

# Tango Masculino

*a new play with music*

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music by Paul L. Johnson

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## Cast of Characters

Rosendo  
El Compadrito

(30's) *Lunfardo: A flashy street tough.* He might be a thug, thief, pimp, hustler – or all of the above, depending on the day. His flashy dress is an affected aping – both envying and thumbing his nose at the upper classes. A short-bladed knife (a sign of courage) is always handy, tucked in the waistband of his trousers. The compadrito is the archetypal – and in Argentine lore, almost mythical -- street-tough of the period. His code is strict: Courage and machismo above all else – and fuck anything that moves – respectable women, the prostitutes he owns, men who pay him, men he can ‘put one over on’... Among the lunfardo (thief) class, there’s no stigma attached to fucking another man; it’s something of a badge of honor. Any man who allows himself to be fucked, however, is a marica or maricon – a queen or queer. To the compadrito, to be the submissive partner would be a matter of unimaginable shame.

Our compadrito carries much baggage. His love/hate relationship with an abusive father has left him with emotional scars – an overcompensating need to dominate those around him, and a gnawing, silent need to finally confront a person stronger than himself and to find a sort of welcome release in surrendering control. And the need is growing.

Jorge  
El Chico

(16-19) *The Boy.* A young man from the Palermo Arrabal (a slum on the outskirts of Buenos Aires). He’s the youngest son of an out-of-work gaucho, now deceased, and a protective and adoring mother. He’s drawn to men sexually, but terribly torn. He very much wants a father figure and lover to protect him and to adore, but is also aware of the stigma attached to ‘maricon.’ He has inherited too much of his father’s pride and machismo to ever be seen as less than a man. He’s now increasingly desperate to find an identity he can live with. He’s also of an age where one may still retain the hope of a knight in shining armor.

Manon  
La Marica

(20-35) *Lunfardo: Queen* The term used by Argentine men of the period who self-identified as homosexual. As an admitted passive partner in male-male sex, the marica was scorned by and ostracized from normal Latino society. However in the Lunfardo world of brothels and slums they were a common and even accepted part of the outcast mix – though certainly not having the status of a ‘real’ man. As part of La Confrada (their own term for the subculture) they were becoming a visible minority in the city at large, often as drag hustlers, and were a matter of growing concern for civic authorities.

Manon, like most of her period, has embraced the rather rigid role defined for her. Once ‘out’ as a passive homosexual, she has lost any claim to

masculinity and sees her identity as largely female. There was no middle ground. She lives the Latina feminine stereotype – probably more than most women.

Lorenzo  
El Sindical

(20-30) *The union man* An Italian immigrant. He is a man of strong convictions, but a will that can't withstand the pressures around him. Workers had zero rights in turn of the century Argentina and labor organizers were regularly beaten and murdered by both hired thugs and police. The class divide was huge and oppression of the worker very real. Lorenzo is fast nearing the end of his rope. He sees little hope for change and is slowly giving up the fight, using sex and drugs as an escape from the seeming hopelessness of his crusade.

Francisco Vallon  
El niño mal  
de familia bien

(18-25) Literally, '*bad child of good family*,' he's a black sheep who ventures out of his wealthy home to go slumming and whoring among the lower classes. Because of the danger of the slums, the 'bad children' almost always made the rounds in packs and were a regular sight in the brothels on the outskirts of the city. He is wild, likable, proud and macho with an arrogance less affected than inbred. While friendly and reasonably comfortable among the thugs, pimps and drag hookers with whom he mingles at night (possibly still in the white tie and tails he wore to the opera earlier) he certainly considers himself superior. He's not 'bad' any more than the thieves he's befriended. Both are simply products of their own time and society with a class structure and prejudices so immutable they are hardly questioned by either.

Julia  
La China Criolla

(16-25) *Creole, woman of mixed blood*. A dark-skinned mulata prostitute. On the whole, less brazen than the Italian or Spanish immigrant prostitutes, the Criollas were generally better thought of by the authorities because they tended to be more modest and 'womanly' in the Latina stereotype – also because they were Argentinas – not outsiders. She is a prostitute not out of choice, but out of poverty and tends to treat her johns in the same way she would treat a husband. She has a very real attachment to La Madre, but also a very real desire to get out of 'the life.'

Rufino  
El Guapo

(30-45) *Good-looking, brave man, bully*. Our guapo is employed as a thug for the local political boss. He enforces proper voting, suppresses organized labor and keeps the workers in line, generally at knifepoint. He doesn't do any of this for ideological reasons; it's merely his job and gives him a certain status and fear-inspired respect among the rabble. He

doesn't pick a quarrel unless it's in his self-interest, but he does have a slight streak of mean.

Alejandro  
El Langa

(25-35) *Lunfardo: show-off, pimp* Tough, has a friendly rivalry with Rosendo, tinged with a certain amount of jealousy. Like all the men except Manon, the Latino code of honor and machismo is unquestioned.

Sophia  
La Italiana

(18-30) *The Italian*. An Italian immigrant prostitute. She is brash, loud, aggressive – one who might be unflatteringly termed “a real ball-breaker.” She dominates anyone she can, easily eviscerates with her tongue and has a colorful vocabulary. She earns her living the way she does at least partly by choice – it's one of the few ways a woman can be truly independent. She's not at all evil, but she takes shit from nobody.

La Madre

(40-60) *The mother*. The madam of the bordello, but also very much its mother. She is both disciplinarian and protector to her girls – most of whom she truly cares for. Our madam is of ambiguous sexuality. Her preference for masculine dress is perhaps part lesbian penchant, part as a symbol of her dominant role in the house, and part a way to thumb her nose at upper-class conventions. She is a retired hooker, has certainly had relationships with men, and is now the dominant partner in a special relationship with Julia. The sexual nature of the relationship is less important than La Madre's selection of a masculine role in society. The contemporary terms for lesbian – *uranista* and *invertida* – seem to have had less to do with sexual preference than with a woman who took on a job or role traditionally reserved for men – in business, society or in her affections.

El Cantor / Juan

(40-60) *The singer*. A male Argentine tango singer of the '30's. Impeccably dressed, hair slicked back. He is elegant and macho, with deep, resonant, voice that sings with an honest and heartfelt drama his yearning for something lost. (The same actors plays Juan, an anonymous tango dancer/john in the first scene.)

La Canta

(40-60) *The singer*. A female Argentine tango singer of the '30's. Stylishly gowned with heavy makeup, she exudes both elegance and sexuality. Dietrich-like, a playful half smile gently mocks both herself and those who desire her. In a deep, smoky alto, she too croons a sincere, almost tragic longing for all that is gone.

The Musicians

A trio of street musicians consisting of Bandoneón, violin and guitar. They are shabbily dressed and scratch out a living playing at bordellos and street dances.

## Musical Numbers

## ACT I

Arrabal de mi recuerdos	La Canta
Tango Primero	(Instrumental)
Héroe	La Canta
Tango de Casa	(Instrumental)
Mi Dolor	El Cantor
Tango Masculino	Los Cantores

## ACT II

La Pareja Alegre	El Cantor
La Canción de la Mujer Honesta	Manon
La Mentira Del Beso	La Canta
El Duelo	(Instrumental)
Tango Final	(Instrumental)
Mi Dolor (reprise)	Los Cantores

## The Setting

Shortly after the turn of the century, the patio of a bordello in the Porteño district of Buenos Aires, both real and remembered

– and –

The late 1930's, the stage of a Buenos Aires nightclub.

*“[The tango] at first was dance separately like the candombes; later the dancers came together and transformed the dance into one for partners intertwined, preferably men; thus it passed into the brothels.”*

--Horacio Salas, *El Tango* (1980)

*“I'll add another curious example: sodomy. In all the countries of the world, an indivisible reproof falls upon both parties of that unimaginable contact... Not among the tough guys of Buenos Aires, who proclaim a kind of veneration for the active partner – because he has put something over on his companion...”*

--Jorge Luis Borges, *Nuestras Imposibilidades* (1931)

*“People in the street are lavish  
with vulgar approval.*

*For to the rhythm of the tango ‘La Morocha,’  
two men from the slums dance in a lewd embrace.”*

--Evaristo Carriego, *Misas Herejes* (1908)

Tango Masculino was originally produced by the Wings Theatre Company in New York City and received the 2001/2002 OOBRA Award for Excellence in Off-off Broadway Theatre.

