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La Gringa

ENGLISH VERSION

by **Carmen Rivera**



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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REPERTORIO ESPAÑOL



Gilberto Zaldívar
Productor

René Buch
Director Artístico

Robert Weber Federico
Productor Asociado Artístico

Ganador del Premio de las Artes del Gobernador de Nueva York

presenta
La Gringa

de Carmen Rivera

Elenco (Por orden de aparición)

Manolo.....	RICARDO BARBER
Norma.....	ANA MARGARITA MARTÍNEZ-CASADO
Iris.....	MARILYN SERI
María.....	ANA SOLER
Víctor.....	RENÉ SANCHEZ
Monchi.....	BRUNO IRIZARRY

Producción diseñada por
Robert Weber Federico

Asistente del director
Bruno Irizarry

Música y efectos de sonido
**Rafael Moscoso y
Carlos Bernalés**

Traducción
**Carmen Rivera y
René Buch**

Dirección de
René Buch

El proyecto VOCES NUEVAS recibe apoyo económico de
The Jerome Foundation, Greenwall Foundation y AT&T.

Director técnico
Rigoberto Obando

Supervisora de vestuario
María Brites

Edición de sonido
Manuel Herrera

Asistente de producción
Adrian Gallard

REPERTORIO ESPAÑOL recibe el apoyo económico del
LILA WALLACE-READER'S DIGEST THEATRE FUND FOR NEW AUDIENCES y además es participante del
LILA WALLACE-READER'S DIGEST ARTS STABILIZATION INITIATIVE que es una actividad conjunta de
LILA WALLACE-READER'S DIGEST FUND,
THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK y
THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS STABILIZATION FUND.

El programa de Desarrollo de Jóvenes Artistas de Repertorio Español es posible gracias a la generosidad de
THE EDWARD & SALLY VAN LIER FUND y THE NEW YORK COMMUNITY TRUST.

CHARACTERS

MARÍA ELENA GARCÍA – 22 year-old Puerto Rican-American woman, born and raised in New York City. She's considered a "Nuyorican." María is young and naïve.

MANOLO COFRESÍ – Early 60s. Her uncle. Manolo had dreams of pursuing acting when he was young. Although he is very ill and near death, he possesses a lively spirit and a great sense of humor.

IRIS BURGOS – María's cousin. 24 years old. She is very extroverted and a bit jealous of her cousin María.

NORMA BURGOS – María's aunt; Iris' mother and Manolo's sister. Late 50s. She never pursued her dream of being a singer and lives with much bitterness and resentment in her spirit.

VÍCTOR BURGOS – Norma's husband. Early 60s. He possesses a great deal of positive energy and has a huge capacity for love.

RAMÓN "MONCHI" REYES – A neighbor. 24 years old. He has an entrepreneurial spirit – he started his own farm and falls in love with María.

PLACE

Las Piedras, Puerto Rico (The countryside)

TIME

The present, during the Christmas holidays

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

La Gringa had a long journey full of blessings, with many godmothers and godfathers.

La Gringa began as a one-act play entitled *The Universe*, produced by Shaman Repertory in 1990. It was my husband, playwright, Cándido Tirado, who felt very strongly that there was a much bigger story in *The Universe*. He dramaturged the early drafts and directed the readings of the play, as it made it way up the food chain of new play development.

Many thanks to the actors, who gave their time and their art to the early readings of *La Gringa*: Cecilia Arana, José Febus, Irma Estel de la Guerre, Félix Solís, Anthony Ruiz and Selenis Leyva.

Many thanks to Pedro Monge and the Ollantay writing workshop, which produced a reading series at Repertorio Español, including *La Gringa* and where the producers, Robert Federico and Gilberto Zaldivar, decided to pick up the play for production.

Many thanks to René Buch for believing in the play, for co-translating with me and for bringing such life to the story through his direction. On Feb. 9, 1996, *La Gringa*, opened at Repertorio Español, later that year it shared an OBIE with *El Cano*, written by Louis Delgado (rest in peace mi hermano) as part of the New Voices Series and remains in repertory to this day.

Many thanks to Dr. Gloria Waldman, and Dr. Clara Rodríguez, who frequently included *La Gringa* in their curriculum and brought hundreds of students to see the play throughout the years.

Many thanks to Lysna Marzani for bringing this play to Samuel French, Inc. and for your infinite patience.

Muchísimas gracias to Nancy Guevara for the Spanish lessons, to Nicole Betancourt for the Taino Symbols and to María Cristina Fusté for her sharp proofreader's eye.

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Mil, mil, mil gracias to my grandmother "Nana Elisa" who provided all the bombas and who, along with Cándido, shared with me their knowledge of harvesting food in Puerto Rico.

Carmen Rivera holds an MA in Playwriting and Latin American Theatre from New York University. She recently co-wrote, with Cándido Tirado, *Celia: The Life and Music of Celia Cruz*, (HOLA Award 2008, Outstanding Achievement in Playwriting), which played Off-Broadway for nine months at New World Stages. Other Off-Broadway productions include: *La Gringa* (currently in repertory at Repertorio Español – OBIE Award 1996); *La Lupe: My Life, My Destiny* (2002 ACE Award – Best Production), *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water, To Catch The Lightning* (1997 Nomination ACE Award – Best Production); *The Next Stop* (INTAR / Repertorio Español); *Under The Mango Tree* (INTAR).

Other works include: *Ghosts in Brooklyn*; *The Loves of our Lives*; *The Next Cycle*; *Betty's Garage*; *ameRICAN*; *Delia's Race*; *Plastic Flowers*; *The Power of Words*; and *Caravan of Death* which have appeared at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM); La Mama E.T.C; The Women's Project and Productions; SOHO Rep; New Georges; New Perspectives Theatre; Martice Enterprises; Nuyorican Poet's Café; Theatre for a New City; National Public Radio (NPR); City Lights Youth Theatre and in theatre festivals in New York, Chile, Russia, Puerto Rico, Colombia and Bolivia.

Founding Member of E.P.P. (Educational Play Productions), which brings plays that deal with social issues into the public schools.

