

Esquina

by

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Lies written in ink can never disguise facts written in blood. Blood debts must be repaid in kind.
The longer the delay, the greater the interest.

- Lu Xun -

DESCRIPTION

An off-duty police officer is charged with the murder of 17-year old Jose Aral.

CHARACTERS

- * MARIA, Jose's grandmother
- * ELIÁN, Jose's grandfather
- * RAOUL, Jose's uncle
- * ESCONDIDA, Jose's aunt, wife of RAOUL
- * SERAFINA, Jose's older sister, police officer
- * PAUL, Jose's older brother, accountant; wears a black eye-patch
- * MARIO, MAGDALENA, MARTA, friends of Jose's
- * REPORTER/PRIEST/MAYOR (same actor)

NOTE: Jose's "shrine" is indicated by a candle surrounded by stones of various sizes.

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ACT I, SCENE 1

A single candle burns. RAOUL, PRIEST, SERAFINA in uniform. RAOUL's shirt has streaks of what look like blood. He kneels in front of the flame.

RAOUL: It shouldna happened. I mean, a kid, just a kid, good kid, full of, you know, the usual fires --

PRIEST: Raoul --

RAOUL: (*ignoring PRIEST*) -- but good, always good, open, not like a slap but like a door, welcome you in --

PRIEST: (*more insistent*) Raoul --

RAOUL: (*still ignoring*) -- I will miss his laugh, man, "tió tonto, tió tonto," but, you know, said in an open way, big smile, no meanness to him --

SERAFINA: Uncle --

PRIEST: Raoul --

RAOUL: Don't touch me!

SERAFINA: Father -- Uncle, why do you have --

PRIEST: (*overlapping*) Sometimes we cannot understand -- (*to SERAFINA*) Sorry --

RAOUL: Don't tell me we can't understand! (*to SERAFINA*) And don't touch me!

SERAFINA: Just job-related, uncle, believe me ---

PRIEST: Raoul, I only mean that sometimes it is not possible to make sense of what seems senseless.

RAOUL shoots to his feet.

RAOUL: This was not some event! Assassination!

PRIEST looks to SERAFINA.

SERAFINA: I've never seen him like this.

RAOUL: Why did this happen -- what kind of, I mean, animal takes Jose -- Jose! --

PRIEST: (*to SERAFINA*) Please --

SERAFINA: Uncle Raoul, look at me -- focus --

RAOUL: (*ignoring*) -- what kind, you tell me, because I know people are animals --

PRIEST: You mustn't --

SERAFINA: Uncle, I gotta know --

RAOUL: Animals from the mud! Made right outta the mud -- Adam made outta mud, right, huh? Isn't that what God did? You're the know-it-all. You never lose where you come from, right?

RAOUL drops to his knees again.

RAOUL: Jose! Jose! -- we're all mud -- just dirt --

SERAFINA: Uncle, I gotta know why --

RAOUL: Don't! You gonna make it any better?

SERAFINA: I'm not from the mud.

RAOUL: Look at what one of your kind --

SERAFINA: Not my "kind" -- how many times --

RAOUL: Mud is mud.

PRIEST: This is your niece, Raoul.

RAOUL: You want me doing the other cheek?

PRIEST: Just don't let your grief make you hard.

RAOUL: What a stupid thing we do, isn't it, candles, a flame gets put out and we put up another flame to make a memory -- but nothing, nothing is gonna bring him back, nada me lo va resucitar a mi sobrino -- good boy, full boy, had a heart -- a heart! That pig took it!

PRIEST goes to say something, but SERAFINA puts a hand on PRIEST to stop him.

SERAFINA: *(with force)* Uncle Raoul.

RAOUL: *(ignores, then speaks)* What?

SERAFINA: The shirt.

RAOUL: What?

SERAFINA: The shirt. I gotta ask about the shirt.

With repressed rage and a flamboyant gesture, RAOUL unbuttons his right shirt cuff to show a forearm slashed. He rubs it across his shirt front, leaving a smear. He rebuttons the cuff.

RAOUL: Blood dust ashes pain memory --

SERAFINA: Nobody else's?

RAOUL: What?

SERAFINA: *(with emphasis)* Nobody else's?

RAOUL: You think at a time like --

SERAFINA: Yes or no, uncle?

RAOUL: Mine only -- cut out for Jose --

SERAFINA: Jose wasn't yours -- Jose belongs all around now, tió, you can't mark him out all for your own --

RAOUL: Uniform and badge --

SERAFINA: You think that's all I am?

RAOUL: That's all I'm hearing -- that blue line pig kills your brother and you hassle one of your own about blood he has shed for the Angel --

SERAFINA: *(to PRIEST)* Tell him when he comes around back to talking sense --

RAOUL: -- what would you know about sense --

PRIEST: -- I sense --

SERAFINA: -- that he shouldn't make such a big thing about waving around a bloody shirt since pigs like me take a dim view of anyone walking around bleeding like a chaos and talking up trash about how blue lines ain't nothing but animals full of mud -- no blue takes that kindly --

RAOUL: And you can tell --

PRIEST: Now, look --

SERAFINA: I got a duty to get back to.

SERAFINA exits.

RAOUL: And you can tell her --

PRIEST: I'm not a messenger service.

RAOUL: *(pointing at candle)* That's all that's left.

PRIEST: That's not true.

RAOUL: Then what is true, padre? What is goddamn left of the Angel?

PRIEST: Whatever is left of ourselves.

They both stare at the candle. PRIEST loosens his collar.

RAOUL: That's the goddamn truth, Father.

PRIEST: Unfortunately.

RAOUL: That's the goddamn truth, too. Go. Go!

PRIEST exits. RAOUL stands slowly, then takes off his bloody shirt.

RAOUL: Angel, don't you worry. Don't you worry at all.

RAOUL snaps the shirt quickly, which blows out the candle. Blackout.

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ACT I, SCENE 2

REPORTER, MARIA, ELIÁN, ESCONDIDA. Glaring lights.

REPORTER: Yes, Gary, we are reporting live from what people are now calling La Esquina, which almost overnight has turned into a gathering place for friends and family and neighbors and well-wishers, even strangers who have stopped by to offer their condolences. As you can see over here, people have set up a little shrine to Jose on the street corner, just down a block from where he was allegedly attacked by Officer Pedro Amargo -- there are candles, messages of love and sadness scrawled across the altar --

Gesturing to the unseen cameraman to move in closer.

REPORTER: -- even a pair of Jose's sneakers which they've hung up as a kind of tribute to this very well-liked young man.

Moving towards MARIA and ELIÁN.

REPORTER: And I have with me here --

REPORTER moves to MARIA and ELIÁN.

REPORTER: -- the grandparents of young Jose, Maria and Elián Aral, who had raised him when Jose's parents died in a tragic accident --

ESCONDIDA: What are you doing?

REPORTER ignores ESCONDIDA as he moves in.

REPORTER: Mr. and Mrs. Aral --

ESCONDIDA: Get out of here.

REPORTER: -- could you tell us how you feel?

ESCONDIDA goes to say something else, but ELIÁN holds up his hand to stop her. ELIÁN glares at REPORTER as if looking at an insect. MARIA simply stares ahead. Painful dead air as REPORTER waits for ELIÁN to say something.

REPORTER: *(to ESCONDIDA)* Are you a translator for the family?

ESCONDIDA: I am Jose's aunt.

REPORTER: Would you mind --

With disgust, ESCONDIDA turns to MARIA and ELIÁN.

ESCONDIDA: This reporter is asking --

REPORTER: Wait --

ELIÁN: I know what he's asking.

REPORTER: You know English?

ESCONDIDA: Why would you think they wouldn't?

REPORTER: I --

ESCONDIDA: They have been here for more years than the numbers you have in your IQ, so let me keep translating for you since you seem so unprepared --

REPORTER: You don't really have to --

ESCONDIDA: Just wait.

REPORTER: Really --

ESCONDIDA speaks in a very exaggerated Spanish accent.

ESCONDIDA: He. Wants. To. Know. How. You. Both. Feel. About. What. Happened. -- *(to REPORTER)* Good eh?

ELIÁN: You want to know what we feel.

ESCONDIDA: Elián, he doesn't deserve --

REPORTER: Yes, yes -- please --

ELIÁN glares at the REPORTER.

ELIÁN: Viva Fidel. Viva Che. Viva Cuba.

REPORTER with tight false smile.

REPORTER: Reporting live from La Esquina --

Blackout.

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ACT I, SCENE 3

PAUL, dressed in a sharp suit. MARIA, ELIÁN, ESCONDIDA, RAOUL with a new shirt. Everyone silent, watching PAUL pace.

PAUL: *(to ESCONDIDA)* What you did --

ESCONDIDA: What did I do?

PAUL: Well, it was not smart, tia.

ESCONDIDA: But what did I do?

PAUL: You basically told a reporter, in front his cameraman, and his audience, to take his microphone and --

ESCONDIDA: Why should I be polite to an idiot -- like giving a crystal bowl to a pig -- and what gave him the right anyway?

PAUL: It's his job.

ESCONDIDA: Don't use that tone!

RAOUL: Escondida --

ESCONDIDA: You stay out of this, Raoul --

PAUL: I am just trying --

ESCONDIDA: He should not stick his nose in the meat grinder if he doesn't want it to be part of the chorizo. And that goes for any of them because I will chop them all off.

PAUL: Tia --

ESCONDIDA: You know me, Paul -- *(indicating ELIÁN and MARIA)* -- when it comes to them, I have no storage space for bullshit. And I am done explaining to you.

PAUL: Papa --

ELIÁN: What?

PAUL: What you said to him, Papa --

ESCONDIDA: Leave him alone!

ELIÁN: What about what he said to us -- asking us how we felt -- what did he think? Like we want to dance? What would have happened if I had said what I really feel? (*indicating MARIA*) What she really feels? None of you know that! There would have been nothing left of him!

A tense silence settles in the room.

PAUL: He's just doing his j[ob] --

ELIÁN: A stupid job, then, and he should find work to do that doesn't suck him dry.

PAUL: His "job" can do a lot for us if we play ball with them.

ELIÁN: Now I have a grandson who insults me with sports.

PAUL: Papa --

ELIÁN: "Do a lot"? To do a lot of what? To make a sport out of --

PAUL: To help us make our case --

ELIÁN: The only case is Jose's dead!

RAOUL: Angel's dead.

PAUL: I mean "out there" -- you should know this better than anyone, abuelo -- getting the hearts of the people behind you --

ELIÁN: Completely different then -- not for some capitalist vultures --

PAUL: (*patiently*) We know because we're on the inside -- but "out there" -- Jose can be just some punk kid who got what he [deserved] --

ELIÁN: Jose was never a "punk" --

PAUL: We know that -- all of us know that -- but --

ELIÁN: Like flies over dead meat.

PAUL: First it's vultures, now it's flies --

ELIÁN: And what good are flies or vultures to us?

PAUL: They will help us make our case -- doesn't anyone see that?

ESCONDIDA: Thought that's what the court is for --

PAUL: Yes, but there's --

ESCONDIDA: -- the judge is for, the jury is for --

PAUL: But there's another case --

RAOUL: We need to get the body back that they're eating.

ESCONDIDA: *(disapproving)* Raoul --

PAUL: He's right. Raoul is right. Jose belongs to us. So, let's just, for the moment -- for the moment, okay -- look at the facts.

ELIÁN: The facts?

Such is his vehemence that everyone falls silent. MARIA stares into space like a stone.

ESCONDIDA: *(indicating MARIA)* Elián -- look -- be --

ELIÁN puts a heavy but not ungentle hand on MARIA.

ELIÁN: *(slightly softer)* The facts? The facts know everyone in this room. Your brother is dead.

PAUL: I know --

RAOUL: My nephew --

ESCONDIDA: Our --

PAUL: I know --

ELIÁN: Murdered.

PAUL: I know!

ELIÁN: Then why are you wasting time about --

PAUL: Because, like it or not -- like it or not -- life goes on.

Everyone responds to this in his or her own way.

PAUL: Life goes on. It goes on. Tia, you want courtroom, judge, and jury -- have you heard the people outside, around that "shrine," making a pilgrimage to la ofrenda -- "Justicia," they shout --

ESCONDIDA: I hear it -- who can't --

PAUL: "Justicia."

ESCONDIDA: And your poor abuelita can't --

PAUL: It's loud, I know -- but that "justicia, justicia" is only going to get louder and louder and louder and louder --

ELIÁN: (to RAOUL) Unless I had a son -- (to PAUL) -- or a grandson who'd throw 'em out --

RAOUL: I can do that if you want --

ELIÁN: Then you should do it!

