of you and me. Your mother took it...

ROSA: I'll make a copy of it for you.

MARIO stands up.

MARIO: (Nostalgic) You used to call me Marito.

ROSA: And you called me Rosi.

MARIO: We're twelve years old...

ROSA: You live next door.

MARIO: We have similar families.

ROSA: Macho-father, puppet-mother. The Works.

MARIO: We help each other.

ROSA stands up, excited like a child.

ROSA: We're accomplices!

MARIO: Best friends.

Silence. ROSA is saddened by a memory. The projected image fades.

ROSA: But our friendship didn't stand a chance, Marito. My father wouldn't let me play with you.

MARIO: (Effeminate) Because I was obvious?

ROSA: Blatantly obvious.

MARIO: Too bad.

ROSA: The first time you came to visit, my father didn't even greet you. Remember? And then when you left, he gave me his fucked-up orders: I never ever want to see you with that boy again! Can't you tell he's a "pájaro"?

MARIO: Yeah, "pájaro." (He whistles.) A pretty bird. What were some of the other things they called me?

ROSA: Pato.

MARIO: A cute little duck. Quack quack quack!

ROSA: Butterfly.

MARIO: (Fluttering around) Mariposa!

ROSA: Invertido.

MARIO: Freak!

ROSA: Partido.

MARIO: Broken one!

ROSA: Mariquita.

MARIO: Little Mary!

BOTH: Pervert!

Silence.

ROSA: (Like her father) I don't want to see you with that boy again, is that clear?! Don't even speak to him!

MARIO: He was afraid I might contaminate you.

ROSA: (Laughing) Little did he know!

PERFORMANCE 2

The Riot Act

Lights up on MARIO and ROSA, in the living room. MARIO's guffawing is heard as ROSA walks to the microphone. She takes long, thumping steps, pulling up her pants. She is doing an impersonation of a John Wayne type. As she finds her place in front of the mike, she becomes once again a storyteller.

ROSA: I remember feeling attracted to women since I was a baby. When I was about seven I used to play doctor with a neighbor girl. She'd hug me and I'd touch her "sick" tummy and she'd touch the "bebé" I had between my legs and it felt so good. We closed our eyes and kissed each other on the mouth, with tight, bumbling lips. We played house and I was the husband. And we had children. (Silence.) My fantasies started early. I was usually a handsome knight in love with a princess. Or a tough militia man who carried two guns, one hanging from each hip. A virile and brave captain. Oh yes, and I drove a jeep. Everyone respected me and loved me, especially the women. And I always managed to get the lady of my dreams, Sarita Montiel! (She turns to MARIO, who is sitting on the couch, posing as a femme fatale.) You, on the other hand, wanted to be Sarita!

MARIO: (Taking a bow) Ay! Sarita is the most feminine woman that ever lived!

ROSA: What a voice she had! (To the audience) La Montiel was a

Spanish actress famous for her roles as Singing Starlet who succumbs to temptation and is rescued from perdition by a handsome wealthy leading man.

MARIO: (He props up his invisible large breasts.) She was also famous for her humongous tetas.

ROSA: (Entranced) She sang "cuplés," songs about forbidden loves and valiant bullfighters and beautiful women who sell violets!

MARIO: Her best movie was The Last Cuplé.

ROSA: My favorite was The Queen of Chantecler...

MARIO will impersonate the voluptuous Spanish songstress. His left hand on his waist, his right playing invisible castanets, he flutters his eyelashes and sensuously wets his lips with his tongue. He begins humming and then sings the refrain from "El relicario," a song about a handsome bullfighter and his beloved dark-haired lady. ROSA will speak over MARIO's singing.

ROSA: Most of her movies told the same story and in most of them she died in the last scene, or her lover died. The cause of her death was always mysterious and dramatic: a weak heart, a deep unrequited love, too much boozing or simply too much singing...

MARIO falls on the floor, stricken by a heart ache and a terrible cough. He is trying to sing in spite of the pain and the coughing. ROSA runs to his side, holds his limp body.

ROSA: No! No! A doctor, please! Is there a doctor in the house?!

(MARIO fakes a melodramatic death. ROSA faces the audience, solemnly) Ladies and gentlemen, the great Marito-Sarita, singer of singers, dancer of dancers, has just sung her last cuplé!

MARIO gets up from the floor, laughing. ROSA goes back to the microphone.

MARIO: (Waving his hand with a flourish) Bah! Too much melodrama!

ROSA: I agree!

MARIO: Back to your story, please.

ROSA: (To the audience) Where was I? Ah sí, my fantasies... Damn how I prayed. I prayed and begged God to help me change.

MARIO kneels down and prays. His eery silhouette flickers on the screen.

ROSA: I'd kneel during Mass and I'd tell Jesucristo and the Virgin of Charity: Look here you guys, please, you've got to save my soul from eternal damnation!

MARIO: (Echoing ROSA) And my body from temptation.

BOTH: (In litany) From eternal damnation!

ROSA: Tell you what, Papá Dios, so that everything goes fast and easy, I'll close my eyes and I'll think real hard that I'm a normal girl and that I like boys.

MARIO: That I'm a normal boy and that I like girls!

ROSA: Then I'll open my eyes, I'll look at the statue of Christ on the cross and Wham! Rosita Rodríguez has been cured! She's a new person! (Imploring) Is that a deal? (Silence.) But there were no miracles for me...

MARIO: No miracles for us.

ROSA takes off her coat jacket and turns to MARIO; he is back on the couch.

ROSA: You're not gonna believe what my mother said to me one day!

MARIO: She read you the riot act?

ROSA: The works!

MARIO: (Campy) Was she worried, perhaps, about your tomboy manners, your disdain for domestic activities?

ROSA adopts a body builder's pose.

ROSA: She wanted to drive out of me all traces of masculinity.

MARIO: (Effeminate) To force you to be fragile.

ROSA: (Mockingly) Tender.

MARIO: Womanly.

Silence.

ROSA: Lucky for me there were no beatings and no broken jaws.

MARIO: Lucky for you.

ROSA: (Somber) From my hideaway I listened to your cries...

MARIO: Things were much worse for me... because I was born a boy.

ROSA: Your crime deserved no forgiveness and no mercy.

MARIO: Blows and kicks for me, The Butterfly.

ROSA: The Duck. The Little Mary.

MARIO: For you, wise advice...

ROSA: (Extremely feminine, impersonating her mother) Your behavior must be... calmer, Rosita. You should lower your voice when you talk. You shouldn't be out there hunting birds and climbing trees. (As if carrying a baby) You should play house with your dolls and not play war games with the boys. You must help me more around the house, and stay home more. (Authoritative) And you must start wearing skirts!

PERFORMANCE 3

Guantanamera

MARIO and ROSA enter the kitchen, marching. MARIO is waving a large Cuban flag. ROSA is carrying one bearing a hammer and a sickle.

MARIO: In line!

ROSA: (Saluting) To the frontline!

MARIO: The Bandera Cubana is flying above the world!

ROSA: The new Cuban flag!

BOTH: To the frontline, Guantánamo men!

ROSA: Your motherland is proud of you, Guantanameros!

MARIO points somewhere offstage.

MARIO: Señorita García is coming!

ROSA: Coñó!

They carefully place the flags on the floor. ROSA will pose as the teacher. MARIO salutes her and freezes in this military posture.

ROSA: A ver. Respondan. What did Cristobál Colón say when he set foot in Cuba in 1492?

MARIO: This is the most beautiful land that human eyes have ever seen.

ROSA: Who was the great man who died in 1895, fighting for our freedom?

MARIO: The greatest poet that ever lived: José Martí, our apostle!

ROSA: When did Cuba gain its independence from the Spanish crown?

MARIO: In 1898.

ROSA: Muy bien. Respondan. What did Che Guevara say to Fidel before he left Cuba to fight for the liberation of Latin America?

MARIO: Hasta la victoria, siempre! Until victory victory victory always always always!

ROSA: Enough! Now name one of Fidel's good friends.

MARIO: Nikita!

ROSA: What does president Johnson do to Black people in the North?

MARIO: He throws them to the dogs.

ROSA: What is a better word for Capitalism?

MARIO: Imperialism!

ROSA: Recite one of Martí's famous poems.

MARIO: (Solemnly) I am an honest man from where the palm tree grows. And before I die, I want to share these verses of my soul. (Singing) Guantanamera, guajira guantanamera...

ROSA: Quiet! Quiet I said!

Silence. They march down to the living room and come to a sudden halt. MARIO will impersonate a Miliciano. He takes a crumpled piece of paper out of his shirt pocket and waves it aggressively in ROSA's face.

MARIO: This paper says that you people want to leave the country. Is that correct?

ROSA: (Somewhat intimidated) Yes. That's correct.

MARIO: In that case, I'll have to inventory your belongings.

ROSA: We know.

MARIO inspects the place.

MARIO: I'll have to make a list of everything you own.

ROSA: We know.

MARIO: The man of the house will have to go to the fields. And he will live there, in Las Barracas, until the family receives the Exit Telegram.

ROSA: We know... sir.

MARIO: You must call me "camarada."

ROSA: Sí, camarada.

MARIO: Sunday at six in the morning, the man of the house must show up at Guantánamo Park. And he will be taken to the fields to cut sugar cane. Understood?

ROSA: Yes. He will cut a lot of sugar cane, comrade.

BOTH: (Frenzied) Camarada camarada camarada!!

Silence. MARIO will no longer impersonate the Miliciano.

MARIO: (To the audience) Now we're the Worms, "Los Gusanos."

ROSA: That's what they call us at school.

MARIO: And everywhere we go.

ROSA: ¡A los Gusanos! (She stomps her feet.) ¡A los Gusanos los aplastamos!

MARIO: The Worms! (He stomps his feet.) Let's crush the Worms!

They stomp their feet vigorously and then throw themselves on the couch, playfully.

MARIO: (To the audience) We're willing to kiss the Gringo asses.

ROSA: Speak for yourself!

MARIO runs up to the kitchen, picks up the Soviet flag and

MARIO: Faggots were taken there, too, because the Revolution said they were sick and needed reforming.

ROSA: Treatment.

MARIO: Las Barracas: A magical place where traitors paid their dues...