Publications include: *La Gringa* (Samuel French); *Positive/Negative: women of color and HIV* (Aunt Lute); *One-Acts At The Women's Project*; *Women Who Write Theatre* (Smith and Kraus) and *Nuestro New York* (Penguin USA.).



Ode to the Diasporican
(pa' mi gente)

Mira a mi cara Puertorriqueña
A mi pelo vivo
A mis manos morenas
Mira a mi corazón que se llena de orgullo
Y dime que no soy Boricua

Some people say that I'm not the real thing
Boricua, that is
because I wasn't born on the enchanted island
because I was born in the mainland north of Spanish Harlem
because I was born in the Bronx
Some people think I'm not bonafide
because my playground was a concrete jungle
because my Río Grande de Loiza was the Bronx River
because my Fajardo was City Island
my Luquillo, Orchard Beach
and summer nights were filled with city noises
instead of coquis
and Puerto Rico was just some paradise
that we only saw in pictures

What does it mean to live in between
What does it take to realize
that being Boricua is
a state of mind
a state of heart
a state of soul

Mira a mi cara Puertorriqueña
A mi pelo vivo
A mis manos morenas
Mira a mi corazón que se llena de orgullo
Y dime que no soy Boricua

¡No nací en Puerto Rico.
Puerto Rico nació en mí!

By Mariposa, a.k.a. María Teresa Fernández

Apologia to the Last Cacique

Taino
Taino Taino
Thai Eeee Nooo!
No No No Taino No No
More Taino More No More Taino
More No Mas Tainas Tainas No Mas
Tainas No No No Taino No Grow No More
No Taino No No More Taino No No Flow Slow-
Ly through my Peninsulares veins.
Brains inhibited, inhabited w/ patricide genocide
To hide within non-self of multicultural redundancy.

Taino Dieee No more no how.
Nonexistent paradoxical hunger for the Antilles.
No thank you's to the Spain in me.
Phallic faults of Euro-Ego-Centrism monopoly of
Institution prostitution committed by the Moreau in me.
Justice of lustful hurricanes crashing on shore like timbales
Keep this quasi-suicide Swallowed by the Sea.

X-plain X-piate X-tract X-trapolate X-communicate
The me in me that leaves my blood seeping
European; Peon my Euro-family I-deology.
The chronology of psychology of the colonized
Downsized to an economy of self-loathing,
While I slip off this imperial clothing to hug the heart of a
Stolen Batey to pray... to pray... to Yocahu;
Not for me who was too young to see
The Merengue banned, planned to keep
Sugar cane pain and inane racial insecurity
Inside every port and valley that is and isn't me,

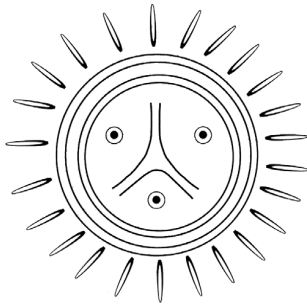
But for the me before me who came from the sea
Gun toting, misquoting Christianity.
Baptizing with barrels of canons.
Canons of thought taught me to hate me,
Simultaneously Cane and Abel,
Unstable, living in explicit duality.
To retal-I-ate this fate I deify the Rican in me,
Create Oedipal Borincano tragedy.
Armed with broken cemi subway token
I deliver my apology to the Last Cacique
As ritual to expel the Ponce De Leon in Me:

Forgive me for giving this apology in someone else's language.
Forgive me for having spilled my own blood.
Forgive me for shunning what neuro-astrological comical prophecy
Took extracurricular millenia to occur to me.
Forgive me for I am the sin and the sinner, the oppressor and the oppressed.
Obsessed, I am the forked path forged in the wrath of X-ploitation.
I am the boy without a nation, a victim of ethnic castration, racial fornication,
Forgive me for the me that never was never will be me.

Now I absolve me. I resolve me. I solve & I evolve me
Into the Post Neo Sorta Rican I been born to be.
With torch word and dream I carve me into an amulet
To let ancient future I survive without compromise,
Offering the charm as gratitude to the Last Cacique
Residing in the Eternal Parranda in the sky,
Leaving behind a Güiro that never got the Chance
To Dance and play it's last lament for WE,
Who are like the stone sands of Boqueron,
Diverse, Fleeting, Greeting everyone as

Hermano No No Taino No No Taino No So Taino
Now Flow So Taino Grow Taino Now Taino
Tainow Grow Tainow Flow Now
Taino Grow Now Tainow How
Taino Flow Now Tainow
Know Taino Now
Tainow Tainas
Tainow Now
Taino
Now

By: Vincent Toro



For tío Manuel – Thank you for that night at the ranch, where you recited poetry with the Gods.

For my Nana Elisa – Thank you for your gift of story and song. I miss you everyday.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

(It is very close to Midnight on December 27th. The sounds of coquis are heard. NORMA enters.)

MANOLO. You didn't knock.

NORMA. I don't have to, it's my house.

MANOLO. Did she arrive?

NORMA. Iris and Víctor went to pick her up.

MANOLO. I can't wait to see María.

NORMA. I don't know why she's coming here for. (**NORMA** holds up tea to **MANOLO**'s lips.)

MANOLO. Ah not again! (**MANOLO** will not open his mouth.)

NORMA. You will keep drinking this orange tea until you're cured.

MANOLO. I'm dying Norma, nothing is good for me.

NORMA. You just decided to give up and die...

MANOLO. Everyone dies.

NORMA. (*She takes out a bottle of beer from underneath his bed.*) This is what is killing you! Who's bringing it to you? If you die, it's not my fault... (*The sound of a car arriving is heard.*) They're here... God protect the person who brings you the beer.

(NORMA exits with the bottle of beer. Lights shift. The slam of a car door is heard, and a very irate IRIS storms in.)

IRIS. Your niece, Miss Puerto Rico, is here. Today was the most embarrassing day of my life! Mami she took pictures of everything. She took a picture of the guy who picked up her bags. And then she made me take a

picture of her kissing the ground, oh no, the sacred Puerto Rican ground!

NORMA. Iris she's never been to Puerto Rico before. She grew up as an American.

