

Pictures at an Exhibition

by

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DESCRIPTION

Margaret Pasqualini, a professional photographer, is arrested at a photo lab for taking nude pictures of her son, pictures she said were part of an exhibit she was putting together as a final project for her class in advanced photographic techniques. Police had been notified by the lab owner about the pictures and were forced to arrest Pasqualini when she refused to accompany them to the station. Rather than agree to a plea bargain in her subsequent conviction for malicious destruction of property and disorderly conduct, she instead chooses to go to jail for 30 days. There she meets Vera Cortez, serving 25 years for being an accomplice in the murder of her own child. Their month-long relationship opens up the possibility for a real and vital connection between people who, though from completely different classes and experiences, can find common ground as parents raising children in a dangerous world. Pictures At An Exhibition also raises intriguing questions about how we do and do not protect our children and the thin line between art and exploitation.

PRIMARY CHARACTERS

- MARGARET PASQUALINI, photographer
- MATTHEW PASQUALINI, her husband
- ALEX PASQUALINI, their son, 4 years old (or a child that looks that age); is mute, must sign ASL
- VERA CORTEZ, prisoner, around 31 years of age, from East Harlem; she must be predominantly Hispanic

MULTI-CHARACTERS

(Note: Three men and three women should be sufficient to cover all the multi-character roles. They should run a range of racial and ethnic types, ages, body shapes, etc. The more varied, the better.)

- A (male) = Philip "Flash" Gunn, photo lab owner; Videographer
- B (male) = John Twyman, a lawyer; TV News Anchor
- C (female, older) = Judge; Reporter 1
- D (female) = Reporter 2; Lab Technician; Assistant D.A.
- E (male) = Reporter 3; Police Officer (at photo lab); Radio Host
- F (female) = Photographer; Police Officer (at photo lab); Prison Guard

SETTING / TIME

Any American city / present, spring

LIGHTING

Lighting suggestions are made throughout the script, but the director and lighting designer are free to make whatever changes necessary to produce the show.

SET

- Two beds, a footlocker at the foot of each.
- A table and two chairs
- CORTEZ's bookshelf, overflowing with books that show her beliefs
- On the back wall CORTEZ has two posters which indicate Puerto Rican/Latino pride
- A small Puerto Rican flag
- A diploma hanging on the wall -- associates degree in communications
- On stage right is MARGARET's area; stage left, CORTEZ's area. In each area are various props which the actors will use to recreate scenes that take place outside the prison. They should be easily accessible but not block the audience's view.

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ACT I, Scene 1

There are two tables, one mid-stage right, one mid-stage left, angled, with chairs. Sound comes up: something from Steve Reich/Pat Metheney or a similar kind of music. Lights go to half, then out. Sound out as lights go out, then the sound of a metal prison door closing.

Immediately, lights bump up on MARGARET. Music underscoring begins. She sits on the floor slightly downstage of center.

The NEWS ANCHOR sits at the table stage left. One of the multi-characters stands behind the ANCHOR with a sign that looks like of those banners the chiron operator puts on the screen over the shoulder of the anchor.

MARGARET carries a 3x5 or 4x6 notepad and pen. She writes a line or two, closes it, puts it in her back pockets, and begins.

NOTE: Though not required, if the actor and director feel comfortable, the actor could do stylized movements to accompany all the inter-scene speeches, movements which embody the sense of the words. The choreography is up to the director, actor, and any other collaborators.

MARGARET: I started with the clearest of motives. I began with the cleanest of hands. No protection -- that gave us no protection. At all. Against the rain of shit. Against the downpour of shit and blindness that -- Focus. We get judged by what we do. But we do not always do what we get judged for. We do not always do what we get judged for. Yet the judgement sticks. And then it feeds. Like a parasite. In a body not yet dead. Stop that. Stop this. Three days. I have three days. I have three days to find an answer. I have three days for an answer to find me.

Lights bump immediately to black

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ACT I, Scene 2

Lights bump up immediately on LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR at the stage left table. Sound effect: a gunshot that starts a race, loud, or the first bars of the opening fanfare of the Kentucky Derby. MARGARET sits on the floor in front of him, in shadow.

NEWS ANCHOR: Picked up for porn -- that's what police are saying tonight after arresting a student photographer for alleged child pornography. Alerted by a photo lab, two officers arrested Margaret Pasqualini when she and her four-year old son came to pick up pictures she said she had taken for a photography project. The pictures allegedly showed the son in the news -- excuse me, in the nude.

ANCHOR changes focus to a second camera. Chiron sign flips over and moves over other shoulder.

NEWS ANCHOR: When asked to go to the station, Pasqualini, according to the officers, tried to grab the pictures. They were forced to handcuff and remove her from the lab. Pasqualini will be charged with disorderly conduct and malicious destruction of property. Child pornography charges may be brought.

ANCHOR returns to original camera. Chiron sign backs off.

NEWS ANCHOR: This is one story I'm sure we'll work for quite some -- work on for -- quite some time.

As if speaking to a fellow news anchor, hearty tone.

NEWS ANCHOR: Boy, I hope no one ever, ever looks at my photo albums! Jeez Louise!

Simultaneous: sound of a movie set clapper and light bump out on LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR; ANCHOR and CHIRON exit. Light bumps up on MARGARET. She is writing.

MARGARET: Just the facts, ma'am.

MARGARET puts away the notebook.

MARGARET: All right. I did fight back -- pissed beyond whatever "beyond pissed" is! -- they cuffed me and hauled me away! All that -- Grade A certified fact. But once in the air, pulverized -- Christ, then, then, like everyone snorting lines, such craziness!

She makes as if she's skeet shooting.

MARGARET: Pull.

She follows the arc of the "clay pigeon," makes sound like a gunshot.

MARGARET: Gossip came sniffing up like a razor in heat. Pull. Death by a thousand public cuts. Pull. Imagine -- Imagine if raw meat had feelings while the lioness breathed on it --

that lioness breathed on me. Other "facts": I started with the clearest of motives. I began with the cleanest of hands. Those facts, however -- not useful.

She follows the arc of the "clay pigeon," makes sound like a gunshot.

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ACT I, Scene 3

Light out on MARGARET, who exits. There is music while the rest of the cast moves on stage for the "perp" walk: Steve Reich or something similar.

Lights up; with it, background sound of crowd conversation. Reporters, photographer, and videographer are "shooting the breeze," waiting for MARGARET's "perp walk." They must have working equipment. They can be sitting on the tables and chairs. MARGARET and JOHN TWYMAN, her lawyer, enter, and the crowd descends on her to get a comment and pictures. As JOHN escorts MARGARET, he is constantly shouting "No comment" to the questions of the reporters. The questions can be asked willy-nilly because she is not going to answer them.

However, the last question is asked by REPORTER 2, and it should be something heard very clearly: "Ms. Pasqualini, have you taken any more pictures of naked kids?" She is led off-stage left, and the reporters and photographers talk among themselves as they prepare to leave.

As they talk, they pack up equipment, light cigarettes, check date books, pagers, cell phones, etc. The pace of the dialogue and the business should be brisk.

REPORTER 2: *(to the VIDEOGRAPHER)* Get anything?

VIDEO: Head bowed, five seconds. Slice of the crowd.

REPORTER 2: Should do it.

VIDEO: Enough for the low-brows at six.

REPORTER 2: I wish she had spit something out.

REPORTER 3: A closed mouth gathers no feet.

REPORTER 2: Make my job easier.

REPORTER 1: The human race does not exist to snag you the Pulitzer.

REPORTER 2: Not for chickenshit like this.

VIDEO: Chickenshit, brok-brok --

REPORTER 3: Yeah, for this chickenshit you get the Pullet Surprise --

General groan.

PHOTO: What's she tagged for?

REPORTER 1: What cave you been in?

PHOTO: My editor just sends me to take pictures. "I know nah-think."

REPORTER 2: They clipped her for taking pics of her naked son.

PHOTO: The one trashed the photo lab?

REPORTER 3: That be the one, girl.

PHOTO: *(said distinctly)* I hear her son's a mute.

VIDEO: How do you hear a mute?

REPORTER 2: It's a "mute" point.

REPORTER 3: Creepy, huh? A mute.

REPORTER 1: I'm speechless.

REPORTER 2: Hope no one fingers my negatives -- I'd be jailed for life.

VIDEO: What don't I come over and fing[er] --

REPORTER 2: Save your batteries.

REPORTER 3: She called it aht.

REPORTER 2: Justify a lot of selfish shit with that word.

PHOTO: Anybody seen the pictures?

REPORTER 1: No one has.

PHOTO: So what happened?

REPORTER 1: Thirty days.

VIDEO: Chickenscat.

REPORTER 1: Judge lobbed her a softball: fine, community service, probation, letter of apology

--

REPORTER 2: -- privileges of her class --

REPORTER 1: -- but you could see it in her eyes: "No fucking thank you, Judge, fuck you," and off to jail for principle --

REPORTER 2: -- another privilege --

REPORTER 3: Yeah, tomorrow you'll read, "A source for the defense said -- "

REPORTER 2: Sanctimonious shit --

REPORTER 3: " -- she intended to say f, dash, dash, dash" --

REPORTER 2: Tired of it.

VIDEO: *(to REPORTER 2)* The woman's got a point --

REPORTER 2: Blah, blah, blah.

PHOTO: You were there?

REPORTER 1: Every day.

VIDEO: *(to ALL)* The woman's got a point. She's got a point. I mean, you can't let the Gestapo tell you --

REPORTER 2: Sieg heil --

VIDEO: C'mon, Eva Braun, this is serious. Who's to say what a person can and can't say?

REPORTER 2: This isn't about that -- she fucked her kid over.

VIDEO: *(to ALL)* Who would you want telling you what not to say?

REPORTER 3: A brief pause for philosophical introspec --

VIDEO: C'mon -- would you do any different to protect your sources?

REPORTER 3: Completely diff --

At this point, MATTHEW walks on, clearly not expecting the crowd.

REPORTER 3: Her husband, it's her husband --

Everyone rushes him, and he's trapped before he knows what to do.

VIDEOGRAPHER and PHOTOGRAPHER press in close. REPORTER 2 checks her notes.

REPORTER 2: What's his fucking name?

REPORTER 1: Matthew Pasqualini --

MATTHEW: *(slightly stunned)* Matt.

REPORTER 1: What do you think of your wife's sentence?

MATTHEW: I --

REPORTER 2: Are the pictures pornographic?

MATTHEW: No --

REPORTER 3: Do you intend to appeal?

MATTHEW: I can't --

At this point the REPORTERS can ad lib questions to him. MATTHEW doesn't answer them. He moves forward, realizing he has to get away; they pursue him. Just before he exits, REPORTER 2 shouts out the following question.

REPORTER 2: Matthew Pasqualini, are you sure your child is completely safe with you?

MATTHEW is stunned, and even the others pause for a moment to look at REPORTER 2. She repeats the question.

REPORTER 2: Are you sure Alex is completely safe with you?

The VIDEOGRAPHER continues taping. MATTHEW escapes.

REPORTER 2: (to VIDEOGRAPHER) Get that?

VIDEO: Yeah.

REPORTER 2: Priceless. Okay, let's get ready to --

REPORTER 3: You going to use --

REPORTER 2: Legit question, I can't be responsible for --

REPORTER 1: But you accused the guy --

REPORTER 2: Just asked him a question.

REPORTER 3: Yeah, but --

REPORTER 2: Can't be responsible for how delicate he is -- or you. (to VIDEO) Ready?

VIDEO: Yeah.

REPORTER 2: Let's get out of here, then. (to the others) Kiddie fashion festival to cover.

PHOTO: Off to take pictures of kids, huh?

VIDEO: With their clothes on.

REPORTER 2: Pulitzer, come to mama!

REPORTER 2 leaves.

PHOTO: (to VIDEO) Beware of the lioness.

VIDEO: She's already been fed today.

VIDEOGRAPHER roars as he leaves. REPORTER 1 motions to REPORTER 3.

REPORTER 1: Let's book. (to PHOTOG) Gotta cover the governor's testimony on battered women.

PHOTO: A big fan of it?

REPORTER 1: An election year, so -- start a task force.

REPORTER 3: Low cost trolling for the women's vote.

REPORTER 1: What he really prefers is sucking the toes of rich contributors.

PHOTO: Tasty.

REPORTER 1: Watch for next Sunday's "Metro."

REPORTER 3: Just you?

REPORTER 1: We're a team all the way, honey.

PHOTO: Great -- more shitraking. Just what we need.

REPORTER 3: Nature of the biz, sister. Muck may suck --

REPORTER 1 & REPORTER 3: -- but it sells.

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ACT I, Scene 5

Transitional music: a snippet of Paul Simon's "Kodachrome." FLASH comes to the stage right table and sits. A light up downstage left. MARGARET walks into it during the music, carrying the pad. She puts the pad away.

MARGARET: How does something like this begin? How does the mote in the eye, that tiny nothing, infect light into darkness? The pictures of Alex, my Alex, my lovely lovely Alex -- he was simply an assignment for the course. No motives ulterior -- Freudian, Jungian, Satanic, or otherwise. Through my eyes I simply saw Alex's four-year old innocence; through theirs -- Well, I can now say what they saw. They saw their own dark selves,

their own caged filth. And when the keys were offered, they turned everything loose on us like dogs.

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ACT I, Scene 6

Light out on MARGARET; she sits and watches in shadow. The lights come up on FLASH. He is wearing a lab coat; he takes several rolls of film out of his pocket and puts them on the table. He also takes out a small notepad or ledger book and writes in it. In the background the audience can just barely hear a machine that does color prints. A LAB TECH comes out to the desk. The conversation should move briskly.

LAB TECH: Flash --

FLASH: Yeah?

LAB TECH: Flash --

FLASH: What?

LAB TECH: Flash -- you gotta look --

LAB TECH hands FLASH several contact sheets.

FLASH: What?

LAB TECH: Here.

FLASH takes them and shuffles through them. LAB TECH talks as he does this.

LAB TECH: Do you think --

FLASH: What?

LAB TECH: Well?

FLASH: What?

LAB TECH: Do you think what I think?

FLASH: What do you think?

LAB TECH: Well, I don't know --

FLASH: What?

LAB TECH: What do you think? Look at the pictures.

LAB TECH starts pointing out individual pictures to FLASH.

LAB TECH: Naked little boy --

FLASH: Wait! Let me at least look at them.

LAB TECH: Can't you see?

FLASH: See what?

LAB TECH: A naked little boy!

FLASH: Slow down! What's the matter with --

LAB TECH: Look -- here, and here --

FLASH: Back off for a sec, okay?

FLASH looks.

FLASH: Okay -- what?

LAB TECH: Don't you see?

FLASH: I'm missing it. Whose order?

LAB TECH: Pasqualini. Taking the course --

FLASH: Well, then, there you are.

LAB TECH: What do you mean?

FLASH: Nicely done. Good composition.

LAB TECH: How can you s --

FLASH: That's her son.

LAB TECH: Aren't we --

FLASH: They're --

LAB TECH: -- going to --

FLASH: -- for a course.

LAB TECH: -- do something? Aren't we going to do something?

FLASH: Do something? That's her son -- what something? What's bothering you?

LAB TECH: *(holds up pictures)* About this!

FLASH: What's this?

LAB TECH: You're telling me you don't know --

FLASH: Nothing's there.

LAB TECH: You're telling me you don't know? What kind of person --

FLASH: Not her.

LAB TECH: -- what kind of person would take posed pictures --

FLASH: That's her son.

LAB TECH: -- of a naked little boy?

FLASH: They're for the course --

LAB TECH: That makes her exempt? They make me feel --

FLASH: What?

LAB TECH: Don't they make you f --

FLASH: No. Not really.

LAB TECH: What was I going to say?

FLASH: I don't know. I don't know how you feel.

LAB TECH: No, you don't.

FLASH: They're fine. We get naked kid pictures every day.