ROSA: And "sick" men and women turned "normal."

The Cuban national anthem is heard far away. The characters march, waving the flags and saluting.

ROSA: In line!

MARIO: To the frontline!

BOTH: With the Bandera Cubana flying above the world!

They exit marching.

BOTH: (As an echo) To the frontline, Guantanameros!

mounts its pole, rubbing himself against it.

MARIO: We're willing to turn ourselves into whores.

ROSA: Gusano!

MARIO: Willing to sell ourselves.

MARIO returns to the living room, carrying both flags. He sits with ROSA.

MARIO: One day they started to pick up all the guys with long hair...

ROSA: Women in hot pants.

MARIO: The people who sang Beatle songs.

They sing the refrain of a Beatle song with a marked Cuban accent.

MARIO: They picked up the Patos and the dykes, "Las Tortilleras."

ROSA: Coño! That word still gives me goose bumps.

MARIO pats his hands together as if making a tortilla.

MARIO: ¡Tor-ti-lle-ra! Tortilla maker!

ROSA: Shut up! Carajo!

MARIO grabs the Cuban flag and pretends to be cutting its pole off the ground.

MARIO: We were chopped off the ground as if we were sugar cane!

Helterskelter! A troche y moche!

Silence. ROSA turns to MARIO sympathetically.

ROSA: Did you escape the Raid?

¡a casa de las hijas!

MARIO: Yes. I was lucky... or too young.

ROSA: So was I. But I had friends who were taken away to Las Barracas, where the Gusanos were punished...

PERFORMANCE 4

One Huge Cemetery

Spotlight on ROSA. She stands in front of the microphone, facing the audience.

ROSA: The first couple of months in California I did nothing but bitch and ask to be sent back to Spain. There was life there, in Madrid. There were good-looking people and gorgeous music and crowded plazas. Here, in California, there were only cars and freeways. Nobody walked! The streets were always empty. How I hated this world! Southern California was one huge cemetery. And the music on the radio was horrible! (She mockingly sings a verse from a late sixties rock song.) They called that unimaginative crap music! The weather was supposed to be the best on the entire globe. It was warm like in Cuba and it would be easy for both of my parents to find jobs here. My poor Mami! She had to work outside the house for the first time in her life! Yes, California was supposed to be the promised land. But to me it was the vivid picture of Hell. Nothing moved me. No, not even gorgeous blonde Gringas or the prospect of "espeekee de eengleesh." I was convinced that I had left my heart behind, buried on the island, just like the song said, Cuando salí de Cuba... (She sings.)

While ROSA sings, MARIO enters and stands behind her, his arms crossed. He is glaring at her, tapping his foot impatiently. She notices his presence and turns around to look at him. Then she

takes off her jacket, throws it over one shoulder, and faces the audience.

ROSA: Anyway, to make a long story short... I bitched and bitched about going back to Spain, even to Cuba! I bitched about my boredom and my loneliness, about my nostalgia. I drove myself to tears and exile hysteria. I bitched until one day when I woke up with this heavy realization: I was stuck here! Coñó! That day I grabbed my Spanish records, my photo album and my Cuban mementos, and I stashed them all deep in the closet. Then I started to go to American movies, because now I was ready to understand them. The first American film I remember enjoying was Valley of the Dolls. The first American song I sang was "Aquarius." The first one I detested was "It's your thing." And the first American meal I remember savoring with gusto was a Sir Burger Supreme, with cheese. (As she exits) Mmm... The rest I guess you could say is... history.

PERFORMANCE 5

The Test

Dark stage. A distant, haunting disco tune is heard. The disco ball begins to turn, creating an explosion of bright-colored, swirling stars. Lights up on MARIO, under the ball, dancing. He is entranced. As the ball gradually slows to a halt, a series of slides is projected on the screen: Images of MARIO in the nude. The photos have the look and texture of a soft-porn centerfold. In the last few shots, MARIO's body appears sensuously intertwined with another male body, as if they were making passionate love. Only their silhouettes in chiaroscuro are seen in the last shot, which lingers and fades as the music stops.

MARIO looks around, surprised to see himself alone on the dance floor. Lights up on ROSA; she is standing in front of the screen, facing MARIO accusingly.

ROSA: (To MARIO) Did you make the appointment?

MARIO ignores her. He is dancing again.

ROSA: I'm talking to you, Marito!

MARIO: Use my real name! I'm not a kid anymore.

ROSA: Did you call the clinic, Mario?

MARIO: No, I didn't!

ROSA: I'll make the appointment for you if you want...

MARIO: I said no! Leave me alone. Can't you see I'm enjoying myself? There's nothing wrong with me.

ROSA: I know. But we have to be sure.

MARIO stops dancing and turns to ROSA, clenching his fists. They stare at each other for painful, silent seconds.

MARIO: But what if...?

ROSA: Qué?

MARIO: What if it turns out that I'm... infected?

ROSA: We'll deal with it. Together.

MARIO: Will it be expensive? You know I don't have any money.

ROSA: It's a program set up by the state. And it's free. (She walks down to the living room, reaching out to MARIO with her hand.) Vamos, Marito!

MARIO: (Childish) If you insist on calling me Marito, I'll call you Rosi!

ROSA: Fine with me!

MARIO: After we make that appointment, could we go for a walk at the beach?

ROSA: Sure.

Lights dim to black as ROSA and MARIO enter the beach area. When the lights go up, ROSA is sitting on the bench, MARIO on the towel. She is gently massaging his shoulders. Soothing ocean sounds are heard.

ROSA: I know how difficult this is for you, Mario. I went through it myself. And I was scared shitless waiting for the results.

MARIO: But women don't seem to get this virus as much as men.

ROSA: I don't think anyone is exempt.

MARIO: But you're OK... aren't you?

ROSA: Yes. I'm OK.

MARIO: The last time I had a blood test, I fainted.

ROSA: That happens to a lot of people.

MARIO: My blood looked so thick and alive. It had a beautiful color. Bright carmine... scarlet.

ROSA: You won't faint this time. Don't worry.

MARIO: They give you a number and you wait a week. Then you know.

ROSA: You should spend that week with someone you love.

MARIO: Are you willing to pamper me for seven days?

ROSA: I'll make you frijoles negros and yuca frita.

MARIO: You don't know how to cook Cuban food!

ROSA: I sure do. I can even make your favorite dessert.

MARIO: Mercocha?!

ROSA: Yes, mercocha.

MARIO leans back and rests his head on ROSA's lap. She caresses his face and tousles his hair. Lights dim and music plays faintly. It is a Spanish ballad from the late sixties.

ROSA: I'll play my oldies for you. Raphael, Sarita Montiel...

MARIO: The music I never listen to anymore.

ROSA: We'll sing and dance all week!

MARIO: But the seventh day will come.

ROSA: It'll be a Tuesday. But not a "Martes Trece."

MARIO: No. It'll be a Friday.

The music stops abruptly. Spot light on MARIO. He jumps up. He seems confused and frightened.

MARIO: Did you hear that?

ROSA: Yes, I did.

MARIO: Was that my number?!

ROSA: I don't know. Why don't you check? Do you have your slip?

MARIO pulls a crumpled piece of paper out of his pants pocket, stares at it and tosses it away.

MARIO: Coño, Rosi! They're calling me.

ROSA picks up the slip.

ROSA: Go in, Marito. We have to know...

MARIO seems restless; he feels trapped in his body. He wants to set out running and escape his fate.

MARIO: No!

MARIO enters the discotheque area. Blaring disco music plays as the previous slides are projected again, this time in rapid succession. The disco ball is swirling, frantically. MARIO tries to move to the music, but he is shaky and scared. His dance is a forced mockery of pleasure. The ball comes to a halt and the music stops. MARIO looks at ROSA. She is standing next to him.

ROSA: Give them your number, Marito.

MARIO: I'm afraid.

ROSA: I know. But we have to find out. (She hands him the paper.) Here. They need this to show you the results of your test.

MARIO: And then what?

ROSA: Then we'll know what to do. We'll get help. (Silence.) If you need it.

MARIO: (As he exits reluctantly) I'll see you soon, I hope.

ROSA: Of course you will, chico!

PERFORMANCE 6

High School Days

Spotlight on ROSA, in front of the mike. The instrumental version of a sixties rock song is heard.

ROSA: Can you picture me in high school? I was confused to the marrow but fashionable. My hair dyed blonde, or rather what I thought was blonde; in reality a strange orange shade somewhere between red and brown, barf-inducing color. I used to wear those dreadful bell-bottoms with the waistline below the hip, and a wide, scaly, worn-out leather belt. I thought was hot to trot! The American students, compared to the ones in Madrid, seemed to me like people from another planet: tall, dead-white, washed up and tacky. Skinny girls with false eyelashes made of broom straw. Straight hair teased on top in the form of a nest, hanging long and loose below, as if all of a sudden there were a million greasy baby boas coming out of the high nest. Eyeshadow in blue, green, purple or all three colors smeared on their eyelids. Miniskirts that displayed long, feeble legs wrapped in grey stockings. Platform shoes that forced them to drag themselves like war tanks. Most of the boys were freckled blonde types with T-shirts and filthy tennis shoes. The Koreans were gaining a reputation for being smart. Through a dirty trick of fate, some of them had ended up first in Argentina and then in "America," so they spoke fluent Spanish with a Tango accent. There was also a species called Low-

riders, mean-looking dudes who smoked marijuana and lived in Santa Ana. And the Blacks! How they had warned me at home to stay away from those people! Which I did, Heaven forbid. And while we're on the subject of my high school days, those ESL classes! English as a Second Language. The darned classes were taught by a thin, stooped old man who didn't speak a word of Spanish, much less Korean. Mister "What's-His-Name" would stand in front of us every morning and tell jokes that no one understood. He talked and talked and cracked up and talked and once in a while he'd write a verb on the board, asking us to repeat: I eat, you eat, he eats, she eats she eats she eats...

PERFORMANCE 7

Carnival Queen

Lights up on ROSA and MARIO, standing in front of the mirror. ROSA is taking women's garments out of a suitcase while MARIO watches. She brings out a pink fur coat, pumps, a long, wavy, auburn wig, and gaudy costume jewelry.