ACT I  
Scene 1

*(The play takes place in two distinct places and times. In the large, central area of the stage where most of the action takes place, it is Buenos Aires, just a few years after the nineteenth century became the twentieth. We can see a portion of the patio of a bordello in the Porteño district – a rough area near the docks. The patio is enclosed on three sides. SR is the back wall of the house, protected by a narrow covered porch. Opening onto the porch are three doors, one, center, of heavy wood planks, leading to the parlor of the brothel. Two smaller doorways, not much more than double louvered shutters, lead directly to bedrooms, the downstage door to Manon's room and the upstage to Sophia's. The walls of the building are brick, covered with cracked and patched pink stucco. The porch is rough wood. At the far upstage end of the porch we can see the bottom few steps of an outside staircase that leads to the second floor and is mostly unseen behind the building. A crude fence made of corrugated tin with wood supports runs across the upstage side of the patio, separating it from the Rio de la Plata, with a wooden gate far UL leading to an alley and hence the street. The back of another building, windowless and in disrepair, encloses the SL side of the patio. A few mismatched chairs and a couple of rickety wooden tables are here and there for occasions when the festivities spill outside. Four or five strands of colored lanterns run from the porch roof, over the patio, and meet high on a pole against the SL wall, giving a warm, if dim glow to the proceedings. Overall, the effect is shabby but clean with an obvious attempt to make the place look festive. All of the colors here – sets and costumes - are slightly muted, giving the almost sepia-tone look of an aging photograph.)*

*(As the play begins, however, this area is dark and unseen. A moment after the house lights have gone out, the opening strains of a spirited*

*tango are heard. Far SL, outside of the main set, a spotlight reveals La Canta, a striking tango singer of the 1930's. She is on a stage, mid performance, a large old-fashioned microphone on a stand in front of her. La Canta is an elegant woman in her 50's or 60's in a dark, stylish gown and deliberately dramatic make-up. Neither she nor her surroundings are anything approaching sepia-toned. She exudes a casual sexuality often combined with a slight smile of good-natured amusement – both at herself and her admirers. With a sincere, if dramatic, nostalgia she begins to sing “Arrabal De Mi Recuerdos” in a rich, smoky alto.)*

*(N.B. – sung lines are indented.)*

### **La Canta**

In the years of my youth there were many lovers,  
Some hard to remember, others easy to forget.  
But if one should live long enough, one discovers,  
The one you look back on without regret...

Arrabal,  
Lover whose memory still lingers.  
Arrabal,  
Where you kiss with the knife, cut with the lips.  
Arrabal,  
Smoky memories: bordellos and dance halls,  
Memoirs of fear, of courage, of youth.  
The nights that we danced – milongas and tangos...  
Fears that were lies, hopes that were truth...

Even now with the power to make me look back...  
The face of my lover, the love of my life,  
Arrabal de mi reuerdos.

Arrabal,  
Your streets were the arms that held me.  
Arrabal,  
We who had nothing, you gave so much.  
Arrabal,  
Derelict quarter, in your embrace,  
An outcast world claimed its pride.  
Partners in shadow, limbs entwined

in a dance where passion and power collide.

Todavía con la fuerza me haces recordar...  
El rostro de mi querida, El amor de mi vida,  
Arrabal de mi recuerdos.

Tantos años han pasado y sigo evocando  
La sangre de mi corazón, El alma de mi canción,  
Arrabal de mi recuerdos.

*(As La Canta takes her bow place and time segue. The lights begin to rise on the patio. It is night, and beneath the colored lights, three couples are dancing a tango of the 'old style' – less refined and perhaps more visceral than the dance we have come to know. This early tango is more lively, more overtly sexual, more combative, and at this period, danced almost exclusively by men. It is not a dance of romance -- more a display of power, each man trying to outdo his partner in a heated male-male display of sexual machismo.)*

*(Dancing on the moonlit patio are Lorenzo and Alejandro, an idealistic young Italian immigrant and an Argentine tough-guy, slightly older. Alejandro is leading. Taking the lead in the second couple is Rufino, a thug/enforcer for a local factory boss. He is dancing with Juan, a middle class bordello customer. All of these men are dressed in white shirts; shabby dark jackets and somewhat crumpled hats. A couple of the men sport ties. The third couple is rather different. Francisco is obviously of a different class than the others, snappily dressed in striped suit. His partner, Julia, is a young mulata beauty in traditional Argentine 'country' garb: peasant blouse and a full, floor-length woven skirt. In deference to her profession, the blouse is pulled a bit lower than necessary in the bosom. The skirt is also tucked into her wide belt just high enough to show off a comely bit of calf. The dancers are accompanied by three rather unkempt street musicians playing a violin, a guitar and a bandoneón.)*

*(The three couples all have a few drinks under*



*their belts, and are having a fine time. Their dance is improvised – perhaps a little crude, definitely lewd, and punctuated with the occasional whoop or shout. These aren't the polished, sophisticated dancers of 'Tango Argentino,' rather, a bunch of common guys, decent street-dancers, half-looped, improvising steps to a new dance, still very much in a raw and formative state.)*

*(After a few moments, La Madre, Manon and Sophia enter from the main house and stand on the porch watching the dancers. La Madre is a commanding woman in riding pants; knee-high leather boots, the hilt of a knife protruding from the right one, and a billowing white shirt, open far enough down the front to expose more than a little breast. She is well past 50, but still handsome. Manon is a drag prostitute, actually looking quite respectable in a high-necked dress and high-button shoes. Those who didn't know better might mistake her for the real thing. Sophia is more flashy than Julia, dressed in a revealing evening dress that might have arrived mail order from a Paris fashion magazine. The women relax on the porch, urging on the dancers with whistles and the occasional bawdy comment. A few more moments and the back gate swings open, admitting Rosendo and Jorge. Rosendo is – deliberately -- the sort of man to whom all eyes turn as he enters a room. He's a sharp dresser: skintight striped trousers set off by spit-polished leather boots with high Cuban heels. His short jacket is perfectly tailored to his tapered waist. A brightly colored shirt is almost completely hidden by the long white scarf, tied loosely at his neck and draped down his chest like a cravat. A gray, felt slouch hat is pulled low over his eyes. A cigarette dangles from his lips. He is the compadrito – in another time and place, the slick Chicago gangster or the rapper with a posse. And like all of them, he carries with him an attitude to match his costume: confident, arrogant, and above all, macho. He's about 35 and very much in his prime. Behind him is Jorge, a young man of 16*

*or 17. And while trying to put up a good front, he's very much Rosendo's opposite: unsure, insecure, his clothes rumpled, worn and ill-fitting. Hatless, he hangs back near the gate, eyes darting around the patio, uncertain. Rosendo moves through the dancers, giving Alejandro a friendly clap on the shoulder as he passes. Juan, not so light on his feet, bumps his partner Rufino, who shoves him back roughly as the other dancers continue.)*

**Rufino**

Hey! Watch it!

**Juan**

Sorry...

**Rufino**

You dance like an ox.

**Sophia**

Says the bull...

**Rufino**

*(Moving suggestively to Sophia with a wicked grin.)*

You know I am, chica. You finally ready?

**Sophia**

I need some air. Dance with Rosendo.

**Rosendo**

I've got some business...

**Sophia**

Come on, Rosendo. Show him what you got.

**Rufino**

*(Good natured, but with an edge.)*

Yeah. Show me what you got, Rosendo.

*(Rufino holds out his arms, dance position, to Rosendo as if to lead. It's a friendly challenge. Rosendo, looking mildly amused, motions Jorge aside. He approaches Rufino and shakes his head, holding out his own arms in a way that makes it clear it is he who will lead. Rufino gives a smirk and a little bow and acquiesces. They join the other dancing couples, but it's obvious these two are in a different league. Their dance is a contest of machismo, each constantly topping the other in flashy cortes and cobradas. And while there's a seriousness to the cock-fighting, both are enjoying themselves tremendously. Soon, the other dancers move aside to give the two men more room and form an arc around them, clapping and shouting. The dance builds in intensity, finally ending with the men poised together nose to nose, their eyes locked in a challenge, the tension almost sexual. Then, Rosendo laughs. Rufino joins in, clapping Rosendo on the back and tipping his hat as the rest of the little party applauds. Rosendo looks back to Jorge who is hanging back, nervous, unsure whether he should stay or go. With a little smile at the boy's obvious discomfort, Rosendo gestures for Jorge to join him. They move to a table and sit. Sophia wanders over and sits on Rosendo's lap, sliding her hand inside his jacket.)*

**Sophia**

Hmmmm. I love a sweaty man.

**Julia**

Is that why your room always smells like one?

**Sophia**

Put a.

**Julia**

Takes one to know one.

**La Madre**

Julia...

*(She shows Julia a token.)*

You got somebody inside.

**Julia**

Who?

**La Madre**

Don Carlo.

**Julia**

*(Rolling her eyes as she exits.)*

Madre de dios...

**Lorenzo**

*(Giving some coins to the Musicians)*

Here.

**Alejandro**

Hey – you're not leaving?

**La Madre**

Come on inside. You can play in the parlor. The customers like a little music.

*(The musicians hesitate. The Bandoneon player  
flips the coin Lorenzo has just given him.)*

So I'll pay you something. Don't worry. We'll work it out.

**The Bandoneon Player**

Yeah. We'll work it out.

*La Madre ushers the musicians into the house.  
Manon and Lorenzo have begun whispering  
together, slightly apart from the others.)*

**Manon**

You won't be too long?

**Lorenzo**

No, I just have to take care of things. You know?

**Manon**

I know.

*(She smiles at Lorenzo, and with a certain elegance, exits into the house.)*

**Alejandro**

Don't keep the little marica waiting.

**Lorenzo**

You jealous, Alejandro? I beat you to her this time.

**Alejandro**

I can do better.