SERAFINA enters. PAUL does not see her.

PAUL: A trial is already going on out there --

RAOUL: But Papa --

PAUL: -- a trial about justice, whether we want it or not --

RAOUL: Look at what Paul is saying, Papa --

ELIÁN: What he's saying disgraces Jose --

PAUL: They don't think it's a disgrace to Jose -- they see a cop kill a kid for no reason and they gather and they demand -- no more just letting it pass, no more keeping it quiet! That would be the disgrace! You out of all us should respect that, Papa!

ESCONDIDA: Paul, turn down the volcano, okay? Pay attention.

PAUL notices SERAFINA.

ELIÁN: Go on. Go on.

PAUL: We can't think the mayor and the police department aren't sitting in their offices already making plans. (to SERAFINA) Right? Plans are being made up all around us, aren't they? (to ALL) So why shouldn't we be as smart if not smarter about it, about all of it? Not doing it for us but for Jose. But we need to be smarter, we need to be a lot smarter --

SERAFINA: And are you laying out a case for the lynch mob, brother of mine?

PAUL: No.

SERAFINA: (as she greets everyone) Setting it all up for rough justice?

SERAFINA greets ELIÁN, ESCONDIDA, nods to RAOUL. Hugs MARIA.

SERAFINA: Papa, Mama, tia --

ESCONDIDA: Serafina --

PAUL: No.

SERAFINA: Sounds like it to these ears.

PAUL: Well, it's not like that.

SERAFINA: Then what's it like?

PAUL: We want justice, not just what the law might feel good about giving away.

SERAFINA: Hasn't even been indicted yet --

PAUL: He will be --

SERAFINA: -- and already you're planning --

PAUL: Someone needs to watch out for this family.

SERAFINA: So, it would make more room for you if I just left?

PAUL: It would be better if you understood.

SERAFINA: *(to ALL)* It'd also probably be better if my brother wasn't right. Yes, there are plans, Papa. I don't know what they are, but they're laying them out to us. We've got cruisers on three corners, and there's talk about blocking the street off so that people can --

ELIÁN: So, you're going to let them stay --

SERAFINA: Not me, Papa --

ELIÁN: -- on my property, making a mess --

SERAFINA: Not me, Papa -- I'm not the police chief.

PAUL: Yet.

SERAFINA: Not ambitious like you, bro -- I like just serving and protecting. *(to ELIÁN)* Those are the orders by the book so far, Papa.

ELIÁN scrutinizes PAUL and SERAFINA.

ELIÁN: My ears are burning. I hear all of this, and my ears burn. *(to PAUL)* I have you talking in here about justicia -- *(to SERAFINA)* -- and your "cop" in here -- you give me "law" and you give me "orders" --

ESCONDIDA: Elián, why don't you just spit on her shoelaces and get it over with?

ELIÁN: I never wanted her to be a "cop" --

SERAFINA: *(to ESCONDIDA)* Never far down, is it?

ESCONDIDA: Because a cop killed Jose doesn't mean Serafina's --

ELIÁN: "Law" and "order" killed Jose!

ESCONDIDA: Last I heard Serafina didn't change her name to "law" and --

RAOUL: You should --

ESCONDIDA: (*ignoring him*) Serafina is just our Serafina, like always --

SERAFINA: Papa, "cop" is an old misery between us that now has got to go away -- the sun is rising in a different place from now on, now that Jose is dead. Yes? At least my brother the accountant is right about that.

PAUL: Papa, it's not any different -- you wanted justice back then -- we want it now -- no cleaner, no dirtier --

ELIÁN: It's not the same.

PAUL: Yes, it is. Plans. I'm thinking that --

PAUL gives them all a concentrated look.

PAUL: If you want, I will handle the bobos and bobas coming around sticking us up with their cameras and whatever.

SERAFINA: Our vocero?

PAUL: For the family. If everyone agrees.

ESCONDIDA: I don't ever want to talk to them again -- I'd have to take too many showers.

PAUL: Raoul?

RAOUL: Whatever makes people see the Angel as the Angel.

PAUL: Papa? Papa?

ELIÁN look at them, his face suddenly very tired.

ELIÁN: It's only been three days -- three days --

PAUL: I know --

ELIÁN: -- and already it's like the world means nothing that it did before.

PAUL: Life does go on.

Without warning, ELIÁN slaps PAUL, but not hard -- out of frustration.

ELIÁN: Life.

ELIÁN takes MARIA's hand with an uncharacteristic tenderness.

ELIÁN: What is "goes on"? I'm sorry.

PAUL: It's all right. I will spend myself as much as I can, Papa.

SERAFINA laughs.

PAUL: I'll take that as a yes from you.

SERAFINA: Just not a "no."

PAUL: Then I will take that as a yes.

SERAFINA: It doesn't matter, Pablo --

PAUL: Paul -- Paul --

SERAFINA: "Pawl"-not-Pablo -- it's all now "Let my people go" and no one can stop it --

ELIÁN: (*warningly*) Serafina.

SERAFINA: Of course. (*to PAUL*) Count my "not no."

PAUL: Well, all right, then -- it's decided.

MARIA: Yes.

Everyone looks at MARIA, realizing that she has spoken for the first time.

MARIA: If there is hell --

PAUL: Okay, Mama.

MARIA: If there is hell --

PAUL: It's okay, Mama. It's okay.

MARIA strikes her breast, hard, with the hand that holds ELIÁN's hand. Blackout.

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ACT I, SCENE 4

MARIA and PRIEST -- confessional. MARIA has a large black purse.

PRIEST: Yes? How long has it been since your last confession?

No response.

PRIEST: Yes?

No response.

PRIEST: Are you there?

MARIA strikes her breast, hard.

PRIEST: Take your time.

MARIA: Do you know who I am?

PRIEST: In the confessional, we are all equal before God.

MARIA: Very nice -- and also very wrong -- but it's not what I asked you. I asked you --

PRIEST: Yes, of course, Maria, I know you.

MARIA: I don't think you do.

PRIEST: You are Maria Aral -- you are the grandmother of Jose Aral, wife of --

MARIA: (*dismissive*) Oh, that "Maria"? That Maria is gone.

PRIEST: She is a "Maria" worth keeping.

MARIA: Not anymore.

PRIEST: Then who --

MARIA: I don't know. New Maria.

PRIEST: And has this new Maria come to confess?

MARIA: Sins? Sins?

PRIEST: You are there, and I'm in here.

MARIA: And what are these "sins" that she should confess?

PRIEST: How would I know until she -- you -- confess them?

MARIA: You don't hear me: give me the catechism about "sins."

PRIEST: Maria, this isn't necessary --

MARIA: You do not get to choose. Define them.

PRIEST: Technically -- an offense against God's love for us, which he gives to us forever, without end or hesitation or condition.

MARIA: God's "love" -- God's "love" is the sin here. Listen to this.

MARIA strikes her breast, hard.

MARIA: I am trying to get it to ring.

MARIA strikes her breast again, hard.

PRIEST: You shouldn't do [that] --

MARIA strikes it twice more.

MARIA: I want to break it -- it's useless.

PRIEST steps out of the confessional.

PRIEST: Maria? Maria? Let's find some place softer.

PRIEST offers MARIA his arm.

PRIEST: I'm sure Elián won't mind.

PRIEST picks up her purse.

PRIEST: Come with me.

MARIA rises, takes his arm.

MARIA: You have a little muscle there.

PRIEST: Thirty years of making the sign of the cross. Come on.

They move into a new light, sit in a pew: the chapel. Several moments of silence.

PRIEST: I like the light in this little chapel -- the air soothes --

MARIA holds up a hand to stop him.

MARIA: I know your tricks, Father --

PRIEST: All of them?

MARIA: I'm not some little lamb on the edge of a cliff.

PRIEST: You don't think so?

MARIA: No, I don't. Your "shepherd of the people" is not for me, not now.

PRIEST: Then that puts me fresh out of tricks.

MARIA: Good -- now you can just listen and answer me straight. Is there a hell? Is there a hell?
It's a simple question.

PRIEST: It's not a simple question.

MARIA: Four words, single syllable.

PRIEST: "Four words" doesn't mean a simple question or a simple answer.

MARIA: (*slight sarcasm*) "Technically" -- I don't have time --

PRIEST: "Technically" -- yes.

MARIA: And who goes there? Technically.

PRIEST: "If one violates God's love" -- Maria, this is not the topic for --

MARIA: Answer me --

PRIEST: (*formulaic*) If one violates God's love, then, without confession, the soul will be lost.
But --

MARIA: (*cuts him off*) "Will be lost" -- uh-uh, no, wrong voice, Father. Voz pasiva. They don't just go "lost," just wander into hell like, "Oops, man, how the hell did I get to hell?" -- they get sent. They get thrown. They get flung --

MARIA flicks her fingers.

MARIA: -- like something picked out of the nose. Who? Who?

MARIA flicks her fingers again.

MARIA: Who does that? You don't even have to answer because we both know the answer.

PRIEST: It's not God.

MARIA: Ah, well, you have to speak well of your employer, but I don't. Not me. I know.

MARIA flicks her fingers again.

MARIA: He's got big fingers. They're working all the time.

PRIEST: God does not send --

MARIA: I'm past that --

MARIA flicks her fingers.

MARIA: It's what He does. And that is all right -- God can do whatever God-things he wants -- except that he has to expect something back --

MARIA flicks her fingers.

MARIA: -- in His face. Who sends God to hell? When he violates our love? Answer: me.

PRIEST: You can't.

MARIA: I can.

MARIA strikes her breast, hard.

MARIA: I have.

MARIA strikes her breast again.

MARIA: Now, Father, I would like to confess.

PRIEST: Forgive me, Maria --

MARIA: No, that is what you are going to do for me.

PRIEST: I can't begin your confession with such --

MARIA: I am ready.

PRIEST: -- anger in your heart --

MARIA: "Bless me, Father -- "

PRIEST: Wait --

MARIA: "For I have sinned -- "

PRIEST: Wait --

MARIA: "And this will be my last confession."

MARIA gives him a hard look.

MARIA: It is my right. It is my duty to Jose. Go on. Tell me I should have love in my heart even though my heart has been crushed.

PRIEST: Maria --

MARIA: The other cheek -- yes. Go on. Tell me about being tested, God's plan, the resurrection --

PRIEST: Maria -- stop. There's no need. You are exactly the lamb at the edge of the cliff. And this will not be your last confession.

MARIA: Oh yes it will. Because after this, I am without sin, forever. I don't have to answer to anyone except Jose, and Jose never asks anyone to be in pain. Go on, teach me some more -- tell me that no human being can be without sin.

PRIEST: You should have been a Jesuit.

MARIA: I should have started being a pain in His ass a long time ago.

PRIEST: I'm sure you were, whether you knew it or not.

MARIA: Good.

PRIEST: But the lamb at the edge of the cliff -- listen -- the shepherd? The shepherd? You see, he's -- twisted inside. If he doesn't move, and the lamb doesn't move, and everything just stays still --

MARIA: No dead lamb.

PRIEST: No sorry shepherd.

MARIA: But nothing ever stays that still.

PRIEST: And so, he must act. Soft words, gentle motions -- "come here" "come here" -- stepping closer, closer, all the time hoping --

MARIA: Father -- now you listen -- you try to be such a good man, and that's why you miss everything. The lamb isn't scared. No -- that look in its eye, the shake in its muscles -- it knows --

PRIEST: What?

MARIA: It knows that with one step it will be freed from the shepherd. You think the lamb wants to stay with the man who will kill it one day? One step -- and gone from the suffocating hands.

PRIEST: The shepherd only wants to save it.

MARIA: The lamb only wants to be released.

PRIEST: No chance the two can be as one?

MARIA: The two should be as two. The shepherd should go home. That way, no one gets hurt.

MARIA stops.

PRIEST: I think -- I feel -- that perhaps certain kinds of suffering --

MARIA: "Certain kinds"?

PRIEST: Maybe all, then --

MARIA: All, Father --

PRIEST: I don't know -- but --

MARIA: All --

PRIEST: Perhaps you are -- In any case, I think -- I feel -- that great suffering at least --

MARIA: Yes?

PRIEST: Does absolve --

MARIA: Like water over the baby?

PRIEST: It can.

MARIA: It must -- or else why, Father? Why?

PRIEST: Yes. Yes. If you'd like to begin.

MARIA blesses herself.