ROSA: Where did you get all this stuff?

MARIO: It belongs to a friend who does drag.

ROSA: Do you...?

MARIO: Once in a while, but only for the fun of it.

ROSA: I didn't know...

MARIO: My drag is a very private thing.

ROSA: Sure!

MARIO: Go ahead. Try some of it on.

ROSA: (Stroking the fur coat) This feels so good.

MARIO: It's all legitimate fake. Have you ever seen finer pink fur?

ROSA puts on the fur coat, the wig, a pearl necklace and earrings. She freezes into a feminine, doll-like posture. MARIO looks her over from several angles.

MARIO: (Laughing) I don't know. Somehow it isn't you.

ROSA: I disagree! I look radiant!

MARIO: Like a delicate and desirable flower.

ROSA observes her own reflection, laughing.

ROSA: The Real Rose.

MARIO: I thought you said you're always a man in your fantasies.

ROSA: Not always. (She is putting on makeup.) There are those rare occasions when I feel totally fem. (Campy) When I become La Mujer.

MARIO: Eat your heart out, Sarita!

ROSA: (Fixing her hair) Do you remember our childhood fantasy?

MARIO: Of course I do. It was a story about a dancer and her tragic love...

ROSA: (Extremely effeminate) I am La Rosa, the Carnival Queen.

MARIO: Your kingdom is a majestic float. You're the dancer of dancers! The singer of singers!

ROSA: (Showing off her butt) La más culona!

MARIO: One night you decide to take a break from so much dancing and singing...

ROSA: Yes. I want to experience the wonders of a simple life.

MARIO: You're strolling through the park, mingling with the people... (He bows.) Your faithful and abiding subjects.

ROSA: And then I meet him.

MARIO: His name is Amor.

ROSA: I fall in love with him at first sight.

MARIO: You'll become his sweetheart and he'll take you to his home, to meet his parents. (ROSA takes a couple of steps, swaying her hips as if she were modeling.) You walk in looking pure and innocent, wearing a simple summer dress.

ROSA: His parents greet me warmly. They think that I'm a decent

girl. (Making the sign of the cross) And that I go to Mass on Sundays.

MARIO: They are so pleased their boy has met you, Rosita.

ROSA: But then...

MARIO: Oh then.

ROSA: Amor finds out that I have a secret life...

MARIO: He sees you one night, half-naked, dancing your butt off on a float that represents a giant phallus.

MARIO sobs melodramatically.

ROSA: He cries because I'm not the decent girl he thought I was.

(MARIO kneels in front of ROSA, an affected expression of anguish on his face.) I catch his glance full of sadness and rage. (MARIO stands up, disheartened.) Then he leaves, and I jump off the float and run after him. (MARIO enters the beach area. Sounds of a raging storm.) I must tell him the truth! (To the audience) But what the hell is the truth?!

MARIO is getting ready to jump in the water.

MARIO: Adiós, Carnival Queen!

ROSA: (Crying) He runs to the pier and there he stops, and there I see him... He's going to take his life!

MARIO: Adiós!

ROSA: No, Amor! Don't do it! Wait! You must listen to me, I am not who you think I am! (To the audience) But he just saw me dancing my butt off on top of a huge pinga. He knows that I am who I am!

MARIO: Adiós!

ROSA: (Horrified) There's a wave, a tidal wave that swells up and

swallows him in one gulp! Amor!

MARIO jumps into the choppy ocean.

MARIO: (As he exits) Adiós, Carnival Queen!

ROSA kneels in front of the mirror and cries. Then she takes off her outfit in haste, laughing hysterically. MARIO returns. He is carrying a plate of mercocha. He sits on the floor and offers ROSA the chewy toffee-like candy. The characters' childhood fantasy continues.

MARIO: Here's some mercocha for you. Mami just made it.

ROSA: Gracias, Marito! (She eats some, chewing with gusto.) Mmm... cooked sugar, cinnamon... I love this gooey stuff!

MARIO: (Timidly) Rosi, could I give you a kiss, just a little kiss? Would you let me...?

ROSA: Sure, Marito, but not on the mouth, OK? 'Cause that's for grown-ups and, besides, I don't like to kiss boys.

MARIO: Fantastic, Rosita, because I don't like to kiss girls but I'd love to kiss you, because you're my sister.

He gives her a breathy kiss on the cheek.

ROSA: Marito, you're blushing!

MARIO: No, I'm not! (She hugs him.) Rosi, I...

ROSA: Yes, Marito?

MARIO: I don't think Amor should die.

ROSA: I agree! The Carnival Queen and her Amor should live happily ever after. Together!

Silence. MARIO drapes his arm over ROSA's shoulders.

MARIO: There's something else I've been meaning to tell you...

ROSA: What is it?

MARIO: (Apologetic) I... I hate playing the part of Amor.

ROSA: (Laughing) And I hate playing the Carnival Queen!

MARIO stands up impulsively and picks up the garments.

MARIO: Let's do it right!

ROSA: Do what...?

MARIO: Our show. Our way!

ROSA: Now you're talking, coño!

MARIO begins to dress in front of the mirror. He puts on a girdle and stockings, then a tight, black evening gown, spike-heel pumps, makeup, the wig, the fur coat. While he is dressing, scenes from two of Sarita Montiel's movies are projected: a soundless collage of close-ups from "El último cuplé" and "La violetera."

ROSA searches through her record collection and finds the perfect song, a heavily orchestrated bolero rendered passionately by a Spanish songstress; it tells a story of lost loves and broken hearts. ROSA puts it on and then looks at MARIO from different angles. She seems to be preparing the scene for filming. She will direct him and he will do as she says. The song lingers in the background, its lyrics in counterpoint with the characters' words. The projection of movie clips ends when ROSA begins to speak.

ROSA: Your long hair waving and bouncing. Your chin barely touching the left shoulder. Close-up of your eyes. Now turn your head to face the audience.

MARIO: Daring and alluring, provocative...

ROSA: Yes. Now let your coat fall gently on the floor. Close-up of your bare back. Then rest your hands on your thighs.

MARIO: I am the Carnival Queen...

The song resounds, powerfully.

ROSA: Hurry! Wet your lips, clear your throat. Let your voice be an echo. Sing!

MARIO walks coquettishly to the microphone, grabs it delicately and then turns to ROSA.

MARIO: What should I be thinking? What should I feel?

ROSA: Just feel the music. Feel the strings, the brass, the voice. Feel the words. Make them tell your own story.

MARIO: When I sing, should I think about him? Amor...?

ROSA stands erect, reaching out to MARIO with her hand. She has become the parody of a man saying farewell to his beloved mistress.

ROSA: Yes, think about me.

Spotlight on MARIO. He dances sensuously. Transported by the music, he begins to lipsync the song. The impersonation is vivid and convincing. He is a beautiful woman dancing for her man, a Spanish songstress rendering the lyrics of a love song with passion. ROSA's velvety voice is heard over the music.

ROSA: Your hips are swaying for me. Close-up of your eyes, of your carmine lips. Now throw your head back, your silky hair bouncing. You're a desirable flower, Sarita, a beautiful singing mannequin. The lady of my dreams.

PERFORMANCE 8

Total Physical Response

Spotlight on ROSA, in front of the microphone. She is wearing a tight-fitting dress with a bolero jacket. Her makeup and hair style accentuate her feminine qualities. She looks elegant and professional.

ROSA: You like my outfit? I dress this way to teach: The Academic Look. It isn't really me, but what the heck. I gotta play the part. I'm a Maestra de Español at the University of Orange. Teaching is my thing, I love it. It's great to be paid for doing what you love to do, know what I mean? I'm good at it, too. I get excellent evaluations. The secret to my success? I don't teach grammar and I don't do drills. Instead, I use a technique called Total Physical Response, T-P-R. (To someone in the audience) No, it's not what you're thinking. It's a teaching technique I picked up in one of my Methods courses. I was invented by a guy named Asher. For real! With TPR, you command the students to do certain things and they're supposed to obey you, responding only with a gesture. (To someone in the audience) Don't make that horny face. It's all very professional and pedagogical. (She exits the stage and mingles with the audience.) You start with parts of the body, Tóquense los ojos! And they touch their eyes. Tóquense la cabeza! And they touch their heads. Los brazos!, their arms, El estómago! their tummies, El trasero!, their plump behinds. Then, gradually

you go on to more complex commands. You say things like TAKE A LONG, WARM BATH AND SING "GUANTANAMERA" WHILE YOU SCRUB HARD. MAKE A CUBAN SANDWICH. MAKE A CUBA LIBRE... You get the idea? The students are supposed to associate the new sounds with the actions without having to learn the grammar. And they pick up the language that way. Makes sense, doesn't it? They don't have to know that the noun "tortillera" is of the feminine gender because it ends in a; or that "pájaro" is masculine because it ends in o. None of those distinctions make sense, anyway. How do you explain the gender of nouns like "pinga," which means dick in Cuban Spanish? Or the noun "bollo," which means pussy? Have you ever heard of transgender nouns? They don't teach you about those in Spanish classes! (To some of the spectators) You want a TPR demonstration? Don't worry, I won't make you touch your private nouns. Promise! Now watch me and do as I do. (She's raising her arms.) Levanten los brazos! (She's touching her eyes.) Tóquense los ojos! (She looks around, obviously disappointed.) On second thought, maybe you're not ready for my kind of teaching!

PERFORMANCE 9

Man of the House

Lights up on the living room. ROSA and MARIO are drinking Cuba Libres and listening to Cuban music (Celia Cruz, Beny Moré.) They are stoned. The look of the room has changed slightly: a couple of knick-knacks have been added and one of the watercolors has been replaced with a hyperrealist painting of MARIO and a Latino man in the nude. As the lights go up, MARIO is looking at the painting. ROSA is sitting on the couch, observing him. In spite of the characters' slurs, the conversation is fast-paced. The mood is campy.

MARIO: God, I miss him!

ROSA: Do you love him?

MARIO: Yes.

ROSA: Does he love you?

MARIO: Maybe.

ROSA: Why aren't you with him, then?

MARIO: It's a long story...

ROSA: I like long stories.

MARIO: (Sarcastic) I can attest to that!