**Lorenzo**

Yeah. That's why you're standing out here with those pendejos – while I, on the other hand, am going upstairs to get me a little.

**Alejandro**

Yeah – get you a little what?

**Francisco**

Who cares – at least he's getting something.

**Juan**

What happened to Julia?

**Francisco**

There's somebody ahead of me.

**Lorenzo**

Those are the breaks – my overdressed, bourgeois capitalist-pig friend.

*(Francisco amiably tips his hat.)*

**Francisco**

You better watch out. Julia takes much longer and maybe I'll jump the nearest communist.

**Lorenzo**

Yeah, try it riquito – try it at the march next week, there will be plenty of communists there. Right Alejandro?

**Alejandro**

The march? March yourself. I'm tired of marching.

**Lorenzo**

What, you got something better to do? Like hang around here all day?

**Alejandro**

And what else should I do? There's no work.

**Lorenzo**

You should get off your butt and go march with me. What do you think we're marching for?

**Rufino**

Shut up, Lorenzo.

**Lorenzo**

*(Ignoring Rufino)*

Come on – that's why you've got to march, Alejandro. That's why everybody's got to march. If we had a union, they couldn't have tossed you out on the street.

**Rufino**

If we didn't have fucking immigrants like you, there would be plenty of jobs for everybody and nobody would get thrown out on the street. You got a big mouth, Lorenzo.

**Lorenzo**

You may be willing to be a toady for capitalist...

**Rufino**

I'm telling you to shut your fucking mouth. Watch your step, cabrón. The people I work for. They're watching you. And you don't want to fuck with them.

**Lorenzo**

Your 'people' can go to hell. The workers...

**Rufino**

You don't want to fuck with me, either.

*(There is a moment of standoff, but Lorenzo backs down.)*

**Lorenzo**

No. I've got better things to do. Gentlemen...

*(He tips his hat, and crosses to La Madre. Rufino looks as if he might follow, but Rosendo is at his arm, Sophia beside him.)*

**Rosendo**

Leave him alone Rufino. He's just a little crazy.

**Rufino**

Yeah. A little too crazy.

*(Lorenzo gives La Madre a few coins, receives a tapita in return and exits into Manon's room. Rufino watches him go, then turns to Sophia.)*

Hey – you free?

**Sophia**

No, querido. Never free.

**Rufino**

You know what I mean.

**Sophia**

You got a tapita?

*(Rufino hands her a small token which she passes to Rosendo without comment.)*

Then what you waiting for?

*(She gives Rufino a little grab on the ass. He responds by grabbing her head for a long, hot kiss. When he's finished, he puts an arm around her waist and leads her into the house. Jorge has watched all this transpire – trying, not entirely successfully, to appear as if he's seen it all before. Rosendo moves back to the table with Jorge.)*

**Juan**

*(holding out cards)*

I hate waiting. You want to play some Truco?

**Francisco**

Nothing else to do.

**Alejandro**

What the hell. Might as well take your money.

**Francisco**

Who's dealing?

*(Their voices fade as the game begins. Faintly, we hear music from inside the house as the musicians begin to play again. La Madre is approaching Rosendo & Jorge)*

**La Madre**

*(To Jorge)*

You see anything you like?

**Jorge**

I... I'm not...

**Rosendo**

I don't think my friend is quite ready.

**Jorge**

I just... I just came to... To talk with Don Rosendo.

**La Madre**

Oh! *Don* Rosendo! So talk. You want a beer, *Don* Rosendo? How about you?

**Jorge**

No, I... Thanks. I better not... I don't have any money.

**Rosendo**

*(mildly amused)*



No, then I guess you better not.

**La Madre**

*(to Jorge)*

You want some mate?

**Jorge**

No. Thank you.

**La Madre**

Relax. It's on the house.

**Jorge**

Yeah. OK. Thank you.

*(La Madre exits into the house. In the background, we dimly hear the voices of the men playing cards and the music from within.)*

**Alejandro**

Mierda. I never get anything.

**Juan**

Shut up. How much we up to, Francesco?

**Francesco**

It's three to you...

**Rosendo**

So.

**Jorge**

What?

**Rosendo**

You wanted to talk to me...

**Jorge**

Yeah.

*(silence)*

Thanks... For getting me away... You know...

**Rosendo**

Not a problem.

**Jorge**

I didn't know the police -- bothered people there.

**Rosendo**

Too many men hanging around the Plaza Mazzini at night... The police have to look like they're doing something. It's no big deal.

**Jorge**

Oh.

*(A silence.)*

I thought they were going to... They didn't bother you.

**Rosendo**

No. They don't bother me.

**Jorge**

Why?

**Rosendo**

The police know me. I know the police. We don't bother each other.

**Jorge**

Oh.

**Rosendo**

So what's your name, chico?

**Jorge**

Oh. I'm sorry. Jorge.

**Rosendo**

Jorge. Good. We're getting somewhere. And Jorge, what were you doing wandering the Plaza Mazzini late at night?

**Jorge**

Nothing. I was just on my way... Somewhere else.

**Rosendo**

I see. And you were on your way somewhere else on Friday at the cock-fights?

*(Jorge is silent. La Madre enters with a gourd of mate with a metal straw. She gives it to Jorge and a glass of beer to Rosendo.)*

**Jorge**

Thank you.

**La Madre**

You're welcome.

*(She gives him a friendly wink and exits.)*

**Rosendo**

I remember faces. Call it a habit. I've seen yours a few times in the last few days.

*(Jorge is still silent)*

So one more time. Why the plaza? You looking for somebody?

**Jorge**

I was just... I've never been there before.

**Rosendo**

Come on. Stop dancing around, OK? It makes me tired. You like what the men in the plaza are selling? Say so. You there to have a good time? Who cares? It doesn't cost much.

**Jorge**

I am not... I've got to go.

**Rosendo**

Calm down. So you weren't there to buy?

**Jorge**

You weren't there to sell?

*(a beat, then Rosendo laughs quietly again.)*

**Rosendo**

You have a mouth.

**Jorge**

Just don't think...

**Rosendo**

Don't think what?

**Jorge**

Nothing.

*(Jorge gets up to go, but this time Rosendo is serious – almost threatening. He has Jorge's wrist in a grip like a vice.)*

**Rosendo**

Look: There are only two reasons I've seen you around so much. First, you're a maricon – you want to pay me to treat you like a woman. That doesn't matter either way. Or if not – you've got some other reason to follow me. Like somebody wants to know what I'm doing and pays a boy to tell them. Now, that *does* matter, little man. So you tell me which it is.

**Jorge**

Nobody's paying me to follow you. And I'm not a fucking maricon.

**Rosendo**

Then what?

**Jorge**

I just... Let go of me. I just wanted to talk to you.

**Rosendo**

Then we've talked. You can go now.

**Jorge**

I wasn't following you. OK? I was just... My brother – he told me you were important. Everybody knows you. Nobody messes with you.

**Rosendo**

Good to know.

**Jorge**

He said they call you El Capo...

**Rosendo**

*(A little laugh again.)*

Only people who want something. And what do you want, Chico?

*(silence)*

Go on – what are *you* asking for?

**Jorge**

I'm not asking for anything. I got something to offer.

**Rosendo**

Oh? What?

**Jorge**

*(Not the way he'd planned it, but it's now or never.)*

Me. I'm offering to work for you.

**Rosendo**

Oh. Thank you. You are too good to me.

**Jorge**

I didn't mean... Look, I just want to work.

**Rosendo**

Don't we all.

**Jorge**

By brother – he said that you have jobs – things that people do for you. I can do that.

**Rosendo**

You want a job? Go on harvest – go ask at the slaughterhouse. That’s where you find work.

**Jorge**

*(Increasingly desperate)*

I won’t do that. My brother works harvest. It gets him nowhere.

**Rosendo**

And you want to get somewhere.

**Jorge**

Yes. I want to get somewhere.

**Rosendo**

Some of the women here, they work for me – you want to do that? No? I didn’t think so. Sometimes I throw people out of here if they get out of line. Sometimes I have to cut them. You big enough for that?

**Jorge**

*(cocky)*

I got a knife.

**Rosendo**

Oh – you’ve got a knife. You know what to do with it?

*(Gorge pulls out his knife.)*

Yeah, I know what to do with it. My brother taught me.

**Rosendo**

You ever kill anybody?

**Jorge**

No... But I could.

**Rosendo**

*(With a withering contempt)*

Put it away little boy. The things I need done, I need a man to do. OK?

*(Rosendo gets up to leave, but Gorge rises first, the knife is in his hand.)*

**Jorge**

Don't walk away from me. You don't fucking walk away from me.

*(There is a long moment. The men playing cards have gone silent and are watching the proceedings. Rosendo's eyes are deadly.)*

**Rosendo**

Are you going to use that?

*(no response)*

Well?

**Jorge**

*(Thinking fast – he's gone way too far.)*

No... I'm going to give it to you.

*(Gorge offers the weapon, hilt first. Now it's Rosendo who is silent, but he takes the knife.)*

It was my father's. He gave it to me. Before he died.

**Rosendo**

*(Now slightly off balance)*

Then why...?