MARIA: Here is my act of contrition: hatred has washed my heart clean. I am purified because I have chosen my hell. I am not going to leave it to anyone else to put me in it. I will not be fooled by love. I will not lose my precious Jose like some bird flying away by forgiving anything or anybody. I want my heart to crush the killer because now it is nothing but stone and that is all stone is good for. These are my sins that are no longer sins. Amen.

MARIA sits back. She opens her purse, takes out a string of rosary beads. She hands them to PRIEST, closes her purse.

MARIA: It is very nice here.

PRIEST: *(examining beads)* Yes, it is. Are you all right?

MARIA: Are you?

PRIEST sits back. MARIA smiles. Blackout.

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ACT I, SCENE 5

PAUL and RAOUL in PAUL's office. At times PAUL will take out a pack of cigarettes from his suitcoat pocket and knock them against the palm of his hand. But he never opens the pack. He is doing this as he looks at RAOUL.

PAUL: I heard about you and Serafina. How is your arm?

RAOUL: It's fine.

PAUL: It is?

RAOUL: Yes.

PAUL: Yes?

RAOUL: Yes.

PAUL: That's good, uncle. That's good. Serafina can be tough. Is tough. I don't how I ever got such a hard-ass for a sister.

RAOUL stands very still, as if he were under interrogation.

PAUL: It's okay, tió, you can smile at that.

RAOUL: I don't see anything to smile at. That's how she is.

PAUL: Yes, that's how she is. But you can still smile -- relax -- you have the "job" already -- well, not a "job," I guess, since it won't pay any money -- well, maybe it will, you never know -- but it'll be good work we're doing.

RAOUL: Like I said before, anything to make people see the Angel as the Angel.

PAUL: (*overlapping*) "-- see the Angel as the Angel" -- the Angel, yes -- uncle, you may have to stop saying that, things like that -- feel them in here, but keep them to yourself. The blood -- the intensity -- I understand, believe me, but private now --

RAOUL looks at PAUL, then looks away.

PAUL: Please sit down. Go ahead.

RAOUL sits.

PAUL: Because you must know, right? How they talk?

RAOUL: No.

PAUL: Raoul --

PAUL stops tapping the pack against his palm, looks directly at RAOUL.

RAOUL: Yes. I know.

A couple of taps more, and then PAUL puts away the cigarette pack.

PAUL: We are part of a family that talks, aren't we? Talk talk talk talk talk -- a bunch of parrots.

RAOUL: I know they talk about me. That I'm slow.

PAUL: Uncle, you don't have to --

RAOUL: "One cerveza short of a six-pack" -- and because Escondida and I didn't have children --

PAUL: Uncle --

RAOUL: That was not my fault -- everything's fine in me -- it was her --

PAUL: Uncle -- Raoul -- look at me -- look at me -- we have to be clear about everything if you're going to go with me on this -- you connected? Plugged in?

RAOUL: Yes.

PAUL: Good, good, because beer -- children -- you know that's not what they really talked about.

RAOUL: I never.

PAUL: And I want to tell you that I never believed any of it. I saw you with Jose -- you were a good uncle -- I even defended you --

RAOUL: You never said anything to me.

PAUL: I didn't want to embarrass you.

RAOUL: They said everything to me, but never to me -- their faces -- always this look -- Escondida couldn't give me a -- nothing inside her, you know -- and so Jose was like this -- this -- why didn't you say anything to me?!

PAUL: I wanted to respect your dignity. I'm sorry. I told all of them -- I should've told you.

RAOUL stares straight ahead, barely keeping himself contained. PAUL taps on his eye-patch.

PAUL: Remember how I got this?

RAOUL: What?

PAUL: Remember how I got this?

RAOUL: That was a bad day.

PAUL takes out the cigarette pack.

PAUL: Got me to quit smoking!

RAOUL: You shouldn't joke.

PAUL: You are going to have to learn to joke if we're moving forward with this together. You want to move forward, don't you?

RAOUL thinks.

PAUL: Tell me a joke.

RAOUL: How about "one egg short of a dozen"?

PAUL: How about "one pork pie short of a picnic"?

RAOUL, for the first time, actually smiles.

RAOUL: How about "one hot pepper short of an enchilada"?

PAUL: There you go!

PAUL taps his eye-patch.

PAUL: That's how this felt after a while. It did get me to stop smoking -- gotta remember that.

PAUL puts away the pack.

RAOUL: It was a horrible day.

PAUL: Raoul, the operative word in that sentence is "was." The way they broke up the party -- that night-stick slammed down -- bam! -- the way Serafina went off to the police academy --

RAOUL: Just like sticking a finger in your eye.

PAUL: Is that a joke?

RAOUL: No.

PAUL: Yes, it is! I never knew you had a comedian inside you! Stuck a finger in my eye. Yeah, it was a horrible day -- horrible month after that day -- horrible year after that month --

RAOUL: They never did anything to him --

PAUL: "Line of duty" -- my parents just too scared -- I hated them for a long time -- yeah, I did -- I got talked about, too -- little whispers, little doubts: "Is he ever going to --" You know what I mean. But all that is all "was," Raoul. All "was."

RAOUL: You defended me?

PAUL: Jose loved you.

RAOUL: He made a lot of fun of me, too.

PAUL: It was his way -- he took after his brother!

RAOUL: Some of the things he said --

PAUL: Just like a kid -- it meant the opposite of what it looked --

RAOUL: Is that true?

PAUL: Of course it is. Jose knew.

RAOUL: When he came along --

PAUL: He seemed to make everything bad go away.

RAOUL: For everybody.

PAUL: Is it going to be "was," uncle? Is it going to be living well and doing the right thing? Or is it staying back? Is it always going to be "one short"?

RAOUL: You defended me?

PAUL taps his eye-patch.

PAUL: I know how to do that.

RAOUL stands, faces PAUL, shakes his hand.

PAUL: Inside. Private. Strong.

Blackout.

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ACT I, SCENE 6

MARIA and ESCONDIDA in ESCONDIDA's hair shop, set up in ESCONDIDA's home. MARIA sits primly in the chair. Her purse is nearby. ESCONDIDA picks up a comb, touches MARIA's hair lightly.

ESCONDIDA: The same, Maria? The usual?

MARIA does not respond. ESCONDIDA looks it over.

ESCONDIDA: It hasn't grown much. And it's getting thin the way my stomach isn't --

MARIA: Why are you still married to a follón like Raoul?

ESCONDIDA gives MARIA a direct look.

ESCONDIDA: So this is the mood we picked out of the closet this morning?

MARIA: Too many things under too many stones.

ESCONDIDA: And today is made different how?

MARIA refuses to answer. ESCONDIDA puts her hand on MARIA's head, then pulls it away.

ESCONDIDA: The volcán! Maria Full of Grace is full of steam! I know that heat, chica -- what's up your pantaletas?

MARIA: You stayed married to him.

ESCONDIDA: And a pig in Havana oinks the same as in Miami. So what?

MARIA: You had better in you. Have.

ESCONDIDA: You already had Elián, and I woulda felt bad stealing him from you. Now, do you want me to --

MARIA speaks with a sudden ferocity.

MARIA: Turn them over! All of them! Now! Now!

ESCONDIDA brings over the second chair, carefully sets it down, carefully sits in it.

ESCONDIDA: What could I have done?

MARIA: You were never pregnant.

ESCONDIDA: I thought I was.

MARIA: And you married him on such a thought.

ESCONDIDA: I was way past the quinceañera, Maria -- I was young getting older. You know how that is.

MARIA: And did it ever make the fear go away? No, it didn't. And older still caught up with you.

MARIA snaps her fingers.

MARIA: Jose gone, you owe nothing to anyone. Not even to Jose.

ESCONDIDA: And you not even to Elián?

MARIA: Too many things have been put under too many stones -- that's all I know.

MARIA indicates the apron.

MARIA: Put it on the floor.

ESCONDIDA gets up, spreads out an apron. MARIA points to her purse.

MARIA: Bring me that.

ESCONDIDA goes to pick up the purse but finds it incredibly heavy - so heavy, in fact, that she needs two hands to bring it over.

ESCONDIDA: What'd you have in here?

MARIA reaches into the purse and takes out a good-sized stone.

MARIA: Some people stone to death what they hate.

MARIA lets the rock drop onto the cloth. She reaches in, takes out another one, drops it.

MARIA: This is too slow. Grab one side.

They each grab a strap, lift, turn upside down. A good piles of rocks come tumbling out. MARIA kneels down carefully. ESCONDIDA joins her.

MARIA: I have been picking them up from the street, from the grass -- I wish I knew all their names.

MARIA starts handing rocks to ESCONDIDA, who begins to pile them in an orderly way -- into what might be a grave marker in a cemetery.

MARIA: Granito. Cuarzo. Basalto. Pedernal [flint]. Caliza [limestone]. Pizarra [slate].

MARIA holds a stone, lets it drop.

MARIA: Jose, mea culpa.

ESCONDIDA places it. This same action happens again and again as the lights fade to black.

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ACT I, SCENE 7

Three FRIENDS of Jose gather at the shrine: MAGDALENA, MARTA, and MARIO. MARIO has a trumpet that he blows from time to time. He also has a backpack. All are disconsolate.

MAGDALENA: I can't believe it.

MARTA: I still can't believe it.

MARIO: *(sotto voce)* Believe it.

MAGDALENA: Jose, man -- gone -- goddamn --

MARTA: Not just gone -- *(voice drops)* -- but like, gone!

MARTA makes an exclamation point in the air: sharp downward line, period jabbed by the middle finger.

MARTA: Fucked clean away.

MAGDALENA: I hope they fry that motherfucker's ass!

Makes the same exclamation point.

MARTA: To a McDonald's golden brown.

They share a hand gesture.

MAGDALENA: Asesino for motherfucking sure.

MARTA: A badge and a Glock and you think you don't have to answer --

MARIO gives a blast on the trumpet, which interrupts MARTA and MAGDALENA. Indicates the candle. They both fall silent.

MARIO: Respect, eh?

MAGDALENA: You always scare the shit way out of me with that thing!

MARIO: You two huffing up -- embarrassing.

MARTA: You're right, you're right. We really shouldn't be --

MARIO: My weapon of choice.

MARTA: Don't talk about weapons!

MARIO: (*showing trumpet*) I'm carrying my dead dad.

MAGDALENA: (*makes sign of the cross*) You shouldn't talk like that.

MARIO: Why not?

MAGDALENA: Spooky.

MARIO: You don't think we got dead people all around us?

MAGDALENA: Just don't, all right.

MARIO: I'll bet you right now -- agh! Watch out -- behind you! Fantasma!

MARIO blows a mambo riff as MAGDALENA jumps. MARTA laughs.

MARIO: It was horrible, man --

Chasing him.

MAGDALENA: I'm taking your throat --

MARIO: It looked like Celia Cruz going for your hair -- hey! -- 'cause she needed a new wig -- hey, hey!

MARTA: Chica, he got you a good one.

MARIO: It was gonna be a hot mango wig with salsa verde roots.

Stops chasing him.

MAGDALENA: Don't do that shit to me! You know how spooked I get if you --

MARIO: Oh, oh, oh -- Magda and her bad dreams --

MAGDALENA: Mario and his dead papa.

MARIO: (*mock-horrified*) Do you see him?

MAGDALENA: Shove it. This whole thing has got me spooked.

MAGDALENA ruffles MARTA's hair.

MAGDALENA: Ain't it got you spooked, too?

MARTA gives a wan smile but doesn't answer. MARIO adds in a slow mambo riff.

MARIO: My dad caught my mom with this stuff.

MAGDALENA: Yeah, we heard.

MARIO: Sweet music.

MAGDALENA: So sweet, then, what happened to the son?

MARIO makes as if he's going to blow it again, and MAGDALENA covers her ears in mock pain.

MAGDALENA: I wouldn't want to be your mama anyway.

MARIO: Don't worry.

Silence as they return to the candle. MARTA traces on the air, as if she were tracing something written on the shrine.

MARTA: "We love you, Bemba."

MARIO: Bemba -- Bemba --

MAGDALENA: Our Bembita.

MARIO: *(tracing)* "R.I.P. Jose -- "

MARTA: *(reads the rest)* "You will always remain in my heart."

MARTA suddenly begins to cry, really really hard. Surprised, MAGDALENA and MARIO wait.

MARTA: "In my heart."

MAGDALENA: What, Martita?

Hesitantly looks at them both, then decides to reveal.

MARTA: I loved him.

MAGDALENA: We all loved --

MARTA: No! No!