ROSA: He doesn't mind that you're a "Gusano"?

MARIO: He knows how I feel... He's a poet, you know.

ROSA: Yes! And poets know about feelings. But does he know that you're a slimy Cuban worm?

MARIO: Speak for yourself!

ROSA: Do you like his poems?

MARIO: (Laughing) I don't understand them!

ROSA: (Toasting) Here's to poetry!

MARIO sits on the floor, by ROSA's feet.

MARIO: I'd rather toast to art, to the the masters I admire, Dali, Andy Warhol, Frida Kahlo. (He drinks.) To the pretty landscapes I paint.

ROSA: Original Marios.

MARIO: Shit that you hang on an office wall.

ROSA puts on a disco song.

ROSA: So... are you moving to New York?

MARIO: I don't know. I like where I live.

ROSA: Here and there and everywhere.

MARIO: (Defensive) In beautiful homes, all in the best areas of Hollywood and Laguna...

ROSA: A kept woman.

MARIO: Please! I prefer to think of myself as a hired artist. Yes, a sort of glorified interior decorator. Give me a budget and I'll turn your house into a work of art!

ROSA: I like what you did here.

MARIO: I just... added a little trinket here, a little color over there, put up a couple of pictures, a new carpet. Nothing much.

ROSA: Joan doesn't like the art.

MARIO: What's her problem?

ROSA: She thinks it's self-indulgent, or narcissistic or

something. I mean, why give us a picture of you and some guy getting it on?

MARIO: We're not "getting it on"!

ROSA: She thinks you are.

MARIO: And what do you think, Rosa Rodríguez?

ROSA: Never mind. Let's get back to the topic of your trip to New York. When are you leaving?

MARIO: I decided I'm not going. I'm staying right here.

ROSA: You love living in other people's houses, don't you?

MARIO: The variety does wonders for my biorhythms.

ROSA: I like your art, Mario. Really, I do. What do you call that style?

MARIO: Hyperrealism.

ROSA: That's it. Suddenly the whole place looks... hyperreal. I like it.

MARIO looks around the room, as if inspecting it.

MARIO: Actually, I think I'm a better housesitter than I am a decorator. And a much better decorator than an artist... Joan hates it, doesn't she?

ROSA: Yeah, she hates your "touch." You know why?

MARIO: Because she thinks I'm prettier and more talented than her?

ROSA: No. Because she wishes she'd done all this herself. She should've been the one to make things look different around here. But all she can do is add gadgets, fancy machines. She knows that you and I have something special, and she can't figure out what it

is. So she's pissed.

MARIO: We share memories. There's no way she can be part of that.

ROSA: She doesn't like being left out. And she resents you for it.

MARIO: Too bad.

Silence. ROSA lights up a joint and passes it to MARIO. They smoke zestfully, indulging in their highs.

ROSA: Speaking of art, what have you been working on lately?

(Teasing) Another painting of yourself?

MARIO: (In jest) I'm experimenting with new media, growing bacteria on soiled underwear and exposing toilet paper to the sun. Decay is my theme.

ROSA: It sounds like... a science experiment.

MARIO: Yes. It's all very cold and objective.

ROSA: (Laughing) You won't be hanging any of that new stuff here, that's for sure.

MARIO: Thanks for your support!

ROSA: You're ahead of your time, Marito.

MARIO: Yes. A century from now people will be paying millions for my underwear pieces.

ROSA puts on a record of Puerto Rican salsa.

ROSA: You'll get a break one of these days.

MARIO: Maybe in New York...?

ROSA: (Sarcastic) Dreams do come true in the Big Apple.

MARIO dances. The music is powerful, inviting. He is getting down.

MARIO: My man is waiting for me en su querido Harlén, wearing his

Puerto Rico Libre T-shirt. (Shouting) Viva Puerto Rico Libre!

MARIO gestures for ROSA to join him; she declines.

MARIO: He is listening to Willy Colón, waiting for me.

ROSA: Go back to your poet, then!

MARIO: No... I know what it'll be like. I lived with him for almost a year, remember?

ROSA: Nine months, to be exact.

MARIO: What a good memory you have when you get stoned!

ROSA is moving, getting into the song.

ROSA: You really want to dance with me?

He nods and smiles. She joins him. They are perfectly compatible dancers. She leads. Their steps are fanciful and intricate. They look great together.

ROSA: We still have the knack!

MARIO: What do you mean? We're better than ever!

The music stops. They catch their breaths. Silence. We hear a distant conversation, voices of Caribbean men telling jokes and laughing. MARIO seems enticed by the sound.

MARIO: You hear that?

ROSA: The music?

MARIO: No. The Machos Caribeños talking downstairs, in the lobby, or at the corner... You hear them?

ROSA: No.

MARIO: My poet... is one of them.

ROSA: Yeah, you like the Macho type.

MARIO: He thinks he's one of those real men.

ROSA: El Hombre!

MARIO: The man of the house.

ROSA: Hair on his chest, a gold medallion.

Silence.

MARIO: He's a ghetto school teacher, a radical Boricua from Upper Manhattan.

ROSA: Definitely not my type.

MARIO: I met him in Miami, at a Cuban restaurant...

ROSA: What was he doing there, starting the Revolution in the monster's tummy?

MARIO: He was visiting an ex-lover.

ROSA: No me digas! He has a weakness for Gusanos?!

MARIO: (Defensive) He had a weakness for me!

ROSA: I'm sure the feeling was mutual...

MARIO: (Nostalgic) When he came home everyday, after his subway ride, I'd greet him with a kiss...

ROSA: He'd let you kiss him?

MARIO: Yes. Then he talked about his students, about the lack of things at school. And I'd tell him about the bathroom basin, which was falling apart. And we'd bash the good-for-nothing Super who didn't fix shit.

ROSA: The Super-Soup.

MARIO: The Super-Caca.

ROSA: Su-Portorro.

MARIO: Super-Turd.

ROSA: In-Supertable.

Silence. They drink.

MARIO: My man has dreams.

ROSA: Who doesn't?

MARIO: He wants to change things with his writing, get people to think differently...

ROSA: I'll toast to change!

MARIO: Once in a while I'd buy him a chocolate milk shake. He's a chocoholic, you know...

ROSA: Does he like mercocha?

MARIO: (He nods) On Sundays we'd take long walks through Central Park, or we'd go to visit his revolutionary friends.

ROSA: The "Independentistas," your kind of crowd!

MARIO: Yes. But at home... I was his revolution.

ROSA puts on a disco song. Lights dim, closing in on the painting of MARIO and his lover.

MARIO: (Entranced) He kisses me reluctantly, but he will let me run my tongue down his arms, his neck; down the ecstasy line that passes through his belly button, that leads to his pubis and there it becomes a fragrant thicket. He'll let me savor his thighs, lick the dense black ringlets on his legs. His balls are overflowing and tender, he'll let me drink from them. His pinga is mine, too. He'll let me count each tiny vein, each wrinkle. He'll let it be my toy. Reddish brown, mushroom head. Baby pink tongue on his huge head. This is his offering... our favorite subject...

ROSA: Sex.

MARIO: Love.

ROSA: Revolution?

MARIO: Passion.

ROSA: Death?

MARIO: No.

Silence. ROSA mixes two Cuba Libres.

MARIO: He didn't... He didn't contaminate me.

ROSA: How do you know?

MARIO: He's not infected.

ROSA: How do you know?!

MARIO: He tested negative.

ROSA: Is that what he told you?

MARIO: Yes.

ROSA hands MARIO a drink.

ROSA: (Sarcastic) Here's to his health... Salud!

MARIO: Salud!

After taking a sip, ROSA lights the joint again. She smokes and offers MARIO some; he declines.

MARIO: You should never mix pot and Cuba Libres. It makes you evil... Rosa La Horrorosa! The Greatest Bitch! La Más Culona!

ROSA: You're drunk!

MARIO: (Laughing) And you're a pot head!

ROSA walks up to the painting of MARIO and his lover. She observes it, studies it. Then she turns to MARIO.

ROSA: Who did, then?

MARIO: Who did what?

ROSA: Who made you sick?!

MARIO: I don't know, Rosi.

PERFORMANCE 10

Drawing

Lights up on MARIO. He is at the beach, sketching on a drawing pad. His mother's mellow, heavily accented Cuban voice will be heard offstage. Her presence torments him; it cuts into his thoughts, overlaps with his words, drowns him out. But at times, it also becomes a distant wail, a soothing whisper. His mother, MIMA, is an invisible yet forceful presence, a powerful memory.

MARIO: Glass walls, the wind, a trace of the wind. And the palm trees... No, not the palm trees...

MIMA: (Imploring) Leave my son alone! Leave him alone!

MARIO: I'll draw the heat, it's vital. And the traffic lights and the highway... the city...

MIMA: I live with this fear! This fear!

MARIO grows increasingly edgy.

MARIO: The blond stud who's running to the beach, to his freedom.

MIMA: This fear that one day you'll go too far!

MARIO: I will draw his freckles and his muscles and the contour of his...

MIMA: You'll go too far!

MARIO: The brick facade... the fruit stand... Guantánamo Street, I'll draw it...

MIMA: What has Marito done to you?!

MARIO: Guantánamo Street leads to the sea.

MIMA: What has he done?!

Children are heard, laughing.

MARIO: The cool breeze that revives me...

MIMA: I will go crazy!

MARIO: The statue of an angel, I will draw it... The children who play by the shore...

MIMA: I will go crazy in this house! Loca!

A hard-driving disco tune comes on. MARIO tosses the pad away and runs to the dance floor. He dances awkwardly, as if in pain. His mother's tormented voice is heard over the music, blending with it.

MIMA: Loca! Loca!

The music stops. MARIO covers his ears and presses his hands against his temples. He tries to silence the voice but fails. The memory surrounds him, engulfs him.

MIMA: What do you mean he's a "pájaro"? Can't you see he's just a little boy?! What does a little boy know about being a pájaro?! He's a sensitive kid, that's all; he likes to do his drawings... So what if he turns out to be that way?! Does he deserve to die because of it?! (Horried) Leave him alone! You'll kill him!

MARIO falls on his knees.

MARIO: I can't feel my lips, Mima! I can't feel my face!