**Jorge**

Because you're going to give it back to me. When you think I'm ready.

**Rosendo**

I am?

*(Neither man moves for a moment, then Rosendo sits again. The other men go back to their cards. Begging is hard, but George drops the cocky act and manages it with a certain dignity even though he is shaking slightly. He sits as he speaks.)*

**Jorge**

Don... Rosendo... Please. For sixteen years, I've lived in my mother's house. She tries to take care of me – to protect me. She can't. Hell, she can't even take care of herself. My brother's gone most of the time – Uruguay – harvest – doing shit-work for people who treat him like shit. He's thirty and he looks sixty. I can't do that. I'm not going to do that. Shit, you don't understand.

*(Rosendo is still silent. Jorge is near tears – but*

*would never cry.)*

I left home. A month ago. To make it on my own. Well, I haven't been so good at it. OK? I've been living in an alley down by the docks. I've been stealing when I need something to eat. I've never done that before, but I'm learning. I'm getting by. But I want to do better than get by. A lot better. OK? You can teach me.

*(Rosendo sets the knife back on the table.)*

**Rosendo**

You go back home, Jorge. It's better.

*(Jorge has lost. But he manages to get it together. He squares his shoulders.)*

**Jorge**

No. I can make it on my own.

**Rosendo**

Can you?

**Jorge**

Yeah. I can.

**Rosendo**

Go on. Get out.

*(Jorge reaches to retrieve his prize possession, but Rosendo is quicker. The older man's hand is on the knife again. The two men lock eyes as Rosendo pulls the knife from under Jorge's hand. Rosendo stands, takes a step back, and flips the knife a couple of times – almost taunting. Twice humiliated, Jorge loses it. In a flash, he's on his feet, his chair going over with a crash. His eyes dart around for another weapon. He grabs Rosendo's beer bottle and raises it. He doesn't strike, but he isn't bluffing, no matter what, he will not leave without what is his. There is a momentary standoff, then suddenly, Rosendo lets out an incredulous laugh. He can't seem to stop. Jorge just stands there, mouth agape, bottle mid-air, staring at Rosendo – who finally gets himself under control. Again, Jorge reaches for his knife.)*

No. I'm keeping this.

*(Jorge again threatens with the bottle.)*



No... No, you have won, Chico.

*(He gives a little bow.)*

I'll follow your orders. I'll give it back when you're ready.

*(Jorge lowers the bottle, still not quite understanding.)*

There's a little room upstairs in the attic. I'll talk to La Madre. It won't be a problem.

*(Jorge still just stares.)*

Well, what do you say?

*(Spent – and a little dazed.)*

**Jorge**

What... What am I going to do?

**Rosendo**

Nothing you'll need this thing for.

*(Rosendo slips Jorge's knife into his own belt and shrugs)*

You'll do whatever I tell you. You shine my boots. You wash out my shirts. If you're good, maybe I'll let you run a couple of errands. You got a problem with that?

**Jorge**

No. No... You're the boss.

**Rosendo**

OK. You going to put down that bottle?

**Jorge**

Oh... Yeah.

*(Rosendo puts a firm hand on Gorge's neck.)*

**Rosendo**

Come on inside. I'll find you something to eat.

*(Over his shoulder as he leads Jorge inside.)*

Deal me in. I'll be right back.

*(The lights fade. As the patio disappears, La Canta reappears. She is singing a zamba...)*

**La Canta**

I was raised on the pampas and dreamed of romance.  
I had many suitors, but they hadn't a chance.  
For I knew the gaucho I dreamed of at night,

With the face of an angel and trousers worn tight.

How we danced the hot nights of a wild carnival!  
His form tall and slender, I saw only his splendor.  
But he wasn't a hero at all.

Hero! The man to adore and respect...  
Hero! The man you'll defend and protect...  
Hero! The man who will stand and will fight,  
who'll enfold you at night...  
The man that you love,  
is your hero.

Older and sadder, I thought myself wise.  
Courage and power would now be the prize.  
In a breath, one appeared who defeated all foes  
But arms that you lean on can also enclose.

It's hard to watch gods from their pedestals fall.  
But life can be cruel; he was worse than a fool.  
No he wasn't a hero at all.

Hero! The man to adore and respect...  
Hero! The man you'll defend and protect...  
Hero! The man who will stand and will fight,  
who'll enfold you at night...  
The man that you love,  
is your hero.

*(The final verse is slower)*

Finally, broken, I gave up my dreams  
Knowing no man is the hero he seems.  
I settled for someone as common as dirt.  
Years on his face and sweat on his shirt.  
But I worship him still, though he's nothing at all.  
For to me he will dare every weakness to bare.

*(a tempo)*

My hero who never will fall...

Hero! The man to adore and respect...  
Hero! The man you'll defend and protect...  
Hero! The man who will stand and will fight,  
who'll enfold you at night...  
The man that you love,  
is your hero.

**Scene 2**

*(Later the same night. We can hear tango music, sexy and raw, from inside the house. The offstage music will continue throughout the scene. Jorge is discovered at a small table in a shadowy corner, sipping on a bottle of beer and passing time sketching on the back of an envelope with a piece of charcoal. Muffled voices – and not happy ones are heard from inside.)*

**Sophia**

Go on – cut it out. I'm tired.

**Rosendo**

I'm not.

**Sophia**

And I'm supposed to care?

**Rosendo**

Hey – what's your problem?

*(Rosendo and Sophia enter from the house, both in their standard 'working' attire. Rosendo isn't exactly plotzed, but he's had a couple.)*

**Sophia**

You. You're my problem.

**Rosendo**

The band's still playing. People are dancing in the parlor. Come back in. Dance with me.

**Sophia**

Band. Ha! You call that a band? Three half-assed musicians La Madre pulled in off the street? In Napoli we wouldn't let them in the front door.

**Rosendo**

You're in a mood cara mia. I can take care of that.

**Sophia**

Would you stop pawing me? I've been pawed enough tonight.

**Rosendo**

You didn't object so much this morning.

**Sophia**

That was this morning. Look, I just laid down for three fat old men who still smell like the inside of a slaughterhouse. I don't need another one.

**Rosendo**

Hey, don't get...

**Sophia**

Three times I change the sheets. Three times I fill up the basin, and fixed myself up, and drag my ass back to the parlor looking like God-damn Cleopatra... I feel like shit. I'm going to bed.

**Rosendo**

Come on... You know you want your papi...

*(He embraces her -- she shoves him roughly.)*

**Sophia**

Jesus! I told you to get off me.

**Rosendo**

Hey! Who you think you're talking to?

**Sophia**

A horse's ass. You're drunk, Rosendo. You get stupid when you get drunk. Now let me go.

**Rosendo**

I'll let you go when I'm God-damn ready. All I want...

**Sophia**

All you want? You think I give a shit what you want? You want a piece of ass? Fine, go to the plaza and pick up some marica who wants to get plowed...

**Rosendo**

You watch your mouth...

**Sophia**

I'll say whatever the hell I...

**Rosendo**

Remember who owns you, chica. You are mine, bought and...

**Sophia**

Yeah? That the only way you can get a woman?

**Rosendo**

Bitch... You aren't worth...

**Sophia**

That's if you can get it up for a change.

**Rosendo**

Fucking puta.

**Sophia**

Don't you touch me!

*(He has grabbed her by the hair, his hand raised to smack her, Sophia is screaming, but La Madre has thundered onto the porch.)*

**La Madre**

Shut it.

**Sophia**

He tried to...

**La Madre**

I said to shut it. Let go of her. You don't act like street trash. Not in my house. What's the matter with you, Rosendo? You got no pride? We still got customers in there.

*(He just picks up his hat, which has fallen to the ground and stands, beating the dirt off of it,*

*fuming.)*  
And you. Get back inside where you belong.

**Sophia**

I'm going to bed. I'm tired.

**La Madre**

You're going where I tell you to go. Make a scene again, and I'll put you back on the street where you belong.

**Sophia**

I don't feel good. I'm sick.

**La Madre**

Then I'll call a doctor tomorrow and take it out of your cut.

**Sophia**

Bruja.

**La Madre**

So what's it going to be?

*(Wordlessly, Sophia stomps back into the house.)*

What's got into you, Rosendo? I thought you had more class.

**Rosendo**

*(Still angry but oddly sincere)*

I'm sorry.

**La Madre**

I'll get over it. Come on back in.

**Rosendo**

No. I need to walk.

*(He leaves out the back gate. La Madre notices Jorge in the shadows and walks over to him.)*

**La Madre**

So. What are you up to?

**Jorge**

Nothing.

**La Madre**

You doing OK?

**Jorge**

OK? Yeah. I guess.

**La Madre**

Rosendo – He treating you all right?

*(Jorge looks up quizzically)*

It's my house. Understand? Rosendo, he may take care of some of the business, but it's still my place. I keep an eye on things. So if I want to know something, I ask. You been here a while now. Rosendo doing right by you?

**Jorge**

Yeah. Rosendo's -- OK.

**La Madre**

Rosendo's an ass. He's OK – but he's still an ass. Just don't take too much shit. You hear?

**Jorge**

I don't.