LAB TECH: Not like these.

FLASH: (*overlapping*) These -- more formal, that's all --

LAB TECH: Just look again.

FLASH: They're fine.

LAB TECH: Look at them -- you'll see what I see --

FLASH: I don't know what you see.

LAB TECH: Yes, you do -- you see it, too.

FLASH: No, I don't --

LAB TECH picks up the contact sheets.

LAB TECH: Look at this one -- look at where she has him hold the stuffed animal --

FLASH: Please!

LAB TECH: And the way he's spread here -- And the way he's touching --

FLASH makes a gesture of dismissal.

LAB TECH: Deny -- go ahead -- doesn't make it right --

FLASH: What's wrong?

LAB TECH: You know.

FLASH: No, I don't know. Two minutes ago I was writing up the weekly accounts -- Then you come in -- All of a sudden -- Go finish --

LAB TECH: You have a responsi --

FLASH: Go finish your work.

LAB TECH: You have a responsibility --

FLASH: Go finish -- What are you saying?

LAB TECH: You own this business --

FLASH: Yes.

LAB TECH: It's your call.

FLASH: My call?

LAB TECH: I think we should call --

FLASH: Yeah?

LAB TECH: -- someone.

FLASH: Call someone? All of a sudden it's "call someone"?

LAB TECH: This isn't right.

FLASH: This is no big -- "Call someone"? I can't c -- This is no big deal.

LAB TECH: Why are you upset?

FLASH: I'm not -- it's you, with your stories. I'm sure nothing's going on here.

LAB TECH: And if something -- ?

FLASH: -- if what? --

LAB TECH: -- if something!

FLASH: Her? I find it hard to believe --

LAB TECH: Suppose tomorrow you found out -- today you found out --

FLASH: Please!

LAB TECH: But supp --

FLASH: But she's not --

LAB TECH: And you could've stopped it. And you could have stopped it. You could be held liable.

FLASH: That's not true!

LAB TECH: Legally --

FLASH: That can't be tr --

LAB TECH: Don't jeopardize --

FLASH: It's not my fault.

LAB TECH: Someone has to take a stand --

FLASH: A stand.

LAB TECH: -- I wish --

FLASH: What?

LAB TECH: Nothing.

FLASH: Wish what?

LAB TECH: Someone had taken -- Look, nothing. Stop this. You can --

FLASH: Not her!

LAB TECH: -- stop this. Do you know?

FLASH: I just know.

LAB TECH: Do you know? For sure? Lot of it around. Those trials --

FLASH: -- a lot of which turned out to be crap --

LAB TECH: -- kids dying every day --

FLASH: If it was true, she wouldn't bring the photos here!

LAB TECH: Maybe she doesn't, maybe she doesn't know, either She's not exempt. Protect the child -- We -- you -- should call someone.

FLASH: Who?

LAB TECH: I don't know.

FLASH: Do you really think -- What time is she supposed to come in?

LAB TECH: After two o'clock.

FLASH: I don't know --

LAB TECH: Call the police.

FLASH: I can't call the police!

LAB TECH: Why not?

FLASH: We build a trust -- Christ, the last thing anybody wants is the police. She trusts me.

LAB TECH: Don't think the choice can be yours.

FLASH: What time did you say --

LAB TECH: After two o'clock.

FLASH: Let me finish the sentence, at least. I should talk with her first.

LAB TECH: What would you say?

FLASH: I would -- You know, I'd ask --

LAB TECH: What? What would you ask?

FLASH: I don't wanna do this. I don't want to do this. I'll call the police -- just to find out what I should do, all right?

LAB TECH: It's a start.

Lights begin to fade.

FLASH: A start. I don't like this.

Lights fade quickly to black. As they do, five "strokes" pop in somewhat quick succession, as if a camera was taking pictures. Each "stroke" catches FLASH and

LAB TECH in their distress. Photo machine sound out, and while the "strokes" are popping, one ring of a phone, then a voice:

VO: The following call will be monitored.

Lights out. FLASH and LAB TECH exit.

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ACT I, Scene 7

Light up down center.

MARGARET: I have wondered, wondered what they saw. Replayed the whole session with Alex. Pored over what I said, did, trying with their eyes -- the suspicions -- I have gone over and over this -- raked, wracked -- each time -- each time I can only see Alex's graceful spirit in my lens. Drenched with light. A mother, son, a simple afternoon, trust, simple. But they want to know only what they think they know, thinking that what they think they know is more the truth than the truth that happened because to them the truth is them, not the truth. All about them, not the truth. I wish -- I wish they'd -- Then they'd know. But they don't want -- So I must continue the knowing, the knowing, I must continue knowing the truth, living it -- or else, or else all their infection, all their infection will drown me. And Alex. And Matthew. Will drown us all, drown us completely.

Lights out. One stagehand brings out a hair brush, hair tie, sneakers, and a jacket and bag for MARGARET and puts them on the stage left table. For ALEX, a second stagehand brings out a child's red shirt, green corduroy pants, socks, and black sneakers with velcro tabs.

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ACT I, Scene 8

Lights up on MARGARET and ALEX. MARGARET is dressing ALEX, just after his bath. ALEX is in his underwear.

MARGARET: You smell so delicious! Do you know how delicious you really are. I could just eat you alive.

MATTHEW enters and stands in the doorway; he is not seen at first.

MARGARET: Okay, cinnamon bun, get me your socks.

ALEX goes to the table to get the socks and sees MATTHEW. MATTHEW motions him to be quiet while he sneaks up behind MARGARET. ALEX brings MARGARET the socks.

MARGARET: Give me your feet.

As MARGARET says the next line, MATTHEW signs it to ALEX.

MARGARET: This little piggy went to get ribs, this little piggy --

ALEX points to MATTHEW standing in the door.

MARGARET: Huh? Hey. What are you doing home?

MATTHEW: Ran into a problem -- had to pick up some tools. Hey, Mister Buffo, how ya doing?

MARGARET: I didn't expect you.

MATTHEW: How about letting me have some of the fun?

MATTHEW kneels down and continues helping ALEX put on his right sock.

MARGARET: Thanks. We've got to get moving here.

ALEX is dawdling with his socks.

MATTHEW: What's up?

MARGARET: Places to go. *(to ALEX)* Let's keep getting dressed, little man.

MATTHEW helps ALEX. MARGARET starts getting herself ready.

MATTHEW: *(overlaps)* What's on the schedule?

MARGARET: Oh -- stuff. Pharmacy, supermarket, art supplies -- photo lab.

MATTHEW: Photo lab.

MARGARET: Photo lab. The pictures are done. Alex, the socks.

ALEX finishes putting them on.

MATTHEW: The pictures are done.

MARGARET: The pictures are done. Got the call this morning.

MATTHEW: What comes next?

MARGARET: The shirt.

MARGARET hands him ALEX's shirt.

MATTHEW: Arms up like Superman.

MATTHEW slides the shirt onto ALEX.

MARGARET: Pants next.

MATTHEW: You put them on, okay?

ALEX puts on his pants.

MATTHEW: The pictures are done.

MARGARET: Yeah.

MATTHEW helps ALEX dress. MARGARET continues to get herself ready.

MARGARET: How's the job?

MATTHEW: I found the subflooring rotted out.

MARGARET: The old couple, right?

MATTHEW: Wanted to replace it, but they just wanted the new counter up -- the cost --

MATTHEW gets ALEX's sneakers.

MATTHEW: Sneakers next.

MARGARET: The cost --

MATTHEW: *(to ALEX)* Try putting the right one on the right foot. Told 'em only going to cost 'em more later on. *(to ALEX)* Left foot.

MARGARET: Uh-huh.

MATTHEW: And I gave 'em a break on the price.

MARGARET: Softie.

ALEX is finished dressing.

MARGARET: Well --

MATTHEW: Definitely a style: red shirt, green corduroy pants, and black sneakers. Alex, go brush your teeth. Each one thirty-two times.

ALEX exits stage right.

MATTHEW: Remember, thirty-two. So --

MARGARET: So.

MATTHEW: So. The pictures are ready. What's next?

MARGARET: Another week until the exhibition.

MATTHEW: Yeah.

MARGARET: Don't you have to get back -- ?

MATTHEW: A week.

MARGARET: It'll take me the whole week. A very simple matting. Already budgeted for.

MATTHEW: I know.

MARGARET: Right. And then, well then, the class is -- over. Aren't they waiting?

MATTHEW goes to speak.

MARGARET: Don't. Don't.

MATTHEW: I'm glad --

MARGARET: -- the class is over -- not news.

MATTHEW: That's not what --

MARGARET: I'm sure you are -- I can understand wh --

MATTHEW: -- I want to say.

MARGARET: Aren't they waiting for you?

MATTHEW: I'm glad the pictures are ready.

MARGARET: Because it means --

MATTHEW: Because it means a lot to you --

MARGARET: But not to you.

MATTHEW: That's not entirely true.

MARGARET: Did you get your tools?

MATTHEW: Look --

MARGARET: I'm sure they're anxious --

MATTHEW: Maggie --

MARGARET: How can you, "not entirely true"?

MATTHEW: I just wanted it to fit --

MARGARET: You never understood how it couldn't just "fit in" --

MATTHEW: Time, yes, you needed time, space, I heard all that --

MARGARET: But did you underst --

MATTHEW: Didn't I give you --

MARGARET: Not without --

MATTHEW: Because I didn't always understand how much --

MARGARET: Well, it wasn't for a lack of explana[tion] --

MATTHEW: Expla -- ? It was always about why I couldn't, how I couldn't --

MARGARET: You're right -- you know, you're right -- it was mine. It was all mine. And I make no apolo[gies] --

MATTHEW: I'm not asking for that --

MARGARET: Right. Well, good -- don't worry, no more -- I'm sure they're anxious to get their subflooring fixed -- just go --

MATTHEW: Maggie! Give me an inch. Damn, damn, you can be --

MARGARET: What? What?

MATTHEW: Maggie -- Maggie, I am glad it's over.

MARGARET: Old news.

MATTHEW: But I'm also --

MATTHEW holds his fingers apart an inch.

MATTHEW: The edgewise, the word edgewise I've been trying to get in -- I'm also, I'm also proud of you.

MARGARET: You shit.

MATTHEW: I am n[ot] --

MARGARET: Don't you dare -- You shit. Don't you dare steal --

MATTHEW: I'm trying --

MARGARET: You shit.

MATTHEW: Make up for lost --

MARGARET: Why?

MATTHEW: Why.

MARGARET: Why now?

MATTHEW: Why. The rotted wood.

MARGARET: What?

MATTHEW: I was ripping out the rotted wood --

MARGARET: Fuck --

MATTHEW: And I knew the pictures would be done soon --

MARGARET: Checking that subflooring --

MATTHEW: Do the job right.

MARGARET: -- man, oh, man.

MATTHEW: So I told 'em what was right --

MARGARET: What Matthew always does.

MATTHEW: Master craftsman.

MARGARET: And if you have to replace it --

MATTHEW: -- you replace it.

MATTHEW holds up his fingers in a "V" peace sign. MARGARET closes them. ALEX comes back.

MATTHEW: Good job.

MARGARET: Got to wear sunglasses, they're so bright! You're not too late with the compliment.

MATTHEW: I know -- that it -- whatever "it" is -- it's not over -- I know that. We need --

MARGARET: Much more.

MATTHEW: *(to ALEX)* What?

MARGARET: You're right.

MATTHEW: *(to ALEX)* What? No, we weren't doing "loud talk." Just talking.

MARGARET: Go get your coat on. Yes, I'll be right there.

ALEX leaves stage right to get his coat.

MATTHEW: Little jugs -- Got a bid in on some cabinet work -- nice to get it when this ends.

MARGARET: I'd better get --

MATTHEW: If I get it, we can get the health insurance started up again.

MARGARET: Got all my fingers crossed.

MATTHEW: I should know on the bid --

MARGARET: Alex --

MATTHEW: -- by the end of the week.

MARGARET: Alex, stop playing in the closet.

To MATTHEW, putting on her jacket, grabbing her bag.

MARGARET: That'll be good. Get your coat on and get in here. We have to get going.

ALEX jumps into MATTHEW's arms.

MATTHEW: Hey!

MARGARET: *(to ALEX)* Picture time.

MATTHEW: Gonna be fun to see those pictures, huh?

MATTHEW kisses ALEX.

MATTHEW: Kiss your mom for me just like this.

MATTHEW kisses MARGARET.

MATTHEW: You watch out for her, okay, little Superman?

MATTHEW leaves.

MARGARET: Give me a Daddy kiss. Okay. It's just you and me, little man.

MARGARET moves with ALEX to downstage right. Light on them. Transition sound to photo lab.

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ACT I, Scene 9

MARGARET: All right -- this is what I remember. I came into the shop, Alex in tow. A customer was there -- she left.

FLASH and two POLICE OFFICERS enter. FLASH has a package in his hands, the contact sheets clipped to it. Lights up on full scene.

MARGARET: Two other people there. Indicated for them to go ahead. They deferred. And then -- I stepped up.

The scene begins.

MARGARET: Well, Flash. I'm here for my pictures. Lot of work to do --

One of the two OFFICERS steps forward. The other OFFICER takes the photos. During this scene ALEX stays very close to MARGARET.

OFFICER 1: Are you Margaret Pasqualini?

MARGARET: Yes.

OFFICER 1: Are these your pictures?

MARGARET: Yes. Is there some problem?

OFFICER 1: Ma'am, could you tell us what these pictures are about?

MARGARET: They're about him.

OFFICER 1: Why did you take them?

MARGARET: Flash, who are they?

OFFICER 2: We're from the police department.

Both pull out identification, but before they put them back, MARGARET snatches OFFICER 1's ID and looks at it closely. She then hands it back.

MARGARET: I've got work to do.

OFFICER 1: You realize these pictures are of a naked child.

MARGARET: Of course -- they're of him! They're for a photography project, for a course. What's the problem? Alex, it's okay.

OFFICER 2: We've had a complaint about child pornography.

MARGARET: I don't get it.

OFFICER 2: These pictures are of a naked child.

MARGARET: My naked child. I took them.

OFFICER 1: Why?

MARGARET: I told you -- for a project. I'm his mother. *(to FLASH)* What's going on here? Who called in the Keystones?

OFFICER 1: No reason to be insulting --

MARGARET: Insulting? I came to pick up my pictures -- Alex, it's all right -- and suddenly I'm molesting my child. *(to FLASH)* Who called them?

FLASH: I did. I did.

MARGARET: You should have talked to me first. You know better. You know me --

FLASH: How was I to know -- I didn't have a choice -- The times -- It happens so often --

MARGARET: *(to OFFICER 2)* My pictures -- This is absurd. Is this from some three-hour seminar --

OFFICER 1: Ma'am, there's no need for --

MARGARET: I haven't done anything wrong. Give me my pictures.

OFFICER 2: You'll have to come to the station.

MARGARET: *(to OFFICER 2)* Just look at the pictures -- they're about his innocence. That's what they're about.

OFFICER 2: I don't know anything about photography --

MARGARET: Obviously. Or me. Or Alex.

OFFICER 2: We have to go.

MARGARET: I'm not going.

OFFICER 2: If you don't come voluntarily, we'll call DSS to take your child while we take you into custody.

MARGARET: You're threatening to take my child?

OFFICER 2: Doesn't have to go that far.

MARGARET: What is it, honey? Slow down, tell me.

OFFICER 1: He can't speak?

MARGARET: He's mute. *(to ALEX)* What is it, sugar?

MARGARET kneels down to "listen" to ALEX. Everyone waits.

MARGARET: He wants to know who is doing "loud talk."

OFFICER 1: Ma'am, it will be easier on everyone if --

Still kneeling, MARGARET pulls ALEX closer to her.

MARGARET: I am not going with you. I want my pictures. I've done nothing wrong. I have my rights. I want to call my husband. *(to ALEX)* What is it, honey?