MIMA: Look what your father did to you, mijo.

MARIO: (In pain) Don't let him do it anymore!

MIMA: Look at your little nose, and your lips!

MARIO: I'm bleeding, Mima.

MIMA: Get dressed, mi niño. Let's go to the hospital.

Silence. MARIO gets up with great effort. He listens attentively, relieved that the voice is finally gone.

MARIO: (To the audience) I'm holding his hand. There are crowds and tall buildings, white columns, glass doors. I cling to my father, straggling behind. Why does he push me away? I look up at his moustache, I don't see it. (He sobs.) My Papi is gone! I'll never hide in his arms again, never fall asleep on his chest. Where is Papi?! (Impulsively, he walks to the mirror and presses his face against the glass, as if looking for his father on the other side.) I see him and I run to him! I hug him hard, as if afraid that he might leave again... He tells me that it was all a prank, that I shouldn't cry. Tears are for sissies. He had been hiding from me to see my reaction, hoping I'd behave like a tough little boy. (Haunting and mellifluous disco music is heard. MARIO returns to the dance floor. He sways and hums, submerged in his fantasy.) The music travels down my throat, up my asshole, like a swift and powerful virus, into my eyes, through my veins, invading me... killing me softly. (He reaches out to an invisible dance partner.) A young man on the dance floor, all by himself. It's me I'm seeing, ages ago. The time I broke away. Merry Christmas! Feliz Navidad at home with pork roast and black beans... Feliz? What was so merry about it? (Silence.) In my room, Pipo tears up my drawings and pushes my face into the watercolor set. He's forcing me to eat my greens, my reds and blues and grays, my pinks

and my browns, the spots of colored water, the fine hair of my brushes. Eat it all! Eat it! (He embraces himself.) Your arms used to embrace me, Papi. There, in front of my bedroom window, you used to kiss me. Sshhh... I just heard you come in. You're tiptoeing your way to my tiny arms. Lie down by my side, Papi. Cuddle up to me. Let me caress your eyelids, your hairy chest. (Silence.) I'm three years old and you still love me. Don't you? You're proud of your tough little boy.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

PERFORMANCE 1

A Healthy Meal

Lights up on the kitchen. ROSA enters, putting on a frilly apron. She will stay busy slicing carrots, preparing broiled chicken breasts and a potato salad, washing dishes and doing other related chores during the entire performance.

MARIO: (Entering) I'm hungry!

ROSA: We're having a healthy meal today. (She sticks a carrot in his mouth) Here. Have a snack.

MARIO: (Choking) Mmm... a familiar sensation.

MARIO nibbles at the carrot while observing ROSA.

MARIO: If only you could see yourself.

ROSA: (Laughing) Would I feel ashamed?

MARIO: The lovely Rosita is making a potato salad in her Seal Beach condo.

ROSA: We're also having broiled chicken breasts. No red meat!

MARIO: She has finally become an American!

ROSA: Wrong. The lovely Rosita was too old when she came to the Promised Land.

MARIO: (Melodramatic) Too old to become a true Gringa, but too young to embody the Guantanamera myth!

MARIO walks down to the living room, humming and singing the

"Guantanamera" refrain. He picks up one of ROSA's record albums and holds it up.

MARIO: Oh, but there are traces of the past in her pad!

ROSA: An occasional song by Raphael, yes. (She sings the refrain from "Digan lo que digan.") Nothing like a good dose of that guy to get me going.

MARIO: She's really a special kind of gal, this Rosita from Guantánamo.

ROSA: (Laughing) A lucky bitch!

MARIO: She laughs at her parents...

ROSA: The lost generation.

MARIO: A dying race?

ROSA: No. They're alive and kicking in Garden Grove, middle class Orange County.

MARIO: They fulfilled their dream! They have a house with a garden and a two-car garage and a dog and a cat and a swimming pool.

ROSA: And let's not forget their marble statue of the Virgin of Charity.

MARIO: La Virgencita de la Caridad del Cobre displayed on their lawn, yes!

ROSA: My parents are proud members of the Cuban Club José Martí.

MARIO: Ironically named after the great poet and apostle.

ROSA: Picture my father playing dominoes with three other Papi look-alikes. And my mother gossiping away in a corner.

MARIO: The Cuban Studs trying to pick up the beautiful and supposedly virginal Cubanitas. Mmm...

ROSA: And the Virgin of Charity watching over the whole scene.

MARIO: (Imitating old ladies) Oye, chica, Rosita, when are we going to meet your boyfriend? Oye, chica, Rosita, aren't you worried that you're getting too old for marriage? Aren't you concerned? Oye, chica, Rosita!!

ROSA: Shut up! No jodas más!

MARIO: Would you rather talk about... "The Island"?

Silence.

ROSA: Papi says he doesn't like to talk about Cuba and yet he talks about it constantly, every chance he gets! Cuba Cuba Cuba!

MARIO: He's true to his Cubanidad. Genuine Cubiche. You, on the other hand, never think about your homeland.

ROSA: Wrong. I just don't live in the past.

MARIO: You're proud of the world you've created. (Pointing to the watercolors) Tantalizing vaginal art...

ROSA: No maps of the Crocodile-Island.

MARIO: No flags and no portraits of Martí.

ROSA: No frijoles negros.

MARIO: No mercocha.

ROSA: Not even yuca frita. (Prissy) It's too fattening.

MARIO: (Mockingly proud) We're a unique breed of Cubanos.

ROSA: Cuban hyphen Americans.

MARIO: Cuban hymen Americans, you mean.

ROSA: Speak for yourself!

MARIO: OK, so we're neither here nor there. Is that it?

ROSA: Right. We can't handle the reactionary shit and we can't

swallow the communist crap, either. (Melodramatic) We're against all dogma!

MARIO: (Jestingly) That's us! Marginal people. Renegade YUCAS.

ROSA: Definitely not YUCKIES!

MARIO: How chic.

Silence.

ROSA: (Pensive) Would you like to go back to Cuba some day, Mario? Maybe live there?

MARIO: I'd like to visit, but I don't think I ever will.

ROSA: Don't be so sure.

MARIO: I've heard that things have changed there; the way they treat gay people, I mean.

ROSA: (Matter-of-fact) Everything changes.

MARIO: Except our memories...

ROSA is very involved in her cooking.

ROSA: You're distracting me, Marito. I've got to get this meal going!

Back in the kitchen, MARIO gives ROSA a loving pat on the back.

MARIO: A good little cook, this Rosita.

ROSA: A dyke with no ties and no roots anywhere.

MARIO: She teaches Spanish without a Cuban accent because that pays the mortgage. (Doing a grammar drill) Yo como tú comes él come ella come!

ROSA: I don't teach grammar!

MARIO: (Sarcastic) And... let's not forget those darling short

stories that you just love to analyze in class. (Aside, to the audience) At home she prefers to read lesbian harlequin romances, the ones that are sexually explicit. (He helps ROSA with her cooking.) By the way, how's the White Lady doing?

ROSA: Joan?

MARIO: The one and only. Unless there's a new tortilla on the comal.

ROSA: No, there's no one else. Joan's doing fine.

MARIO: Do your parents know about her?

ROSA: Parents always know, they just don't like to hear about it.

MARIO: My father stopped talking to me when I told him...

ROSA: I know.

MARIO: And my mother is nuts. Literally. She's locked up in a loony bin.

ROSA: But she knows about you. And she accepts you.

MARIO: Sure. I'm one of the reasons she's crazy!

ROSA: It was your father who drove her nuts, not you!

MARIO: Let's not talk about that now, please.

ROSA: You have to face certain things, Marito. Sooner or later.

MARIO: (Sarcastic) Just like you do!

ROSA: (Defensive) And what is that supposed to mean?

MARIO: How do you manage to fake it all so well?

ROSA: Fake what?

MARIO: You know. Pass for straight.

ROSA: I have no choice. I have to watch my ass! I need to eat and pay the mortgage.

MARIO: So much for facing up to things!

ROSA is hurt. MARIO gives her a short, breathy kiss on the cheek.

MARIO: Would you lose your job if you came out at work?

ROSA: Probably. Or the fucking machos would make life impossible for me. The chairman especially. He's a homophobic pig.

MARIO: Do you ever get sick of acting, Rosi, of putting on a show for people you don't give a shit about?

ROSA: Some day I won't have to. And neither will you.

Silence.

MARIO: When are we eating? I'm hungry, coño.

ROSA: (Throwing up her arms) And I'm sick of cooking!

PERFORMANCE 2

The Baby Lesbian

Lights up on ROSA, in front of the microphone. MARIO is sitting at one of the tables, having a drink and watching her. He seems to be enjoying himself.

ROSA: By the time I met Joan, I had already stopped fighting my "deviance." I had said to myself, Niña, your native island is Lesbos, not Cuba. Now what are you going to do about it? I guess you could say I had experience. Joan didn't; she was a Baby Lesbian. And I was more than willing to share with her my knowledge of the "Island." I met her at a bar; I didn't even know her name yet and she was already talking about her job. She was a producer of TV commercials. So I fed her this routine about my so-called interest in publicity and she bought it. What do I really think about publicity? Just another word for brain-washing! But what good would my true opinion do at such a crucial moment? Here was Joan sipping her Martini and talking about production theories, sales dynamics, about forecasting and statistics, and all I could think about was her... (She touches her breasts.) Anyway, to make a long story short, Joan and I fell in love at first sight and we embarked on a wild joy ride...

MARIO: (Laughing) What a ridiculous way to describe your fucking! "Wild joy ride"!

ROSA: Hey, this is my show! I can be ridiculous if I want to!

MARIO: You poke fun at everything, your life, your sexuality...

ROSA: And you eat it up, don't you? You love to laugh at the White Lady, at my tortillas and my teaching... As long as your sex is glorified and exalted, who cares! Right?

MARIO: You're not in love with Joan, and there's nothing funny about that.

ROSA: Poor Marito! He was beaten to a pulp by his father and he caused his mother to go crazy. He turned gay because he rejected the macho authority...

MARIO: Joan's a good lay. That's the only reason you're with her. Admit it!

ROSA: Or was he born inverted and had to face his difference in order to be true to himself?

MARIO: (Defensive) Yes! I was born this way!