**La Madre**

No. I noticed that. Good for you.

*(She winks and starts to go, but notices the drawing.)*

What's this?

**Jorge**

Nothing.

**La Madre**

Let me see.

*(She holds the paper up to the light to get a better look.)*

Not bad.

**Jorge**

Thanks.

**La Madre**

Somebody teach you to draw like that?

**Jorge**

My mother. She's better at it.

**La Madre**

Who is it... Ah... Never mind. Should have known.

*(She looks after where Rosendo has vanished. Embarrassed, he grabs the envelope.)*

**Jorge**

It's not anybody.

*(She musses his hair in a maternal way.)*

**La Madre**

Niño loco.

*(He grins at her shyly. Francisco, and Julia appear on the porch, very stoned. He's in white tie and cutaway, carrying a top hat. They don't notice the others and kiss deeply.)*

**Julia**

Nice.

**Francisco**

No, you. You're nice.

*(He dreamily kisses her neck, her breast...)*

**Julia**

*(pulling a medical-looking glass tube from her cleavage)*

You want some more?

**Francisco**

No. I'm OK. It's good. Makes me feel good.



**Julia**

That's what it's for.

**Francisco**

You make me feel good to.

**Julia**

That's what I'm for.

**Francisco**

I meant it, you know. What I told you...

**Julia**

Did you?

**La Madre**

Julia!

**Julia**

Mama? I'm here, mama.

**La Madre**

I can see that.

**Julia**

Francesco has to go.

**La Madre**

You're taking chances you know.

**Francisco**

What?

**La Madre**

You boys from the north side – you usually come together. It's better that way.

**Francisco**

I'll remember that.

**La Madre**

Yeah. Remember that. Some people down here, they see a rich boy... He's not too steady on his feet... You better be careful going home.

**Francisco**

Yeah. I will. 'Night Julia.

*(He kisses her again, slow and sensual.)*

**Julia**

'Night

*(Floating slightly, Francesco exits out the gate.)*

**La Madre**

Give it to me.

*(Julia hands her a tapita.)*

I don't care about that. You know what I mean.

**Julia**

Oh.

*(Reluctantly, Julia retrieves the vial from her blouse and hands it over.)*

**La Madre**

You promised me. You stupid puta, you promised me. Where'd you get this?

**Julia**

I...

**La Madre**

Was it him? The rich boy? He bring needles too?

**Julia**

No...

**La Madre**

Like hell no. What did I tell you about morphine? You saw Juanita go, didn't you? You want to go the same way?

**Julia**

No...

**La Madre**

You stupid then? Why don't you listen?

**Julia**

Don't... Don't yell at me...

*(Julia, too loaded to deal, is softly crying.)*

**La Madre**

Oh hell... Don't... Shhhhh...

*(Julia buries her head in La Madre's breast, crying softly. La Madre strokes her hair gently.)*

Quiet, baby. Mama's here. Mama's here.

**Julia**

It just... I go someplace else.

**La Madre**

I know. I know what it does.

**Julia**

Don't be mad at me.

**La Madre**

No. I'm not mad.

**Julia**

Promise?

*(Julia looks up. La Madre brushes the tears off her face.)*

**La Madre**

Yeah. I promise. Now you keep yours. No more. No more, OK?

**Julia**

OK. Yeah. I'm sorry.

**La Madre**

I know.

*(Gently, La Madre holds Julia's face. They kiss. It's not exactly passionate, but it's not exactly sisterly either.)*

It's OK.

*(La Madre brushes Julia's cheek again and speaks softly.)*

You're a mess.

**Julia**

I know.

**La Madre**

Let's get you inside.

**Julia**

No... Please? Just let me stand out here a while. The air feels nice.

**La Madre**

Yeah. OK. You all right?

**Julia**

I'm fine. You worry about me.

**La Madre**

Somebody has to.

*(Julia kisses La Madre again – gently.)*

**Julia**

Thanks.

*(La Madre nods & exits into the house. Julia wanders onto the patio and moves a little,*

*swaying, dancing in her head. When she looks a tad unsteady, Jorge rises. She notices him.)*

I didn't know you were here.

**Jorge**

There's nothing for me to do.

*(She looks him over.)*

**Julia**

You're really young.

**Jorge**

OK.

**Julia**

Nice eyes. Very pretty.

**Jorge**

Thanks.

**Julia**

You like girls?

**Jorge**

Uh... Yeah.

**Julia**

Then how come you never...

**Jorge**

I don't exactly have... lots of money.

**Julia**

Oh.

*(She runs her fingers lightly down her body, enjoying the high.)*

**Julia**

The air feels good.

**Jorge**

Yeah. It does.

**Julia**

I should go back in. Somebody's waiting for me.

**Jorge**

I know.

*(For a moment, it looks as if she will leave. Instead, she takes a step closer to Jorge. She kisses him on the lips, very gently, very romantically. When she's finished, she looks into his face for a long moment, stroking his hair.)*

**Julia**

That was for free.

*(She slides a hand into his open shirt and strokes it. She closes her eyes, visibly aroused. Tentatively, he reaches for her breast, but the gate is swinging open. It's Rosendo supporting Lorenzo. Lorenzo has been beaten. Julia steps away and leans near the house, watching.)*

**Rosendo**

Come on... Easy.

**Lorenzo**

I can walk.

**Rosendo**

Sure you can. Come on. Sit. Look what I found.

**Jorge**

Jesus.

**Rosendo**

He was lying in the street a couple blocks up.

**Jorge**

Is he going...

**Rosendo**

I think he'll be all right.

**Lorenzo**

I'm fine.

**Rosendo**

Yeah. You look fine. Go inside. Get Manon.

*(Jorge wordlessly obeys. Julia comes closer.)*

Who did it?

**Lorenzo**

Doesn't matter.

**Rosendo**

Maybe it does.

**Lorenzo**

Four... Five of them? I guess they didn't like my face.

**Rosendo**

From the slaughterhouse?

**Lorenzo**

Yeah.

**Rosendo**

Julia... Find me some water. You spoke at the march today?

**Lorenzo**

Yeah. We've got them scared. They're scared of me.

**Rosendo**

Yeah, you've got them on the run all right. Julia?

*(She hasn't moved.)*

Never mind. I'll get it myself.

*(He hurries over to where La Madre's basin sits on a corner of the porch. He fills it from a bucket.)*

**Julia**

You're hurt.

**Lorenzo**

Yeah...

**Julia**

I'm sorry.

**Lorenzo**

What's wrong with you?

**Julia**

You're bleeding.

**Lorenzo**

Yeah. I noticed.

**Julia**

Does it hurt?

**Lorenzo**

Jesus. You're way up there with the birds, aren't you?

**Julia**

*(smiling)*

Coming down a little. Too bad.

**Lorenzo**

Yeah. Too bad. Wish I was there.



**Julia**

It feels good.

**Lorenzo**

Good for you. This hurts like hell. You got any more?

**Julia**

Huh-uh. Sorry.

**Lorenzo**

Shit.

**Julia**

I can get you some if you want.

**Lorenzo**

Yeah. I want.

**Julia**

It'll be tomorrow...

*(Manon rushes in with Jorge who hangs back by the door. Rosendo brings the water.)*

**Manon**

God! Lorenzo... What...

**Lorenzo**

It's OK. I'm OK.

**Manon**

No you're not... Jesus.

**Rosendo**

Let's get him cleaned up.

**Manon**

There's more light inside... God, papa... Why...

**Lorenzo**

Please. It doesn't mater.

**Manon**

Help me get him inside.

**Lorenzo**

No. I can walk. Really. It hurts if you touch me. I'll make it.

**Manon**

Who did it? Mother of God...

**Lorenzo**

Doesn't matter. No. Come on. Just give me a kiss – gently.  
*(She does.)*

See that makes it better.

**Manon**

Don't be an idiot. I told you if you went to the march...

**Lorenzo**

Not now, baby, OK? Come on. I just want to lie down.

*(Manon walks slowly beside him and holds the door to her room. They disappear inside.)*

**Julia**

I better go in too.

**Jorge**

Yeah.

*(She moves to Jorge and brushes her lips lightly, almost teasingly, to his.)*

**Julia**

'Night.

**Jorge**

'Night.

*(Julia exits into the house, seeming to leave an unspoken invitation for Jorge to follow. Jorge watches after her for a long moment. Rosendo watches Jorge.)*

**Rosendo**

She's pretty.

**Jorge**

Yeah.

**Rosendo**

Did we interrupt something?

**Jorge**

No.

**Rosendo**

No?

**Jorge**

She was just... Nothing. We were just talking.

**Rosendo**

You want her?

**Jorge**

I... Yeah. Sure.

**Rosendo**

Then why don't you go after her?

**Jorge**

It's just not the right time. OK?

**Rosendo**

It's always the right time for that, chico.

**Jorge**

Maybe for you.

**Rosendo**

Of course for me. I'm a man.

**Jorge**

What's that supposed to mean?

**Rosendo**

Hey, calm down. I didn't mean anything.

**Jorge**

I don't see you inside getting any.

**Rosendo**

No. You don't.

**Jorge**

Then mind your own business.