(Through the door bursts MARÍA ELENA GARCÍA. She has on a hat and a jacket with a Puerto Rican flag on them. She is carrying a suitcase.)

MARÍA. Hold it! Hold it! *(She puts her suitcase down and begins taking pictures. Speaking in incorrect Spanish.)* No tía, don't look at me. No mira me.

IRIS. *(Correcting her Spanish.)* No me mires. Don't look at me!

MARÍA. I want a spontaneous, I mean a natural picture!... Ah... anyway how are you tia Norma?

NORMA. Fine. *(NORMA is very cold to MARÍA. MARÍA kisses her, but NORMA doesn't reciprocate the kiss.)*

MARÍA. Wow, I'm so psyched! ¡Qué maravilla! *(She takes a deep breath.)* Smell the air, it's so pure. OH Listen to the CO-QUIS. *(She stands still to listen and take it all in.)* Co-quí... co-quí... That's excellent!

IRIS. Virgen María.

MARÍA. It's like listening to a symphony.

IRIS. A symphony of squawking little big-eyed frogs is not music to my ears.

MARÍA. Iris, coquis are not frogs.

(VÍCTOR enters.)

VÍCTOR. Look Norma, she looks exactly like Olga. The exact same face.

NORMA. Hm!

VÍCTOR. How's Olga?

MARÍA. Mami's fine... she's doing really well.

VÍCTOR. Very good.

MARÍA. She's good, and papi's good too... everybody's great... um... um... Is tío Manolo feeling better?

VÍCTOR. No mama, he is very sick.

MARÍA. (*Speaking in incorrect Spanish.*) Mami digaba... um... that Manolo has been sick.

IRIS. (*Correcting her.*) Dijo! Said!

MARÍA. What?

IRIS. Mami “dijo”... that Manolo is sick...

MARÍA. Spanish is so confusing. I confuse the verbs. I want to learn to speak Spanish really well. I studied it in the university, but I need more practice.

VÍCTOR. That’s wonderful. You should learn your language. And you speak it well for an American.

MARÍA. Thank you. (*She takes a picture of VÍCTOR.*) I can’t believe I’m here in Puerto Rico. This place is more beautiful than I ever imagined. I don’t know of any other place more beautiful... Oh... I forgot I have gifts for everyone.

NORMA. Save the gifts for tomorrow. You will sleep in the room next to Iris’... she will show you. Pues... let’s go to sleep Víctor.

MARÍA. Thank you for everything.

VÍCTOR. Our pleasure m’ija.

MARÍA. Bendición Tía y Tío.

NORMA & VÍCTOR. Qué la Virgen te acompañe.

(**VÍCTOR** hugs **MARÍA**. **NORMA** exits without hugging **MARÍA**. **MARÍA** and **IRIS** remain staring at each other.)

MARÍA. It feels great to be with my people. I want to see everything on the island, not only the buildings... (*Looking for the word in Spanish.*)

IRIS. Edificios. I speak English.

MARÍA. Good you can help me... um... okay, edificios. I want to get close to the land, (**MARÍA** swats a mosquito away.) I want to bond with Puerto Rico.

IRIS. You’ll bond with your sacred Puerto Rican land by tomorrow morning, when the mosquitos discover new meat, boom – you’ll be bonded.

MARÍA. When the plane was descending, I saw San Juan... the lights looked like stars in the universe. It was beautiful. Oh, here I have something for you.

IRIS. Chica you didn't have to... what did you get me?

MARÍA. Here. (*MARÍA gives IRIS a bottle of perfume.*)

NORMA. (*O.S.*) Iris, go to sleep!

IRIS. I'm coming... I don't want to hear my mother's voice.
Oye thank you.

MARÍA. You're welcome... Buenas noches Iris!

IRIS. Good night!

(*IRIS exits. MARÍA takes a deep breath.*)

MARÍA. I love it here... No in Spanish... Me encanta estar aquí.

(*Lights shift.*)

End of Scene 1

Scene 2

(The next morning. The radio is on. VÍCTOR enters with new hankerchiefs, with his initials on them.)

MARÍA. GOOD MORNING!

VÍCTOR. María, I like the hankerchiefs you gave me...
Gracias, but they are too nice, I can't blow my nose in them.

MARÍA. I'm glad you like them. *(MARÍA looks out into the audience, as if she's looking out through a window.)* Isn't there supposed to be a brook out there? Mami said she swam in a brook right outside of the house when she was little.

VÍCTOR. That brook dried up years ago. Iris was a little girl.
(NORMA enters.)

NORMA. Look Víctor, I got some yerba buena for Manolo.
Doña Fela made the tea for me.

MARÍA. Bendición Tía!

NORMA. Qué la Virgen te acompañe. María please turn off the radio!

VÍCTOR. It's okay, I'll do it. *(VÍCTOR exits off-stage to turn off the radio.)*

MARÍA. I made some coffee.

NORMA. I know you were being helpful, but this is my kitchen.

MARÍA. I didn't mean any harm.

VÍCTOR. *(VÍCTOR re-enters.)* Don't worry m'ija. Gracias por el café. I am going into town now to buy the part my truck needs.

NORMA. I told you to get one of those new Mitsubishi trucks last year... but you don't listen to me.

VÍCTOR. I'd rather shoot myself. The truck will work with that part. See you later.

(VÍCTOR exits. PAUSE.)

NORMA. I don't like people cooking in my kitchen. María, this morning you took too long in the shower. I know people from New York are used to wasting everything, but water costs money here,... and I don't want to hear music in this house.

MARÍA. Okay Tía, I'm sorry. (*MARÍA picks up a gift from the table.*) I have your gift here.

NORMA. Not now. I have to give Manolo his tea.

MARÍA. I'll bring him his tea.

NORMA. He's not up for visits.

MARÍA. I want to... cheer him up.

NORMA. ¿Animarlo?

MARÍA. Yes, and I also wanted to give him the gift I brought for him. It's always nice to have visitors when you're sick. If he doesn't want me to stay, I'll leave. I promise.

NORMA. Make sure he drinks the tea.

MARÍA. Okay.

NORMA. Don't stay there too long.