OFFICER 1: What's he saying?

MARGARET: He says he's scared. Any reason for him to be scared? *(to ALEX)* Everything's okay. I want to call Matthew.

OFFICER 2: You can call him at the station.

MARGARET: I want to call him from here.

MARGARET moves to FLASH at the counter.

MARGARET: Where's your phone?

FLASH: What should I do?

OFFICER 1: *(to FLASH)* Stay right where you are. Ms. Pasqualini, let's go --

MARGARET: Get your hands -- Flash, get me the phone.

OFFICER 1 makes another attempt to grab her, this time more firmly. MARGARET pulls away from him, violently, and lunges toward OFFICER 2 to get her pictures. The two OFFICERS wrestle her to the ground and handcuff her. FLASH comes out from behind the counter and gets ALEX out of the way.

OFFICER 1: Let's go!

OFFICER 1 escorts her out the door. FLASH stands there holding ALEX. OFFICER 2 comes over and takes ALEX's hand.

OFFICER 2: The Assistant D.A. will be in touch.

Lights bump out. All exit except for FLASH. Sound effect: same for end of NEWS ANCHOR.

* * * * *

FLASH and REPORTER 2 each grab a chair and bring it to center stage. This interview should be done rapidly. REPORTER 2 has a pad and takes notes. This is being videoed but is not a live interview. REPORTER 2 is pushy.

REPORTER 2: *(to the CAMERAPERSON)* Three, two, one. *(to FLASH)* All right, Mr. Gunn, we're taping. What made you call the police?

FLASH: The police. The pictures --

REPORTER 2: -- of a child --

FLASH: -- of a child, yes --

REPORTER 2: Surely you've handled child pictures before --

FLASH: A naked child.

REPORTER 2: And you've never had any of those?

FLASH: Yes, but --

REPORTER 2: These were different.

FLASH: I guess.

REPORTER 2: You guess?

FLASH: They were -- different.

REPORTER 2: Different. Enough to make you call the police. There must have been something --

FLASH: I just wanted to make sure --

REPORTER 2: -- of what?

FLASH: You know --

REPORTER 2: No, I don't know.

FLASH: -- the abuse, all the abuse that goes on --

REPORTER 2: -- and the pictures showed that?

FLASH is silent.

REPORTER 2: There must have been something -- to trigger --

REPORTER 2 gives him an encouraging gesture, to continue speaking. FLASH remains silent.

REPORTER 2: *(another tack)* Ever called the police about any other customer?

FLASH: No.

REPORTER 2: Why now?

FLASH: *(slightly exasperated)* Because it was a child.

REPORTER 2: But you've handled child pictures before, right? You said --

FLASH: Yes --

REPORTER 2: So why this child?

FLASH: I couldn't take a chance.

REPORTER 2: Something about the pictures, then --

FLASH: I really shouldn't --

REPORTER 2: "Take a chance," you said, "make sure," you said -- abuse --

FLASH: I really can't --

REPORTER 2: Shouldn't you tell --

FLASH: No.

REPORTER 2: Sure?

FLASH: Yes.

REPORTER 2: Sure?

FLASH: Yes!

REPORTER 2: (*another tack*) Did you know Pasqualini?

FLASH: She's used my lab before.

REPORTER 2: Ever -- discuss things with her?

FLASH: We'd talk, you know, her projects --

REPORTER 2: Ever do anything that made you suspicious?

FLASH: What're you getting at --

REPORTER 2: How did she treat her son?

FLASH: Always holding him, keeps a hand on him. He's a mute --

REPORTER 2: Touching him a lot, then?

FLASH: He's her son, for Christ's sake!

REPORTER 2: Language, please --

FLASH: Well, don't ask me stupid qu --

REPORTER 2: Were the pictures any good?

FLASH: The pictures.

REPORTER 2: Yes, the pictures. Pay attention, Mr. Gunn. The pictures -- were they any good?

FLASH: Technically.

REPORTER 2: Yes?

FLASH: She knows her stuff.

REPORTER 2: Her stuff?

FLASH: Technically --

REPORTER 2: Do you think the pictures are pornography?

FLASH: Porno[graphy] -- ?

REPORTER 2: Would you judge, in your professional opinion, would you declare the pictures pornographic?

FLASH: Declare?

REPORTER 2: If I had a Bible here --

FLASH: A Bible!

REPORTER 2: Figure of speech --

FLASH: I couldn't swear -- is that what you want? -- wouldn't swear to it --

REPORTER 2: But sure enough to call the police?

FLASH: That's not why I called.

REPORTER 2: Why, then?

FLASH: I didn't have a choice.

REPORTER 2: Mr. Gunn, we all have choices.

FLASH: What are you --

REPORTER 2: You made your choice -- you called the police. So you must have been sure --

FLASH: To protect -- the childr[en] -- I'm not sure --

REPORTER 2: Mr. Gunn, help me out here --

FLASH: I'm not sure --

REPORTER 2: -- what was in the pictures?

FLASH: -- what I'm sure of.

REPORTER 2: What was that?

FLASH: Never mind.

REPORTER 2: I can just re-run the tape.

FLASH: I'm not sure what I'm sure of.

REPORTER 2 writes.

FLASH: Look, don't put --

REPORTER 2: Sorry, already chiseled. So maybe they weren't pornography?

FLASH: I never said --

REPORTER 2: In your professional opinion?

FLASH: I never said --

REPORTER 2: And the abuse -- you mentioned abuse --

FLASH is silent.

REPORTER 2: Should I maybe conclude here that, maybe, this whole thing is -- a mistake? Mr. Gunn?

FLASH: I never said -- any of --

REPORTER 2: What? What? Mr. Gunn?

FLASH: I think maybe I've said enough.

REPORTER 2: Enough. You've said more than enough. Thanks. (to CAMERAPERSON) Cut it.

Lights out. FLASH and REPORTER 2 exit, replacing chairs behind tables. Transition music.

* * * * *

ACT I, Scene 10

MATTHEW enters with a large square of muslin painted to look like plywood and lays it out. He also has the following: a tape measure clipped to his belt, pencil behind the ear, a small pad of paper in his shirt pocket. The lights come up. MARGARET enters and stands somewhere in the shadows. JOHN enters and stands at the stage right table with a briefcase.

MATTHEW: The subflooring.

He begins measuring the cloth and writing figures in the pad.

MATTHEW: They wanted to build something on top of nothing. And I gave 'em a price break so they wouldn't. I knew exactly what they were thinking: I don't think I can afford. I'm short this month. I don't like surprise. Cover it over. Maybe it'll go away.

MATTHEW finishes measuring the cloth. He then kneels in the center of it and begins folding it slowly, deliberately.

MATTHEW: They needed the break. I could have half-slopped it but -- I'm just not going to. I pried up the old floor -- in places came apart easily-- rotted out, some old devious drip. In others, it stuck -- the eager contractor, what, forty, fifty years ago, nail-happy to keep the board unwarped, my pry bar each nail squealing as it gave up its grip. Everything hidden now exposed. I renewed the floor. I set the pipes. I raised the counter, squared it, argued it flush. Routed the doors. Settled the sink, caulked and zippered, everything tight. Everyone needs a break.

MATTHEW has finished folding the cloth.

MATTHEW: On every job I've ever done, I've tried to leave my signature somewhere: on a wall stud, back side of sheetrock, corner of the new cement stoop: Matthew Pasqualini. I just like the idea of it. I have this half-image of someone someday taking something I made apart and seeing my name, wondering -- well, maybe not -- wondering who the name was. I understand Maggie completely. About this course. Her nails. Her measuring. Her name. All of it. She just never saw my signature on any of it.

Lights cross fade to JOHN. MARGARET exits. MATTHEW crosses to JOHN, drops the cloth and tape measure on the table, and sits.

* * * * *

ACT I, Scene 11

MATTHEW is clearly distraught.

JOHN: Matt? Matt?

MATTHEW: Yeah.

JOHN: You all right?

MATTHEW: How should I plead, counselor?

JOHN: I can come back --

MATTHEW: No, no --

JOHN: Why don't I can't --

MATTHEW: No. I feel guilty enough as it is, you're here late --

JOHN: Really, I can --

MATTHEW: -- giving you that shitty cup of coffee.

JOHN: It was fine, fine.

MATTHEW: At the moment, I don't feel too -- master craftsman --

JOHN: Understandable.

MATTHEW: Alex is scared -- I'm scared -- No, don't go, not yet. Another cup?

JOHN: I'll pass.

MATTHEW: Healthy choice. John -- John, what's going to, what, what, what can happen?

JOHN: Convicted, she'll probably be convicted.

MATTHEW: Convicted.

JOHN: The pornography -- not a problem, not likely -- no child abuse --

MATTHEW: DSS -- Christ!

JOHN: I have their report -- so the judge'll want to pin an easier tail on the donkey --

MATTHEW: -- on the donkey --

JOHN: -- something like disorderly conduct, destruction of property --

MATTHEW: C'mon --

JOHN: Have to tag her with something, Matt --

MATTHEW: They screwed up --

JOHN: They can't admit a screw-up --

MATTHEW: They screwed up, it's their fault --

JOHN: They can't admit.

MATTHEW: So --

JOHN: So could mean jail time, um, probation, fine, community service. Judge's call.

MATTHEW: But John, didn't, she didn't do anyth --

JOHN: She did and she didn't, Matt.

MATTHEW: What? Did what? She just wanted to pick up --

JOHN: She should have gone with them. No one ever wins a pissing contest with a cop.

MATTHEW: Pissing contest.

JOHN: She challenged them, Matt. In their face.

MATTHEW: But, you know, you know Margaret --

JOHN: -- and I can admire her chutzpah, I suppose --

MATTHEW: -- bulldog with a bone --

JOHN: -- I can admire all that --

MATTHEW: What's not to admire?

JOHN: Matt --

MATTHEW: She never did learn --

JOHN: Matt --

MATTHEW: She always holds on too long --

JOHN: That's my point --

MATTHEW: Maggie's got a vice-grip --

JOHN: Pay attention, Matt. Matt, they see a woman -- Matt, they see a woman who lost control.

MATTHEW: Lost control?

JOHN: They don't see a strong wom[an] --

MATTHEW: Lost control?

JOHN: They see a hysterical woman --

MATTHEW: Margaret never loses contr[ol] --

JOHN: They see a neglectful parent. That's probably the worst. Once that impression's laid down, Matt -- Matt, listen to me: it's a hard picture to erase. Hard. I'll try, but -- She should have just gone with them.

MATTHEW: She always holds on too long, John.

JOHN: You know better than I --

MATTHEW: You know that, too. You've been on the receiving end. I just can see her now, in the store -- no one going to outtalk her, defender of principle -- I threatened to get her a cape and a halo once --

JOHN: Matt? We need to go --

MATTHEW: Have you, have you seen the pictures?

JOHN: Yes. We need to get --

MATTHEW: And?

JOHN: And what?

MATTHEW: And?

JOHN: And. And they're not pornography, if that's what you're asking. Not legally -- Not legally.

MATTHEW: Is that what I'm asking?

JOHN: I don't know.

MATTHEW: What?

JOHN: Maybe photogra[phy] -- maybe photographers process differently than I do. To be honest, Matt -- they made me uncomfortable.

MATTHEW: C'mon.

JOHN: Alex is too young to, to realize --

MATTHEW: She never hurt him --

JOHN: I'm not saying she did --

MATTHEW: -- this never hurt Alex --

JOHN: I'm sure, Matt --

MATTHEW: People are saying --

JOHN: I know what they're saying, and I don't believe that she, but, but -- you can't always --

MATTHEW: What?

JOHN: -- know that, Matt --

MATTHEW: I know. I was there --

JOHN: Still, from another point of --

MATTHEW: This course meant --

JOHN: -- view --

MATTHEW: -- so much to Maggie.

JOHN: From another point of view, I'm saying --

MATTHEW: It meant so much to her. We fought about it constantly: about the money --

JOHN: Matt --

MATTHEW: -- about the time, the money --

JOHN: -- all I'm saying is --

MATTHEW: She would never hurt --

JOHN: -- all I'm saying, Matt, all I'm saying is, you can't always know, know your intentions --
Maybe Margaret -- I don't know.

MATTHEW: She loved it --

JOHN: Okay, she loved it. I want to drop it, Matt, because we have to talk about tomor[ow] --

MATTHEW: I know why she loved it --

JOHN: Matt --

MATTHEW: She loved it because it got her out. It got her out. It took her away.

JOHN: Look --

MATTHEW: The way Alex can take her --

JOHN: -- about tomor[ow] --

MATTHEW: The way I can't -- the way I can't --

JOHN gets up from the table.

JOHN: Fix that later, Matt. But we have to get to "later," and that starts with tomorrow, with Margaret standing up in front of the judge and the gavel going tap, tap, tap to pound

down the nails. I need you to be ready to help Margaret because more than likely it's not going to go her way, I need you to get your mind around that.

MATTHEW: She really loves Alex.

JOHN: I know that.

MATTHEW: No matter what you think -- You have to believe that.

JOHN: I believe that, of course I believe that.

MATTHEW: She would never hurt him.

JOHN: I believe you. But that's not my strongest defense.

MATTHEW: You have to be on her side.

JOHN: Matt -- I need you to be ready.

MATTHEW: Ready.

JOHN: I'll call.

JOHN starts to exit.

MATTHEW: John?

JOHN: Yes?

MATTHEW: Do your best.

JOHN: Only club I got in the bag, Matt.

JOHN leaves. MATTHEW sits at the table for a moment, alone, then the light fades down on him. He exits, taking the tape measure and cloth. Transition music.

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ACT I, Scene 12

Lights up. MARGARET enters. The JUDGE, ADA, and JOHN enter behind her.

MARGARET: It did not go my way.

MARGARET turns and faces the JUDGE.

JUDGE: I've made my decision. I'm sentencing you to 18 months of probation, 50 hours of community service, and \$300 in restitution to the lab.

ADA: A written apology?

JUDGE: Agreed.

JOHN: Your honor --

JUDGE: It's either that, Mr. Twyman, or 30 days in jail for your artiste. I'd say your choices are fairly clear. You have three days to make your decision.

The lights go strange. Sound can be used here to establish mood. All the actors speak as a CHORUS and arrange themselves around MARGARET. The speech should be said as venomously as possible without overacting, and there should be stylized movement accompanying the words.

JUDGE: You know as well I do you're guilty of something.

VOICE 1: You feel it, don't you?

MARGARET: I do not.

VOICE 2: If only you had just been able to walk in and get your pictures -- By now you'd have your exhibit ready.

VOICE 3: And you would be complimented as an artist, your ego satisfied.

VOICES 1,2,3: Life would be correct.

MARGARET: It's not about my ego.

JUDGE: But it didn't go like that, did it?

VOICE 4: Somebody else had the

VOICES 4,5: second thoughts

VOICE 5: you wouldn't admit to yourself.

MARGARET: Second thoughts --

JUDGE: And your response?

VOICE 1: Denial.

VOICE 2: Indignation.

VOICE 3: Resistance.

ALL VOICES: Everything except staring in the mirror.

MARGARET: I was protecting!

VOICES 1,5: Nothing is unconnected.

VOICE 3: Did you think Alex would never again remember standing naked in your studio

MARGARET: No harm!

VOICE 2: The rough painted canvas against his skin

MARGARET: It freed him!

VOICE 1: The bright lights flashing in his eyes --

VOICE 4: That he would never, one day, recall it and perhaps wonder

ALL: What his mother was doing with him?

MARGARET: He was safe!

JUDGE: Or did you answer for Alex

VOICE 3: Like every good apologist

VOICE 1: Saying that he loves having his picture taken

VOICE 5: That this is play for him

VOICE 4: That I would never deliberately hurt him

VOICE 2: So therefore I can go ahead and use him?

MARGARET: Use him?