*(a silence)*

I'm going to bed.

*(He starts to go.)*

**Rosendo**

Jorge...

**Jorge**

What?

**Rosendo**

You're right. It's none of my business.

*(Jorge just stands there for a moment, a little thrown. Rosendo lights a cigarette.)*

You want one?

**Jorge**

Yeah. Thanks.

*(They smoke in silence.)*

I guess... I don't know.

**Rosendo**

What?

**Jorge**

I just didn't feel like it.

**Rosendo**

Julia?

**Jorge**

Yeah.

**Rosendo**

Maybe she's not your type.

**Jorge**

Maybe.

**Rosendo**

So what is your type?

**Jorge**

I don't know. Somebody... different.

**Rosendo**

How different?

**Jorge**

What do you mean?

**Rosendo**

Nothing.

**Jorge**

So what's your type?

**Rosendo**

Everybody's my type.

**Jorge**

Sophia?

**Rosendo**

When she's not being a bitch.

**Jorge**

Sorry.

**Rosendo**

Women... They love to leave you... hanging.

**Jorge**

I wouldn't know.

**Rosendo**

I guess you haven't... Probably none of my business.

**Jorge**

Probably not.

*(Rosendo laughs lightly.)*

**Rosendo**

You know, I like you.

**Jorge**

What?

**Rosendo**

You speak your mind.

**Jorge**

Yeah. Thanks... I guess.

*(He goes to get his beer.)*

**Rosendo**

You look... Restless.

**Jorge**

Everybody's... busy. Except me. Nothing to do.

**Rosendo**

Been sitting here by yourself all night? Drinking alone?

**Jorge**

Pretty much.

**Rosendo**

Listening to the music?

**Jorge**

Yeah.

**Rosendo**

Not good to drink alone.

**Jorge**

Not much choice. Everybody's inside dancing.

**Rosendo**

They dance while they wait for a woman. Keeps them in the mood.

**Jorge**

Does it?

*(Jorge finishes his beer)*

**Rosendo**

You empty?

**Jorge**

Yeah.

### Rosendo

Wait here. I'll be right back.

*(Jorge wanders for a moment, seeming oddly nervous. Finally he sits, edgy, listening to the music from inside the house. The lights of the patio have dimmed a bit. El Cantor appears in a spotlight far SR, removed from the main action. He is a solid looking man in his 50's or 60's, impeccably dressed in the style of the '30's – immaculate tuxedo, hair slicked back. The rough tango music from inside the house mixes with the slicker, more orchestral sound of the Cantor's music as he begins to sing.)*

### El Cantor

I still can see her eyes,  
Inviting me,  
To a street dim with shadows.  
I still can see her arms.  
They beckoned,  
to a room that had no doors.

I see white pearls,  
touching her throat,  
where my hands once did.  
I see black hair.  
Its scent,  
the essence of my regret.

*(As El Cantor sings, Jorge wanders over to the open door of the bordello and looks inside, watching the dancers. Haltingly, he tries a few steps, mimicking their moves.)*

Why dance the night away with a woman who may turn cold?  
Why try to lead when the steps of her dance can not be controlled?  
Why grasp the thing you want, certain you already know  
how brief the grasp and how quick the pain of letting go.

I still can hear her voice.  
Its whisper  
betrays all my secrets.  
Her only promise:  
that of an icy wind  
to a reckless naked man.

*(El Cantor's orchestra begins an instrumental break as he steps away from his mic for a sip of*



*water. The lights on El Cantor dim to a glow as Rosendo reenters waving a full bottle of whiskey. The music continues under.)*

**Rosendo**

Presto! I told you it was no good to drink alone.

**Jorge**

Thanks.

*(He hands the bottle to Jorge who takes a long chug, then hands it back. Rosendo drinks.)*

**Rosendo**

You OK?

**Jorge**

Yeah. Burns a little – going down.

**Rosendo**

You're not used to whiskey.

**Jorge**

I'll manage.

**Rosendo**

I like it out here. Sometimes I just sit here by myself – after everyone else has gone to bed.

**Jorge**

Yeah. Me too.

**Rosendo**

It's late. Just a few people left inside.

**Jorge**

Dancing?

**Rosendo**

Uh-huh. You know how to dance?

**Jorge**

Tango?

**Rosendo**

Uh-huh.

**Jorge**

A little. It wasn't allowed at home. Too obscene.

**Rosendo**

And that's a bad thing?

**Jorge**

To my mother.

**Rosendo**

And to you?

**Jorge**

No.

**Rosendo**

That's why only men dance it – sometimes whores. Too obscene for a nice girl – it's too much like sex.

**Jorge**

What do you think about – when you're dancing?

**Rosendo**

I don't know... Power. The tango's a struggle – like sex is a struggle – which partner will have the power. It's like a challenge. I think about winning.

**Jorge**

And do you win?

**Rosendo**

Always.

*(a pause)*

So you dance?

**Jorge**

Just a few steps. I'm not very good.

**Rosendo**

And how did you learn?

**Jorge**

My brother taught me. He's not very good either. He learned it at the street dances.

**Rosendo**

Show me.

**Jorge**

No.

**Rosendo**

Come on. Show me.

**Jorge**

No really, I'm not good at it.

**Rosendo**

Then I'll teach you.

**Jorge**

That's all right.

**Rosendo**

That's what you said you wanted, isn't it – to learn?

**Jorge**

And you're so good?

**Rosendo**

The best. You got to be. You dance to show the other man who's best.

**Jorge**

Give me another drink.

**Rosendo**

All you want, chico.

*(Jorge drinks.)*

Give it to me.

*(Rosendo takes it and drinks.)*

Come on.

**Jorge**

No.

**Rosendo**

Can't take a challenge?

**Jorge**

Fuck you.

**Rosendo**

No. Just dance.

*(Rosendo holds out his arms in dance position. Warily, Jorge joins him – with plenty of space between them. They dance, Rosendo silently demonstrating steps, Jorge mimicking him – following. Slowly, the dance becomes closer – more erotic. Finally, Rosendo does a cobrada, holding their pelvises close together – grinding them slightly. Jorge mildly freaks. Abruptly, he pulls away and goes for the bottle.)*

**Rosendo**

Something wrong?

**Jorge**

No. There's blood... You have blood on your shirt – from Lorenzo. I didn't want to get it on me. That's all.

**Rosendo**

OK. Then we won't get it on you.

*(Slowly – deliberately seductive, Rosendo removes his shirt and drops it.)*

Come on.

**Jorge**

No. That's enough.

**Rosendo**

You afraid of me?

**Jorge**

No.

**Rosendo**

You afraid of yourself?

*(a long pause)*

**Jorge**

No.

*(Just as deliberately, Jorge puts down the bottle and walks back to Rosendo. Again, they dance. This time there is no doubt it is deliberately erotic – a sexual challenge -- from both. And the dance becomes different. The lights on the patio seem dimmer. There are more shadows. The dance seems less real – more dream-like, as if the dancers have stepped slightly outside of reality. As the Cantor sings his tango, the couple moves smoothly, as one.)*

Todavía veo tus ojos,  
 invitándome  
 a una calle do sombras.  
 Todavía veo a tus brazos  
 llamándome  
 a un lugar sin salida.

Veo perlas blancas,  
 acariciando su piel,  
 como te acariciaba yo antes.  
 Veo tu cabello negro,  
 su olor inolvidable,  
 la esencia de mi dolor.

¿Porque pasar la noche con una mujer fría?  
 ¿Porque bailar con una mujer cual no baila?  
 ¿Porque aguantar lo que sabes que nunca tendrás?  
 Tan breve el momento, y fuerte el dolor al saber que a mí nunca vendrás.

Todavía oigo tu voz.  
 Tu suspiro  
 traición a mis secretos.  
 Su única promesa  
 eres una brisa muy fría  
 a un hombre desnudo y sin vida.

*(The music ends. The dancers come to a stop, not releasing each other. Both are staring at each other, their breathing a little heavy. Wordlessly, Rosendo releases Jorge and steps back. He turns away and heads for the stairs to the second floor. Almost there, he turns back.)*

### **Rosendo**

Are you coming?

*(A beat, and then Jorge walks after Rosendo. Rosendo puts a hand on the back of the young man's neck. Together, they disappear up the stairs. The music resumes as the lights fade to black. The cantor speaks the tango's bridge over the music.)*

### **El Cantor**

Trate de quererla. Pero quererte sería una locura.  
 Como es desear lo que más temes.  
 Quise entregarme alma completa.  
 Pero someter a mi querido...  
 ¿Sería un acto de valor,  
 o un acto de dolor?  
 Nunca lo sabré, porque nunca me entregué.  
 Té eh perdido eso nunca lo perdonare.

*(The music continues under as the dim lights restore on the patio. Jorge stands, shirtless and barefoot, smoking a cigarette. A moment later, Rosendo enters, also barefoot, in trousers and suspenders, from the stairs. His mood is dark.)*

### **Rosendo**

I wondered where you were.

**Jorge**

You were asleep. I didn't want to bother you.

*(Indicating the cigarette)*

You mind?

**Rosendo**

No. You OK?

