

Pictures at an Exhibition

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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.

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 Metheny 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

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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

(ignoring the comment)

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

(checking her notes)

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)

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 shittraking. Just what we need.

REPORTER 3

Nature of the biz, sister. Muck may suck --

REPORTER 1 & REPORTER 3

-- but it sells.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 4

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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 5

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 ands 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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 6

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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 7

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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 8

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 9

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 10

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)
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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 11

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

VOICES 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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 12

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 --

(to JOHN)

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.
(picks up the picture)
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

(tapping his watch)

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 smoothes the paper.

MARGARET

It's the only thing would take me aw --

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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 13

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.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 14

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?

(sees MARGARET)

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, Borinquena 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.

* * * * *

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.

(opens book)

"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)

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 bruja 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.

* * * * *

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 "thank you")
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

(putting her cards down)

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!"

* * * * *

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!

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.

* * * * *

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.

(grabs the book)

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 alks toward the table.

CORTEZ

(runs to the table)

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. Ooh, 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
(feeling her head)
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.

* * * * *

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.

* * * * *

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 --

(indicating her body)

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

(showing the cloth)

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 preciously, 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 jíbaro 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 --

(pointing to CORTEZ)
-- 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?

Beat.

MARGARET
(taps her breastbone)
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 --

(showing the cloth)

-- 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

(brushing her hair)

It's been so long.

(hands back the brush and mirror)

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