ALL VOICES: This is what confronted you

JUDGE: The day you breezed in to pick up your pictures.

ALL: You didn't think of it then.

JUDGE: But you have to think of it now. You have betrayed --

MARGARET: Nothing!

JUDGE: You have betrayed the people who loved you.

ALL: You love the people you have betrayed. Guilt --

JUDGE: Is your incense

ALL: Shame --

JUDGE: Is your journey.

MARGARET banishes the CHORUS.

MARGARET: Begone! Get the fuck out of my head!

Silence.

MARGARET: If someone tells you long enough that your skin is blue, you will believe it. If they kiss you when you say "Yes," if they beat you when you say "No!" -- if they Pavlov every inch of your life so that when you see not-blue, if when you assert not-blue, when you even whisper "Not-blue," if anxiety floods your veins and "not-blue" turns into "not true," you will believe your skin is blue. For a moment, my hands, my face, the whole sheath of me turned into -- sky -- and I dissolved. For a moment I betrayed myself. The voices made me forget what I know, made me remember what never happened. (But then, Alex. I remembered Alex, the spectrum of Alex -- and all the colors righted themselves. Alex loves the camera -- it lets him speak through his body, and so he's freed from language. As am I. When he sat for me we were in pure art, purely in the moment. How blended I felt with him, how he cleansed my spirit. In the course I felt like an artist -- I was an artist. I pushed beyond lines, past edges -- no longer Matthew's Maggie, no longer even Mom of Alex, but somewhere in a sweet place completely my own, responsible to no one, owning my own face. An artist. I wish I were back in the studio with Alex, with nothing but the bright lights and his smile. No sturdy Matthew, Matthew keeping the house solid, no world chomping on garbage for entertainment. I want to be in that moment again, free, unchained. What have I done wrong? I have done nothing wrong. I've done nothing to hurt Alex -- and what hurt I've given Matthew, that comes from the wrench of two souls growing in different arcs -- no judgment needed. But now all this: nothing proved, everything "alleged," all smeared. The whole dirty ordinariness squeezing the beauty out of everything. So what has to be done? What has to be done is what must be done so that when Alex grows up, I want him to know I did the right thing. I want him, if he is ever faced with a test, to look back at me with a compass for the right choice. That's what must be done. So what has to be done? The voices are gone. I can hear myself.

MARGARET takes out her notebook and begins to write as the lights fade to scene change light. She continues to write until the lights come up, moving into the stage right chair once it is placed.

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ACT I, Scene 13

Scene change light. The three of them are sitting in an interrogation room. The two tables are pushed together to form one table. The GUARD stands nearby. The GUARD will respond as action escalates, prepared to restore order. All through this MARGARET appears calm, but she should, periodically, bounce her leg nervously. As the music sound fades, JOHN begins.

JOHN: I haven't heard her say, "Go ahead, accept the terms."

MATTHEW: Of course she will --

JOHN: No "of course" about it, Matt.

MATTHEW: Get the paperwork, or whatever, started.

JOHN: I can only do what my client tells me to do.

MATTHEW: So tell him, Maggie. Tell him. Kiss up and kiss it off and let's put this whole -- thing -
- behind us.

MARGARET: This thing.

MATTHEW: All this -- shit -- Has she been talking to you like this?

JOHN: Not like this, not like anything.

MATTHEW takes out a sheet of paper and hands it to MARGARET.

MARGARET: A black face and red tears.

MATTHEW: My last guns, Maggie.

MARGARET: Matt --

MATTHEW: He's been throwing his favorite toys around. He's let me know I don't give him a bath like you do. He's not thrilled about day care. Come home. You didn't do anything wrong. You've got nothing to prove.

MARGARET does not respond to this.

MATTHEW: Don't believe what they're saying in the papers.

JOHN: She doesn't get the papers.

MATTHEW: Doesn't matter -- it's in the air.

JOHN: We don't have a lot of time left.

MATTHEW: *(to MARGARET)* So enlighten me.

No response from MARGARET.

MATTHEW: Taking pictures of Alex wasn't -- wrong. The pictures never hurt Alex; what hurts him is that you're not there.

No response from MARGARET.

MATTHEW: I wouldn't be honest -- you know this -- there were times when I felt like a fifth wheel, watching you. But that's okay. We'll work on that. But we can't do that if you're

here. Tell John to get back to the judge -- eat a little crow, I know that sticks in here, but it's really nothing. A, a, a bent nail -- chuck it.

No response from MARGARET.

MATTHEW: I'm going to tell John to crank it up for tomorrow. All right? A little crow, a little salt, a little salsa -- not so bad.

MARGARET: And everything okay.

MATTHEW: Broke no cosmic laws. No commandments. You were under stress. You got harassed -- lost your temper, very human thing to do. Fixable. Minor.

MARGARET: Minor.

MATTHEW: You've made your point -- you didn't do anything wrong. Duly noted with everyone who cares about you. Let's go home.

MARGARET: John? If I bow?

JOHN: You'll have a record either way.

MATTHEW: *(to JOHN)* Might add some zip --

JOHN: Matt --

MARGARET: So everything would be all right.

MATTHEW: Yes, Maggie. All right. For all of us. This might not be so bad after all -- it's been seven years, probably time for a check under our hood -- I'm going to tell John. To go ahead. Maggie? Maggie?

MARGARET: No.

MATTHEW: No.

MARGARET: No.

MATTHEW: I knew it. I knew -- Knew you couldn't let it go. No one gets a tongue up on Margaret Pasqualini. Uh-uh. No one, ever.

JOHN: Margaret, going to jail --

MATTHEW: *(to MARGARET)* What are you saying?

JOHN: Margaret, I can't protect you in jail --

MARGARET: There's a reason why I haven't said anything for the last three days -- I've been -- digging.

MATTHEW: Do it at home.

JOHN: I don't have any jurisdiction here.

MARGARET: No, you don't.

MARGARET picks up the picture.

MARGARET: Matt, don't be mad at me. Don't be anything at me.

MATTHEW: Don't be anything --

JOHN: Matt!

MARGARET: There's something I have to do here that's the right thing to do --

JOHN: Margaret --

MATTHEW: The right thing is us --

MARGARET: The right thing --

MATTHEW: -- no, not even that, not even that -- the right thing --

MARGARET: You're not listening --

MATTHEW: -- don't even count me in -- it's Alex. The right thing is home. Home. Home. That's gotta clinch it, Maggie. Home.

MARGARET shakes her head no.

MARGARET: The right thing is also keeping my name clear --

MATTHEW: About you --

MARGARET: About Alex, too. He's going to have to do the hard thing someday --

MATTHEW: You don't think it's hard for him now --

MARGARET: I want him to look back and know I did this -- I won't pretend --

JOHN taps his watch.

JOHN: Time.

MARGARET: It's been a long three days, Matt -- longer, longer than you know. Long. Don't think I don't agree -- you argue just like you build a house --

MATTHEW: Maggie --

MARGARET: But --

MATTHEW: List --

MARGARET: I did some very stupid things, Matt. I put Alex in harm's way -- in the store, maybe in the pictures --

MATTHEW: Not in the pic --

MARGARET: I kept you away, who deserves it least.

MATTHEW: You don't have to do penance --

MARGARET: That's not what -- I'm not -- I'm just saying I see things now, now, now that I'm not -- not boiling over --

JOHN: We're running out of time.

MATTHEW: Come home.

MARGARET: I have to fight this, Matt.

MATTHEW: Have to fight --

MARGARET: Have to fight this. Nothing I did was wrong.

MATTHEW: This is like another -- project, right?

MARGARET: If I don't fight it, it's like admitting --

MATTHEW: Principle --

MARGARET: -- to a lie -- Yes, principle -- People shouldn't be arrested -- Don't you think I know -- costs?

JOHN: Matt, sit down!

MATTHEW grabs the picture.

MATTHEW: How am I supposed to explain --

MARGARET: Alex will learn --

The police officer makes a signal.

MARGARET: Alex will know --

MATTHEW: Alex will hate --

JOHN: Time's up.

MATTHEW: More words. More time.

MARGARET: No. No. No.

MATTHEW: (*overlaps*) Fine. Fine. If you can give up your son --

MATTHEW rumples the paper and tosses it at her. MARGARET smooths the paper.

MARGARET: It's the only thing would take me away --

MATTHEW: Fine. We'll get along -- just fine --

MARGARET: Matt.

The GUARD moves forward.

MATTHEW: Got the cabinet job.

JOHN: Matt, we have to go.

The guard and MARGARET leave.

MATTHEW: Hope the First Amendment keeps you warm.

JOHN takes his arm.

MATTHEW: Damn, that was stupid, wasn't it?

JOHN: Matt --

JOHN and MATTHEW leave. Lights out. The sound of a closing cell door; set change light bumps up and transition music as cell is set. The set must be very easy to put into place and must be done quickly. Meanwhile, the talk show: RADIO HOST and CALLER seat themselves in the audience in such a way as to draw attention away from the set change, e.g., on either side of the audience. A light will be on each of them.

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ACT I, Scene 14

A bit of cue-in music for a RADIO TALK SHOW HOST, coming back into the program. Lights up. The HOST sits at the stage left table. The CALLER stands stage center, facing the audience, holding a cordless phone; she can walk as she talks. Where it feels right, the lines should overlap because the HOST is trying to move the show along.

RADIO HOST: Welcome back after all those ludicrous commercials -- but, hey, they're paying my salary, so okay by me. All right, our topic this morning: kid porn or "poorn" judgment? You make the call. You may have heard the story: young mother arrested at a photo lab

for taking pictures of her naked son for a photography project. The police carted her off when she tried to go three rounds with 'em in the lobby. Bam, bam. And why were the police officers skulking around the lab? They'd been called there by the lab owner -- a Mr. "Flash" Gunn, great name! -- because Mr. Gunn felt "nervous" about the pictures. Apparently the woman's four-year old son witnessed the whole thing. Now she's off to the pokey for 30 days for "artistic principle." Now, questions to "porn-der," especially for you libertarian wankers: Should the lab owner have dropped a dime? what about artistic freedom when it comes to children? -- and no calls, please, from the Men Loving Boys perverts out there. Should they string Margaret Pasqualini up or celebrate her as a hero of the First Amendment? Give us your thoughts at 1-800-POPS-OFF. Chris, you're on.

CALLER: Pat, thanks for taking my call.

RADIO HOST: Just glad to do my job. What's up?

CALLER: I have really mixed feelings about this, really mixed.

RADIO HOST: Mix away.

CALLER: I mean, parents have been snapping pics of naked kids since the first cameras --

RADIO HOST: I got 'em --

CALLER: -- so what's the big deal?

RADIO HOST: -- you got 'em.

CALLER: Right. But kids today -- wow, they're really at the mercy, know what I mean?

RADIO HOST: Every day.

CALLER: They can get killed for peeing on some guy's lap!

RADIO HOST: I read about that.

CALLER: So better to be on the safe side and call in the police.

RADIO HOST: Even if, as I understand it, even if the pictures are really pretty good --

CALLER: But "good" means what? You can justify --

RADIO HOST: -- a project about her son's innocence --

CALLER: What?

RADIO HOST: A project about her son's innocence --

CALLER: Some project!

RADIO HOST: -- apparently don't show any abuse or mistreatment --

CALLER: It's not like she's gonna publicize pictures of that!

RADIO HOST: We're talking about a person's reputation here.

CALLER: Don't we all have to take up the slack to protect the children?

RADIO HOST: Maybe --

CALLER: You gotta believe the child.

RADIO HOST: But what gave Mr. Flash Gunn the right --

CALLER: Gotta draw a line somewhere.

RADIO HOST: Who draws?

CALLER: I guess -- gotta go with your gut.

RADIO HOST: But whose "gut" decides? Do you see the problem here?

CALLER: To be honest, I have to say that she shouldn't have taken the pictures.

RADIO HOST: Why?

CALLER: Even if they're art, whatever that is, she used her son to get something she wanted.

RADIO HOST: Used her son.

CALLER: I think that's wrong.

RADIO HOST: So she exploited her son?

CALLER: In a way, ya know --

RADIO HOST: Is that what you're saying?

CALLER: Ya know, no different than the farm workers. Really. So she's getting what she deserves.

RADIO HOST: Sharp thinking there, Patty-O. Thanks for the call. Sarah, you're on the air --

Lights out. Sound: music, as if the radio show were going on break.

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ACT I, Scene 15

Lights come up. Sound: background sounds of a prison -- these can include voices, occasional announcements over a P.A. (though the announcements should be

garbled enough so as not to be recognizable), other doors opening and closing, distant music, walking, etc.

On the upstage bed CORTEZ is discovered asleep. The GUARD leads MARGARET to the cell; the sound of the door sliding open; she steps in; the sound of the door closing. MARGARET stands there. The sound of the closing door wakes up CORTEZ. She sits up suddenly.

CORTEZ: Tamara?

CORTEZ sees MARGARET.

CORTEZ: Who are you? Who are you? Right, right, that's right -- I forgot. Today is the new beef. The virgin territory.

MARGARET does not respond. The GUARD leaves.

CORTEZ: Welcome. Sit down. I'm not known to bite. I hear you are deposited here for thirty days. I'm not. Any cigarettes? She lacks the local currency. Lacks -- a smile, some courtesy, peace of mind -- lacks a lot. That bed is yours. I didn't sleep much last night -- I'm tired. I do not want to be disturbed. Understand? Standard operating procedure, so that we get things right right off. You're only here for a month -- I live here, Borinqueña prisoner of war. You, you're just a guest of the state, a radar blip, a --

MARGARET: I thought you wanted to sleep.

CORTEZ: Como?

MARGARET: You said -- You said you wanted to get some sleep.

CORTEZ gives MARGARET a straight look that MARGARET holds, nervously. The look lasts for a good five seconds, longer if wanted.

MARGARET: You said you wanted to get some sleep.

CORTEZ: Good thing you didn't pull your eyes away. I gave you the rules of the house. Now I will sleep.

MARGARET sits there, looking at her surroundings. Noises continue; lights fade briefly to black. Transition sound or music.

INTERMISSION

ACT II, Scene 1

Pre-Show Music: Selections from Lou Reed's New York. Lights go to half, then out. CORTEZ and MARGARET are discovered on their beds in what will be known as "night light": bluish, dim.

In the background, dimly, occasional noises: a cough, something dropping to the floor, building settling, footsteps, etc. -- the prison at night.

Music comes up -- mysterious, ethereal, pleasant. This music will be known as "Tamara's voice." CORTEZ stirs and sits up.

CORTEZ: Tamara? Tamara?

She rises. The lights now change: multicolored, but still dim. Other sounds come in, mixed in with the music, eerie sounds, to create an eerie mood.

CORTEZ: Tamara? Tamara?

CORTEZ starts moving around the cell, waking MARGARET. MARGARET raises herself slightly to look.

CORTEZ: Goddamn it! Goddamn it! Leave me alone! Just leave me alone! Tamara. Tamara.

Then she stands there, just staring into the dark. MARGARET watches. CORTEZ becomes aware that MARGARET is watching; they lock eyes for a few beats, then CORTEZ makes a gesture for MARGARET to lay back down. MARGARET lays back down. CORTEZ sits for several beats. MARGARET again lifts herself up to watch CORTEZ. They remain this way as a bell or alarm goes off: a wake-up call. Lights up to full, with prison sounds.

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ACT II, Scene 2: The First Degree

The GUARD walks in to check on them, then exits. Background noises dim down and are gone by "Out at the end of the month."

CORTEZ: Some advice? Eat something.

MARGARET: If there was something to eat.

CORTEZ: You have to eat.

MARGARET: No appetite.

CORTEZ: You have to fake it, then. Even a rent check can't afford to look weak. Out at the end of the month?

This brings a small smile to MARGARET.

MARGARET: What do we do now?

CORTEZ: Nothing.

MARGARET: Nothing.

