

## **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* -

# Esquina

## BRIEF 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.

# Esquina

## 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, "tio tonto, tio 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

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, tio, 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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 done 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

They swarm around 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.

ELIÁN holds up his hand to ESCONDIDA, looks directly at PAUL. 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **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

That's very nice -- and it's 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)

That "Maria"? That Maria is gone.

PRIEST

She is a "Maria" worth keeping.

MARIA

Not any more.

PRIEST

Then who is here?

MARIA

I don't know. New Maria.

PRIEST

And has this new Maria come to confess her sins?

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 -- they are an offense against God's love for us. Given to us forever, without end or hesitation or condition.

MARIA

Then 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

(twice more)

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

From 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.

PRIEST

Without tricks, then -- at your service.

MARIA

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 --

(flicking her fingers)

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

(flicking her fingers)

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.

(flicks her fingers)

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

PRIEST

God does not send --

MARIA

I'm past that --

(flicks her fingers)

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 --

(flicks her fingers)  
-- 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

**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, tio, 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!

(tapping eye-patch)  
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

(tapping eyepatch)

I know how to do that.

RAOUL stands, faces PAUL, shakes his hand.

PAUL

Inside. Private. Strong.

Blackout.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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.

(snaps her fingers)

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.

(indicating the apron)

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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 like pansy-ass gangstas.  
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.

(ruffles MARTA's hair)

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?

A look at MAGDALENA.

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)

Fucker!

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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 --

(looking for word)

-- 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

For murder, 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

**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, cuidase --

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 back-pack.

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

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 revolucionário 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 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 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.

MAGADLENA

(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.

\* \* \* \* \*

**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

(musing)

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### **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, and the silence settles heavily. Then MARIA begins where she stopped.

ELIÁN  
Stop this! Now!

MARIA pauses, and the silence settles heavily. 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!

(no response)

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. MARTA'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 ennit  
i 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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!

\* \* \* \* \*

**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 her baton, 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **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.

(imitates peeing)

Whizzzzz! Sorry. They think muscle is the same as a brain.

MARTA turns around in the chair, enraged.

ESCONDIDA

(moving scissors out of the way)

¡Cuidate!

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.

(swooning)

Dios mio!

(growling)

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.

MAGDELENA

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.

(smoothes MAGDALENA's hair)

We move on.

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

\* \* \* \* \*

## 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

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.