MARÍA. Yes tía. (*MARÍA exits with the tea and his gift.*)

(*Lights shift.*)

End of Scene 2

Scene 3

(Lights up on the marquesina. MANOLO's room is still dark. MARÍA knocks on the door.)

MANOLO. Come in. *(MARÍA enters.)* Olga... Olga...

MARÍA. No tío Manolo, it's me María, Olga's daughter.

MANOLO. Turn on the light.

(MARÍA turns it on. MANOLO sits up with difficulty.

MARÍA sees a great many theatre posters, African Style Comedy and Tragedy masks, shelves of records and an old record player, clothes everywhere and books on the floor.)

María? You look exactly like your mother. You're all grown up.

MARÍA. Yes. I'm twenty-two years old... How do you feel?

MANOLO. I feel old, like rotten junk, but now that I see your beautiful face, I am very happy.

MARÍA. Here is your tea and I have a gift for you.

MANOLO. Give me the gift.

MARÍA. You have to drink your tea first. That's what Tía said.

MANOLO. Nah... What did you bring me?... Tell me...

MARÍA. ...Okay... *(MANOLO tries to open the gift but his hands are a bit stiff. MARÍA helps him open the gift.)* Here.

MANOLO. Thank you. *(MANOLO holds up two cds.)* Beethoven and La Lupe... my favorites.

MARÍA. Mami knew you would like them.

MANOLO. How is my sister and the man who kidnapped her to New York?

MARÍA. My mother and father are doing well... they send their love. Your tea...

MANOLO. Yuch!... how about some big, fat, juicy pork chops?

MARÍA. There's no way tía Norma will let you eat pork chops. Come on. *(MANOLO doesn't want to drink the tea.)* Tía allowed me to come here on the condition that you would drink your tea.

MANOLO. You can drink it and tell Norma I did.

MARÍA. Ave María.

MANOLO. I'm not a baby.

MARÍA. You're acting like a baby. Why do men always act like babies when they're sick?

MANOLO. I'm not sick, I'm dying.

MARÍA. You shouldn't say that.

MANOLO. Why not, it's true. We all have to die.

MARÍA. Well you're alive now, drink your tea. (MANOLO lets MARÍA put the cup to his mouth. He drinks the tea.)

MANOLO. No more... YA!

MARÍA. (MARÍA looks at all of the theatre posters.) Did you see all of those plays?

MANOLO. Some... I performed in others.

MARÍA. As an actor? I don't believe you.

MANOLO. Don't believe me.

MARÍA. What about *Hamlet*?

MANOLO. That one I saw.

MARÍA. *Life is a Dream*?

MANOLO. I did lights for that one.

MARÍA. *Don Juan Tenorio*?

MANOLO. I did the props.

MARÍA. You told me you were an actor!

MANOLO. You didn't point to the play I was in.

MARÍA. Which one?

MANOLO. ...*"Romeo and Juliet."*

MARÍA. What part?!

MANOLO. Romeo of course.

MARÍA. (MARÍA laughs.) No way! I bet you only know "Romeo, Romeo, where art thou Romeo..."

MANOLO. "O Romeo, Romeo, whereFORE art thou Romeo?"

MARÍA. "Deny thy father and refuse thy name; or if thou wilt not be but sworn my love, And I'll no longer be a Capulet..."

MANOLO. "What's in a name? That which we call a rose By

any other name would smell as sweet... “

MARÍA. You really played Romeo?

MANOLO. For one performance. I used to work backstage... but one night Romeo got sick and I knew the part, so I went on as Romeo. Everyone said I was the best Romeo they had ever seen. You'd make a great Juliet.

MARÍA. I played Juliet once.

MANOLO. Are you an actress?

MARÍA. I did a couple of plays in college.

MANOLO. Then you are an actress.

MARÍA. I wanted to study theatre, but Mami says it's not a stable career.

MANOLO. So you studied something stable?

MARÍA. I double majored in Business Administration and Puerto Rican Studies, I really loved my Puerto Rican Studies classes.

MANOLO. (*Laughs outloud.*) Puerto Rican Studies, ¿qué bobería!!

MARÍA. It wasn't silly. I wanted to learn about my culture, there's nothing wrong with that?

MANOLO. You speak Spanish pretty good for a gringa.

MARÍA. I'm not a gringa!

MANOLO. Oh, okay, sorry. Mira, go over there...that bag... look inside. (**MARÍA** *does so.*) I bet you didn't study this in Puerto Rican Studies.

MARÍA. (**MARÍA** *looks in the bag.*) A güiro... do you know how to play it?

MANOLO. ...Of course I know how to play it!

MARÍA. Play something.

MANOLO. The last time I played it was a long time ago. I don't know if I can. Here, you play it. Take the pick and scrape the side. (**MARÍA** *tries to play the güiro.*) AH NO! Stop, stop... give it back to me. (**MANOLO** *plays a short rhythm with difficulty. When he gets the rhythm, he stops playing and rubs his wrists.*)

MARÍA. Ah... that's excellent.

MANOLO. I used to play better... you just have to know the rhythm. I love playing it. I made this one.

MARÍA. Teach me how to play it.

MANOLO. Not now m'ija. I'm a little tired.

MARÍA. Okay. *(She gets up to leave.)*

MANOLO. Thank you for the gifts María.

MARÍA. If you need anything just let me know.

(MARÍA exits and as lights fade on MANOLO's room, the playing of a güiro is heard.)

End of Scene 3

Scene 4

(**IRIS** enters. *She's dressed very well.*)

NORMA. What smells so good?

IRIS. The perfume Tía sent me.

NORMA. Oh...

IRIS. Mami, did you open the gift that Tía Olga sent you?

NORMA. Uh... I haven't had any time...

IRIS. Help me with this.

(**NORMA** helps **IRIS** with a necklace. **MARÍA** enters.)

NORMA. Did he drink the tea?

MARÍA. Yes tía.

NORMA. How is he feeling?

MARÍA. He's weak, but he looks good. You look great.
Where are you going?

IRIS. I have a job interview.

MARÍA. Think positive... um... feel... positivo, you'll get the job.

IRIS. This is my third interview for a pharmaceutical company in two weeks.