ROSA: Ah, the pain of having to hide your deepest truth! He's such a tragic hero! Ooops, pardon me... A tragic heroine.

MARIO: Why are you always trying to say funny stuff?

ROSA: Because I hate tragedies.

MARIO: I don't like them, either.

ROSA: Then do what I do. Laugh about it all!

MARIO: I can't. There's nothing comical about my life.

ROSA: Use your imagination. Invent a little!

MARIO: I can't be funny like you. I'm not a comedian.

ROSA: Neither am I.

MARIO: Yeah, but you wish you were. You'd love to have your own show. (Fanfare. He grabs the mike.) The "Rosa Rodríguez Comedy

Hour"!

ROSA: (Pushing him away) Nothing wrong with a little comedy. It keeps me going.

MARIO: That's why you teach, isn't it? You love to have all those sexy Gringuitos listening to your dumb jokes in Spanish and laughing. Your captive audience!

ROSA: Hey, don't knock it. It's a living.

MARIO: Your comedy routine is getting long, Rosi.

ROSA: I won't say another word. Promise!

MARIO: That's not what I want...

ROSA: My lips are sealed.

MARIO: (Laughing) No, they're not.

ROSA: Well, I guess I should clarify that.

MARIO: Go ahead with your story, Rosi.

ROSA: I don't want to bore you...

MARIO: Just make it short. I don't have a lot of time.

PERFORMANCE 3

Toy Brothers

Dim lights up on the living room. MARIO is lying on the couch, covered with a blanket, shivering. ROSA enters and throws another blanket on him. She sits by him.

ROSA: Did you call your father?

MARIO: No, I didn't.

ROSA: I thought we agreed...

MARIO: Just let me sleep, Rosi. (He cuddles up next to her.) It feels so good to be... with you. (He caresses her face and her body.) Can I... Can I touch you, Rosi?

ROSA: (Jokingly) Yes. You're the only boy who's allowed to do it.

MARIO: Your long eyelashes and your soft, wavy hair... your soft skin... your legs, firm and tanned to bronze...

ROSA: I'm not Rosita la Gordita anymore?

MARIO: No, you're not fat at all. You're a beautiful girl... My Guantánamo girl...

ROSA: Your Guantánamo woman.

She tucks him in. He dozes off and seconds later comes out of his sopor with a start. He seems terribly frightened; he tries to get up and run away.

MARIO: No! No!

ROSA: What's the matter?!

MARIO: Let me go!

ROSA: Where are you going?

MARIO: Steps behind me... I've got to get home!

ROSA: You're there already, Marito. At home. Safe.

MARIO: Gun shots... and sirens... My mother warned me, Don't go near the Guantánamo Fence. Stay away from there... Don't cross the Fence!

ROSA: Did you cross it?

MARIO: Yes... and I saw incredible things on the other side. Forbidden things... But then I got lost... and they killed me...

ROSA: (Caressing him) You're not lost. Or dead. Feel my fingers running through your hair. My lips on your hands, on your rosy nails, Marito. Feel them.

MARIO: Papi!

ROSA: Yes, Marito...

MARIO: He's sleeping with me... I like touching his chest, hairy and warm...

ROSA: What's he doing?

MARIO: Looking at me... smiling... I think he loves me.

ROSA: He does.

MARIO: We're in Guantánamo... We live on Guantánamo Street.

ROSA: Yes. Guantánamo Street leads to the sea.

MARIO: The wind... a trace of the wind...

ROSA: (Stroking his forehead) Yes, the cool breeze...

MARIO: I like the way he touches me.

ROSA: Go to sleep now, Marito.

Silence. MARIO is suddenly wide awake.

MARIO: I can't! He's looking at me... He doesn't love me anymore.

ROSA: How do you know?

MARIO: Because...

ROSA: How do you know he doesn't love you?

MARIO: Because he's mean to me. And to Mima... She cried a lot the day of the fight... and she had to go to the hospital.

ROSA: What fight, Marito?

MARIO: Mima was kind to me...

ROSA: What was the fight about?

MARIO: I don't know. I just remember... Papi pushing and shoving and throwing things... I tried to defend her... I went for his legs, biting them. But he was too strong.

ROSA: Did he hit you, too?

MARIO: Yes... But then, later, Mima helped me write the letter and I... I forgot about the fight.

ROSA: What letter, Marito?

MARIO: (Reveling in the memory) The letter to the Reyes Magos... I imagined them riding their camels across the skies, wearing their pointed boots, cloaks and garments of lights...

ROSA: What did you ask them for in your letter?

MARIO: I asked them for crayons and coloring books, a watercolor set... And a life-size doll that you could wind up and then it would walk and eat... better a boy doll...

ROSA: Of course.

MARIO: Because that way I could pretend he was my brother.

ROSA: And you could give him your name, right?

MARIO: Sí, sí... my name... (MARIO is very agitated. ROSA holds him tightly and tries to comfort him.) Leave me alone! Déjame!

ROSA: Just relax.

MARIO: I can't feel my face!

ROSA: Your face is fine.

MARIO: He's hitting me...

ROSA: Why does he hit you?

MARIO: Because...

ROSA: Why?

MARIO: Because I like to draw pictures... pictures of naked toy-brothers... Because I ran away from home... with a neighbor boy... and I was gone for hours.

ROSA: Was it your father who found you?

MARIO: Yes... He nearly killed me when he saw me sitting on the grass... in the rain... kissing the palms of my friend's hands... his fingers... dark like the legs of a spider.

ROSA: Your father was probably worried. You ran away!

MARIO: Papi hates me! He hates me because I look... and act...

ROSA: Go on.

MARIO: I look and act... like a girl.

ROSA: Tell him not to hit you anymore.

MARIO: I can't.

ROSA: Tell him, Marito.

MARIO: I can't! My voice doesn't come out.

ROSA: Speak to him with your eyes, then.

MARIO: Let me forget him!

ROSA: Not yet.

MARIO: If I love him... why does he hate me?

ROSA: Maybe he doesn't hate you.

MARIO: I miss him!

ROSA: Then call him.

MARIO: I can't...

ROSA: Will you let me call him for you?

MARIO: No! I don't want to!... I don't like feeling so helpless,
Rosi!

PERFORMANCE 4

Trashy Memories

Lights up on MARIO. He is sleeping on the couch. ROSA enters and tucks him in. She walks to the mike as she peeks at her friend. Then she faces the audience.

ROSA: Joan tried to make a Meat-and-Potatoes kind of gal out of me. She hated my music; she said it was "melodramatic" and "artificial." (She sings.) Joan is into "real" music. She tried to turn me on to Emmylou Harris and Bonnie Raitt and Linda Ronstadt; Linda without her mariachi hat, of course. Joan taught me wonderful words that I thought I was incapable of using, like "discombobulated." (Impersonating Joan) "Not tonight, honey. I feel discombobulated." She was lovingly condescending about my accent and set out to give me diction lessons on a regular basis. She got me to try a high-fiber, cholesterol-free diet and refused to eat at the local Cuban restaurant because, as she put it, "Cuban cuisine is salty, cloyingly sweet, greasy, totally unhealthy!" Joan showed me the wonders of camping and hiking and mountain climbing. I still can't believe she considers that stuff a vacation! Sleeping on the floor and getting bitten by mosquitoes and all kinds of bugs? Having to do your thing in an outhouse? Or out in the open? Forget it! Joan bought us a computer and showed me how to use it. She also got us an answering machine and a VCR. She turned my life around, or at least she tried to... (She walks

to the couch and checks on MARIO, who sleeps soundly. She takes her suit jacket off and covers him with it. Then she returns to the mike taking light, careful steps.) Joan moved out a couple of weeks after Mario moved in. She just couldn't handle the situation. (Reflective) I must confess I miss her. (She looks at MARIO.) No, Joan wasn't just a good lay; she was my partner. And I did love her in spite of our differences. Now that she's gone, I realize that there was one thing I truly hated about living with Joan. And that was having to play my music very low, or listen to it with my earphones when she was at home and I just couldn't resist the temptation. (She sings.) My only cherished traces of the past, those corny and "artificial" singers. Voices that I felt forced to hide as if they were a shameful drug addiction. My private pleasure. (Ironic) Trashy memories of underdevelopment.

PERFORMANCE 5

The Truth

Lights up on MARIO and ROSA. He is wrapped in a blanket, posing for her in front of the mirror. He seems absorbed in his reflection.

MARIO: Don't you just love my dress, Rosi? It's long and tight and black and I'm wearing a fur coat.

ROSA: You look radiant! Like a delicate rose.

MARIO: Like Sarita Montiel!

ROSA: It's carnival time, isn't it?

MARIO: Yes. And I'm walking on my lover's arm.

ROSA: Is his name... Amor?

MARIO: (He nods.) He's very Catholic and very handsome. And I am his decent girl.

ROSA: But doesn't he know?

MARIO: What? What is he supposed to know?

ROSA: That you're not really his innocent girl.

MARIO: True. I'm a singing mannequin without a heart.

ROSA: You're the Carnival Queen. And you're dancing away!

MARIO: (Dancing) My hips, swaying softly.

ROSA: And your shoulders moving in frenzy! Hear the bongos? Rock your body in place, down and down...

MARIO stops dancing.

MARIO: (Aggrieved) So I guess... I guess our love is doomed. He'll

leave me when he finds out...

ROSA: Or he might accept you the way you are.

Mario stares at his mirror reflection.

MARIO: The way I am. Sick... and dying.

ROSA: He loves you.

MARIO: He won't be swallowed up by the sea... because of my horrible truth?

ROSA: He won't. I promise.

MARIO: Amor! Say you forgive me!

ROSA: But there's nothing to forgive.

MARIO: Say you accept me, then.

ROSA: I do.

MARIO seems transported by a pleasant, inner vision.

MARIO: There are so many people! I like it here!

ROSA: Where are you?

MARIO: At the park, with my father. I'm holding his hand... But now... (Scared) I don't see him!... Papi! Where are you?!

ROSA: (Pointing to the mirror) There he is!

MARIO: Yes! He's hiding from me.

ROSA: It was just a prank. He didn't know you'd be so frightened.

MARIO: But I am!

ROSA: Relax, Marito.