*(Jorge just shrugs.)*

It wasn't your first time.

**Jorge**

No.

**Rosendo**

Tell me.

**Jorge**

Nothing much. He was older – a gaucho – a friend of my brother's. They were staying at the house between jobs. They put him in my room. One night – his woman had dumped him and he came back drunk.

*(Jorge shrugs again.)*

**Rosendo**

You let him?

**Jorge**

He didn't ask permission.

**Rosendo**

You should have killed him.

**Jorge**

Should I kill you?

**Rosendo**

Maybe.

**Jorge**

I let him do it that time – and later – because – I was a kid. He was... like a hero.

**Rosendo**

Am I your hero now?

**Jorge**

You? You're an ass.

**Rosendo**

Yes – sometimes. Sometimes I can be very stupid.

**Jorge**

Like just now?

**Rosendo**

Probably.

**Jorge**

Fuck you.

*(Rosendo takes a cigarette.)*

**Rosendo**

Give me a light.

*(In lighting the cigarette, their hands touch. Sparks. Their eyes lock for a long moment. The young man turns away.)*

What's the matter?

**Jorge**

Nothing.

**Rosendo**

Go on – what?

**Jorge**

*(Almost agonized)*

I don't know what I'm... Never mind.



**Rosendo**

Hey... Chico...

**Jorge**

*(violent)*

Don't call me that. I fucking hate it when you call me that.

**Rosendo**

OK. Fine. Calm down.

*(silence)*

**Jorge**

It's late. I have things to do in the morning.

**Rosendo**

Jorge.

**Jorge**

*(not turning)*

What.

**Rosendo**

Come back to the room.

**Jorge**

No.

*(Rosendo comes up behind the young man and kisses him gently on the back of the neck. No response. He slips an arm around the younger man's chest and kisses his neck again. This time with more passion. Jorge turns.)*

**Jorge**

I...

**Rosendo**

What?

**Jorge**

*(a decision)*

Never mind.

*(Together they turn and walk back up the stairs, the older man's hand never leaving the younger man's back. As they disappear, El Cantor finishes the final stanza.)*

**El Cantor**

I still can hear her voice.  
Its whisper  
betrays all my secrets.  
And somehow in my fear,  
I held on to myself,  
and lost her.

*(The lights have faded to black.)*

**Scene 3**

*(It is several days later. Rosendo and Alejandro are at a table playing dominos. A very stoned Lorenzo lounges on the ground, propped against a wall, watching. Manon and Sophia enter from the house carrying several bundles tied in brown paper.)*

**Manon**

Gentlemen: The ladies have returned.

**Sophia**

Ladies? Ha. I'm not sure you can use that word for either one of us.

**Manon**

Speak for yourself. I am most certainly a lady.

**Sophia**

Better you than me.

*(Manon is ripping open her package)*

**Alejandro**

It's your play.

**Manon**

Come on – stop that silly game and look what I bought!

*(She produces a rather filmy beige gown.)*

**Alejandro**

Very nice. When I find the right woman – I'll buy her nice things like this.

**Manon**

When you find a woman, we'll all be too old to care.

*(Jorge enters from the house, lugging a bucket of dirty water to dump in the alley.)*

**Rosendo**

And what did you buy?

**Sophia**

*(Moving to sit on his lap.)*

Nothing I want to show in public. But Rosendo can see – later.

**Rosendo**

How much later?

**Sophia**

*(nibbling)*

I don't know. How long you want to wait?

**Rosendo**

How long will it take you to...

*(Somewhere between disgusted and jealous, Jorge stops watching and heads for the gate. Alejandro reaches for a domino and tips a glass, threatening to wet the ladies packages.)*

**Manon**

Hey! Watch it!

**Sophia**

It's OK. Nothing got wet.

**Rosendo**

Hey, chico. Take the package inside for Sophia.

*(Wordlessly, sullenly, Jorge puts down the bucket and takes the bundles from Sophia)*

**Manon**

Mine too, papi?

**Jorge**

Yeah. Sure.

*(He trudges into Manon's room.)*

**Sophia**

What's up his ass?

**Rosendo**

Forget him. He's just in a mood.

**Manon**

Kind of cute when he's in a mood.

**Sophia**

And look what else Sophia's brought for you...

*(She produces a gold pocket watch and chain from her décolletage.)*

**Rosendo**

For me? Where'd you get this?

**Sophia**

I've been shopping.

**Rosendo**

Where?

*(Jorge has emerged from Manon's room and goes to drop the other packages in Sophia's.)*

**Sophia**

In the vest pocket of the man next to me on the trolley.

**Rosendo**

Ay, mi querida.

**Lorenzo**

Nice watch.

**Manon**

What's the matter with you? You don't stand when a lady comes in?

**Lorenzo**

I don't think I could.

**Manon**

What's wrong? Hey... Lorenzo, what's wrong with you.

**Lorenzo**

Nothing. I'm happy.

**Manon**

Happy, shit. You're stoned.

**Lorenzo**

Only a little.

**Manon**

Why did you do that again? I hate it when you do that.

**Lorenzo**

I've been hurting again. The morphine makes it feel better.

**Manon**

Don't give me that. There's nothing wrong with you now. You do too much of this.

**Lorenzo**

Don't be mad. Come on. I deserve it. I've been working today.

**Manon**

Working doing what?

**Lorenzo**

I left a little present on the doorstep of El Patron.

**Manon**

A present? What? Lorenzo, tell me what you did.

**Lorenzo**

He's a pig. He treats the workers like shit. So I was making a point – sort of poetic.

*(Jorge has emerged and stops to watch.)*

**Manon**

Lorenzo, stop babbling. What did you do?

**Lorenzo**

*(almost giggling)*

I emptied a big sack of shit – all over. All over the porch, the steps. I even smeared some on the door. He'll get the message.

**Manon**

And he'll get you, you damned fool. Did anyone see you?

**Lorenzo**

Of course not. I'm good. I slip in and out – nobody sees.

**Manon**

Jesus. You better hope nobody saw. Didn't what they did after the march teach you anything?

**Lorenzo**

What does it matter? Plenty of people – they die for the cause.

**Manon**

Yeah. And you – you'll die for a stupid sack of shit. Come on. Get inside.

**Lorenzo**

Why? I like it out here.

**Manon**

Because they're probably looking for you, you idiot.

**Lorenzo**

You're angry.

**Manon**

Of course I am – I'm scared for you. If you weren't stoned out of your mind, you'd be too.

**Lorenzo**

Please don't be mad, baby.

**Manon**

Come on. Jorge, help me, will you? Come on. I'll make you some mate.  
*(Jorge complies.)*

**Lorenzo**

I can walk...

*(But not really. Jorge and Manon help him into her room.)*

**Alejandro**

I better go. I have some people to meet.

**Rosendo**

So go. The game will keep.

*(Alejandro leaves. Jorge has returned again and heads for the abandoned slop bucket. But Rosendo stops him and tosses a coin.)*

Hey, Chico. I have shirts upstairs need washing. Take care of them, OK?

**Jorge**

I'm busy.

**Rosendo**

Busy with what?

**Jorge**

I'm helping La Madre.

**Rosendo**

So help her later.

**Jorge**

You're so busy? Wash them yourself.

**Rosendo**

*(sharp)*

Hey. You have a problem, chico?

*(There is a tense moment.)*



**Jorge**

I've got to dump this. I'll get your damn shirts.

*(Jorge grabs the bucket and exits out the gate.)*

**Sophia**

Damn. He does have something up his ass.

**Rosendo**

*(shrugging)*

He knows who's boss.

**Sophia**

Well, boss man... I'm going to take a nap. You want to join me?

**Rosendo**

Depends what you're offering.

**Sophia**

Probably more than you can deliver.

**Rosendo**

Hey. Fighting words.

**Sophia**

You're more fun when you've got a little fight.

**Rosendo**

Yeah. I'll give you a fight. You go on. I'll be there in a minute.

**Sophia**

Don't be too long. I get bored fast.

*(She exits into her room.)*

**Rosendo**

Hey.

**Jorge**

You talking to me?

**Rosendo**

You see anyone else here?

*(silence)*

So let's have it. What's your problem, chico?

**Jorge**

My name's not 'chico.'

**Rosendo**

It is if I say it is.

*(silence)*

Look, you got a problem, you tell me. Otherwise you keep quiet. I don't need the crap.

**Jorge**

No. There's no problem.

**Rosendo**

Like hell. For the last week you've been sulking around here like some woman on her period.

**Jorge**

I am not your fucking woman.

**Rosendo**

Then stop fucking acting like one.

**Jorge**

You want somebody for your bitch? You got Sophia for that.

**Rosendo**

Oh. So that's what this is about.

**Jorge**

This is about nothing. I've got things to do.

**Rosendo**

Whoa, come here. No, shut up and come here.

*(Now quietly, so the others won't hear.)*

Hey... we had some fun the other night.

**Jorge**

I don't want to talk about...

**Rosendo**

Come on. You drank a little. We had a good time. No big deal.

**Jorge**

*(playing it off)*

No. It was no big deal.