MARIO: *(gives MAGDALENA a "look")* Oh boy.

MAGDALENA: What are you talking --

MARTA: What you looking at -- I did! We had plans. We did! We had plans.

MARIO: Jose's mambo.

MARTA: What?

MARIO: Nada.

MARTA: What did you say?

MARIO: I said, Jose's mambo.

MAGDALENA: He means, not just you, buena girl.

MARTA: What are you saying --

MAGDALENA: It's okay.

MARTA: What you do mean?

MARIO: Just ask.

MARTA: He told me.

MARIO: And another fifty.

MAGDALENA: Mario, lock it.

MARTA: He told me!

MARIO makes the exclamation point, then shrugs.

MARTA: (to MAGDALENA) Is he being true?

MAGDALENA: No, chica -- he's just blowing some bad mambo out his culito.

MARIO: Why? Why are you doing that?

MAGDALENA: Why what?

MARTA: Why what?

MARIO: Why lie? Why be liars lying? Especially now?

MAGDALENA: No one's lying --

MARIO: You're lying now by --

MARTA: Bemba didn't --

MARIO: Bemba did --

MARTA: He loved me!

MARIO: No más ni menos, linda, que anyone else.

MARTA: No! I am gonna chose to keep my mind around --

MAGDALENA: Hundred percent with you, girl. You make your own memory. (to MARIO)
Fuck!

MARIO stands in a forceful way that takes MARTA and MAGDALENA aback, and his glare at them keeps them silent. With a sharp gesture, he brings the trumpet to his lips and plays the first three notes of "Taps." Then he begins to recite.

MARIO: Taps -- played for my dad -- dum dum dum --
when they dropped his bulleted body
down a hole in Arlington, gave my Mom a flag
folded neat as pain, and stuck

a white cross in his heart to make it go away
that he died for some presidential
Noriegan Panamanian hard-on invasion --

soft heart, full of love and honor, made my papa
die by a lie, and leave me at three years old

low and dry on the esquina -- not for me, man, no para mi.

MARIO blows out the second three notes of "Taps."

MARIO: Not ever for me a heart like that.
If we keep Bemba alive, it's not by some jive
of tear-eyed talking and walking wounded
like we the ones whose head got broke
into a million pieces of insane pain
by a boy in blue with a rat's ass IQ --

who are you to think that you
are the center of the center of the universe?

MARIO plays the middle part of "Taps."

MARIO: By hard, man

, that's how we do it,
being hard being hard being hard being hard

keeping caged in the ribs a heart like
a wild animal-fire, like one plague after
another,
like a motherfucking asteroid slamming megaton

into the face of a two-faced world --

rage, man -- anger, man --
heart of stone down to the bone --

MARIO finishes "Taps."

MARIO: So sayeth the Preacher.

A moment of silence.

MARIO: Fuck.

MARIO blows out the candle. Blackout.

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ACT I, SCENE 8

*PAUL at a desk, writing, a newspaper beside him. A second chair at the desk.
SERAFINA enters. She is not in uniform. PAUL looks at her, then goes back to his
writing. SERAFINA waits. PAUL writes.*

PAUL: *(without looking up)* What?

SERAFINA: What do you think?

PAUL: I can't read minds.

SERAFINA: I'm worried about Mama.

PAUL continues to write.

SERAFINA: I think you should be worried about Mama.

PAUL: Mama is always someone to worry about.

SERAFINA: She speaks to nobody.

PAUL: She must talk to someone.

SERAFINA: Nobody. Just -- sits. Like a stone.

PAUL: *(abstracted)* Hmmm...

SERAFINA: Could you listen for a second?

PAUL stops writing but does not face SERAFINA.

SERAFINA: I've tried to, you know, move her -- Papa, too -- get her to cook again, visit her club, do that exercising she does in the water, but -- like a stone, Paul.

PAUL: She is in grief. What would you expect?

PAUL goes back to writing.

PAUL: She is in grief for the death of her grandson who was also her son --

SERAFINA: Being like a stone is not grieving --

PAUL: Different people have different ways -- now, by all means, go ahead and worry, but --

SERAFINA: Paul.

The hard tone of her voice makes PAUL stop writing again.

SERAFINA: You can't brush her off with "people." Paul -- Paul! -- when I say "stone," I mean "stone." She. Doesn't. Talk. Like life lobbed her into some lake and she just drops and drops --

PAUL: Please -- I am trying to finish.

SERAFINA: I obviously came to the wrong person at the wrong place at the wrong time.

The silence of a stone between them.

PAUL: Of course, I'm worried.

SERAFINA: Then you should show it around more.

PAUL: I am trying to --

SERAFINA: You should show yourself more.

PAUL: You don't realize --

SERAFINA: More directly --

PAUL: Of course, you don't --

SERAFINA: -- you know, go and touch her, let her know, give her un beso, un abrazo, like she matters --

PAUL: You have no idea, do you? Do you? This --

PAUL looks for the word.

PAUL: -- thing --

SERAFINA: "Thing" --

PAUL: -- this --

SERAFINA: "Thing" -- great.

PAUL: Don't mock me!

PAUL's sudden vehemence stops SERAFINA.

PAUL: Don't mock me!

SERAFINA: Consider yourself unmocked, bro.

PAUL: For a heartbeat can you just stop with the backbiting, with the cop -- Christ!

PAUL holds out his wrists, as if to be handcuffed.

PAUL: You want to, for trying to do what I'm trying to do? Go ahead -- go ahead! Because it's clear you don't see -- you can't see --

SERAFINA: All this cop sees is you acting like a suspect -- yeah -- like the perp on the perp walk -- "cop" enough for you? -- who treats his grandmother like she's a bargain matinee -- what are you --

PAUL moves toward SERAFINA.

PAUL: You have been at me --

SERAFINA: All right --

PAUL: -- ever since we decided --

SERAFINA: All right -- just back off.

PAUL: -- that I would speak for --

SERAFINA: Some air between us, all right?

PAUL gathers himself. He takes out the cigarette pack, slaps against his palm.

PAUL: (*sardonic laugh*) "Old days," eh?

SERAFINA: No.

PAUL: Why can't we go back to Mama yelling "Basta!", arms crossed, time out --

SERAFINA: Because that was when I liked you.

PAUL: "Why can't they just get along?"

SERAFINA: She always liked praying for impossible things.

PAUL is collected. He puts away the cigarettes, taps his eye patch.

PAUL: I lose it because some cop with promotion on his mind does a one-man band on stopping "juvenile delinquency," and my sister, so caring, goes off to the police academy -- that's who we turned out to be.

PAUL straightens his clothing.

PAUL: This "thing" -- you want a word, Fina? Try on "cause." Our cause -- because it is now a cause --

PAUL hands SERAFINA the newspaper. SERAFINA reads and is visibly shocked.

PAUL: You didn't know.

SERAFINA: Nothing came to the station. For murder?

PAUL: Sayeth the prosecutor's office.

SERAFINA: Oh God. Bemba. This is not good.

PAUL quotes from memory.

PAUL: "The autopsy revealed -- "

SERAFINA: Paul --

PAUL: *(ignoring her)* " -- that he had had his head banged on the pavement, and the force was such that it caused -- "

SERAFINA: All right.

PAUL: *(ignoring her)* " -- multiple skull fractures. The autopsy -- "

SERAFINA: All right!

SERAFINA slams the newspaper on the table. PAUL faces her.

PAUL: " -- in conjunction with with the statements we received from eyewitnesses, determined the cause for the murder charge."

PAUL looks at SERAFINA, who does not meet his gaze. He turns back to writing.

PAUL: The media -- all kinds, from all over -- I mean all over --

SERAFINA: Paul --

PAUL: -- everybody wants a piece of this cause --

SERAFINA: -- this will kill us --

PAUL: -- it's just growing --

SERAFINA: -- did you hear me --

PAUL: -- and growing --

SERAFINA: -- it will kill us --

PAUL: -- and growing.

SERAFINA: So does cancer.

PAUL: No, Fina, of the long sad face, this is growing like a cause should grow. Jose's cause, our brother's cause.

SERAFINA: Pablo's cause.

PAUL: I can hear the middle finger, but --

SERAFINA: You're just doing it for the good of --

PAUL: -- but we all agreed that I --

But SERAFINA holds up her hand: "Enough."

PAUL: *(slight mock)* Ah, there's the basta!

SERAFINA toys with the paper. PAUL finishes writing.

PAUL: You afraid for your "fellow officer"?

SERAFINA: You know he's not mine -- different city, different badge --

PAUL: Isn't all blue true blue to each other under the skin? Huh?

No response.

PAUL: That's what I've been told: pig first --

SERAFINA: And you look like this when you think you look like a winner?

PAUL: Uh-oh --

SERAFINA: Is that the look of the “cause”?

PAUL: So read me my rights.

SERAFINA: I gotta ask because I have never seen that look on you. Ever. “Winner” and “Paul” in the same sentence? But hand you a dead brother, and, hombre, you the big pachuco on the esquina --

PAUL: Stop the fucking Spanglish --

SERAFINA: -- the press releases start puking right out --

PAUL: And that’s all you want us to get out of this -- a dead brother? And some run-of-the-mill justice, maybe, from your friends at the courthouse? Nothing else?

SERAFINA: I will tell you what I want: Mama back. And Papa, too -- he doesn’t know what to do. He’s lost, like a blind donkey.

PAUL: Just go serve and protect -- I’ll take care of my grandparents in my own way.

SERAFINA: Our grandparents. And they need help.

PAUL: So go serve and protect.

RAOUL enters. SERAFINA immediately stiffens.

RAOUL: They’re here, Paul.

SERAFINA gives PAUL a puzzled look.

PAUL: Every spokesperson needs an assistant.

RAOUL: You hear he got murder?

SERAFINA: *(to PAUL)* You picked Raoul?

RAOUL: I never did anything.

PAUL: We’ve made our peace with him.

RAOUL: Did you hear? The newspaper.

SERAFINA: *(barely able to speak)* Yes -- I heard. I read.

RAOUL: The Angel will get justice.

PAUL: Yes, he will, uncle. By any means necessary.

SERAFINA: Who’s here?

PAUL: The cast and crew of the first of many channels.

PAUL holds up the piece of paper.

PAUL: A crude beginning -- but it will get better.

PAUL leaves.

RAOUL: Good news, huh?

SERAFINA: Tio, you better catch up with him -- he's moving fast.

RAOUL leaves.

SERAFINA: Mama, Mama, Mama.

SERAFINA carefully crumples the newspaper into as small a sphere as she can manage. Blackout.

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ACT I, SCENE 9

The shrine. MARIO with his trumpet, MARTA, and MAGDALENA. The three sing a song in low voices -- director's choice of song.

MARIA comes, stares. The singing trails off. They all stand.

MAGDALENA: Señora Aral?

MARTA: (*sotto voce*) Man, look at --

MAGDALENA: Señora?

From her pocket, MARIA takes a small knife.

MARTA: Oh God! Mario --

Without hesitation, MARIA cuts her fingertip.

MARTA: Mario!

MAGDALENA: Señora!

MARIA ignores them. Using the blood, she begins to write on the shrine, pressing her finger to get more as she uses it.

MARTA: Mario, stop her --

MARIO: Sshh!

MARIA struggles to write: not enough blood. SERAFINA enters, in uniform, sizes up the situation, goes to MARIA and gently tries to pull her away.

MARIA resists.

SERAFINA is reluctant to try harder but continues to pull her away.

MARIO comes over and gently puts his hand on MARIA's elbow. MARIA looks at him, then releases herself. SERAFINA moves MARIA away.

Not much is written on the wall.

SERAFINA: Nona -- Nona -- vamos, abuela -- vamonos ya. You shouldn't be out here -- We've got to get you home -- come on, come on -- we'll make you safe --

MARTA comes over, presses on the tip of MARIA's finger to stop the bleeding. MAGDALENA takes MARIA's other arm.

MARTA: She just showed up, like, you know, a ghost --

MAGDALENA: Like, right out of the blue -- is she okay?

SERAFINA: She's fine --

MARIO goes into his backpack and pulls out a First Aid kit, brings over a band-aid.

MAGDALENA: You carry a First Aid thing?

MARIO unpeels two band-aids and gently puts one over the tip of MARIA's finger and the other around the finger to hold the first. Throughout this, MARIA does not resist.

MARIO: "Be prepared."

MARTA: What's that?

MARIO: Boy Scouts.

MAGDALENA: You?

MARIO: Believe it or not.