MARIO hits the mirror, making it swing like a pendulum.

MARIO: I can't relax when he's around!... Don't you hear him?

ROSA: What is he saying?

MARIO: He's talking with Mima... He's telling her that we'll have

to leave soon, that Cuba is turning into a fucking living hell...

ROSA: And what is your mother saying?

MARIO: She... she's saying that Fidel had everybody fooled, that he's not an angel and a savior but a mean devil. (He laughs.)

ROSA: What's so funny?

MARIO: The way my parents talk... They're so scared of Fidel!

ROSA: And you're not?

MARIO: I don't fear Fidel... the way they do...

ROSA: And why is that?

MARIO: Because... I have already known... a worse dictator.

Silence.

ROSA: Hey, you want to go for a ride? The beach, maybe?

MARIO: No. I'd rather go to the disco... Naked dancers, my first tricks... a song that kills me softly...

ROSA: I don't feel like going to a bar tonight, Marito.

MARIO searches the room, frantically.

MARIO: Where is it? Where... Where is... my drawing pad?! (ROSA fetches a drawing pad and a pencil for him. He begins to draw excitedly.) I'm working again, Rosi!

He gives ROSA his sketches. She scrutinizes them.

ROSA: Yes... A palm tree and a flower. Is it a rose?

MARIO sits on the couch, exhausted.

MARIO: (Reminiscing) My lover likes the fact that I'm an artist... He's impressed by that... He doesn't know that I'm a fraud...

ROSA: You're not really an artist?

MARIO: I reflect reflections... That's not art.

ROSA: I wouldn't know.

MARIO: On Sunday afternoons we stroll through Central Park...

ROSA: Or he reads you his poetry, yes.

MARIO: I love his poems, even if I don't understand them.

ROSA: Does he love your paintings?

MARIO: Yes yes! And I've been painting a lot.

ROSA: Maybe he'll help you make it in the Big Apple.

MARIO: Is he alive, Rosi?

She sits with him and holds his hand.

ROSA: Yes... (She points to his heart) Here, in your heart.

MARIO: He died?

ROSA: Sí, Marito.

MARIO: So many people dying...

ROSA stands up, enthused.

ROSA: You want some mercocha?

MARIO: Only if you made it, Rosi.

ROSA: I did. I made it for you.

MARIO: Rosi... can I kiss you?

ROSA: Sure. But only a little kiss. You know I don't like to kiss boys.

MARIO: (Making an effort to laugh) Just pretend I'm a girl.

He kisses her.

PERFORMANCE 6

The Kiss

Dark stage. The svelte silhouettes of two women are seen on the screen. They are two sensuous shadows making love. ROSA's voice is heard offstage; it is seductive, omnipresent.

ROSA: My eyes closed, I imagine her skin. Soft? Warm? And my lips on her breasts. She's wearing a tight skirt and stockings. My hands under her skirt. The edge of the stockings, where the fabric ends and the skin begins. The dampness, the softness, the smell. A saline smell. Playing with her pubic hair, then drinking that slippery dampness. Drinking eternally, to the point of satiation, as if each drop of love were the last drop... She stares at me, thinking I'm asleep. I spread my legs and the throbbing sensation begins. My hands are cups overflowing with her skin; her nipples are hard and pointed. She laces my waist with her arms and inserts her finger, leaving it there, moving it lightly. She pulls away and I feel lifeless for a split-second. But then her tongue, her face, her soul caress me. Yes, baby, I'm wet. And I'm alive again. But she wants more and so do I. She's rubbing and licking in circles, stopping at perfectly synchronized intervals, around and deep, up and down on the burning surface. The rhythm of her fingers and her tongue. Ants in my veins. I have no arms no legs no lungs no eyes. Only my lips on her lips. An all-consuming kiss consuming all of me. I am her tongue inside, the movement of her hands, this river that grows. Where she swims. I am her.

PERFORMANCE 7

Salty Tears

Darkness. Sounds of a rainstorm. Women are heard chanting far away.

MARIO: Shut up! I said shut up! Shut the fuck up!

Lights up on MARIO. He is pacing the living room in his pajamas. ROSA enters; she has been awakened by MARIO's screaming. He runs to her when he sees her.

MARIO: Get me out of here, please!

ROSA: Out of where, Marito?

MARIO: Out of this convent.

ROSA: You're not in a convent!

MARIO: Yes I am... I am one of the nuns.

ROSA: Why do you want to leave the convent?

MARIO: Because... there are men, ragged men crushing the flowers.

ROSA: Who are these men?

MARIO: I don't know... bandits.

ROSA: They won't hurt you.

MARIO: (Agitated, tearing his shirt off) They tear off our habits!

ROSA: I promise you they won't harm you!

MARIO: But they... they take us... They're raping me!

ROSA: (Holding him) It's OK. You're here with me.

The chanting stops. MARIO relaxes. He is comforted by the sound of the torrential rain.

MARIO: Could I sleep... with you tonight?

ROSA: Sí, chico.

MARIO: But what if... my father finds us? He'll kill me!

ROSA: He won't.

MARIO: Will you protect me?

ROSA: Yes. Give me your hand. (He resists.) C'mon, give it to me!

Holding his hand, she guides him to the beach.

MARIO: Where are we going?!

ROSA: Out!

They pretend to be walking in the rain.

MARIO: (Excited) I'm getting soaked to the skin!

ROSA: The raindrops are thick and sweet!

MARIO: Like coconut water!

Knocking on glass is heard. MARIO presses his hands against the mirror.

MARIO: His face outside... I see it...

A boy's muddled voice is heard.

BOY: Help me. I'm cold. Let me in!

MARIO: Should I? Should I let him in?

BOY: Por favor! Tengo frío!

MARIO: He has dimples when he smiles... And he's smiling now.

ROSA: He's in your bedroom already, isn't he? You let him in. He's safe from the storm. By your side.

MARIO: What's his name?

ROSA: You don't need to know his name.

MARIO: I love his thin, dark fingers, the white palms of his

hands... He's here again, Rosi! (He embraces ROSA impulsively.) He won't feel cold anymore.

The chanting resounds again. MARIO stares at the mirror as if looking through a window. He is pointing to a spot down below.

MARIO: In the courtyard... down below... a tiny casket... tiny.

ROSA: There's nothing down there, Marito.

MARIO: The nuns are burying my son... The stillborn son of a bandit.

ROSA: I don't think so.

MARIO: Am I the one in the casket?

ROSA: No.

MARIO: Who are they burying then?! Tell me!

ROSA: (Looking through the "window") I only see rain.

MARIO: And flowers... lots of flowers...

ROSA: Yes. They're all roses.

MARIO: And there are four men lifting up the casket.

ROSA: A tiny casket?

MARIO: No, not tiny.

ROSA: Are you down there, also?

MARIO: Yes. I'm walking... It's a procession... We get there, to the wrought iron gate... they're still excavating... The box into the hole, ropes...

ROSA: What are you doing?

MARIO: Standing in front of the hole... My hand is reaching out to him... down to Papi.

ROSA: Can you touch him?

MARIO: (Crying) No. They're covering the hole little by little...

ROSA: Why are you crying?

MARIO: Because...

ROSA: Why?

MARIO: They fill it up with dirt... No trace of the box...

ROSA: Your father's not in that box, Marito.

MARIO: But he...

ROSA: He's still alive.

MARIO: He turned his back on me!

ROSA: You must forgive him.

MARIO: I can't breathe, Rosi!

ROSA: Yes you can.

MARIO: I'm afraid.

ROSA: But there's nothing to fear.

They embrace.

MARIO: Clinging to you I cling to him... afraid that you might leave me...

ROSA: Never.

MARIO: That you might hide from me...

She caresses his face.

ROSA: Never, Marito.

MARIO: His hand feels cool on my face. He's wiping off my tears with his fingers...

ROSA: Your tiny tears on his lips, he savors them.

MARIO: (Peaceful) What a nice taste, he says.

ROSA: My boy's tears are so salty...

PERFORMANCE 8

Human Form

Lights up on MARIO. He stands in the middle of the dance floor as an impressive image: virile yet tender, somewhat gaunt, intensely sensual. His lips are painted purple; his hair is combed back and glistening. He is wearing a string bikini and his overpowering shadow is cast on the screen.

MARIO: (To the audience) I couldn't speak. If I uttered the slightest sound my gleaming teeth would protrude. And I couldn't show them to just anybody. Not just yet. (Silence.) I sought and found the darkest niche in that old Laguna house, and there I sat, drinking, sulking and nourishing my Halloween fantasy. The music reached my ears...

The tremulous voice of a woman is heard, humming and singing what sounds like a children's song. The lyrics are cryptic. The background is hard-driving, pounding electric drums and synthesizer strings. There is no harmony between orchestration and voice, and yet it all works into a haunting whole. MARIO is dancing.

MARIO: I started dancing with the other creatures, always keeping a distance. I never stopped acting my part, impersonating the frightful blood-sucker like a true diva. No one noticed the cold sweat trickling down my spine. My fear. Behind the image of the handsome and alluring Homme Fatale I was trembling. Behind the

suave veneer there was a homeless boy, a little man afraid of dying, driven solely by his need to see His Holy Spirit become flesh. (The music stops. MARIO reaches up, trying to touch an invisible angel.) Oh, God, if you exist, appear in human form! Before my eyes, tonight, in human form! (Silence. He will run to the mirror and back to the dance floor, as if he were being chased by someone.) I ran out, my cloak waving behind me. Desperate for air and desperate for life, I ran. Had I become a true vampire? I belonged in the night. The sun was my torturer, my executioner. I had never felt as free as I did now, thrust into the dark like a targetless bullet. (Silence. He caresses his chest.) A spark of life burned in my heart, I touched it. I reached inside and held on to it, letting myself be burned by its power. (Silence.) And then I saw him. He was resting on the sand, looking up at the moon. I told him that I had lost my way. He embraced me and I wept in his arms. (Silence.) He knew the truth. He knew I didn't really want his sex. The soothing tone of his voice, yes, I wanted that. And the tender way in which he held me. Tenderness, I thought. Oh how I crave it. I hold his hand, kiss his long white fingers tenderly. I rest my head on his chest and listen to his words. I savor his tongue, I inhale him. Unable to believe that I can finally possess his human form.