CORTEZ: Nothing. The jefes have us screwed down for a few days while they finger through the house for some contraband. Standard operating procedure.

CORTEZ takes out a thick book, an anthology of American literature. She reads.

MARGARET: So we just -- sit.

CORTEZ: Yes.

MARGARET: I'm not used to sitting still --

CORTEZ: There is no hurry to be in a hurry around here.

MARGARET: What are you reading?

CORTEZ closes the book and simply looks at MARGARET. MARGARET sits; CORTEZ goes back to reading. MARGARET's leg begins to bounce noticeably.

CORTEZ: Chill.

MARGARET: Sorry. Nervous.

MARGARET starts tapping her fingers on the table.

CORTEZ: Chill.

MARGARET gets up and paces. CORTEZ watches her.

CORTEZ: No. No. No. No parades.

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: Sit down. Sit down. You've got the scorpions --

MARGARET: Just -- thinking.

CORTEZ: Just control it.

MARGARET: I can't just -- turn it off and on.

CORTEZ: Just have to. It gets very close in here.

MARGARET tries to keep still but can't -- leg jumps up and down.

MARGARET: I'm trying!

CORTEZ: Not very hard -- Maybe I should read to you.

CORTEZ opens the book.

CORTEZ: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself / I loafe and invite my soul / I lean and loafe at my ease."

MARGARET: Maybe I'm not interested.

CORTEZ: He's one of your own.

MARGARET: I don't care.

CORTEZ: If I have to learn the gringo poets, you should know them, too!

MARGARET: What's the right size rebar --

CORTEZ: The right size what?

MARGARET: Rebar. What's the right f-stop if you're shooting on a cloudy day with 400 speed film that you want to push to 800?

CORTEZ: I don't know.

MARGARET: I do -- without a book.

CORTEZ: Brava, f-stop. All right, without a book. Me busco. Estoy aún en el paisaje lejos de mi visión --

MARGARET: Sorry, one-lingual.

CORTEZ: -- Sigo siendo mensaje lejos de la palabra. "I seek myself. I am still in the landscape far from my vision. / I go on being a message far from the word." [Julia de Burgos, Song of Simple Truth, "#2: Intimate," (pp. 6-7)]

MARGARET's leg starts bouncing again.

CORTEZ: You don't like our famed Julia de Burgos?

MARGARET: Got past me.

CORTEZ: Tell me another, without the book.

MARGARET: Dip a brick into water before you butter it with mortar.

CORTEZ: You know this.

MARGARET: For a fact.

CORTEZ: You like facts. Then, fact. I quote, sin libro: "i like and dislike, like the good / dislike the bad in everything, bro" --

MARGARET: Look --

CORTEZ: Listen! You need to listen. "everything changes, bro, anything / that remains the same is doomed to / die, stubbornness must cover all my / angles, bro, y te lo digo sincerely --" [Tato Laviera, AmeRícan, "esquina dude" (58)]

MARGARET: Do house rules mean I have to listen --

CORTEZ: "Te lo digo sincerely" -- I say it to you sincerely.

MARGARET: And I tell you sincerely I don't want to listen.

CORTEZ: What's the matter, querida?

MARGARET: Not in the mood.

CORTEZ: I can understand. All those scorpions making you deaf to beauty, forcing you to accept the loss --

CORTEZ oes back to her book. MARGARET reacts dismissively.

CORTEZ: -- become humble --

MARGARET: Like you --

CORTEZ: -- go with God --

MARGARET: -- like you last night? Shit! Sorry. I'm sorry --

CORTEZ: You need some self-discipline.

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: You're slack, you take up too much space. Be still, Señora f-stop! Now unload, because I want to nip these "nerves" in the bud. I'll recite more poetry.

MARGARET: I wouldn't even call it thinking.

CORTEZ: All jumbled. Smoke in your head. Tick, tick, tick, tick --

MARGARET: My son -- I'm thinking about my son.

CORTEZ: His name?

MARGARET: Alex.

CORTEZ: Age?

MARGARET: Four.

CORTEZ: Married?

MARGARET: Not Alex. I am.

CORTEZ: He has a name?

MARGARET: Matthew.

CORTEZ: He treats you all right? Not Alex. Your husband.

MARGARET: Yes.

CORTEZ: Cheat on you?

MARGARET: Not that I know.

CORTEZ: Yell at you?

MARGARET: No.

CORTEZ: Hit you?

MARGARET: Never.

CORTEZ: Provide for you?

MARGARET: We own a small construction company together. I used to be a "woman in the building trades" until --

CORTEZ: So, let's count off: Nice son. A husband who treats you like a human being. Entrepreneurs. And you're walking free soon. So where's the sting, chica? What? You're here for what?

MARGARET: Disorderly conduct.

CORTEZ: They put you with me for that?

MARGARET: Who are you?

CORTEZ: Stay on the message.

CORTEZ motions for her to continue.

MARGARET: Disorderly conduct. Also malicious destruction of property. I damaged a photo lab. I resisted arrest -- I fought a police officer -- two --

CORTEZ: High crimes and misdemeanors --

MARGARET: I'm here basically because I wouldn't agree to a deal. Eighteen months probation, 50 hours of community service, \$300 in restitution, and a written apology.

CORTEZ looks askance at her.

MARGARET: That's it.

CORTEZ: And you said no.

MARGARET: Right.

CORTEZ: You don't look brain damaged.

MARGARET: I'm not.

CORTEZ: All you had to do was fake sorry, and you couldn't even do that?

MARGARET is silent.

CORTEZ: Answer me.

MARGARET: Yes. No. I couldn't.

CORTEZ: You could be home right now --

MARGARET: I didn't do anything wrong.

CORTEZ: Then I missed your point. I thought you broke the law.

MARGARET: I didn't do anything wrong.

CORTEZ: So what did you do?

MARGARET: It's what they did.

CORTEZ: You're the one in here.

MARGARET: I didn't do anything wrong. They did.

MARGARET's leg starts again. CORTEZ grabs it.

CORTEZ: Focus. On the message. You wrestled a cop. You "damaged" property --

MARGARET: They tried to take something from me.

CORTEZ: What? What?

MARGARET: Pictures.

CORTEZ: Pictures.

MARGARET: Of Alex.

CORTEZ: Of your son.

MARGARET: I don't want to talk about this anymore.

CORTEZ: This is all about pictures of your son.

MARGARET: This is all wrong.

CORTEZ: The House of Correction anthem. "Oh, Señor, I been framed -- " Those pictures, amiga? What up with them? The pictures? Okay. Later. So, just because they're pictures, I'll bet you argued freedom of expression -- impress the judge.

MARGARET: Just leave me alone.

CORTEZ: You'd like to be known as --

MARGARET: Just leave me --

CORTEZ: -- a political prisoner --

MARGARET: -- alone --

CORTEZ holds up two fists.

CORTEZ: Political prisoner zero zero. Judge, I know my First Amendment rights. Blah. Blah. Blah. I'm upholding a great tradition. Blah. Blah. Blah. Judge snoring on the bench. You done? Good. Thirty days if you're too stupid to hit my fat pitch. Hope the First Amendment keeps you warm. Bang. Next. So down the rabbit hole. One of us instead, for thirty days. That's okay, let the leg jump -- I give it permission. Welcome to the bottom rung. Welcome to zero, Zero. Principle, so who cares, principle?

MARGARET's leg pumps again. CORTEZ looks at it, then laughs.

CORTEZ: Boy, your kind scares me! Entirely too much time on your hands. You think doing time for that is real? Principle? I'm waiting for the snap-back, Zero Zero, for the retort. Maybe here is where you should be, retard, a mother who abandons her child --

MARGARET: I didn't abandon anybody.

CORTEZ: No? Then teach brujia here the ways of the world. C'mon, paint me the happy picture of how you choose a principle with your whole family looking at you, hungering for you to stay --

MARGARET: If I put it simple to you --

CORTEZ: Now you're exuding some spirit.

MARGARET: -- will you just stop digging at me for five minutes?

CORTEZ: I can spare five minutes out of 28 days.

MARGARET: You like this all the time?

CORTEZ: No -- sometimes I talk a lot.

MARGARET: Even in your sleep

CORTEZ: The pictures.

MARGARET: The pictures. They were just pictures of Alex, for a photography project. But people saw things in them that weren't there.

CORTEZ: They had some reason?

MARGARET: Nothing there! I knew what I knew, solid --

CORTEZ: So the cops won't let you have the pictures --

MARGARET: Never gave me a chance --

CORTEZ: Mama lion defending her cub --

MARGARET: Against all the filth --

CORTEZ: And then in front of a judge -- So the judge --

MARGARET: So the judge tells my lawyer it's either I admit I did something wrong by taking the easy way out or --

CORTEZ: Or you get a turn of the moon with me.

MARGARET: Turn of the moon.

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: Just the words -- turn -- of the moon --

CORTEZ: Puertorriqueñas are all gassed up with poetry --

MARGARET: No, it's not that --

CORTEZ: We're not gassy?

MARGARET: It just got -- quiet -- when you said that. It felt -- strange.

CORTEZ: It got quiet.

MARGARET: I felt Alex near me -- in me -- Strange --

CORTEZ: So. They're all waiting for you to make this choice.

MARGARET: Enough. No more.

CORTEZ: The pictures --

MARGARET: It's Alex. The principle is Alex. I bet even you can understand that.

CORTEZ: Can he?

MARGARET: He'll understand. Someday.

CORTEZ: How is that going to work?

MARGARET: Because I'll tell him, that's how. When he grows up.

CORTEZ: I'm sure the anticipation keeps the smile on his four-year old face right now.

MARGARET: Do you always go for the throat?

CORTEZ: It's all about you, isn't it?

MARGARET: About me for him.

CORTEZ: Courageous madre! So he'll look back on you from some far-away time, and there's his mami standing tall --

MARGARET: So he'll know --

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: That nothing ever happened.

CORTEZ: Except his mother disappeared on him for a month.

MARGARET: He'll find out that was a small price to pay.

CORTEZ: Such faith.

MARGARET: I'm tired.

CORTEZ: Selfishness will do that to you.

MARGARET: Do you only get one station on your dial?

CORTEZ: I'm only getting one broadcast.

MARGARET: Get a new radio, then, because you have me wrong. Do I need a parade permit?

CORTEZ makes a gracious gesture. MARGARET walks in silence for a few moments and is apparently ready to cry. CORTEZ stands in front of her. GUARD comes by on her rounds. They wait until she passes.

CORTEZ: A little advice: In for a dime, in for a dollar. You in?

MARGARET turns away.

CORTEZ: I read about you, you know. When they told me you were coming. I read, yes.

CORTEZ oes to the certificate on the wall.

CORTEZ: Associates degree in communications. I keep up with your world.

MARGARET: You knew?

CORTEZ: I needed to fill in blanks.

MARGARET: Blanks?

CORTEZ: Right now, for this reason: Lines, Margarita Pasqualini, lines, lines, lines. On a tiny island like ours, lines mean everything. Making them, keeping them. Clear straight lines.

MARGARET: So you knew --

CORTEZ: And now you know I know.

MARGARET: What do I know?

CORTEZ: Want to know my name? Chances are, you haven't read about me.

MARGARET: I've been lucky.

CORTEZ: Cortez. I have a first name: Vera. But don't use it. I go by Cortez, Pasqualini.

MARGARET: No.

CORTEZ: Pascua, the feast -- Pasqualini, the little feast.

MARGARET: No. I go by Margaret. Not Pasqualini, not a little feast. Not Margarita.

CORTEZ: Say that again.

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: "I go by -- "

MARGARET: I go by Margaret? I go by Margaret.

CORTEZ lays on her bed and opens up her book.

CORTEZ: Now we have some lines.

MARGARET: On our little island.

CORTEZ: For the turn of a moon.

MARGARET: Do you shut up now?

CORTEZ: Except for the voice in your head.

MARGARET: I'm changing stations.

CORTEZ: Then I'm off the air.

CORTEZ reads. MARGARET paces. Lights out. Transition sound or music.

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ACT II, Scene 3: The Second Degree

Lights up; music out. MARGARET is sitting at the table drawing in a sketch pad which she has gotten from her footlocker. CORTEZ gets cards and plays solitaire.

CORTEZ: You ate today.

MARGARET: I got it down.

CORTEZ: Only took you a week.

MARGARET: Incarceration as a diet plan. When do we do something other than sit around?

CORTEZ: Soon, from what I hear -- they found who and what they wanted to find. And I can get back to class.

MARGARET: Class?

CORTEZ: What is it like, being famous?

MARGARET: Back to class?

CORTEZ: Picture in the papers, news at six, maybe at eleven, reporters in your garbage --

MARGARET: You don't give anything away, do you?

CORTEZ continues to play.

CORTEZ: Well?

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: Being famous.

MARGARET: It felt like being raped.

CORTEZ: Ever been raped?

MARGARET: No.

CORTEZ: Then it didn't feel like that. What did they do?

MARGARET: You read it all -- you tell me.

CORTEZ: I like details.

MARGARET: You like getting details.

CORTEZ: You have the right to remain silent.

MARGARET: Wild Kingdom. The lions eating the antelope not even dead yet. The TV news:
"Picked up for porn." The radio blab shows. Saint. Demon mother. Saint. Child of Satan.

CORTEZ: The newspapers made you as a bitch -- anything can and will be used against you --
You a --

MARGARET: You tell me.

CORTEZ: I haven't seen it yet -- I don't know if that's good or bad.

MARGARET: I'll try to give you a storm warning.

CORTEZ: You make a living taking pictures?

MARGARET: Not yet.

CORTEZ: So Matthew pays --

MARGARET: Some of it.

CORTEZ: Red queen to black king --

MARGARET: He was helping me pay for the photography class.

CORTEZ: "Student" photographer.

MARGARET: Called "The Human Form."

CORTEZ: I have one of those.

MARGARET: The class -- I thought it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

CORTEZ: Except for Matthew and Alex --

MARGARET: Yes.

CORTEZ: Go on. If you want.

MARGARET: We had this assignment: photograph an emotional state of being using a person.

CORTEZ: Using a person.

MARGARET: See, I didn't start as a photographer. It's just that I started taking pictures of the
work Matthew and I were doing, so we'd have a record, a portfolio. Then one day --

MARGARET mimes taking the photos.

MARGARET: -- it must have been the sunlight laying across a ratty old hammer and screwdriver leaning against each other on a bench: they struck me. Something -- solid. So, snap, snap -- purely useless pictures. Something so ordinary could look so strange at the same time -- I liked that. I liked that I could take it. Take it away. Taking a picture -- very interesting concept. Cortez, when you see the negatives on that first roll of film you develop yourself, and then you see your first print bloom in the developer, something you took -- whew! I was hooked! Closest thing to joy I'd felt since -- since --

CORTEZ: Since whatever.

MARGARET: Since whatever! No comparison. Of itself.

MARGARET "takes" pictures.

MARGARET: I started taking pictures of people on the site -- and I saw a dignity in them that they never believed they had. But I knew. My eye knew. The light knew. Me and the light -- we partnered.

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: I had my first show in a diner!

CORTEZ: Of the workers?

MARGARET: Yes. And when they saw themselves up there, and then saw other people seeing them up there and liking what they saw -- even buying the pictures -- that changed something in them. They got noticed. Became real to someone else, true to someone.

CORTEZ: You told their truth.

MARGARET: No, no -- I didn't say anything. I didn't want to say something. I just captured what they were saying. What my mates were saying -- especially the women. It's always been best when I just -- I don't know -- when all of me is just like a lens, letting the light through. Just like that first time, with the tools. No thoughts, just eye.

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: It just -- sucks you in. I got -- greedy.

CORTEZ: The bug bugged you.

MARGARET: I got ambitious. Studio equipment, more classes --

CORTEZ: The Human Form.

MARGARET: It was so expensive.

CORTEZ: And then the big bad scary pictures.

MARGARET: The pictures nobody knows.