NORMA. Don't worry, you'll get something.

IRIS. When? There's got to be some company somewhere on this island that can hire me.

MARÍA. Why would you want to work for a pharmaceutical company? They pollute the environment.

IRIS. They pay really good. You know this is not New York, where there are jobs everywhere.

MARÍA. It's just as difficult to find jobs in New York. (**MARÍA** is scratching her arms.)

IRIS. You bonded with Puerto Rico already!

MARÍA. Hm?

IRIS. The mosquitos branded you like one of abuela's cows!

MARÍA. I wasn't bitten, I see it more like an initiation into the tribe... Mami sent a rosary for Abuela. I want to hang it on her headstone.

NORMA. She's not buried here. Your mother moved mami to Rincón, which is four hours away, on the other side of the island. Didn't your mother tell you that?

MARÍA. Yes, but the island is small. (*Taking out a map.*) We can drive straight across to Rincón.

IRIS. It looks like you can cross the island, but you have to drive through the central mountain range and that takes hours, up and down mountains... or you can drive on the coast, around the mountains, but it takes just as long. Going to abuela's grave is a whole day adventure that begins at dawn.

MARÍA. I have so many plans for my visit and I wanted to begin with abuela... I want to experience my homeland and abuela's part of my history. From there to El Morro . . . and all of Old San Juan – I want to see El Parque de las Palomas, the Pablo Casals Museum, and of course I want to see Cataño. Then the ENTIRE ISLAND.

NORMA. María, we're not on vacation.

MARÍA. Um... I was thinking Iris and I could visit these places... and since you're not working right now...

IRIS. María, remember my job interview in San Juan...

MARÍA. Tomorrow? Nice island drive... two cousins driving on the coast, smelling the ocean, checking out Puerto Rican men...

NORMA. She has a boyfriend.

IRIS. Yeah, but Ricardo doesn't own me. The problem is that I only have his car until tonight. He lent it to me to go pick you up and for my job interview today.

MARÍA. Okay ... um... I can go with you to your job interview and then we can go to El Morro and walk around Old San Juan.

IRIS. I'm really not in the mood to see things I didn't like the first time I saw them. AND I can't think about seeing Puerto Rico now, I'm very nervous about the interview, if I don't get this job... I can't handle another rejection.

MARÍA. I'll help you do breathing exercises. I know a really good one. Try this – breathe in, then release with a uummmm... to help you relax... huuummmm....

IRIS. NI HEE, NO HU!

MARÍA. Okay forget about the breathing exercises... A trip to San Juan might be good for you, you can relax there... please Iris... please, please... I'm only going to be here for two weeks... we only have the car today...

NORMA. Iris, take her to San Juan.

IRIS. Okay, okay, okay I'll do it.

MARÍA. Thank you!! Thank you!!

IRIS. Fine. (*MARÍA puts on her jacket with the Puerto Rican flag on it.*) Take that off!

MARÍA. It's my favorite jacket.

IRIS. I'm not walking around San Juan with you in that jacket!

MARÍA. Nobody is even going to notice it... Trust me!

IRIS. We're all Puerto Rican in this island we don't have to advertise it.

MARÍA. Okay, okay... (*MARÍA takes off her jacket.*) Got my camera. I'm ready.

IRIS. Bendición mami.

MARÍA. Bendición tía.

NORMA. Qué la virgen to acompañe.

(*MARÍA and IRIS exit.*)

End of Scene 4

Scene 5

(IRIS and MARÍA enter and find NORMA.)

IRIS. Ay! My feet are killing me? We walked all over Old San Juan. And we had to stop every five seconds to take a picture of a Puerto Rican moment...

MARÍA. Don't complain, you had a great time.

IRIS. She took pictures of El Morro, facing the water, then facing inland; all the Taino statues in the museum. You know your niece wanted me to go into one of those jail cells and put my hands in the irons and pose for her stupid camera. I told her forget it! Then she went in there and started acting like she was being tortured and I had to take a picture of her. A natural picture. I almost left her in the jail!

(Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, "Ode to Joy," Fourth movement is heard.)

IRIS. What's that?

MARÍA. I think it's Beethoven.

IRIS. From where? (She listens for a second.) Mami it's coming from Manolo's room.

NORMA. Really? It can't be.

MARÍA. Oh I like Beethoven... Look tía, I bought a miniature figure of a coquí. It's so cute. (The music continues for a beat then stops.)

IRIS. Mami do you know esta loca here gave up a trip to Europe to see this puny island?

MARÍA. Mami and papi wanted me to see Europe. They felt a trip to Europe would make me a well-rounded person... How do you say that?

IRIS. Una persona más completa...

MARÍA. Yes, exactly... I felt it was more important to visit my country. Connect with my ancestors... my grandmother, my great-grandmother... my family. . .

IRIS. Antecesoros.

MARÍA. Exactly...Mami is always talking about Puerto Rico

and I wanted to see it for myself. I have the rest of my life to see the world. I dreamt about Puerto Rico for such a long time... El Morro was more than I expected. I felt a true sense of history. While I was walking around, I had this feeling of... of... peace. As my feet touched the stones, it felt right... I was hypnotized by the sound of the waves crashing against the fort's walls... I realized then that I had come home... The sound of the coquis, the smell of nature, the sun that burns your skin in one day...

IRIS. The mosquitos.

MARÍA. Even the mosquitos bites... all are signs of welcome... I can't go back to New York. **THIS IS MY HOME.** I'm staying in Puerto Rico.

IRIS. You have a life in New York.

MARÍA. I don't have anything there. I mean, I have mami and papi, but I could visit them.

IRIS. How about your boyfriend?

MARÍA. We broke up a month ago.

IRIS. Don't you have a job in New York?

MARÍA. I'll quit and look for a job here.

IRIS. Wake up María, I can't even get a job. My name's on every waiting list from here to the San Juan.

MARÍA. I'll try... we'll try together... we'll both look for jobs.

IRIS. Great, more competition! What if it takes you two or three years?

MARÍA. I have faith that it won't.

NORMA. What is your mother going to say about this?

MARÍA. ...Mami will understand...

NORMA. I'm not sure about that... and the interview, Iris?