MAGDALENA: You and merit badges?

MARIO: (to MAGDALENA) Yeah. (to MARIA) ¿Te aprieta mucho?

MARIA directly looks at MARIO, then folds her hands together.

MARIO: I guess I did it okay.

MARTA: She's okay, huh?

MAGDALENA: For now, I guess.

SERAFINA: Thanks.

MARIO: El gusto es mio.

SERAFINA: *(to MARIA)* Tenemos que irnos, 'lita. *(to them)* I have to get her home.

MARTA: We can go with you --

SERAFINA: No, it's fine --

MAGDALENA: Really, we like her -- we can --

SERAFINA: It's not that far.

They start to move away.

MARIO: Serafina --

Given the moment, the use of the name sounds oddly intimate -- they both notice this. And, hearing the name, MARIA stops, turns, looks directly at MARIO.

SERAFINA: Yes?

MARIO: I'm sorry, but I have to ask --

SERAFINA: It's okay --

MARIO: -- what was she going to write? Tu abuela? What did she have to --

SERAFINA: I don't know.

MARIO: Can I ask her?

MAGDALENA: Mario --

SERAFINA: I don't know what she was going to write.

MARIO: Can I --

MARTA: *(loud whisper)* Mario!

SERAFINA: It's okay. It's okay. Nona?

MARIA looks at MARIO, who holds her gaze.

SERAFINA: I guess it's okay.

MARIO: Perdón, Señora -- ¿qué iba a escribir en la pared?

MARIA continues to look at him, unanswering.

SERAFINA: Maybe I should really take her --

Without changing expression or posture, MARIA clearly and defiantly speaks out several lines.

MARIA: ¡Que no quiero verla! / dile a la luna que venga / que no quiero ver la sangre / de Ignacio sobre la arena --

MARIA simply stops, stares. MARIO holds up his hands.

MARIO: Señora, not enough blood in these ten to write all of that.

SERAFINA: It goes on a lot longer.

MARIO: Yeah.

SERAFINA: A lot.

MARIO: *(to MARIA)* Then I would have to add my toes. *(to SERAFINA)* Who?

SERAFINA: *(looking at MARIA)* Mama -- mama --

MARIO: It's okay --

SERAFINA: A man named Lorca -- Federico García Lorca. Spanish. She knows him full out from memory. Look --

MARIA: *(exploding)* ¡Amor, enemigo mío / muerde tu raíz amarga!

MARIO: *(admiringly)* Bite the bitter root?

MAGDALENA: I don't get it.

MARTA: I sorta --

MAGDALENA: And I don't get who this Ignacio is and why his blood is on the sand and why my enemy has to bite a bitter root --

MARIO: Because it's poetry, chica.

MAGDALENA: Like you know.

SERAFINA: *(to MAGDALENA)* Don't worry, we didn't get it either --

MAGDALENA: No way!

SERAFINA: -- but she gave it to us with the breakfast milk anyway.

MARIO: That is -- man, that is just so --

SERAFINA: I really gotta --

MAGDALENA: *(to MARIO)* Let her go!

MARIO: *(very reluctant)* Right, right -- sorry --

MAGDALENA: *(to SERAFINA)* We'll take her home!

MARTA: Really! It's just up the stairs there. We know where you guys live. Come on.

SERAFINA hesitates, then gives in. MARTA and MAGDALENA shepherd MARIA. SERAFINA tracks them.

MARTA: Ven con nosotras, abuelita --

MAGDALENA: Such beautiful poetry, señora --

MARTA: Careful, señora, cuídase --

MAGDALENA: To tell the moon to come -- I would never be able to recite --

They exit.

SERAFINA: It's really sweet of them --

MARIO: They really liked Jose.

SERAFINA: Who didn't?

The conversation drops for a moment.

SERAFINA: You've been out here a long time.

MARIO: Have to do the right things right.

SERAFINA: Your mother and aunt --

MARIO: They know where I am -- they always know, even if I don't tell them -- sixth-sense-thing, you know -- "Mario radar" --

SERAFINA: Yeah -- Mama had one, too. She never lost it, old as she is -- but like none of what she stuffed away up here backed her up when Jose -- things aren't true for her anymore, I think -- I don't know --

MARIO: I can understand it's hard to understand --

SERAFINA: She never gives up, one way or another, better or worse, but, now -- Look, I've got to go -- and then back to work -- be careful --

MARIO: You know this Lorca.

SERAFINA: Gotta go, really.

MARIO: Okay, Fina, okay, can understand --

SERAFINA realizes she may have been rude.

SERAFINA: Yes, I know "this Lorca" -- a little --

MARIO: Look, if you gotta go --

SERAFINA: No, no -- I'm sure she's -- in good hands --

MARIO: With those two, just like insurance.

SERAFINA, seemingly almost against her will, chuckles.

MARIO: What?

Laughs a bit more, then controls herself.

SERAFINA: I don't know, maybe it's just the -- It's just that -- I have not heard -- that -- come out of her mouth in a long time.

MARIO: It's amazing.

SERAFINA: Yeah, it is -- she is --

MARIO: Lorca, Lorca --

MARIO takes a pen from his pocket. SERAFINA notices that he has things written all over his hands. MARIO writes the name on the third finger of his left hand.

MARIO: -- gotta remember him --

SERAFINA: Mario, I have paper --

MARIO: Nope, fine -- remember better this way --

MARIO shows her his hands.

MARIO: My Palm Pilot.

SERAFINA: Very “handy” -- sorry --

MARIO: Bad jokes are still good jokes --

SERAFINA: Sure you’ll remember?

MARIO: Third finger over, left hand.

SERAFINA: At least until your next shower. Look, the band-aids --

MARIO: Siempre listo.

SERAFINA: And I gotta say that I don’t know many people your age that would be hauling First Aid in their backpack.

MARIO: “My age”?

SERAFINA reaches for her wallet.

SERAFINA: *(not hearing him)* Can I pay you back for --

MARIO: How old do you think I am?

SERAFINA: What?

MARIO: How old do you make me, Fina?

SERAFINA: Mario, all I meant was --

MARIO: What you meant -- I know what you meant, but I just wrote Lorca on my hand and how many --

SERAFINA: Look, I’m gonna go --

MARIO: -- how many cholos you deal with each day would do that?

SERAFINA: You’re tired --

MARIO: I am not tired!

SERAFINA: Well, you’re something --

MARIO: Yeah, I’m something --

SERAFINA: -- and I’m way behind getting back to --

MARIO: I'm not my age, is what I am.

SERAFINA: I'm gonna go --

SERAFINA turns to exit.

MARIO: Marta, big eyes, big sloppy heart, for Jose -- that's her age. Magda, bite the chili pepper, don't trust any sugar -- that's her age. Serafina --

SERAFINA stops, waits.

MARIO: La Fina --

SERAFINA: That's enough. (*lighten it a little*) El fin.

MARIO: No.

SERAFINA: You are tired, and you should go home.

MARIO: You're like the juggler -- keeping it all in the air -- one foot with the friends, one foot with the others --

MARIO mimes juggling --

MARIO: -- just up, and up, and around, and around, and then --

-- until one of the "balls" drops to the ground, which becomes the candle. Then he stops -- and realizes he may have gone too far.

MARIO: And then I find myself here --

MARIO pumps his hand protest-like into the air.

MARIO: (*slight self-mock*) -- justicia! justicia! -- and you find yourself having to deal with, you know --

A couple more half-hearted pumps.

MARIO: -- in your face, and who knows what and how and why -- and it all gets hard and --

SERAFINA: If this is how you treat your friends, then you probably don't have a lot of friends at your age.

MARIO: (*half-smile*) Magda and Marta.

SERAFINA: Younger, not your own. (*relenting*) You always could be one of those little flies that buzz up in your ear, get you slapping, you know --

MARIO: Drive you nuts.

SERAFINA: Mario and his trumpet, in your ear -- you still play?

MARIO: I still play.

SERAFINA: That's good. That's good for any age. Now, I'm really gonna go.

MARIO: Can I trade you something?

MARIO picks up his trumpet and plays a few bars of a mambo tune -- perhaps something from Tito Puente or Perez 'Prez' Prado. He gets SERAFINA to laugh, which makes MARIO smile.

MARIO: Now you play.

SERAFINA: I can't --

MARIO: Lorca -- play Lorca. Just like she did.

SERAFINA: Mario --

But SERAFINA sees that MARIO is not going to relent.

SERAFINA: It's been so long --

MARIO: You said you knew it. You still got to know it. Just like she did. Go on, Fina. Jose's sister.

At this moment, MARTA and MAGDALENA come on, see MARIO and SERAFINA, who do not see them.

SERAFINA: ¡Que no quiero verla! --

MARIO takes up the trumpet, blows several notes to accompany.

SERAFINA: -- dile a la luna que venga / que no quiero ver la sangre / de Jose sobre la arena --

They both respond to SERAFINA's slip of the tongue at the same time.

MARIO: You said "Jose."

SERAFINA: I meant "Ignacio" -- I meant "Ignacio."

MARIO: Doesn't matter.

SERAFINA: Enough --

MARTA: Fina?

SERAFINA and MARIO look at them, surprised, rattled.

MARTA: Fina?

SERAFINA: Yes, Marta.

MAGDALENA: She's asleep. Tu abuelo is sitting with her.

SERAFINA: Fine. Thanks.

MARTA: No problem, really.

MARIO: Thanks.

SERAFINA: I can't do it again.

*MARIO grabs the third finger of his left hand, as if to say, "I can read him."
SERAFINA looks around, then exits into the next scene. MARTA and MAGDALENA
walk over to MARIO, a question on their faces.*

MARIO: I'm tired.

MAGDALENA: Yeah, so?

MARIO: I'm going home.

MAGDALENA: Mario!

MARIO: She's got a job to do.

Lights out, candle still burns.

* * * * *

ACT I, SCENE 10

*Without transition, lights up on another part of the stage: PAUL, RAOUL, unseen
REPORTERS, SERAFINA as "security."*

PAUL: Thank you for coming. Thank you. Today, injustice has been met with justice, con
justicia!

*PAUL pumps his fist into the air. MARIO picks up the candle. A strained look on
PAUL's face, then one more pump. MARIO blows the candle out. Lights to black.*

INTERMISSION

ACT II, SCENE 1

ELIÁN and the PRIEST -- confessional. Several beats of silence.

PRIEST: Yes?

ELIÁN says nothing.

PRIEST: I hear breathing.

ELIÁN says nothing.

PRIEST: I still hear breathing.

ELIÁN raps his knuckles hard against the chair.

ELIÁN: That's the sound of my head, Father.

PRIEST: Sounds hard.

ELIÁN: That's how hard it's gotten because I find myself coming here.

PRIEST: Or it could be someone knocking on a door wanting to come inside.

ELIÁN: Believe me, Father, I need nothing from inside here.

PRIEST: Then why are you here and knocking?

ELIÁN does not respond.

PRIEST: At least I can still hear you breathing. Do you really want to believe your head is that hard, Elián? Or that you are that hard? Or as durable as my chair?

ELIÁN: I think I'm that flammable. I think I am like underbrush in the sugar cane --

PRIEST steps out of the confessional, which surprises ELIÁN.

PRIEST: Come on -- I can't have people bursting into flame in my confessional. Besides, I'm too tired today for metaphor. Come on.

ELIÁN stands.

ELIÁN: Where?

PRIEST: Come on -- I need a break -- come on.

They move into a new light, sit in the chapel.

ELIÁN: I've never been in here.

PRIEST: Because you've never really been in this church at all.

ELIÁN: I've stepped inside.

PRIEST: And right back out after Maria takes her seat.

ELIÁN: I have no use for --

PRIEST: Had no use -- except now, because you're here. Right?

ELIÁN: Except now, yes. It's nice here.

PRIEST: It's not a place for flammable.

PRIEST raps his knuckles on the pew.

PRIEST: Nice to have you here.

PRIEST waits.

ELIÁN: You're waiting for me to say something.

PRIEST: You came to my house, Elián --

More silence hangs between them.

ELIÁN: I am a man without an island, Father.

PRIEST: I was hoping you'd say "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned" --

ELIÁN: I wouldn't confess to you -- or to any man --

PRIEST: It's not men we need to confess to -- but that's all right. Another time. You said "island."

ELIÁN: Without an island.

PRIEST: Is that Cuba? You and Cuba left each other a long time ago, Elián --

ELIÁN gets up from the pew.

ELIÁN: You think so, eh?

PRIEST: I know so -- you've told me as much -- told everybody.