PERFORMANCE 9

Ten Years of Bar Hopping

The photo of MARIO and ROSA as children gradually surfaces on the screen. Spotlight on ROSA, in front of the mike.

ROSA: I finally ran into him one day in 1978; that was eleven years ago. We hadn't seen each other since the time we left Cuba. (Silence.) After long years of searching in vain for the perfect lover, for a home, for a true friend, we found each other...

Lights down on ROSA. A disco song from the late seventies comes on. The image of the children fades and the following series of slides is projected: 1) The dance floor crowded with dancers, mainly male couples. 2) MARIO among the dancers; he is doing a fancy step and enjoying the attention he is calling to himself. 3) The tables, all occupied. 4) ROSA sitting with a woman at one of the tables, the woman's back to the camera. They are watching the dance show. ROSA's eyes are fixed on MARIO.

The last slide stays on screen as lights go up on the discotheque. ROSA is sitting at one of the tables, watching MARIO dance. He looks familiar to her somehow. She is obviously trying to recognize him. She walks up to him and grabs his arm, scrutinizing his face. He reacts defensively, thinking she just wants some room to dance.

MARIO: Don't be so rough, honey. There's room for everybody.

ROSA: (Utterly surprised) I don't believe it!

MARIO: What do you want?!

ROSA: It is you!

MARIO tries to ignore her and dances feverishly.

MARIO: I have a dance partner already, sweetie, so why don't you just grab somebody else and scam!

ROSA: It is you! Mario!

MARIO: The one and only!

ROSA: Marito?!

MARIO: (Thrilled) Rosa? Eres tú?!

ROSA: Sí, chico! Your childhood friend!

They embrace.

MARIO: What are you doing here?!

ROSA: Never mind that. What are you doing here?

MARIO: This is where I live!

ROSA: I knew I'd find you sooner or later.

MARIO: You've been looking for me?

ROSA: All over the world!

MARIO: Coño, you've been busy.

ROSA: For ten years I've been thinking, "One of these days I'm going to find him."

MARIO: Ten years of bar hopping. Sounds like fun!

ROSA: (Laughing) You're all grown up!

MARIO: So are you. (He hugs her and kisses her.) I've missed you, Rosi.

ROSA: I've missed you more, Marito.

The music blares and then fades to background as the

characters enter the beach area. They are chatting, ROSA doing most of the talking. While she speaks, MARIO scribbles a word on the sand. We hear only a moment of their conversation, when she finally asks him a question.

ROSA: But what about you? When did you get out?

MARIO: I left in '69 with my parents.

ROSA: Mmm... You certainly picked the right year.

MARIO: We spent a couple of months in Miami and then we came to California. And that's it.

ROSA: What do you mean "that's it"?

MARIO: There isn't much more to tell. A couple of years later I ran away. For good!

ROSA: Libertad Libertad!

MARIO: (Laughing) I guess you could say the rest is... history.

PERFORMANCE 10

Rosamario

An instrumental version of "Guantanamera" resounds, as an overture. Spotlight on the microphone. Applause. ROSA enters, bows, and wields the mike with a flourish. She is clad in a velvet tuxedo. Lights go up on MARIO as soon as she begins her monologue. He is in the living room, looking at old photographs in ROSA's album. He is wearing the pink fur coat.

ROSA: (To the audience) You know how the story goes: Typical tale of a Cuban family of Worms, Los Gusanos, a decent home being torn apart...

MARIO: (Interrupting) Yes, we know how the story goes.

ROSA: (Turning to MARIO) I'll try to make it short, Marito.

MARIO: Don't. I want to hear the nasty details!

ROSA: What the heck. We have the time! (To the audience) Picture my parents looking up at the blue Cuban sky and asking themselves, Will we ever see our baby again?!

MARIO approaches ROSA, showing her an empty album page.

MARIO: We need a new picture here, Rosi, a recent one.

The image of MARIO in drag as the Carnival Queen and ROSA in her tuxedo is projected.

ROSA: You're right. We'll get one. (To the audience, imitating her parents) May the Virgin of Charity protect you, Rosi! May she help you find your way back to us, some day!

MARIO flips through pages, absorbed in what he sees.

MARIO: These pictures are incredible.

ROSA: (To MARIO) Yeah, too bad there are so many of my parents.
(To the audience) The first couple of months in California I did nothing but bitch and ask to be sent back to Spain...

MARIO: (Reveling in a memory) Rosi...

ROSA: (Exasperated from so many interruptions) Qué, Marito?!

MARIO: Why is it that you never talk about Guantánamo?

ROSA: But I do!

MARIO: Not really... Do you ever miss our hometown?

ROSA: Un poco... Sometimes.

MARIO: So do I.

ROSA: But I miss you more.

Silence. Lights dim as MARIO stands behind ROSA, clutching the album to his chest. The projected image fades when he speaks.

MARIO: (To the audience) They gave me a number.

ROSA: (To the audience) And for the next seven days that's who you were, a number.

MARIO: My blood was thick, bright carmine...

ROSA: Alive.

MARIO: One week. Then I knew.

ROSA: I cooked for you. We played my Spanish oldies.

MARIO: And the seventh day came.

ROSA: It was a Tuesday.

MARIO: Or a Friday. Unlucky either way.

ROSA: Someone called out your number...

MARIO: And I went in.

Full lights up as MARIO steps forward and stands next to ROSA. They face the audience.

ROSA: Talk to the doctor, Marito. He wants to know about you.

MARIO: Should I spill my guts out?

ROSA: Tell him about who you are.

Silence. They face each other.

MARIO: Who am I, Rosi? Do you know?

ROSA: Yes. You're my friend.

They hold hands.

MARIO: (To the audience) The doctor said I'd been exposed to the virus. Infected.

ROSA: (To the audience) But you didn't believe him, did you?

MARIO: No. I was feeling so good in those days.

ROSA: We went to the beach that Tuesday or Friday. And we sat near the water.

MARIO: I wrote a word on the sand, just like I did the night we found each other. (Singing) Guantanamera...

ROSA: (Singing) Guajira guantanamera...

BOTH: Guantanamera, guajira guantanamera.

MARIO tosses the album and takes off his coat. He reaches up, as if touching the wings of an angel.

MARIO: Imagine the orgy I'm going to start up in Heaven, Rosi!

ROSA: Oye chico, and without me!

MARIO: We'll meet up again, don't worry.

ROSA: I want you to give me a spectacular reception!

MARIO: Yes! With a choir of cherubs and cupids singing your name!

ROSA: Very feminine cherubs and cupids, with hard little nipples!

MARIO: (Excited, like a child) Let's put on our show Rosi, for the last time!

ROSA: Not the carnival bitch again! (To the audience, faking solemnity) Ladies and gentlemen, the greatest queen that ever lived has just sung her last bolero, danced her last rumba...

MARIO: Never the last one! (He grabs her hand. She resists.) Give me your hand!

ROSA: Where are we going?!

He guides her to the beach.

MARIO: Out!

They pretend to be walking in the rain.

ROSA: (Excited) I'm soaked to the skin!

MARIO: The raindrops are thick and sweet...

ROSA: Como agua de coco!

MARIO takes his clothes off and displays his body invitingly. He is wearing a bikini.

MARIO: Here's my body, Rosi. You can have it.

ROSA takes off her clothes, down to her underwear. She is sensuously offering her body to MARIO.

ROSA: And this is my gift... What are we supposed to do now?

MARIO: We'll have a party!

ROSA: Yes! This is our only chance!

MARIO: You and I must become Rosamario!

ROSA: Rosario, Rosamar!

MARIO: Marirosa, Mariposa!

ROSA: Rosamar!

MARIO: Ocean rose.

ROSA: Butterfly!

MARIO: Mariposa!

They embrace passionately. ROSA walks to the mike and grabs it with a flair.

ROSA: After the grand finale, the comedian rips the mask off his face and turns into a bird. Up and away he flies, reaching the highest branches.

MARIO: Not a vampire, not a bullet, but a pájaro!

ROSA: A pájaro and a tortillera.

MARIO: This is their greatest moment, when the performance ends...

ROSA: And life begins.

MARIO walks to the mirror and caresses the glass.

MARIO: We did it, Rosi!... We escaped from a faceless reflection.

ROSA: From a lover who will contaminate you.

MARIO: From a lover who'll never get to smell the Real Rose.

ROSA picks up the photo album. The image of MARIO and ROSA as children appears on the screen. The photo has been colorized; it looks impressionistic, like a dream.

ROSA: (Pointing to a page) This is my favorite picture. The only one of us together.

MARIO: (Nostalgic) We were twelve years old...

ROSA: Neighbors.

MARIO: You used to call me Marito.

ROSA: I still do.

MARIO: We were accomplices.

ROSA: Best friends.

The image of the children fades. Sounds of the sea. ROSA clutches the album to her chest.

MARIO: Look at the blue sky, Rosi, and the white clouds! Those colors are so real!

ROSA: Do you see the palm trees?

MARIO: Yes! Mops of silky hair...

ROSA: We're home, Marito. En casa.

MARIO: My father... My father didn't turn his back on me?

ROSA: No. And your mother didn't go crazy.

MARIO: Joan didn't move out when I moved in?

ROSA: No. She wasn't repulsed by your sickness.

MARIO: You didn't spend a year taking care of me, then.

ROSA: No. I didn't become your loving nurse and you didn't have to feel grateful.

MARIO: I made it!

ROSA: Yes. You've never gone hungry.

MARIO: I never hustled. I was a famous artist.

ROSA: We never heard of Castro.

MARIO: We didn't have to be saved from the Red Monster.

ROSA: A plague hasn't broken out.

MARIO: And I am not dead.

A heart-felt guitar solo of "Guantanamera" plays. ROSA carefully places the album on the floor and points to the

audience.

ROSA: There, on that beach overflowing with light... that's where we found each other.

MARIO: You were resting on the sand.

ROSA: You told me that you had lost your way.

MARIO: I lay down by your side. You held my hand.

ROSA: Then we performed for each other...

MARIO: A song that we remembered.

ROSA: That we learned long ago.

MARIO: When we were children...

THE END