CORTEZ: Using a person.

MARGARET: I looked at him and thought, Innocence.

CORTEZ: Innocence.

MARGARET: I wanted to capture --

CORTEZ: You wanted to take --

MARGARET: I wanted to capture what it felt like when I gave him a bath, when he --

MARGARET makes the sign for "I love you." CORTEZ signs back "thank you."

CORTEZ: The little mute boy.

MARGARET: Was that in the papers?

CORTEZ: All but your tit size. So, the pictures.

MARGARET: So I talked it over with Alex --

CORTEZ: Four.

MARGARET: Four.

CORTEZ: And you talked it over with him?

MARGARET: I asked him if he'd like to get his picture taken, which he loves anyway. And I had this idea -- this spark --

CORTEZ: Without his clothes on --

MARGARET: Without his clothes on, yes.

CORTEZ: That in the papers, too.

MARGARET: Child pornography charges.

CORTEZ: You saw Innocence, they saw naked. Naked and mute --

MARGARET: I don't know what they saw -- In one picture I even have wings on him, like a cherub --

CORTEZ: Wings!

MARGARET: How could anyone think --

CORTEZ: Actual wings?

MARGARET: Yes.

CORTEZ: Oh, man! So this ambition of yours turns him into naked for the world with wings on.
Man! They saw what you were doing.

MARGARET: What are you saying?

CORTEZ: Think about it.

MARGARET: He liked it --

CORTEZ: You knew this?

MARGARET: Yes -- I'd taken pictures of him before, naked -- in the bathtub, his bed -- he got a
kick out of it --

CORTEZ: Whose kick, blanca? Not your naked ass hanging out there --

MARGARET: Not his "naked ass," either. There was no "naked ass" -- not like -- Christ, what
are you thinking --

CORTEZ: In here, fotógrafa tanta, anything is possible.

MARGARET: Forget it.

CORTEZ puts her cards down.

CORTEZ: No, let's not. Let's not forget it. You're important, a figure of importance. I want to
know how a figure of importance thinks. What really happened?

MARGARET does not reply.

CORTEZ: Answer me. What happened that day?

MARGARET: Nothing "happened."

CORTEZ: You got Alex thinking this was going to be fun -- Right? C'mon, answer me.

MARGARET: We set up the pic --

CORTEZ: We?

MARGARET: Matthew and I.

CORTEZ: Bathtub?

MARGARET: In my studio.

CORTEZ: Your studio. Your place.

MARGARET: I took my son -- into the studio --

CORTEZ: Into your studio --

MARGARET: Alex and I had a great --

CORTEZ: Wait, took him into your studio, this kid who cannot talk --

MARGARET goes to speak, but CORTEZ stops her.

CORTEZ: Wait, the two people he loves the most -- and take his clothes off --

MARGARET: This is foul --

CORTEZ: -- it's okay because he's just a kid -- he's my kid -- spread him out for all these stranger's eyes --

CORTEZ pretends she's doing the photo shoot with ALEX, mock-taking pictures, interspersed with the "ka-chick" of a photo being taken.

CORTEZ: It's another point of view, isn't it? "Lindo, smile for me" --

MARGARET: Poison --

CORTEZ: "Look adorable, honey pie." Alex as a little island. "Oh, my sweet cheeks." Invade the island with love. "My little angel" --

MARGARET: You shit!

CORTEZ: Do this. Raise that. Extract the riches. Lift. Spread. Take it all away.

MARGARET: Stop it --

MARGARET tries to knock the "camera" from CORTEZ's hands.

CORTEZ: What did that photo lab see, Margaret conquistadora?

MARGARET knocks the "camera" out of CORTEZ's hands.

MARGARET: Keep your filth away from him.

MARGARET bellies right up to CORTEZ; CORTEZ is oddly passive.

MARGARET: How could you know, how could you know --

CORTEZ: Would you kill me?

MARGARET: -- how could you know anything about what Alex and I had that day?

CORTEZ: Kill me --

MARGARET: How could you? If you were a mother, you'd know --

CORTEZ: Would you kill me right now --

MARGARET: -- bottom feeder --

CORTEZ: -- right now if you could?

MARGARET: You're just like them, just like them all --

CORTEZ: Would you kill me to protect Alex?

MARGARET: I did not let them take away anything, anything, and not you, not you, either, not any of you --

The GUARD comes around, and they part quickly. The GUARD lingers for a moment, the leaves.

CORTEZ: You'd do it, wouldn't you?

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: Kill me --

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: Kill me, kill me right now, if you could.

MARGARET: Kill you?

CORTEZ: To protect Alex.

MARGARET: Kill you?

CORTEZ: You're on fire.

MARGARET: You -- stay -- aw --

CORTEZ: You'd do it, wouldn't you?

MARGARET: You back off.

CORTEZ: The power you have --

MARGARET: Just back off.

CORTEZ makes a "shutter" with the thumbs and index fingers of each hand -- a square -- and puts it up against her own right eye.

CORTEZ: If you don't make really, really clear lines --

CORTEZ squeezes the fingers shut, then open, as if they were a shutter.

CORTEZ: -- you end up hurting the people you're supposed to protect. We're all islands, Margaret, we all need lines. You have that power.

Drops the "shutter."

MARGARET: There were always lines with Alex.

CORTEZ: Always?

MARGARET: Always. Clear. Clean. Lines.

CORTEZ picks up the cards and goes back to playing.

CORTEZ: Well, he got lucky then because he was being chased by someone who had artistic ambition, on the edge of being a mirón, a peeping Tomás -- who believed herself the center of the universe. Lines don't matter much to people like that. I'm just translating your testimony. He got a lucky cut of the cards.

MARGARET: Cut of the cards --

Beat. MARGARET makes the "shutter" with her own fingers and looks at CORTEZ.

MARGARET: Look at me.

CORTEZ continues to play cards.

MARGARET: Look at me.

CORTEZ looks up. MARGARET snaps the "shutter."

MARGARET: I just captured a "mate" I know nothing about.

MARGARET makes believe she's taking a print out of a tray and holding it up, letting it dry.

MARGARET: Is this you?

CORTEZ leans in.

CORTEZ: The lighting is dim.

MARGARET looks at the "print."

MARGARET: So -- want to do a little touch-up for me?

CORTEZ looks at MARGARET for a beat, as if deciding something, then gathers the cards together and neatens the pile.

CORTEZ: I can tell you something. Put it away. Imagine I'm 18 years old -- the age of majority. It is a very dangerous time.

Soft at first, the audience hears voices shouting "Puerto Rico libre! Puerto Rico libre!"

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ACT II, Scene 4

"Puerto Rico libre! Puerto Rico libre!" CORTEZ moves to center stage and takes up the cry. She is 18.

CORTEZ: Puerto Rico libre!

She repeats it several times; crowd sound die down.

CORTEZ: Borinqueños! It is time to wake up. Borinqueños! It is time to follow our father, Pedro Albizu Campos, and our mother, Lolita Lebrón, and unchain the beauty of our island from a clown called Uncle Sam. At this moment -- courtesy of the F.B.I., the Federal Bastards of Interrogation -- fifteen of our brothers and sisters -- Los Quince, compañeros, do not forget Los Quince -- lie rotting in American prisons for the crime of wanting the same freedom that Jefferson and Washington wanted, the freedom to be a nation and not a colony, not a slave, not an infected whore! Borinqueños have always fought. Eat that history. Do not be a piti-yanqui, do not accept the argument of the chains, if you want to be full, to be free!

CORTEZ: Los quince, you gave them an eden
of truth and they strangled you
with the snake of power.
Wake up, borinqueños, commit the sin of memory!

Sounds of a door being broken down and general panic, shouts and commands, etc. The lights strobe, and CORTEZ moves down center. Lights change, and she argues with her family.

CORTEZ: I will not go, Mamá. I don't care -- let the fucking F.B.I. take me, I am not going to go live to New York. You live like a pampered slave, and you're worried about my language?!

CORTEZ reacts as if she's been slapped.

CORTEZ: Yes, Papá, I am sorry, I should not have spoken -- No, Papa, I can't tell you that. I can't tell you who I know! I won't tell you that! Yes, Pablo, dearest brother, you're perfectly correct, as usual -- it is not right to put my family in danger. I know that! But I'm fighting for -- Your investments? Is that what you said: your investments? I know about your investments -- in the companies that butcher -- Enough: I don't want to waste the breath. You're just like Mama: a slave. What? What?

CORTEZ reacts physically as if someone tries to subdue her.

CORTEZ: Stop -- Leave -- Get your --

CORTEZ is forced to her knees.

CORTEZ: You're no better than the pigs -- You do not know what my own good is!

All lights fade except for a light on CORTEZ.

CORTEZ: Ahora, Nuyorican. On the island of the enemy. Mi familia perdida, I will turn into the lost soul you think I am.

"Tamara's voice" comes up and all other lights bump out except "Tamara's light." CORTEZ goes to it and caresses it as before. As she does so, there is a blinding flash of light and a bump to black. The flash should be strong enough to blind the audience for a few seconds. "Tamara's voice" continues, then out. Lights up to regular.

CORTEZ: And that's how I came to live in the dead country.

MARGARET: The dead country.

CORTEZ: Since then, so much blood has just -- evaporated.

MARGARET: What do you mean?

CORTEZ: Enough.

They look at each other while the lights go to black. Transition music.

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ACT II, Scene 5: The Third Degree

Lights full up; music out. MARGARET takes a book from CORTEZ's bookshelf and lays on the bed reading. The GUARD enters with CORTEZ, who is carrying a math book. The doors open and close. The GUARD leaves. As soon as she does, CORTEZ throws her math textbook onto the table. She is very agitated, coiled.

CORTEZ: X, x, x, x, x, x, x. Math -- sucks. The numbers just jump around --

MARGARET: Ah, algebra.

CORTEZ: Like a goddamn knife stuck in my eye --

MARGARET: Some women find math hard, Cortez --

CORTEZ: I can't. Not now. I am never going to use this --

MARGARET: That's not the point. Just get through it.

CORTEZ: *(mimicking MARGARET)* Just get through it.

MARGARET: (*laughing*) Don't make fun of me! Finish this, and you're done. Done. Major milestone. Vera Cortez, B.A. More than I've done.

CORTEZ: "B," bullshit, "A" artist.

MARGARET: What's bothering you?

CORTEZ: Don't, all right?

MARGARET: All right, all right. Granted.

CORTEZ flips through the book, exasperated. MARGARET continues to read, half an eye on CORTEZ. Finally, CORTEZ slams the book shut.

CORTEZ: I can't get it to stick!

MARGARET: Let it rest --

CORTEZ: You don't underst -- I have got to make it stick.

MARGARET: It'll stick, it'll stay -- if you relax, it'll come --

CORTEZ begins to pace.

CORTEZ: You --

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: Forget it.

MARGARET: You're pacing. Chill.

CORTEZ: Are you any good at it?

MARGARET: (*bad DeNiro*) You talkin' to me?

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: Are you talkin' to me? Sorry.

CORTEZ: What the fuck was that --

MARGARET: Sorry. Joke, small -- very small.

CORTEZ: Well?

MARGARET: I used to make my way through math.

CORTEZ: Yeah?

MARGARET: Yeah.

CORTEZ: Well?

MARGARET: Oh, I don't know, Vera -- they keep me pretty busy here.

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: I have to finish the sayings --

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: -- of Che Guevara here, and then --

CORTEZ: Fuck you.

CORTEZ grabs the book and throws it in the direction of the bookcase.

MARGARET: Wait --

CORTEZ: Fuck everyone like you.

MARGARET: -- I was just kidding --

CORTEZ: Fuck you all.

MARGARET: So says the all-powerful Cortez --

CORTEZ: Fuck you. Forget it.

MARGARET: Just kidding! Bad timing! Of course I'll help you. Give me the book.

MARGARET goes to get the book. CORTEZ grabs her by the throat and backs her across the cell. MARGARET grabs her wrist.

CORTEZ: I don't need some bullshit irony --

MARGARET: You're hurting m --

CORTEZ: -- from an Anglo kid-fucker bitch --

MARGARET: You're hurting me --

CORTEZ: Get away from me! You're useless!

CORTEZ lets her go.

MARGARET: But I get to leave.

CORTEZ grabs her throat again. MARGARET knocks away the hand and pushes CORTEZ, hard. It catches CORTEZ unaware.

MARGARET: I've eaten enough of your sanctimonious crap --

MARGARET doesn't finish the sentence because CORTEZ is right back in her face.

CORTEZ: You're a fucking pervert.

MARGARET: And you're an idiot.

The GUARD walks in and surveys the scene. They pause until she leaves.

CORTEZ: You don't who you're in with.

CORTEZ starts to walk away.

CORTEZ: So back off.

MARGARET pushes CORTEZ, not hard, just enough to make CORTEZ stumble.

MARGARET: I'm in for a dollar.

CORTEZ: In for a doll -- Ditz rolls the dice --

MARGARET: In for a dollar?

MARGARET stands there defiant. CORTEZ looks around to see if the GUARD will come back, then retreats with a dismissive gesture.

CORTEZ: You are not worth it.

MARGARET: So -- why?

CORTEZ: Go read.

MARGARET: I asked you why!

CORTEZ: Your neck?

MARGARET: So why?

CORTEZ: Your neck?

MARGARET: Fine. So why?

CORTEZ: The numbers, I told you -- they jump --

MARGARET: You crack my throat because --

CORTEZ: I can't nail them down.

MARGARET: So nail me instead?

CORTEZ: You don't know --

MARGARET: How do you know what I know?

CORTEZ: It makes me crazy.

MARGARET: It makes you mean.

CORTEZ: It makes me forget.

MARGARET: It makes you a human being.

CORTEZ: I don't need -- not this time of year -- I don't need -- not from you, not from anyone -- I don't need people, don't need anything telling me "no" --

MARGARET: I wasn't telling you no --

CORTEZ: Yes, you were --

MARGARET: Why this time of year --

CORTEZ: Look, I'm sor --

MARGARET: Why this time --

CORTEZ: I'm s --

MARGARET: Why --

CORTEZ: That -- all that -- from way back --

MARGARET: Back --

CORTEZ: From the dead country.

MARGARET: I want to help you --

CORTEZ: Put the book down.

MARGARET: No -- I'll hold it.

CORTEZ: I don't want the help. Give me the book -- what are you doing?

MARGARET: Nothing.

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: Way back.

CORTEZ: Give me the book.

MARGARET: Dead country.

CORTEZ: Don't want to go there.

MARGARET: Do you really want to show some sorry?

CORTEZ: I never said the word.

MARGARET: Tell me --

CORTEZ: I never say the word.

MARGARET: Tell me what keeps you waking me up at night. You owe me that.

CORTEZ circles around her. MARGARET does not move. CORTEZ grabs her head and moves it around.

CORTEZ: Owe you? Owe you? All right, americanita. Be still. Here is what you are owed. This is part of the dead country. And that's a barrio in the dead country. And that's the liquor store in the dead country that sells the poisons! That's the vacant lot where the jefes of the city knocked a building down and put nothing back. That's the elevated commuter train that slices the throat of the barrio. This is the shitty schools where they fuck away your chances.

CORTEZ grabs the book.

CORTEZ: Owe you? Owe you?

CORTEZ throws the book on the table. MARGARET gets it. CORTEZ sits on MARGARET's bed.

CORTEZ: This is mine.

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: This is mine.

MARGARET goes to sit on CORTEZ's bed.

MARGARET: Then I'll take --

CORTEZ moves to her own bed.

CORTEZ: No you don't. Mine, too.

CORTEZ hops back and forth between the beds.

CORTEZ: My space. All mine. You get none.

MARGARET: Don't get stupid --

CORTEZ: Don't feel privileged.

MARGARET: Privi --

CORTEZ: This is about a special kind of math. What adds up.

MARGARET: Fine, I'll just sit on --

MARGARET walks toward the table. CORTEZ runs to the table.