ELIÁN: You think my Cuba's gone?

PRIEST: Whatever Cuba you hold on to, that Cuba is gone. It doesn't matter anyway --

As improbable as it seems, ELIÁN begins to dance -- stiff, shuffling, but with memories of a younger body.

PRIEST: What are you doing?

ELIÁN: I am riding.

PRIEST: Elián --

ELIÁN: I am riding -- I am riding into Havana con Fidel and Che and Raúl --

PRIEST: Oh.

ELIÁN: You didn't know that about me, did you?

PRIEST: Everyone knows that about you.

ELIÁN: But they don't really know.

PRIEST: Of course not -- how could they? Dance away. You must have been quite the dancer.

ELIÁN stops and points a finger.

ELIÁN: And you -- you would have been la cura que no tiene una cura --

PRIEST points back at him.

PRIEST: And you would be wrong. This cura does have a cure -- if the dancing revolucionario would humble himself a little to try it.

ELIÁN gives him a dismissive gesture, begins dancing again. PRIEST matches his gesture.

ELIÁN: Riding in with the Trinity -- young, winners -- we had done something right!

ELIÁN, now in the grip of memory, dances -- but his breathing is the labored breathing of an old man.

ELIÁN: The smell of the diesel like jasmine, our own sweat like incense -- nothing was like it was before. Nothing! The people lifting us, their voices -- we wanted to do away with the priests -- break the Church -- it gave nothing to the people --

ELIÁN stops dancing to catch his breath. PRIEST half-rises, watches. ELIÁN, for a moment, looks completely lost, catches his breath.

PRIEST: And Maria, of course.

ELIÁN: What?

PRIEST: Maria.

ELIÁN: Yes -- of course -- of course -- Maria --

PRIEST: Come sit down, Elián.

ELIÁN at first refuses, breathing deeply. Then he sits.

ELIÁN: Such fire in her eyes then.

PRIEST: I've seen the picture. Of the two of you. She was quite beautiful -- still is.

ELIÁN: She was the true one -- the believer -- she was -- I only come here, you know, to see you because Maria comes -- I have no use for you --

PRIEST: Elián -- I'm an old bone you like to chew. And you I like -- even if you say you don't like me liking you --

ELIÁN: She has no use for you anymore.

PRIEST lets the words hang in the air.

ELIÁN: She's can't come here anymore.

PRIEST: Has something happened --

ELIÁN: She can't --

PRIEST: Elián, tell me --

ELIÁN: Loca -- mi marida preciosa está loca --

PRIEST: She is not crazy --

ELIÁN: Then explain it to me!

PRIEST: Explain what?

ELIÁN: Explain why she has gone away from me --

ELIÁN lets out a howl that shakes his frail frame. PRIEST tries to gentle ELIÁN.

ELIÁN: We came in, and it was all good -- there was hope -- you should have seen us -- skinny, stinking, sore, sick -- stinking? God, we smelled all the way to the clouds! -- but happy -- happy! -- she sits like in a tomb, like a rock, like a stone angel! -- Fidel! Fidel! Of course, yes, but Che -- Che -- he was -- my man! -- he was -- in a room she sits, saying nothing, giving me nothing! -- Che, so beautiful, he was a real Christ -- I should never have left -- Che -- she -- has gone away -- and I am without an island --

ELIÁN faces the PRIEST.

ELIÁN: Give me absolution.

PRIEST: I can't give you absolution, you haven't confessed anything --

ELIÁN: I need to do that?

PRIEST: I know you haven't forgotten all the rules.

ELIÁN: All right, then -- I confess --

PRIEST: To what?

ELIÁN: I have killed my wife.

PRIEST: You have not.

ELIÁN: I have killed my wife.

PRIEST: You have not.

ELIÁN: Yes, I have.

PRIEST: You have not.

ELIÁN: I have.

PRIEST: I can't imagine you killing anything.

ELIÁN: Then you have a failure of imagination.

Their eyes meet.

PRIEST: You didn't.

ELIÁN: You think the only way I could mean it is if I took a knife or took these hands -- you know so little about anything real.

PRIEST: You don't anything about what I know, real or otherwise.

ELIÁN: Do you want to hear?

PRIEST: I want to hear because you want to tell me.

ELIÁN: That much is real.

ELIÁN fingers PRIEST's stole.

ELIÁN: Do what you have to do.

PRIEST takes his stole, kisses it, and replaces it around his neck.

PRIEST: That what you want? The formality?

ELIÁN: I hate to say it --

PRIEST: Consider it said. All right.

ELIÁN: Here is how this murder happened. I brought her here, gave her children that gave her grandchildren -- and all that has only given back to her a dead -- in a grave now --

PRIEST: That's not killing Maria --

ELIÁN: She didn't want to leave Cuba -- I did.

PRIEST: You?

ELIÁN: (*pointing to self*) Revolucinário? Not me. Not really. I was the dancer -- remember? She -- she was the real thing. I lost faith in Fidel -- Raúl -- Che -- Che! She never did. So, a choice -- I forced a choice --

PRIEST: And she chose you --

ELIÁN: And that made it possible for her to die while she still breathes, and I should be punished for leaving my island -- it is not her fault --

PRIEST: It is no one's fault, Elián, except for the man whom the law has named.

ELIÁN: This is the sermon.

PRIEST: And you have to hear it. We may feel punished by our suffering over Jose's death, but none of us is guilty of anything except sadness and anger.

ELIÁN: (*gently*) You are so foolish, cura.

PRIEST: I don't know if that's the second or third time you've called me that.

ELIÁN: Forgive me -- I absolve you! -- but you think like numbers -- add one, add two, get three -- a little list of sins -- venial, mortal -- check them off and then you swipe, swipe, swipe with penance, and I am clean.

PRIEST: Oh good -- now I'm not the only one being foolish.

ELIÁN: Simply being alive -- that is the sin, not your little list -- living is el pecado original, el pecado único --

PRIEST: And you think it can't be washed -- that you can't be --

ELIÁN: You could swipe me forever and --

PRIEST: And that -- that is just vanity talking -- just self-pity --

PRIEST stands up, which surprises ELIÁN, and in a kind of white-bread way begins to dance the way ELIÁN had danced. He is not very good.

ELIÁN: You're embarrassing me.

PRIEST: How do you get the hips to do --

ELIÁN: Stop it --

PRIEST: It's not in these Irish Catholic bones --

ELIÁN: Stop it.

PRIEST: There we go -- okay! Not until you stop it.

ELIÁN: Stop what?

PRIEST: That stupid dance of self-pity you're doing.

ELIÁN sets himself stubbornly. PRIEST keeps dancing.

PRIEST: I can keep this up longer than you -- I'm in better shape --

But suddenly PRIEST stops, clearly not in better shape.

PRIEST: All right, so maybe I'm not. But that doesn't change the subject.

PRIEST sits.

PRIEST: The only sin, I think, that's really a sin -- not just some ordinary daily human fuck-up -- pardon the Anglo-Saxon -- is pride. Let's think about that together for a moment. Can that hard head think?

ELIÁN: I'm thinking.

PRIEST: Good. Still thinking?

ELIÁN: Yes.

PRIEST: Even better. Because if you love Maria --

ELIÁN: You're a lousy dancer.

PRIEST: But I knock 'em out with my homily.

ELIÁN: I do --

PRIEST: And you came to me because of that --

ELIÁN: For her --

PRIEST: Yes -- so you're asking me --

ELIÁN: Swipe, swipe with some penance -- even if I don't believe it --

PRIEST: Belief isn't necessary --

ELIÁN: It will make a -- way -- back to her -- to get back to my island --

PRIEST: That -- that -- yes -- shows your head isn't that hard after all. Good thinking. Te absolvo, Elián.

ELIÁN raises his fist into the air.

ELIÁN: (*sardonically but softly*) Justicia, eh?

Lights cross-fade to shrine. PRIEST exits.

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ACT II, SCENE 2

MARTA and MAGDALENA at the shrine. ELIÁN appears.

MARTA: Look --

MAGDALENA: I see --

MARTA: He's never been here --

ELIÁN walks toward them, toward the shrine.

MARTA: Señor?

ELIÁN stands in front of the shrine.

ELIÁN: Help me.

ELIÁN holds out his hands, and MARTA and MAGDALENA support him as he kneels. Then they kneel. ELIÁN fingers the stones, selects two small pebbles.

ELIÁN: The stones.

MARTA: People bring 'em.

ELIÁN: Why?

MAGDALENA: I don't know. They just do.

MARTA: They put them down, they pray a little, they leave.

MAGDALENA: (*pointing to stones*) They stay.

ELIÁN gestures to them again, and they help him sit on the ground. ELIÁN takes off one shoe, puts the pebble in it, puts it back on. He takes off the second shoe, puts the pebble in it, puts it back on.

Without asking them for help, ELIÁN slowly rises to a standing position. They rise with him. ELIÁN settles his feet into his shoes until he can feel the pebble in each one.

ELIÁN: Give me your hands.

They do. ELIÁN squeezes their hands.

ELIÁN: (*mostly to himself*) Martha and Magdalene outside the tomb.

ELIÁN lets go of their hands, turns, and leaves. He feels the pebble in each shoe as he exits.

MARTA: I don't know --

MAGDALENA: I don't know, either --

MARTA: I mean, I don't know, like, a lot --

MAGDALENA: I don't know a lot either --

MARTA turns to the shrine, kneels, gets a pebble, and slips it into her shoe.

MAGDALENA: You're crazy --

MARTA stands, wiggles her foot around, feels the pebble, looks at MAGDALENA.

MARTA: I don't think so.

MAGDALENA: If everyone around you's crazy, how could you know?

MARTA: You're not crazy.

MAGDALENA: I will if I watch you --

MARTA takes a step. Then another step. Then one more. Then she sits and takes out the pebble, holds it up.

MAGDALENA: You got the point?

MARTA: I got the point.

MAGDALENA: What was the point?

MARTA: I think it's what old men do. Have to do.

MAGDALENA: But not us.

MARTA: Not us.

MAGDALENA: Good.

MARTA puts the pebble back. Lights out.

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ACT II, SCENE 3

Lights up on PAUL at a press conference, with RAOUL. Next to him: the MAYOR. SERAFINA is in the background, providing "security." MARTA and MAGDALENA join SERAFINA.

PAUL: Thank you all for coming. And we appreciate you coming by to visit the Shrine, Mayor.

MAYOR gives an awkward embrace to PAUL.

MAYOR: At a time like this, Paul, with such a tragedy in our midst, we all have to pitch in to make sure the community is healed.

PAUL reaches back, and RAOUL smoothly hands him a thick document.

PAUL: Healed, Mayor, is exactly right --

PAUL hands MAYOR the document.

PAUL: -- and this is a petition, signed by the good people who you're the mayor of, calling for a citizen review board for the police department. Three thousand signatures, Mayor -- the voices of three thousand people. What do you have to say to them?

MAYOR, blindsided by the tactic, stands in the glare holding the signatures.

MAYOR: I will certainly -- take these into account --

PAUL: We don't have a board like this now, do we?

MAYOR: No.

PAUL: No one who overlooks the police except the police?

MAYOR: And myself, and the council.

PAUL: But the people -- where is the people's voice? Don't you think they should have one?

MAYOR: I will certainly take it under advisement, Paul.

PAUL: Thank you, Mayor. We would all appreciate you doing that. But we hope it goes farther than "advisement" because we want the memory of Jose to live on in a way that makes things better for everybody.

MAYOR: And so do we all.

They embrace awkwardly again.

PAUL: Thanks. A hand for the Mayor.

PAUL applauds politely. The glaring lights go out.

MAYOR: *(barely civil)* Thank you, Paul -- *(holds up document)* I won't forget this.

PAUL: And neither will my family, Mayor.

MAYOR: My best to your family.

PAUL: We can expect no less from a good man like you.

MAYOR exits. SERAFINA comes up to PAUL.

PAUL: *(to the unseen reporters)* Thanks for coming, everyone. The governor said she would be by later today -- so we'll be back!

The media disperse.

SERAFINA: You just pissed off the Mayor.

RAOUL walks up to "bodyguard" PAUL.

SERAFINA: You just --

PAUL: He won't be mayor for long.

SERAFINA gives him a "look."

SERAFINA: Plans?

PAUL: (*musings*) Life is plans, Fina. There are plans -- there are always plans.

SERAFINA: (*to RAOUL*) Is he, uncle? Is he planning?

RAOUL: Where he goes, I go.