IRIS. They liked me, I'm very educated but I have to wait for an opening... the same as always. I have a Bachelor's degree and a teaching license and I can't get a job. Unless I want to work in a factory, which according to the classifieds, pays more.

MARÍA. The job situation is the same in New York... although you'd have better luck in New York, there's a shortage of qualified bilingual teachers in the public schools. You'd get a job immediately.

NORMA. Iris, you don't have to go all the way to New York to find a job.

IRIS. How's the money?

MARÍA. Pretty good, \$35,000 a year starting salary, better than in private schools.

IRIS. What? That's great.

NORMA. Iris, New York is very expensive!

IRIS. So is Puerto Rico.

NORMA. People in New York live like animals.

IRIS. Mami, people here act like animals driving on the highway.

NORMA. New York is also overcrowded and full of drugs.

IRIS. So is San Juan.

NORMA. But not where we live... and it's very cold in New York.

IRIS. I'd love to see snow sometime in my life.

MARÍA. You should just imagine it Iris.

NORMA. When you marry Ricardo, he's not going to live in New York.

IRIS. As long as we have jobs here, otherwise we become the New Puerto Rican immigrants looking for work... and he doesn't give me permission to do things. I do what I want to do.

MARÍA. Just like when mami left Puerto Rico looking for work.

NORMA. Your mother didn't leave to find work, she left because she wanted to do it.

MONCHI. (*off-stage*) Buenos días.

(**MONCHI enters.**)

NORMA. Buenos días Monchi.

MONCHI. Buenos días. I have some plátanos, ñames, and grapefruits for you.

NORMA. Gracias Monchi.

IRIS. Oye, Dr. Jíbarito, what are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be collecting worms?

MONCHI. Buenos días cousin-in-law.

IRIS. You're not my cousin-in-law yet.

MONCHI. When you marry Ricardo, you are going to be the most beautiful cousin in the family.

IRIS. I can't believe you're related to Ricardo.

NORMA. Have some coffee Monchi.

MONCHI. Muchas Gracias, señora. Too bad your daughter is not as good a hostess as you are.

IRIS. Oh excuse me, María I want you to meet the last hillbilly, el último jíbaro – Monchi. Monchi this is my cousin Miss Puerto Rico.

MARÍA. Hi Monchi... ignore my cousin, my name is María.

MONCHI. Don't worry about it, nobody listens to Iris... I'm Ramón, but everybody calls me Monchi. (*She picks up a grapefruit.*)

IRIS. He's a bit unusual like you. He got this scholarship to study engineering but he became a farmer – a high class hick, with an agricultural degree.

MARÍA. Iris, living off the land is noble.

IRIS. I like my food the gringo way, in plastic or in cans.

MARÍA. Hmm... these grapefruits smell so good. Puerto Rico is perfect, the mountains, the coquis and my people.

MONCHI. Are you here on vacation?

MARÍA. Yes and no... I want to discover my roots.

IRIS. You wanna a root, here's a root. (*IRIS hands MARÍA a ñame.*)

MARÍA. Thanks Iris.

MONCHI. Oye profe (slang for "professor"), mind your business.

IRIS. ¡Ahórcate! ("Choke yourself!")

NORMA. Ave María, how's business Monchi?

MONCHI. Good, too good! I can't keep up. During Christmas I expected to sell alot, but not this much. I don't have time to do everything I need to do. If I'm delivering, I'm not gathering; if I'm gathering, I'm not planting... How's Manolo doing?

NORMA. The same.

IRIS. María, Monchi owns his own farm. Oooo!!

MARÍA. I think it's great that you own your own farm.

IRIS. Miss Puerto Rico defends Doctor Jíbarito.

(**VÍCTOR** enters.)

NORMA. What happened? You came back early.

VÍCTOR. Carmelo couldn't get me the right part for the truck, ¡qué chavienda!... Monchi how are you?

MONCHI. Good. How are you?

VÍCTOR. Muy bien. Did you meet my beautiful niece?

MONCHI. Yes I did. Víctor if you need anything you can use my volki.

IRIS. Forget it!

VÍCTOR. Gracias Monchi, maybe another day.

MARÍA. What's a volki?

IRIS. Monchi's car of death, with no breaks.

MONCHI. I have an old volkswagen I use to take my fruits and vegetables around. I'm saving for a truck.

VÍCTOR. Don't worry Monchi, when my truck is working you can use it.

IRIS. Don't hold your breath Monchi.

MONCHI. Gracias, Víctor.

MARÍA. It can't be that bad if it's working.

MONCHI. It takes me where I need to go.

MARÍA. Maybe he can take us to Rincón...

NORMA. NO! (*Everyone looks at NORMA.*) Monchi just said he was very busy and the car can't travel so far.

MONCHI. The volki has never gone that far... but... I'm so busy now.

IRIS. I know, María why don't you help our jíbarito?

MARÍA. That's a fantastic idea.

IRIS. Por favor María! I was just kidding.

MARÍA. Working on a farm is a great way to learn about the land.

MONCHI. You can't spend your vacation picking plátanos.

MARÍA. Why not? I insist... really... you need the help and I'm offering... I want to do it... that way you'll have some free time.

MONCHI. ...I do need the help... uhm... okay...

MARÍA. Perfect.

MONCHI. Okay... tomorrow morning at dawn.

MARÍA. I'll be there.

MONCHI. Adios... I have to go into town.

VÍCTOR. Adios Monchi...take it easy.

NORMA. Regards to your family.

(**MONCHI** *exits.*)

IRIS. Now you're going to dig your hands into real Puerto Rican land.

MARÍA. I'm going to commune with Mother Nature!

End of Scene 5

Scene 6

(MARÍA is up late in the evening speaking to her mother on the phone.)