CORTEZ: Nuh-uh. Mine.

MARGARET: Then I'll just walk --

CORTEZ: Jamás. The real estate is mine. Everything. Footlockers, too.

CORTEZ goes to MARGARET's footlocker and starts piling things on the bed: Walkman with double headset, books, pictures, etc.

MARGARET: Hey --

CORTEZ: Eminent domain. Back off. You own nothing that ain't mine. I want it, I take it -- call it Puerto Rico.

MARGARET: Don't give me that --

CORTEZ: I told you. It's about subtraction. Division. Oooh, a picture of Alex --

MARGARET: Put that --

CORTEZ: Nope.

CORTEZ puts the picture in her pocket.

CORTEZ: He's mine. All mine. Now what are you going to do, little island?

MARGARET: This is not about --

CORTEZ: You don't get to say what this is about. I have told you you can't say anything, so you can't say anything.

MARGARET: I'm not entirely brainless about this.

CORTEZ: You are, though, for the moment, dispossessed. I like that. You like that? Understand, you're the fucking enemy -- get it? -- you're the dead country I don't want to go back to.

MARGARET: I know about these things.

CORTEZ: You do? From your long personal history of being oppressed?

MARGARET: Huh. Have you ever carried pipe with fat-assed thugs who hate your guts just because you ain't got a prick and who would just as soon chuck you off the scaffolding as drink their coffee? You're so goddam selfish!

CORTEZ begins to run her hands over MARGARET.

CORTEZ: Well, pana! The borders have now dropped between us! We can make the revolution happen! You have had the boot against your face!

MARGARET: Stop that!

CORTEZ grabs the waistband of MARGARET's pants and pulls her toward her.

CORTEZ: I feel so drawn to you now!

MARGARET: Stop --

CORTEZ turns her and grabs her from behind.

CORTEZ: Wanna begin the revolution with a taste of Latina?

MARGARET: Let me go! You fucking witch!

MARGARET tries to wrestle free, and as she does so she swings her elbows around, one of which catches CORTEZ hard in the temple/cheek/bridge of the nose. CORTEZ falls to her knees. For a moment MARGARET raises the book over her head to hit CORTEZ deliberately, then doesn't. CORTEZ sees the hesitation.

MARGARET: Cortez? Cortez? Cortez? Cortez?

CORTEZ: You taking roll call?

MARGARET: Cortez, I've never done that to anyone.

CORTEZ: It took two cops, didn't it?

MARGARET: Sorry.

CORTEZ: Should have remembered that.

MARGARET: Here --

CORTEZ: Hands to yourself. Man, that hurts! Don't! Don't! I'll survive. Get your dollar's worth?

Several beats.

MARGARET: Okay if I sit down, oh queen of the night? What just happened?

Beat.

MARGARET: I think this is one you do owe me.

CORTEZ: Irony.

MARGARET: Irony?

CORTEZ: You know that irony act you were doing -- "oh, I'm so busy" --

MARGARET: Meant to be funny.

CORTEZ: Thumb down, squish -- that's what you were doing.

MARGARET: Meant to help you relax --

CORTEZ: No, you didn't! No, you didn't! You have the hardest time telling the truth. You were digging on Vera Cortez looking weak -- looking weak, I might add. You acted like you were joking, but you forgot the context. You took respect from me, and you didn't even know it. I asked you and you refused. And then tell me I owe you? You weren't listening.

MARGARET: And the context here is -- ?

CORTEZ: Never thought algebra'd be so hard on the body.

MARGARET: You didn't answer my question.

CORTEZ: How much you want from me? Do the work yourself.

MARGARET hands CORTEZ the book.

MARGARET: I will give you a hand.

CORTEZ: Maybe later.

MARGARET: Later, then.

CORTEZ: Why didn't you?

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: You had the book -- up -- ready -- Could see you were ready --

MARGARET: Lion and the antelope, huh?

CORTEZ: So?

MARGARET: I'm not a lion. I don't do lion.

Beat.

CORTEZ: That is a good thing to know.

Beat. CORTEZ hands MARGARET the book and lays on her bed.

CORTEZ: The word is bruja.

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: Witch. Bruja. Use it next time.

MARGARET: Next time. Gotcha. Okay if I take up space here --

CORTEZ: Enough.

CORTEZ reaches behind her and gets the picture of ALEX. She hands the picture of ALEX back to MARGARET. MARGARET puts the book on the table and begins putting things back into her footlocker.

CORTEZ: Bruja is also a plant in Puerto Rico. Each leaf has its own seeds, so you can take a cutting and plant it anywhere and it will grow. It's a tough plant. Like us.

MARGARET: So do this, then, bruja: $x^2 + 5x + 6$. Factor it.

From her bed, CORTEZ raises her arms and, using sign language, says "x plus 2 times x plus 3."

MARGARET: X plus two times x plus three. Pass "Go." There is hope for you yet.

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ACT II, Scene 6

Lights go to black; MARGARET leaves. Good salsa music comes up in the darkness, then a lighted area center stage. CORTEZ gets up and gets a Walkman from her footlocker. She pops in a tape, clips the Walkman to her waistband and, moving into the lighted area, begins to dance to the salsa, for fifteen seconds or so. The music CORTEZ hears is what the audience hears. The GUARD escorts MARGARET back; the sound of the door opening and closing can't be heard by CORTEZ, who is dancing intently. There is a small exchange between MARGARET and the GUARD, then the GUARD leaves.

CORTEZ notices MARGARET but doesn't stop dancing. Instead, she moves to MARGARET and begins showing her the steps; MARGARET does her best to follow, eventually sort of getting it. MARGARET then indicates for CORTEZ to wait a second, and MARGARET goes to her footlocker. She takes out a double headset. She exchanges CORTEZ's headset for hers; now they can both hear the music. MARGARET listens for a moment and, following CORTEZ's steps again, begins to move to the beat. For a few moments they dance salsa together, awkwardly but with determination and amusement.

Then MARGARET stops the tape, takes off her headset, hands it to CORTEZ, goes to her footlocker, and gets a tape. She pops out CORTEZ's tape and puts in hers: 1930s/1940s swing music. She puts on the headset and then starts dancing a few steps of the Lindy. CORTEZ looks at her, puzzled. MARGARET encourages CORTEZ to do the steps. CORTEZ does, and then MARGARET partners her as well until they do the Lindy together. The music should be Glenn Miller-ish. MARGARET, on a whim, spins CORTEZ out and back.

Then CORTEZ stops the tape, takes off the Walkman and puts it in her footlocker, and without any apparatus between them, CORTEZ begins to dance a combination of salsa and Lindy, combining rhythms. MARGARET picks up on it, and for a moment they dance a hybrid dance, in silence until lights fade to black. Then transition music/sound to cover scene change. CORTEZ and MARGARET get into their beds.

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ACT II, Scene 7: The Final Border Crossing

"Tamara's voice" as the two women move to their beds, then "Tamara's light." CORTEZ moves to it, but just as she reaches out to it, it disappears, and CORTEZ falls to her knees, face buried in her hands. Lights come up to "night light." She doesn't know that MARGARET is awake and watching. MARGARET sits up on the edge of her bed.

CORTEZ: Tamara -- Tamara -- Tamara --

MARGARET: Hey --

No response.

MARGARET: Cortez? Vera?

CORTEZ: I'm fine.

MARGARET: Want to talk?

CORTEZ gets up and, obviously making a decision, puts her face right into MARGARET's, as if she were reading it. MARGARET does not pull back.

CORTEZ: What do you care?

MARGARET: You're on fire.

CORTEZ: What do you care? You are free tomorrow -- go back to sleep.

MARGARET: House rules are changed.

CORTEZ: Are you ready, then?

MARGARET nods.

CORTEZ: If you're ready, I give you permission -- to ask the final question.

MARGARET: Why are you here?

Beat.

CORTEZ: I am here -- you find me here -- because I helped kill my daughter. Spring is the cruelest time for me because Tamara -- my Tamara, my lost daughter -- would be fourteen this month. Time for a border-crossing.

The following must be delivered with little sentimentality and to MARGARET. CORTEZ is free to move as she needs to and use props as she wants to. It should not be staged in a separate light nor as if time were suspended.

CORTEZ: I had a family. In the dead country. I had three children -- now there are only two. I cannot say "I have" any more. He beat them. My daughter and son -- Tamara and Michael -- Tamara three and Michael just a year old. They weren't his. I had had them with two other men -- my rebellion in exile on the island of strangers. Of course, my family rejected them completely -- not their blood -- so I went with him because he said he would take me in. My savior -- but really my conquistador. History repeating itself through this --

CORTEZ indicates her body.

CORTEZ: To show you how the fear had turned my mind to ice -- I even had a child with this man -- Jawanza -- calculating changes, hoping for softness, figuring he wouldn't beat one of his own. But I had just given him fresh meat. He had this "thing" about Tamara -- it seemed to inspire him for pain. One night, drugged, he started belting her. "Thirty nine lashes" he kept yelling. Locked in the bedroom with Jawanza and Michael, both of them trying to crawl inside my ribs, I -- couldn't -- move. Then it stopped. He dragged a chair. Tamara screamed -- screamed once, just once -- then quiet. Waited. Waited. Then opened the door -- and I wanted to tear my eyes out. He'd tied Tamara to his chin-up bar -- her arms slung over it so she hung from her armpits -- just like a little Christ rag-doll. I remember my eyes -- straight to her right hand -- I watched a drop of blood bead up and then fall. Then another. Then one more. By the fourth one I'd cut her down. El Señor Muerte had passed out on the table, hissing like a dragon. And what did I do? I took her into the bathroom and washed her off and put her to bed -- such a good mama! The dragon hissed. I waited. The next day, I went to wake them for day care -- I had a job. No breath. I held this hand just over her mouth, as I did sometimes at night, to feel their breath. Nothing. I screamed, just once, like Tamara. The dragon came. "You're gonna help me," it said -- and I obeyed. And here's what we did. We dropped Jawanza and Michael off at day care, like the good parents we were, then we dumped her body in the rough grass by the side of the highway. I watched everything from the side view mirror, numb as stone. Then we found a police officer and told her that Tamara had disappeared -- maybe even kidnapped! Two days later, they found her, and he started

playing the kidnap for all his worthless self was worth. But I knew they'd find the truth. And even if they didn't, how could my heart hold any peace? I had held my dead daughter in my arms, helped trash her body. Peace? What island could offer me that asylum? So while the dragon steamed in his sleep, I called the detective who'd given me her card, from the corner phone, one dime to my name. Dialed and hung up, dialed and hung up, and when I finally did connect, I was ready to cut it off in half a breath. She knew, she knew, because at one point, my mouth so thick with shame I couldn't speak, she said to me, "In for a dime, in for a dollar." I told her everything. I paid. She was kind. And when the police came, and the social workers took Michael and Jawanza for foster care, and they cauterized the dragon, and I could feel the cuffs embrace my wrists -- it was the first time in a long, long time I felt safe. I was finally back on an island: lines were drawn; the monster drowned; and I could begin my shame.

Silence.

CORTEZ: I took twenty-five on a plea bargain. He got sixty. Tamara would be fourteen this month.

CORTEZ lifts up her pillow and takes out a piece of colorful cloth.

CORTEZ: This is from her funeral dress.

She hands it to MARGARET.

CORTEZ: So -- in for the dollar. So. You have nothing to say? You always have something to say.

MARGARET: Um --

CORTEZ: What are you thinking?

MARGARET: I can't.

CORTEZ: What are you thinking?

MARGARET: I think we should go back to sleep.

CORTEZ: What are you thinking?

MARGARET: *(in a hiss)* You helped kill your child! You helped kill your own child. You killed your own child.

CORTEZ: Always the master of the obvious. The question now is, what are you going to do?

MARGARET shows the cloth.

MARGARET: I am not going to give this up. All that swill about protecting Alex -- that spew about oppression, about "lines" and "keeping people safe" -- Never safe with you -- she's safe with me.

CORTEZ: She's gone. She's the only safe one around here.

MARGARET: No.

MARGARET retreats to the other side of the cell. CORTEZ shrugs.

CORTEZ: You didn't think it was going to end this way, did you? Thought that whatever I'd done, we'd be in solidarity, de mujer a mujer, woman to woman. It's much more complicated than that, much more -- rich -- than that.

MARGARET: I don't understand.

CORTEZ: This is how we will go about it. That cloth -- keep it close. Listen.

"Tamara's voice" and "Tamara's light" appears.

CORTEZ: I'm called from my sleep, just when I may have slipped over the border into peace, or at least emptiness. Then sounds like lost voices draw me to this bright light -- which I guess is Tamara but with no body, just this knife-white light. I reach, but it slides -- here, then there -- but it never disappears. And then, always, there's a moment --

The light "stops" over MARGARET, bathing her.

CORTEZ: -- when it allows me to arrive. I shape my hand --

She puts her hand up to MARGARET's face but does not touch it.

CORTEZ: -- I circle it, un abrazo de mi niña perdida --

She circles her arms around MARGARET but does not touch her.

CORTEZ: -- and for one breath -- one breath -- I feel pardoned. She tells me I can now get rid of hope and shame: I don't need hope and shame. She offers me a truce. Una tregua.

The bright light and sounds bump out abruptly with the same blinding flash of light as earlier. The lights come back to "night light."

CORTEZ: And just when I think, finally!, she leaves -- and the truce -- dissolves. I wake up on the rough edge of the road, here, still breathing, still caring. And then the first bell rings. And then the day breaks open.

MARGARET: Why did you tell me?

CORTEZ: You see, I have a vision of life -- I do. All that political about borders and lines and power -- that has been my life. But it's not just Puerto Rico, "libre, libre," Lebrón, Lebrón, Lebrón -- that's just one step, that's just one step toward the border that heals us.

MARGARET: You killed your daughter.

CORTEZ: All I need -- to cross that last border -- is Tamara. But she will not guide me, be my coyote. And the reason for that? She tells me that reason every night.

MARGARET: She denies you -- good.

CORTEZ: That cloth under my ear says, "Mami, how you can come to this new day, where power isn't a hungry wolf and borders don't strangle you, if you cannot trust some one person enough to tell them this story?"

MARGARET: You've never told?

CORTEZ: Never the truth.

MARGARET: I don't believe that.

CORTEZ: Bits, junk, lies -- never "nothing but the."

MARGARET: Why not?

CORTEZ: Because those I've shaken awake in that bed would either try to one-up me in pain or shut me out. And I have come too far over this ocean to let anyone or anything deny me.

MARGARET: I was different?

CORTEZ: Do you remember me doing this?

CORTEZ goes right up to MARGARET's face and peers into it.

CORTEZ: Don't bend -- stay with me. You've gone this far. Keep looking. Tell me what I saw in you that permitted all this. This is your final test.

MARGARET: Final test?

CORTEZ: Tell me.

All said while keeping eyes connected.

MARGARET: You saw I would take Tamara's side.

CORTEZ: Defend the oppressed.

MARGARET: I would give you no shadows for hiding.

CORTEZ: Like Tamara's light in my dreamwalk.

MARGARET: And you saw I would not feel sorry for you.

CORTEZ: You would bring me an eye bitter and acid. To see myself whole.

CORTEZ breaks off the eye contact.

CORTEZ: I knew I could count on you to be my coyote.

MARGARET: I'm not sure I could forgive you --

CORTEZ: Forgiveness not required of the sin-eater.

MARGARET: The sin-eater?

CORTEZ: You. You. What you've been tested for. Sin. Eater.

MARGARET: Sin. Eater.

CORTEZ: Yes.

MARGARET: Tested?

CORTEZ: Yes.

MARGARET: Tested? The humiliations --

CORTEZ: I had to see if you would do.

MARGARET: Fattened up.

CORTEZ: From the day I started reading about you, I wondered -- You were no common mother.

MARGARET: What do you feel right now?