PAUL: The city could use somebody who knows --

SERAFINA: I'm going back, Paul -- I'm on the clock here. I can't engage in what you're talking about when I'm on the job. Department rules about police officers being used for --

PAUL: Small eyes, Fina, about the things of the world. There is work that needs to be done --

SERAFINA: -- and you're called to do it --

RAOUL: Nobody's looking out for --

SERAFINA: Uncle, him I talk to -- you don't need to talk to me -- you got that bloody shirt on underneath your suitcoat?

RAOUL: You've got no respect.

SERAFINA: I respect what's worth respect. (*to PAUL*) You should make "plans" to go see them -- fit them into your "plans."

PAUL: Is everything all right?

SERAFINA: As well as can be expected. If you have low expectations. But then again, I got small eyes, according to some authorities.

Glare of a video camera light comes on.

PAUL: (*to unseen videographer*) Do I what? Of course, sure, just let me --

RAOUL smoothly hands him their standard press release.

PAUL: Where are you from? Japan? We got the whole world in our hands, eh? What would you like? The upcoming trial? What don't we have to say about that?

Lights to black.

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ACT II, Scene 4

Bathroom. MARIA prays to the Eggun, The Dead. On the floor, a small glass of rum, a plate of food. She holds the opa ikú, a stick with nine differently color ribbons and bells, which she will periodically pound on the floor during her prayer to call forth the Eggun. She is wearing a necklace of cowrie shells. MARIA seems at peace as she prays.

To the side, as if outside the bathroom, but with the bathroom door open stand ELIÁN, MARTA, and MAGDALENA. They listen to and watch MARIA praying.

MARIA: "Eluwekon ashé osain cherere adashé kokoni jikoji omó la dufetini cherebinu oluosó bogwó ayalu kosó agó -- "

MARTA: (*sotto voce*) What is she saying?

ELIÁN ignores her, glares through what would be the bathroom door.

MARIA: "Ibaye baye tonu bowo oku be lese olodumare mo yuba ibaye bafayaye kosi iku kosi aron kosi -- "

MARTA: Señor, what's she doing --

MARIA: " -- ina dosi eye kosi faya kosi ofo ariku baba wa."

Silence. Then MARIA starts again and continues repeating the words under the following lines.

MARIA: "Eluwekon ashé osain cherere adashé kokoni jikoji omó la dufetini cherebinu oluosó bogwó ayalu kosó agó. Ibaye baye tonu bowo oku be lese olodumare mo yuba ibaye bafayaye kosi iku kosi aron kosi ina dosi eye kosi faya kosi ofo ariku baba wa."

MAGDALENA: Let's go.

MARTA: No! She may need help.

MAGDALENA: Let's tell Fina -- come on --

MARTA: No, you come on --

ELIÁN: (*to MARIA*) Stop this!

MARIA pauses. Then MARIA begins where she stopped.

ELIÁN: Stop this! Now!

MARIA pauses. Then MARIA begins where she stopped.

MARTA: (*to ELIÁN*) Do you want us to go tell somebody --

ELIÁN: She's been like this for days.

MAGDALENA: We can go --

MARTA: What is she saying?

MAGDALENA: Cállete! Respect! Look, we can go get --

But MARTA will not be put off.

MARTA: What is she saying, señor?

ELIÁN: She's calling the Eggun --

MARTA: The what?

ELIÁN: The dead. Maria!

MAGDALENA: I'm going to go -- this is getting way --

MARTA: (to MAGDALENA) Stop it!

ELIÁN: She's praying to the Eggun --

MAGDALENA: (to MARTA) Well, it is!

MARTA: Sssh!

ELIÁN: -- because she thinks -- that Jose will come back -- will come back to her. Give her peace. The Eggun do that sometime.

MARTA: You believe this?

ELIÁN: We tried to kill Santeria after the revolution.

MAGDALENA: What revolution?

ELIÁN: (not hearing her) Might as well have tried to eat our own head.

MAGDALENA: What's Santeria?

ELIÁN: Maria!

There is no response.

ELIÁN: No, I don't believe this trash. She should be out there, she has responsibilities -- Maria!

No response.

MARTA: But what if it makes her happy?

ELIÁN turns to stare at her. MARIA's voice underscores.

MAGDALENA: Now you done it.

MARTA: (to MAGDALENA) Ssh! (to ELIÁN) Señor, all I'm saying is --

ELIÁN: You call that happy?

MARTA: I pray to Santa Marta, my namesake, and it makes me happy.

ELIÁN: Because you're a child. That happens to a child.

MARTA: Not to her?

MARTA walks into the bathroom, moves a strand of MARIA's hair back into place.

MARTA: Why not to her?

MARIA does not even notice her.

ELIÁN: (grudgingly) She's not even doing it properly. She's got it all wrong.

MAGDALENA: I thought you said it was trash.

ELIÁN ignores her, walks to the bathroom doorway and watches. MARIA stops praying, puts down the stick. She takes a small paring knife and without hesitation cuts into her fingertip, then holds one of the cowrie shells up to the blood, as if feeding it.

MAGDALENA: Marta!

ELIÁN speaks, flat-voiced.

ELIÁN: The cowrie shells are the mouths of the saints -- blood purifies our desires, makes us clean, sweeps away the trash in our souls.

Then, with almost indescribable tenderness, ELIÁN steps into the bathroom and kneels beside her. MARTA moves out of his way. He takes MARIA's bloodied hand. He takes out a handkerchief and presses it against the cut.

ELIÁN: K eni hu we gbedegbede / K eni le ju pelepele / K omo eni le n owo gbogbogbo / Le ni sin.

MARTA and MAGDALENA move closer.

MARTA: What are you saying --

MARIA underscores him.

MARIA: *(overlapping)* K eni hu we gbedegbede / K eni le ju pelepele / K omo eni le n owo gbogbogbo / Le ni sin.

ELIÁN: *(overlapping)* Let us behave gently, / That we may die peacefully: / that our children may / stretch out their hands, / upon us in our burial.

There is a moment of tableau with the four of them, then MARTA and MAGDALENA come in to the bathroom and gently help both of them to their feet. They move out of the bathroom.

PAUL enters with RAOUL, followed by SERAFINA. They have all changed their clothes. When he sees what's going on, PAUL asks RAOUL to leave.

PAUL: This is for family.

RAOUL: And I'm not --

PAUL: Go!

RAOUL leaves.

PAUL: *(to MARTA, MAGDALENA)* You two should go. Thank you, but go!

MARTA and MAGDALENA exchange a look, then let go and start to leave with RAOUL.

Suddenly, without warning, MARIA screams a scream of horror and delight. Her body reacts as if someone had jumped upon her back like leaping onto a horse. Immediately words stream from her mouth, a torrent of babble, until she collapses.

MARIA: Odzu kokoru baba okandzua alagba mah o ero baba ole eni ti ko gbo ti ega, a li ega nkpatoto enu eleda eda li olorun da ni bi a lagbara dze o ni iya, ki ofi erin si i. bi adza ba li, eni lehin, a kpa obo adza ti ko li eti ko se idegbe gagalo subu, owo te akpako adaniloju ko se ifi ehin ti afedzu toto ko mo okonri did ni imu abe imu bi aso kpe li abo a hu adebipani ki ise ore enni afeno ni ti iyangbo agbari ko ni modunmodun enniti o da eru li eru ito. agbo meji ko mo omi akoto kan agbon ko se ije fun eiye ki euje mo mo o tan ko je agbon ki o li oro ki olorun ki ofu li emmi gigun --

Lights to darkness.

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ACT II, SCENE 5

REPORTER: *(with cordless microphone)* It was bedlam, sheer bedlam, inside and outside the courtroom at the arraignment of Officer Pedro Amargo today. Because of a mistake by the district attorney's office, the family was not informed of the time of the arraignment. By the time they found out, supporters arrived at the courthouse just in time to see Amargo hustled down the hallway and out of the building into a waiting cruiser.

The district attorney offered his apologies, but that did little to calm the family, friends, and supporters of Jose Aral, who spilled onto the street shouting "Justicia, justicia." Several people in the crowd scuffled with police and one was wounded seriously.

REPORTER moves to PAUL and RAOUL.

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ACT II, SCENE 6

Lights up on PAUL and RAOUL. As PAUL speaks, RAOUL makes as if he is handing a flyer to the crowd around PAUL. He will move in a circle around PAUL. REPORTER has the mike right up to PAUL's mouth, or perhaps kneels in front of PAUL and holds up the mike.

PAUL: Look at the flyer my assistant is handing out -- look at it closely because you have be at the meeting tonight. Come to the Shrine -- bring everyone you can think of -- we must work together to act now so that this travesty of justice is not allowed to stand!

Think of Jose -- think of our Bemba -- do not do anything that would make him ashamed of us! Look all around you -- you can see the police all around, you can see how ready they are to make sure our voices do not get heard, to break us up physically and break our spirits. Keep in your minds and in your hearts the name of Jose, the name of Bemba. Jose, justicia! Jose, justicia! Jose, justicia!

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ACT II, SCENE 7

SERAFINA and MARIO. MARTA and MAGDALENA.

MARIO: Justicia, justicia!

SERAFINA: Move it on, Mario.

MARIO: Make me, pig.

MAGDALENA: *(to MARIO)* This is Fina.

SERAFINA: Just move it on -- I can't ensure --

MARIO: What do I care, sell-out?

MARTA: (*hissing*) Mario!

SERAFINA: Move it on.

MARTA: Come on.

MARIO: Make me.

MARIO pushes SERAFINA.

MARIO: "¡Que no quiero verla!"

MARIO pushes her again.

SERAFINA: Mario, you can't --

MARIO: (*interrupting*) "-- dile a la luna que venga" --

He advances on SERAFINA, who tries to avoid the inevitable.

SERAFINA: You gotta stop --

MARIO: (*interrupting*) "-- que no quiero ver la sangre -- "

SERAFINA: Mario --

MARIO: (*interrupting*) "-- de Jose sobre la arena -- "

They fight. He will not stay down. She has to use force, hard, knocking him unconscious.

MAGDALENA: He's hurt.

SERAFINA: Shit.

MAGDALENA: You hurt him bad, Fina.

SERAFINA: Shit.

MARTA takes off to find help; MAGDALENA follows. SERAFINA speaks into her radio.

SERAFINA: I have someone down here. I have a protestor down here. I need EMS services right away.

SERAFINA looks at the third finger of his left hand and sees that "Lorca" is still written there. EMERGENCY VEHICLE SIRENS crack the air. Lights to black, sound out.

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ACT II, SCENE 8

Lights up on the PRIEST, kneeling. He is at confession. ELIÁN, in shadow, serves as his confessor.

PRIEST: Bless me father, for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession. In that time I have --

PRIEST pauses, sits back on his heels.

PRIEST: In that time I have been a lousy shepherd. Really really lousy. The Aral family? I have been unable to give them any guidance in their suffering, any help to ease their pain. I've begun to wonder if I ever could -- if anyone ever could -- I've lost all feel for the connection between suffering and sin and redemption and happiness. More and more I feel like I'm singing psalms to calm the cattle in the middle of a slaughterhouse.

I do have a sin I've never confessed. I confess it now. When I was fifteen years old and an altar boy, I racked myself with the usual adolescent doubts about God, about faith, etcetera, etcetera. One Friday I decided that I would fast for forty hours, until Communion on Sunday, to see if a sign would be sent to smooth the waters of my heart. I figured if Christ could do forty days in the desert, I could do forty hours on a weekend.

Sunday came -- I was ravenous the way only an adolescent can be ravenous -- stomach growling, sure I was suffering a saint's penance. As the priest and the other altar boy moved down the line of open mouths at the communion rail, I absent-mindedly picked my nose --

PRIEST holds out right index finger.

PRIEST: -- and equally absent-mindedly was going to eat the booger when I realized that if I did that, I'd break my fast and be ineligible for communion. I looked at my finger and -- bam! -- I knew that here had come the sign: the body of Christ or my own body.

PRIEST wipes his finger on his clothes.

PRIEST: That's what I did -- I made my choice. Made what I thought was the right choice. And I felt noble and chosen and justified in my life and ate the kind of good hearty breakfast afterwards that a reprieved man would eat.

The sin? Believing then, ringing the bells as the priest raised wine and host, that suffering would give answers, pain would strengthen faith, that there were such things as love and the protected houses that love would give. Witnessing the suffering of this family and their friends, how they each try to wrench some safe harbor out of the howl of pain around them -- it's not that I've lost faith -- faith is different for me now -- it rests with the agonized Christ on the cross, not with the empty tomb and the pentecostal flames -- rests with the weeping apostles and the emptiness that comes from a loss deeper than your bones.