MARÍA. Mami I'll find a job here, I'm sure I will... I hate that job... they won't care... I'll mail in my resignation... I don't have to give them two weeks notice! Believe me, they won't miss me at all... I don't care if he doesn't give me a reference!... What do you mean I can't live here?!... You can't tell me that, I'm twenty-two years old, I can do whatever I want!! Mom, mom, mami, let me speak, *(MARÍA holds the phone away from her.)* Mami, are you finished? You're not even giving me a chance to... okay, okay, because I love it here, I love Puerto Rico, do you understand that? I want to live in Puerto Rico, mom... you're always talking about how much you love Puerto Rico, your childhood... It's not different for you. Your love for Puerto Rico is more than memories... Well then I want my own Puerto Rican memories... mom forget it... you never listen to me... anyway mom... okay mom, I have to go. Long distance is expensive, bye... What? Yes everybody loved the gifts... tía Norma... yes I gave her the gift you sent her... I don't know if she opened it... she didn't say anything to me. Okay... bye. *(MARÍA hangs up.)* ARGH!!

End of Scene 6

Scene 7

(**MONCHI** and **MARÍA** enter. *It is very early morning in the morning.*)

MONCHI. Okay... now pick the yucca, and put them in the sack. I'll get the yautía...

(*There is one sack half full.*)

MARÍA. Which one is the yucca?

MONCHI. This brown vegetable, it's really a root... you see it looks like it has hair on it.

MARÍA. Okay... I brought coffee. Do you want some?

MONCHI. Not now, we have only two hours to get the yucca, yautía, and the plátanos, and the gandules, we can't forget those. We have to bring all this to town and deliver them to the stores that ordered them. (**MONCHI** works very quickly, but **MARÍA** picks up one yucca at a time.) I have more sacks when you've filled that one.

MARÍA. Okay. (**MARÍA** is trying to pull up a yucca, very daintly and it won't come out. **MONCHI** sees how **MARÍA** is working, he laughs.) What's so funny?

MONCHI. The yucca isn't going to bite you.

MARÍA. Don't make fun of me. It won't come out... it's stuck.

MONCHI. You have to stick your hand in the Earth and pull up the root. (**MONCHI** grabs her hand and plunges both of their hands into the dirt. **PAUSE.** **MARÍA** freezes. They look at each other.) Your hands are going to get dirty

MARÍA. I'm not afraid of dirt.

MONCHI. Good... and you have to work faster, we don't have a lot of time. (**MARÍA** tries to pick up one of the sacks. *It's very heavy.*) I got it.

MARÍA. No, I can do it. I said I would help you.

MONCHI. Okay... bring it to the volki. (**MARÍA** tries to pick it up again but she can't. **MONCHI** picks up the sack.) It's okay, I'll take this. You keep picking the yucca and I'll get the plátanos. (**MONCHI** exits with the sack.)

MARÍA. (*Extremely exhausted.*) Whatever you say.

MONCHI. (*O.S.*) Oh carajo!

MARÍA. What happened?

MONCHI. They're yellow! (*MONCHI re-enters.*)

MARÍA. What are?

MONCHI. The plátanos. The plátanos are yellow. I can't sell them like that.

MARÍA. People like ripe plátanos.

MONCHI. Not for pasteles, people need green ones to make pasteles or acapurrias. What a waste?!

MARÍA. Don't you have more green ones?

MONCHI. Yeah, up the hill. There's no time now to get them... That's it, I'm ruined!

MARÍA. How can you be ruined? You have so many more green plátanos.

MONCHI. In two or three days all of those plátanos will be yellow, then I won't be able to sell them, unless I get people to help me pick them, but that's not going to happen because no body wants to work on a farm.

MARÍA. I'm helping you.

MONCHI. It's not enough... María I have two cousins that were laid off and I offered to PAY them to work for me and they refuse to do it.

MARÍA. Some people are not cut out for farming.

MONCHI. I can't even get people to pick up the vegetables for free. They could be starving and they'd rather buy two plátanos for a dollar in the supermarket... Unbelievable!

MARÍA. Want some coffee now?

MONCHI. Sure. (*MARÍA pours coffee, they sit down and drink.*) I'm sorry I blew up.

MARÍA. I understand... you must feel overwhelmed.

MONCHI. I didn't realize that running a farm would be so hard...

MARÍA. But it's so peaceful.

MONCHI. ...Look...

MARÍA. What?

MONCHI. See that?

MARÍA. No... what is it?... what...

MONCHI. Sh... it's a lizard running up a tree... Ah this is my favorite time of the day.

MARÍA. ...What peace... I feel so calm right now, tired but calm. I grew up in front of an "EL" train. It came out of a tunnel and ran right by my apartment. The whole apartment shook everytime the train passed... I'd love to live in a place like this.

MONCHI. New York seems to be an interesting place.

MARÍA. Yeah... there's alot to do but you can get lost sometimes. You're always walking on asphalt and the buildings block the sun.

MONCHI. The mountains also block the sun.

MARÍA. It's not the same thing... Here you see things grow right before your eyes.

MONCHI. Everything grows here. The land is so fertile. You plant a seed and boom, it's already growing the next day... I'm going to tell you a something. . . Me and three of my friends have decided to buy back Puerto Rico.

MARÍA. What?

MONCHI. We're buying back Puerto Rico. It's more like a corporation but instead of buying stocks, we're buying acres of land. . . I'm in the east. One is in the north, another in the south and one in the west. We'll keep buying land until we meet in the center of the island. I already have two and a half acres... but it's a hard idea to sell to people. My friend in the south already has ten investors.

MARÍA. I'd like to buy some land, when I can afford to.

MONCHI. The more of us that buy land, the sooner we'll get Puerto Rico back. To grow and sell our own food, that's our goal.

MARÍA. Until then, I suggest you guys get some help or you won't make it to the center of the island. AH!!

MONCHI. What happened?

MARÍA. Something's in my hair. AH!!

MONCHI. Stay still!

MARÍA. It's scratching me!! AH!!

MONCHI. ¡Espérate!

MARÍA. Get it off... AH!

MONCHI. There I got it.

MARÍA. AH! ... What was it?

MONCHI. A lizard, you scared it.

MARÍA. I scared it?! It was digging into my head Monchi.

MONCHI. Yeah, I can see your brain through that big hole in your head.

MARÍA. Ha, ha, very funny. (MONCHI caresses her hair.)

MONCHI. You have beautiful hair.

MARÍA. Thank you. (MARÍA moves away from him.)