CORTEZ: Like a lick of sugar after biting the chile. A soft peace.

MARGARET: I don't.

CORTEZ: You're not supposed to.

MARGARET: I get to carry these -- images -- this sin --

CORTEZ: You're doing what it is in your nature to do --

MARGARET: It's not enough.

CORTEZ: Qué?

MARGARET: Not enough for you to tell just me. She's not some discard. She is your daughter.

CORTEZ: Was.

MARGARET: Is. Is! You think the slate's clean just because you confess to me? a stranger? If you don't keep faith with your child every day --

CORTEZ: Can you hurry this judgment along?

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: Chulita, this is all past judgment, past "paying my debt." I've paid. In full. It's on to the next now: life with Tamara after Tamara. Or, in another word -- oh, you ain't gonna like this! -- redemption.

MARGARET: Redemption.

CORTEZ: Yes, that -- ache.

MARGARET: You?

CORTEZ: Not the dead Tamara, the sin you squeeze so precious, that cloth you grab. That's why I gave it to you. It's yours! Dance with the dead all you want! The Tamara who redeems me will come when we all change the lines that turn us into our lowest devils. Women on every building site, huh? you can understand that -- all colors, all shapes! That's Tamara. Children born to parents who want them, with shelter, food, dignity. That's Tamara. No more tribes about language or pigment or power or violence. No more Puerto Rico -- blinded by wanting a nation -- what's a nation except another way to keep the outsiders outside? -- no, no more of any of that, but citizen of a better world! All that in the word "Tamara." I give you the old so I can raise my new daughter.

MARGARET: You are a piece of work -- grace! Aaah! I feel like I have knives in my eyes, this picture of you --

CORTEZ: It will take time.

MARGARET: All this new world mouth music makes me sick to my stomach. You make me sick to my stomach.

MARGARET lays on her bed.

MARGARET: I'm tired. You have drained me for a month.

CORTEZ: It will take time.

CORTEZ stands, alone, then moves down center. "Tamara's light" comes up, and CORTEZ stands just outside of it, lit by its spill, not directly. Voices/music come up. The rest of the stage goes to black. CORTEZ touches or embraces the light, and it does not disappear or explode.

CORTEZ: What will turn the wasteland back?

Only redemption breathed in the syllables of "Tamara."

Only in that light of grace will my life cast
the full shadow of its truth.

The light fades as CORTEZ tightens her embrace, as if she were squeezing the light into herself. MARGARET exits.

* * * * *

ACT II, Scene 8

Rise in the background sounds of a crowd: poetry slam night at the prison. CORTEZ puts on a bandana. She is talking to the crowd before she recites her poem.

CORTEZ: As the Slam-master here, I get the privilege of giving you guys the last word. And that last word is this: Tamara. Tamara -- a word that means "land of all of us." La guagua aérea of my soul brought me to Tamara, the place of peace, borders lifted. For you, compañeros del alma.

She recites, using whatever gestures, intonations, etc. work best..

Tamara

Link:

the transnation of the airplane, la guagua aérea,
carries me from the montañas of the jibaro
to the capital of the empire, Nueva York, city of Harlem bantustans,
Gringolandia perforated by sub-dermal pop-rockero "rock-ER-oh" frequencies,
where the world's oldest colony is a suburb of Brooklyn,
and San Manhattan Juan is a jazz riff of diaspora,
and our unwanted emperors hold their death grips.

Bam!

The plane touches down.

Bam!

We have jumped the pond.

Bam!

Immediate Nuyorican.

Bam!

Instant Ame-Rícan,

Bam!

The new mestizo of the hyphen-nation.

Bam!

Born in the desires that fall between acá and allá.

In the plane we Puerto Ricans inhabit this smeared-edged borderland,
a frontera between the emptinesses of destin(y-n)ation,
we are the postmodern, we are Tamara,
the "land of all of us," pan-everything,
a transnational insurgency, a community in unity
without borders, not taking orders, we're the revolutionary recorders
with our eyes we give the lies to those that mythologize
about the American superior -- we see it growing wearier --
this hiss-story, and its soon-to-be-worn-out glory, is about to change:
Big Apple caribbeanized is the first to be amalgamized
into the new non-nation, our bodies the location
of this postmodern archipelago, each of us double-helix'd

by DNA of fax and phone and email and salsa picante
and the universal declaration of the human right to human rights
and that we will be divided and conquered, fucked and fucked-over,
extracted, redacted, burned, twisted, packaged, and forgotten
no more, no more, no more, nunca más.
We float confused, contradictory, ambiguous, ambivalent,
torqued, tidal, multi-tongued, lunar-mad --
But we are also large, we include multitudes,
and Tamara is a new world between acá and allá --
feel it in your nostrils, look for it under your feet,
hear the stars beat out ritmos de plena y bomba
in the very pulse of the universe,
all of us universal, all of us at home in the in-between.
Tamara.

There is the sound of applause, background talk, etc. CORTEZ puts the bandana away. All the lights fade to black; CORTEZ exits.

* * * * *

ACT II, Scene 9

Lights up. MARGARET and the GUARD enter carrying a photographer's portable frame for hanging a backdrop, which will be set up in front of the "cell." They exit, and the GUARD returns carrying a chair, making three, a plain canvas backdrop folded (which she drops on one of the chairs), and a cosmetic case, which she puts on the table, opens, and checks. MARGARET follows quickly, bringing in a camera case, a tripod, and a briefcase.

MARGARET: (to the GUARD) Thanks. I can take it from here.

The GUARD exits. MARGARET brings over two chairs and starts to hang the backdrop; as she does, CORTEZ enters with the GUARD. The GUARD leaves. As MARGARET speaks, she prepares for the shoot: puts lens on camera, sets up tripod, etc.

CORTEZ: Well.

MARGARET: Hello.

CORTEZ: Hola.

MARGARET: You got my letter.

CORTEZ: Obviously.

MARGARET: So what do you think?

CORTEZ: A photography project.

MARGARET: Yes.

CORTEZ: Isn't that what nailed you last time?

MARGARET: And look what that got me. As I said in the letter -- I received --

CORTEZ: For photographing women in prison.

MARGARET: Yes. Abused women, women who have killed their children --

CORTEZ: Why?

MARGARET: I say a lot of things when people ask me that. And I really do believe what I say. About making my photography useful, after trying to make Alex into something he wasn't. You pointed that out to me. But that's all second. You know why I'm here.

CORTEZ: I don't have to do this.

MARGARET: I didn't see you dragged in here. Leave. But you know why.

CORTEZ does not move. Beat.

CORTEZ: I'll hang -- for a moment.

MARGARET: I didn't put this into the letter because it was too late -- I've already arranged to have a gallery show the pictures. Part of a benefit for battered women. Auctioned off to raise money.

CORTEZ: Really.

MARGARET: Book and website to follow.

CORTEZ: Your cut?

MARGARET: Everything out of pocket.

CORTEZ: And the goodness of your heart.

MARGARET: Actually, Señora Cortez, dead wrong: I'm doing all this out of the coldness of your heart.

CORTEZ: You should be careful with your words.

MARGARET: As careful with you as you were with me.

CORTEZ: Revenge?

MARGARET: Don't flatter yourself.

CORTEZ: You're not making any money at it.

MARGARET: So it isn't greed. Or ambition. Or lust, sloth, gluttony, envy --

MARGARET points to CORTEZ.

MARGARET: -- what's to envy? C'mon, Vera -- you know: only one left.

CORTEZ does not respond.

MARGARET: All right, then, Vera -- straight and simple anger. At you. For being a coward.

Beat to wait for a reaction; CORTEZ gives none. By this time MARGARET has finished her set-up. She has set two chairs in front of the backdrop.

MARGARET: I was not going to let you get away with it.

MARGARET hands CORTEZ the piece of cloth.

CORTEZ: I think I will leave.

MARGARET: Sit. Please. Por favor.

CORTEZ: We're finished.

MARGARET: I called you a coward. I named you. Where's your dollar?

MARGARET taps her breastbone.

MARGARET: Right here -- It sticks. I can't get it past. This whole little star called Tamara hangs right here and explodes, every day. I try to catch the pieces and smash them back together and I can't do it! I am filled with sadness and defeat.

CORTEZ: The human condition.

MARGARET: So. I'm not going to do it alone. This "it." You are going to help me.

CORTEZ: No, I'm not. I'm done. Use somebody else.

CORTEZ moves to get the GUARD.

MARGARET: "Poema al hijo que no llega." [Julia de Burgos, Songs of Simple Truth, pp. 490-491]

CORTEZ: What?

MARGARET: "Poema al hijo que no llega."

CORTEZ: Speaking Spanish now? Not well --

MARGARET: I learned something. For you.

CORTEZ: Because?

MARGARET: Ammunition.

CORTEZ: So you have come as the warrior.

MARGARET: "Poem to the Child Who Doesn't Arrive." Julia de Burgos.

CORTEZ: You remembered.

MARGARET: She came to me in a dream and fed it to me.

CORTEZ: In a dream.

MARGARET: Why not? Things came to you in dreams all the time. "No se cuándo ni dónde / pero se que vendrás."

CORTEZ: "I don't know where or when --

MARGARET: "-- but I know you will arrive. / Child of mine, bathed by sublime tenderness / I have dreamt you a thousand times, / but where can you be? / Why don't you rebel and burst into the world...?" Listen to me! "You will arrive at my arms on a solemn day / when everything at my side will dress in light. / There will be light in the shadows..." That's why I'm back here: It's up to me to bring the light in the shadows so that she is not abandoned. And not alone. You are going to help me finish eating this sin.

CORTEZ: How?

MARGARET: By being the first voice out of the shadows. By being Tamara's voice.

CORTEZ: Giving communion now.

MARGARET: Very simple equation, Vera: you killed your daughter with silence. Like I said, a coward. And a fool, too, expecting some droopy-assed middle-aged white chick sin-eater to shift the universe for you. Sloppy, sloppy, sloppy. This is what I bring -- this "eye" -- but the shadows need your voice from underneath -- You don't do this, you kill off Tamara, old and new, for good. But if you speak out -- do now what you should have done then -- then maybe no more Tamaras get fed to the dragons. That's my new world. That's the real redemption. See, I remembered the word.

CORTEZ moves around the room, in thought.

CORTEZ: You want a truce.

MARGARET: I want coöperation.

CORTEZ: You want more than that.

MARGARET: I would love to make you pay -- but I did learn something from you, after all, about keeping our eyes bigger, our hearts large -- that's what brought me back -- to you.

CORTEZ: Back to me.

MARGARET: So we could work together.

CORTEZ: So, a truce, then --

MARGARET: A truce is for combat.

CORTEZ: You brought the ammunition.

MARGARET: True, but --

CORTEZ: If I agree, I come opposing everything you think and feel is right. So it will be a truce.

MARGARET: Are we that divided?

CORTEZ: Your -- sentimentality, your kind of righteousness -- so sweet, so weak --

MARGARET: If it doesn't come from the heart --

CORTEZ: Don't think Tamara's death doesn't puncture my heart every day.

MARGARET: I sometimes think your heart's a stone --

CORTEZ: My heart is atoned -- you don't understand that.

MARGARET: No, I don't.

CORTEZ: I didn't give you Tamara -- she will never leave me. You never had her. What's in this --

CORTEZ shows the cloth.

CORTEZ: -- is that endless loop of breast-beating you seem to find so inspiring. I'm done with the smell of burned skin. Time for me to prepare for my release.

MARGARET: So you're not big enough to face --

CORTEZ: Stop it! Stop it. I wish you could see your face right now -- not the good, strong, open, scared-into-life face that was here a year ago, that was my coyote, that helped me cross the border. No, now it's a judge's face. Here's another Julia for you:

"But I was made of nows,"

"Nows!" Hear that, Margaret -- dragging no more corpses around!

"But I was made of nows, / and my feet level...would not accept walking backwards,"

Hear that -- not backwards!

"and I went forward, forward, / mocking the ashes to reach the kiss / of the new paths."
[Julia de Burgos, Song Of The Simple Truth, "I Was My Own Route," #20 (pp. 56-57)]

CORTEZ, standing near MARGARET, kisses her.

CORTEZ: New paths, querida -- that's where Tamara and I are going. Do you want to come?

MARGARET, to her surprise, seems pacified by the kiss.

MARGARET: I don't want Tamara repeated -- new paths, too. And I'm going to tell the story.

CORTEZ: You go, girl! I just don't think the liberal guilt thing is the way to do it. All of us here own our own shame -- fully vested. No one here needs to be wept over. But if you're set on that, then you need some balance, some frame for your picture -- a bite of the chile with the sugar.

MARGARET: What?

CORTEZ: The gallery, the benefit -- too clean. Arrange to put these pictures in the dead country, too -- here at the prison, in a church, a bodega, a school, Christ, even just hang them on a fence -- anywhere but just a gallery. And you have to get the do-gooders to go there.

MARGARET: I'm listening.

CORTEZ: You need a context. You need charts of ownership and income and health and education. If you want no more Tamaras in the morgue, they need to know how much of the dead country they own -- they have to own up. They need to cross the borders, not just feel oh so lagrimoso and sensitized. Those are my terms. And if you don't accept them, I'll make sure no one sits for you. That's my ammunition.

MARGARET: Deal.

CORTEZ: Bueno.

MARGARET: So do we have our truce?

CORTEZ: That's up to your anger.

MARGARET: My anger -- to one side. Partnership, then, for the moment.

CORTEZ: Peace along the fronteras.

MARGARET: We'll call the truce Alex and Tamara.

CORTEZ: Tamara and Alex.

MARGARET: Tamara and Alex, then. The name of the truce. Anything else?

CORTEZ: Ask me formally if I want to do this. You've asked everyone else -- now ask me.

MARGARET: Vera Cortez, would you like to participate in this project -- in the name of Tamara?

CORTEZ: In the name of Tamara, yes. Now what?

MARGARET: Sit down.

CORTEZ: You're going to take the pictures now?

MARGARET: Nothing formal. I'll come back out later for the set-up shots. Now it's just to get people used to the camera.

CORTEZ: I don't even know what I look like. According to you, I have devil's horns.

MARGARET: The only horns you have is because you haven't seen a man in a long time.

CORTEZ: For a white piece, you do have a mouth.

MARGARET: Here's a mirror.

CORTEZ: A mirror.

CORTEZ looks at herself tentatively.

CORTEZ: A brush?

MARGARET hands CORTEZ a brush. MARGARET brings over a small box with some simple cosmetic items in it. CORTEZ brushes her hair.

CORTEZ: It's been so long.

CORTEZ hands back the brush and mirror.

CORTEZ: No make-up. Just my game face. What now?

As she speaks, MARGARET goes to the camera, fusses with it, etc.

MARGARET: Get comfortable. Just look at the camera and pretend there's no one behind it.

CORTEZ: There isn't.

MARGARET: For a brown piece, you do have a mouth. We have lots of time. Now, try a smile out on me.

As MARGARET prepares to take a picture, CORTEZ moves toward her.

MARGARET: What are you doing?

CORTEZ: This have a timer on it?

MARGARET: You can even set the number of pictures you want.

CORTEZ: Three. Focus?

MARGARET: Press here to set it. When you're ready, press this button. Five seconds to get there, three seconds between pictures. And it beeps to warn you.

CORTEZ: All right. Sit down.

MARGARET sits down.

CORTEZ: They take pictures, don't they, after a truce gets signed, to burn it into memory? Here is our official record.

MARGARET: Heart and history.

CORTEZ: Tamara and Alex.

CORTEZ focuses the camera on MARGARET, then presses the button. CORTEZ sits beside MARGARET. They can fill the intervening seconds with whatever feels appropriate. But the camera beeps, and they face it in their first pose.

As the lights fade to complete black, there will be three successive pictures, and the lights should burst and then fade slowly, three to four seconds. The fade-out on the last picture should go five to six seconds.

BLACKOUT