I should have eaten the booger. It would have made me a better priest. And now -- my penance?

Lights out on PRIEST.

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ACT II, SCENE 9

Lights up on ESCONDIDA's beauty parlor, in her home. MARTA and MAGDALENA waiting, MAGDALENA browsing a magazine. ESCONDIDA points out the chair, holds out an apron like a bullfighter's cape.

ESCONDIDA: Hey, hey, hey, Martita --

MARTA hesitates, moves to the chair. ESCONDIDA makes a big play of putting on the apron, then waits for MARTA to speak to her.

MARTA: I want it short.

ESCONDIDA: How short is "short" to you?

MARTA: Short short.

ESCONDIDA: You sure so drastic? I can feather it here, you know --

MARTA: Short.

She looks at ESCONDIDA in the "mirror."

MARTA: Really short -- it's what I want.

ESCONDIDA: You want down to bald like a china cup?

MARTA: No me importa.

MAGDALENA looks up from her magazine.

MARTA: You can chop it all off.

MAGDALENA: (*sotto voce*) That would look nice.

ESCONDIDA: (*to MAGDALENA*) Ssh! (*to MARTA*) What's the matter? Linda, you look as sad as a sick chicken.

MAGDALENA: She is sad.

ESCONDIDA: Are you sad?

MAGDALENA: Sad-assed.

ESCONDIDA: Sssh!

MAGDALENA: She's "Jose" sad.

ESCONDIDA: We all are.

MAGDALENA: And she's "Mario" sad.

ESCONDIDA: True?

MARTA, hesitates, nods yes, then very quietly begins to cry.

ESCONDIDA: Oh. Oh. You liked -- ?

MAGDALENA: She did. She does.

MARTA: I'm in the room.

MAGDALENA: Maybe you're here, maybe you're not.

MARTA: And I don't "like" him, I just -- like him.

MAGDALENA: She "likes" him -- don't let her fool you.

ESCONDIDA: Does that mean you don't like Fina?

MARTA both nods yes and shrugs her shoulders.

ESCONDIDA: Yeah. Fina did what she had to do.

MARTA: But Mario was her friend.

ESCONDIDA: But only with the person, not with the uniform.

MARTA: Still the same person!

ESCONDIDA gets a pair of scissors and a comb, getting ready to cut.

ESCONDIDA: Nobody can be friends with a uniform. Fina knows that. It comes with the territory. Fina had a job to do and --

MARTA: But that didn't make what she did right.

MAGDALENA: Look, girl, I like Mario as good as the next, you know that, but he, well, he invited what he got.

MARTA: He did not!

ESCONDIDA: Sit still, or I'll nick you.

MAGDALENA: *(mockingly)* Justicia, justicia! Like little boys on the playground. Pissing contests.

MAGDALENA imitates peeing.

MAGDALENA: Whizzzzzz! Sorry. They think muscle is the same as a brain.

MARTA turns around in the chair, enraged. ESCONDIDA moves the scissors out of the way.

ESCONDIDA: ¡Cuídate!

MARTA: I always knew it about you!

ESCONDIDA: Careful.

MAGDALENA: Knew what, tonta?

MARTA: You don't think Jose deserves --

MAGDALENA: And you can shut your face! You don't think I didn't want them to double-dip his ass for Jose's dying? Jose should not be dead! But let's face facts, moonbrain.

MARTA turns away. ESCONDIDA undoes MARTA's apron.

ESCONDIDA: Short as you want it, I'll hit brain.

MARTA: *(sotto voce)* I don't have any.

ESCONDIDA: You can get up now.

But MARTA remains seated in anguish.

ESCONDIDA: Go on -- it's Magda's turn.

But MARTA looks as if she is going to fold in on herself.

MAGDALENA: Martita --

MARTA: (*whispering*) There is so much pain. People hurt so much.

MAGDALENA moves closer to MARTA.

MAGDALENA: The problem with you, Martita, is that you got a heart too big for your brain. And you got a brain that don't ever shut up.

MARTA: I can't help it.

MAGDALENA: (*joking*) It's all those telenovelas you watch.

MAGDALENA swoons.

MAGDALENA: Dios mio!

MAGDALENA growls.

MAGDALENA: Hijo de puta! (*to ESCONDIDA*) Eh, right?

ESCONDIDA: (*moony*) Siempre, siempre, mi corazon.

MARTA: Go ahead, make fun of me.

ESCONDIDA: We're not making fun of you.

MAGDALENA: You always want the moon -- but sometimes you can't afford it. Mario named her a pig, Marta. That was just stupid. He called her a pig when people had their backs up and acting all righteous and shit -- sorry -- and everyone is acting like they got a stick of dynamite up their butts -- sorry again -- like Fina's brother there, Pablo quien no es a Pablo, talking all trash about fighting and injustice and whipping people up like he's some messiah when all he's looking for is to get his ass -- sorry again -- into some politician's pig trough, and your husband, don't mean to be disrespectful, but he's got his nose all browned-up because he thinks Pablo's a big wind and all he's got is a small kite and he better get it up or else he's going to have to be an ordinary fuck for the rest of his life. That's what I think. Sorry about the "fuck."

ESCONDIDA smooths MARTA's hair.

MAGDALENA: You're right -- way too much pain. There is always way too much pain. What are facts in the face of pain? I can get mine cut later.

RAOUL enters, smug. He's dressed in a very nice suit.

MAGDALENA: Definitely get it cut later.

RAOUL: No, you won't.

ESCONDIDA: And what are you saying to my customers?

RAOUL: I got something to say.

ESCONDIDA: So say it.

RAOUL: This is my house --

ESCONDIDA: That's what you want to say?

RAOUL: This is my house, and I can't be seen having anything like this going on.

ESCONDIDA: What "this" are you talking about, Raoul? What "this"?

MAGDALENA: We should go.

ESCONDIDA: No. *(to RAOUL)* Where did you get that suit?

RAOUL: I need to look good now.

ESCONDIDA: Where did you get it?

RAOUL: I bought it.

ESCONDIDA: With?

RAOUL: With my money.

ESCONDIDA: Which is mostly my money because I bring in most of it.

RAOUL: You don't understand a thing.

MAGDALENA: You working on being Pablo's middle leg now?

MARTA: *(hissing)* Magda!

RAOUL: Paul -- he's Paul. And you got a mouth you should learn to change.

ESCONDIDA: What is Paul doing?

RAOUL: *(that smug look)* Justicia. *(more smug look)* He's gonna run for mayor.

MAGDALENA: I told you.

ESCONDIDA: And because he's running for alcalde, I can't cut hair in my own home?

RAOUL: My house. This place has to got to look like this suit.

ESCONDIDA picks up a pair of scissors and walks up to RAOUL.

RAOUL: Put those down.

ESCONDIDA: These are real sharp, Raoul. They can take a chunk out of a suit as easy as peeling a plantain.

ESCONDIDA turns to MAGDALENA.

ESCONDIDA: Magda, you ready?

MAGDALENA sits in the chair, and ESCONDIDA swirls the apron over her. MARTA perches on the other chair.

ESCONDIDA: I got customers, Raoul. I got a business, Raoul. Now, Magda, you want that big roll in front, like we talked about?

MAGDALENA: I do.

ESCONDIDA: What you do think about that, Marta?

MARTA: *(small voice)* It's okay.

ESCONDIDA: I think it's a fucking good choice.

ESCONDIDA looks directly at RAOUL.

ESCONDIDA: Sorry for the "fuck."

RAOUL, defeated, storms out. For a moment, ESCONDIDA also looks defeated and puts down her scissors.

MARTA: We can come back --

ESCONDIDA: No.

ESCONDIDA picks up the scissors, holds them out straight.

ESCONDIDA: Steady as a rock, eh? We move on.

ESCONDIDA smooths MAGDALENA's hair.

ESCONDIDA: We move on.

Lights dim on them as they come up on PAUL. The three women watch.

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ACT II, SCENE 10

NOTE: These final scenes should be staged together seamlessly, as if a film camera were taking one unedited shot. Or think of them as musical themes coming together into final coda.

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The REPORTER and PAUL in chairs, at an interview.

PAUL: I don't take up this challenge lightly. I lost a brother, and no matter what the court said and the jury said, a terrible injustice was done to Jose, to my family, to everyone in this city who is poor and who is weak. It is my duty, then, to bring justice back to this city. For you, Jose, that's why I am running for mayor -- justicia, one way or another.

REPORTER: May I ask you a personal question?

PAUL: Of course.

REPORTER: The eye patch --

PAUL: A youthful accident. It's important to Jose --

REPORTER: I think it's quite dashing.

A lightbulb over PAUL.

REPORTER: Like a pirate.

PAUL: Let's think of it more like Moshe Dayan of Israel. No, like John Wayne in that Western.

REPORTER: Like fighters.

PAUL: Exactly. Maybe it'll start a fashion.

REPORTER: Who knows these days? Thank you very much for being with us this afternoon.

They shake hands.

PAUL: Justicia -- don't forget.

*Lights out on PAUL and the REPORTER and the three women, all of whom exit.
Lights up on SERAFINA.*

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SERAFINA in street clothes, police badge in hand. She drops it to the floor and with her heel grinds it into the floor, stomps on it, destroys it, does her dance of death on it. Then picks it up, pockets it.

Lights out on SERAFINA, up on family. In darkness, SERAFINA gets a chair, helps MARIA enter and sit.

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The family home: PAUL, ELIÁN, ESCONDIDA, RAOUL. Everyone is silent for a moment, uncomfortable.

PAUL: (to ELIÁN) How is she, abuelo?

ELIÁN shrugs, does not answer.

ESCONDIDA: Serafina is there with her now. It's my shift tonight.

PAUL: (to ESCONDIDA) How is she?

ELIÁN: (to no one in particular) They never killed Che Guevara, you know. Someone sacrificed himself for Che. It was a plan so that they would get the wrong man. Che is alive somewhere.

ESCONDIDA: He'd be an old old man, Papa.

ELIÁN: Just like me. Maybe I am Che, eh? Ever think of that? Hiding in the belly of the beast. Waiting. You think about that.

Everyone looks at ELIÁN, who himself looks off into the distance and begins to sing softly.

Lights out on family, up on SERAFINA and MARIA. The family watches the scene.

* * * * *

MARIA, dressed in a simple dress, sits and stares, no particular look on her face.

SERAFINA: You would be proud of Paul, I think -- the announcement went well. Where we had the shrine, outside the house?

At this moment, MARIO enters in darkness with his trumpet.

SERAFINA: Paul got the Mayor to name the street corner after Jose. Little sign hung up on the pole, his name, a star. Shrine is still there. Getting bigger every day.

Under the lines MARIO plays Taps, straight or jazz, depending.

SERAFINA: And someone took Jose's sneakers and threw them over the phone line -- Marta said that shows where a young person died. Magda -- what a mouth she has! -- says it

was better doing that than some stupid sign hanging on a telephone pole. Papa -- he's doing okay -- he misses you -- he's okay -- he's not okay --

But realizes how stupid it is to be saying any of this. SERAFINA takes out the badge and shows it to MARIA. MARIA takes it, looks at it, hands it back. MARIO blows the last three notes of Taps.

The PRIEST walks in. SERAFINA pockets the badge, rises, gives the chair to the PRIEST, and crosses to MARIO.

As SERAFINA crosses, the PRIEST takes a string of cowrie shells out of his pocket and offers them to MARIA. She looks, sees what they are, takes them, and wraps them around her hands. She smiles. Lights out on them, up on MARIO and SERAFINA. Everyone watches the scene.

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MARIO puts down his trumpet, holds out his left hand.

MARIO: They washed it all off in the hospital.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a pen, offers it to SERAFINA.

MARIO: Nurse refused to make me a copy. Would you?

SERAFINA takes the pen. MARIO holds out his left hand.

MARIO: Ring finger.

SERAFINA writes the name of "Lorca" on MARIO's finger.

MARIO: L - O - R - C - A.

SERAFINA gives the pen back to MARIO.

SERAFINA: I don't know what to say. Does anything hurt?

MARIO: What kind of question is that?

MARTA and MAGDALENA enter. MAGDALENA carries a candle. SERAFINA lights it. MAGDALENA gives it to MARIO. The four look at each other.

Lights come up on the other groupings. Everyone faces the audience. MARIO holds up the candle as if it were a chalice, then blows it out. Lights bump immediately to blackout.