MONCHI. Sorry... you have a boyfriend, right?

MARÍA. ...No... I... not anymore.

MONCHI. But you still think of him, right?

MARÍA. I don't want to go through that again.

MONCHI. This guy sounds like a big mamao ("jerk"). I bet he works in an office. (MARÍA laughs.) He pushes paper right! I knew it, he has soft hands... see my hands, dirty, hard, and calloused. I make my living with these hands.

MARÍA. My hands are dirty too.

MONCHI. (Touching her hands.) Those are the prettiest, dirtiest hands I've ever seen.

MARÍA. More coffee?

MONCHI. Yeah.

MARÍA. (MARÍA pours coffee.) What about you?

MONCHI. What?

MARÍA. Do you have a girlfriend?

MONCHI. How many women do you know want to go out with a farmer?

MARÍA. Why not?

MONCHI. If I'd become an engineer that would have been a different story. Everybody thinks I'm crazy. Nobody believed that I could give up such a great future to do this. The only people that supported me were Manolo and Norma.

MARÍA. Norma? My tía Norma?

MONCHI. She understood my love of seeing things grow.

MARÍA. I can understand Manolo, but Norma?

MONCHI. I used to help her with her flower garden. She taught me alot.

MARÍA. She's not very affectionate with me.

MONCHI. That's the way she is. But she takes very good care of Manolo and she paid for Iris' school. She's your aunt, but she's also a stranger to you... it takes time to get to know someone... Come on, we have to get to town. *(They grab the sacks and exit.)*

End of Scene 7

Scene 8

(Later that evening. MARÍA enters MANOLO's room. She is walking slowly and in pain.)

MANOLO. What happened to you?

MARÍA. I'm in love.

MANOLO. With Monchi? I knew it.

MARÍA. NO! With my beloved island...

MANOLO. Oh, Siéntate. *(She walks, with great difficulty to the chair and sits down.)*

MARÍA. I was picking gifts from the Earth. AH!! Beautiful jewels brought forth from Mother Earth.

MANOLO. Vaya regalito. ("go precious gift")

MARÍA. Everyday I feel closer to Puerto Rico. I know for certain this is where I belong.

MANOLO. Planting yucca?

MARÍA. I'm trying to be serious! AH! My whole body's in pain.

MANOLO. You only worked one day.

MARÍA. Even the muscles behind my ears are sore.

MANOLO. You need a hot bath.

MARÍA. Ah... I can't move... I really found Puerto Rico today.

MANOLO. Where? I've been looking for it for a long time and I haven't found it.

MARÍA. In the ground, in the trees, in the yucca... there's something spiritual about collecting food that people are going to eat... Oh, oh, you know tío Víctor gave me a rabbit... beautiful, grey, with green eyes. I named her Stella. What a wonderful day. I'm going to help Monchi again tomorrow.

MANOLO. I think it's because you like him.

MARÍA. NO!... I don't hate him. I mean I like him, I just don't like him like that.

MANOLO. If I were a girl, I'd go out with Monchi.

MARÍA. You're not his type.

MANOLO. At least you won't starve to death.

MARÍA. I don't want to go out with anyone for a very long time.

MANOLO. AH!! Somebody broke your heart.

MARÍA. That's in my past, I don't want to talk about that.

MANOLO. That means your heart was really broken, abaratao, torn apart, aplastao!!

MARÍA. Drop it!! I told you that's all part of my past... I put my heart back together. Today I was reborn.

MANOLO. You can't forget the things that happened to you.

MARÍA. Yes I can... I just did... See? *(She snaps her fingers.)*
I'm the new and improved María.

MANOLO. Those things you want to forget brought you to this point right here at, this moment.

MARÍA. The new and improved María doesn't look back with anger! I told you my past is my past! ... Damn it! AH!

MANOLO. Um, hm...

MARÍA. Stop looking at me... ARGH... we did "Romeo and Juliet" together in school, okay!

MANOLO. Who?

MARÍA. The guy!

MANOLO. Who?

MARÍA. The guy, the guy... the guy, you know, the guy we're talking about, THE GUY...

MANOLO. Hm, the guy. Did he play Romeo?

MARÍA. NO! He played Tybalt.

MANOLO. At least he gets killed!

MARÍA. I was madly in love with 'the guy' – he was Sicilian-American. He told his family I was also Sicilian because they were racists AND I went along with it like a big pendeja!

MANOLO. "Love Be Blind, cannot hit the mark!"

MARÍA. Blind, deaf and dumb. Then he breaks up with me!

MANOLO. Why don't you just date Puerto Rican guys?

MARÍA. Because the Puerto Rican guys I know, want to date Barbie dolls. The curious thing was that Peter...

MANOLO. Who?

MARÍA. The guy... he looked Puerto Rican and even danced a mean salsa.

MANOLO. You went out with him because he looked Puerto Rican and he went out with you because you didn't look Puerto Rican... ¡qué reguero! Sorry María... you cannot hide the rice and beans in those eyes! I don't know how he missed them.

MARÍA. Sometimes I feel Puerto Rican and sometimes I don't. These last couple of days I have felt so Puerto Rican... like never before. It's all so confusing in New York... mami and papi never taught me Spanish. I had to learn it in school. They kept me sheltered in private schools. They wanted me to be American, to succeed. I'm glad I went to those schools but I don't have any roots, a tree cannot live without roots...

MANOLO. Nobody can take your roots away from you. Even the smallest plants have roots.

MARÍA. Not me. I'm rootless, like when a yucca is plucked from the Earth.

MANOLO. If you think you're a yucca now, coño you're really confused.

MARÍA. If I were a yucca everyone would know who or what I was. Then I'd have no problems.

MANOLO. You should find a vegetable psychiatrist.

MARÍA. Very funny Manolo... I don't know where I belong... I need to know who I am.

MANOLO. There's no doubt that we are related – we've both been in the theatre – we are a dramatic family. Everyone has talent, except Inez, she's my second cousin, or maybe third, she has the worst voice on Earth... even the priest stopped her from singing in church because he said she scared the heck out of the holy spirit. (MARÍA *laughs*.) I never let her sing with me. Who I did

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