**Rosendo**

Then what? If you want... You know where my room is.

**Jorge**

You think... You think I want... fuck you.

**Rosendo**

Hey. Calm down.

**Jorge**

I let you... I let that... Once. You got it? What do you think I am? Manon? Some fucking...

**Rosendo**

Jesus... What's the matter with you?

**Jorge**

You want to know what's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong. I thought you were... Shit, I... You know why I let... Why that happened?

**Rosendo**

Because you wanted it to happen.

**Jorge**

It was because I was stupid enough to look... I fucking trusted you.

**Rosendo**

Yeah? And why not? I give you some reason...

**Jorge**

Ever since... Jesus! You've treated me like shit. Like I'm another one of your... fucking whores.

**Rosendo**

Look, I never...

**Jorge**

One time... Because I thought you... Well you listen to this. I am not your woman. I am not Sophia, and I am sure as hell not a fucking Manon.

**Rosendo**

How have I...

**Jorge**

Hey! Chico! Wash out my socks. Hey! Chico! I need a beer. Fuck you. You order me around like some Goddamn barmaid. Fuck you!

**Rosendo**

Whoa, boy. You were the one who asked...

**Jorge**

I asked to work for you – real work. Not to wash your stinking shirts. Not to haul buckets of slop. Not to fucking wait on you. I'll fight for you. I'll make your payoffs. I'll fence the crap Sophia steals. I'll clean your knife. I'll polish your fucking boots if that's what you want. But I will not be your woman.

**Rosendo**

Well excuse me, Don Jorge...

*(Rosendo reaches to ruffle his hair, but Jorge smacks his hand away.)*

**Jorge**

Don't fucking touch me.

*(Rosendo grabs Jorge's wrist in a grip something like steel.)*

**Rosendo**

You want to test me?

*(Deadly)*

*(Jorge doesn't back down, their eyes are locked, the tension almost sexual. Rosendo reaches up with his free hand. His fingers lightly brush Jorge's cheek. Then they slap it -- hard. Jorge doesn't flinch, but it is he who finally looks away. Wordlessly, Rosendo releases him, walks away, turns back and throws Jorge the gold watch.)*

The Jew's place -- by the docks. He's a fence.

*(Jorge is silent.)*

You think you can get a good price for it?

**Jorge**

Yes.

*(He tosses Jorge his hat.)*

**Rosendo**

And take this. A man shouldn't be on the street without a hat.

*(Jorge looks at it a moment and puts it on.)*

Down a little. In front.

*(Jorge, biting his tongue, makes the adjustment.)*

You'll do.

*(Jorge turns to leave, but Rufino is coming through the gate. His look is ominous. Jorge looks to Rosendo who motions for him to wait.)*

What can we do for you, Rufino?

**Rufino**

Where's Lorenzo?

**Rosendo**

Inside.

**Rufino**

Our business would be better done out here.

**Rosendo**

What business is that?

**Rufino**

Look – this doesn't concern you, Rosendo.

**Rosendo**

Maybe it does.

**Rufino**

You and me have no problem. It has nothing to do with the house -- just Lorenzo.

*(Rosendo considers for a moment, then nods to Jorge who wordlessly disappears into Manon's room.)*

**Rosendo**

Lorenzo is... sick.

**Rufino**

Then he's sick. I have my orders.

**Rosendo**

He's not in shape to put up much of a fight.

**Rufino**

*(shrugs)*

So it should be quick. Look, I've got nothing against Lorenzo. But he's stupid. He's got to learn some respect.

*(Lorenzo enters, Manon tugging at him. Jorge follows.)*

**Lorenzo**

You want me?

**Manon**

Lorenzo, please... You don't have to...

**Lorenzo**

*(still fairly stoned)*

I can take care of myself. Let go.

**Manon**

Can't you see? He's not well...

**Rufino**

Lorenzo! You been visiting the Patron's house today?

**Lorenzo**

I go where I want.

**Rufino**

You left him something.

*(La Madre has entered, followed by Julia.)*

**La Madre**

Rufino! What's going on?

**Rufino**

Answer my question, Lorenzo.

**Lorenzo**

I gave him what he deserved.

**Rufino**

*(shaking his head)*

You are stupid, Lorenzo.

**Lorenzo**

*(charging in)*

I'll show you...

**Manon**

Lorenzo... Don't...

*(Rufino belts Lorenzo and the fight is on. It's not much of one, however. Lorenzo gets in a brief lick or two, but mostly he just takes a pounding.)*

**Julia**

Jesus... Mama...

**Manon**

Rosendo – stop them...

**Sophia**

*(entering)*

What in hell?

**Lorenzo**

*(picking himself up)*

You fucking bastard...

*(But Lorenzo charges again. Rufino easily sidesteps and trips him. He kicks Lorenzo in the side.)*

**Rufino**

You had enough?

**Lorenzo**

Like hell...

*(Lorenzo is up again, but this time he comes up with a knife in his hand.)*

**Rufino**

*(warning)*

Lorenzo...

*(Lorenzo makes a wild slash. Rufino draws.)*

**Jorge**

Rosendo...



**Rosendo**

Stay out of it. He drew first.

*(Lorenzo is out of control – wild. He stabs and slashes, Rufino doing his level best to stay out of the way. Manon is screaming. The following lines tumble on top of each other.)*

**Manon**

Lorenzo! Stop it! Put it down! He'll kill you... Lorenzo!

**La Madre**

Don't be a fool... Take it away from him. Rufino!

**Julia**

No! Please... Don't let them... Stop it...

**Sophia**

Come on! You can do it. Show him what you got, baby!

**Lorenzo**

Think I'm scared? Think I can't take you? I'll show you bastards...

**Jorge**

This is crazy. We can't... Rosendo...

**Rosendo**

Rufino...

*(But Rosendo's voice has distracted Rufino just enough. Lorenzo slashes his arm, drawing blood. Rufino, holds his arm for a moment, stunned, then he turns deadly. A slash, a feint, Lorenzo falls and would be dead in another moment – But Manon has drawn a knife from her garter. She screams as she charges. Rufino turns just in time for the knife to be buried in his stomach. There is a moment of dead silence. Nothing moves. Then Rufino falls – hard. Manon stands calmly, the bloody knife in her hand.)*

**Lorenzo**

*(dumbly)*

Manon? You...

**Julia**

*(almost hysterical)*

God! What did you...

**Sophia**

Jesus! Is he...

**Julia**

Is he dead? Manon... How could you...

*(In a heartbeat, La Madre takes charge.)*

**La Madre**

Shut up. You want people to hear? Rosendo!

*(She jerks her head toward the prone Rufino. Quickly, Rosendo puts an ear to the dead man's chest. He looks back to La Madre and shakes his head.)*

Someone may have heard on the street. Sophia: go to the corner, you can see to the river. Watch for the police.

*(Wordlessly, efficiently, Sophia complies.)*

Julia: See what he's got on him.

*(With a strange fascination, Julia kneels by the body, going through pockets.)*

Manon: Get him inside. Clean him up. This never happened.

**Manon**

Lorenzo, come on. Lorenzo...

**La Madre**

Go!

*(Lorenzo shakes off the cobwebs and follows Manon inside.)*

Rosendo...

**Rosendo**

I'll take care of it.

**La Madre**

Don't be a fool. Another fight? They catch you with him, this time they'll hang you.

**Rosendo**

It's got to be done...

**La Madre**

Send Jorge for Alejandro...

**Jorge**

No. I can do it.

**Rosendo**

Don't be ridiculous...

**Jorge**

I said I can do it.

**La Madre**

Are you sure?

**Jorge**

*(struggling to keep his voice calm)*

Yes.

**La Madre**

All right then.

**Julia**

*(Handing La Madre some coins, and a ring she took from the dead man's finger.)*

This is all there was.

**La Madre**

You OK?

*(Julia nods)*

Come inside.

*(They exit into the house.)*

**Rosendo**

You can't... You don't know what...

**Jorge**

I said I'd do it. Just tell me... what to do.

**Rosendo**

It has to go in the river. You don't...

**Jorge**

I can manage. It's not that far.

**Rosendo**

Listen to me, chico. Once he's there you have to... You cut him open. Take out the insides. Fill it with stones. Otherwise the body will float and they'll find him. You really think you can do that?

**Jorge**

*(Evenly—almost with disdain)*

You think I can't?

**Rosendo**

No. I think maybe -- you can.

**Jorge**

Help me get him on my shoulder.

**Rosendo**

*(Handing Jorge his knife)*

Wait. Here.

*(Jorge takes the knife, but Rosendo continues to hold the blade.)*

And chico...

*(Jorge shoots him a look.)*

Jorge...

**Jorge**

What?

**Rosendo**

After – if you need...

**Jorge**

What?

**Rosendo**

You still know where my room is.

*(Jorge takes the knife and slides it under his belt. He walks toward the body then looks back over his shoulder.)*

**Jorge**

*(a challenge)*

Yeah. You know where mine is too.

*(Music begins as the lights come up on La Canta. As she begins to sing, the two men lift the corpse to Jorge's shoulders. Jorge takes a second to get himself together and turns to go. Rosendo opens the gate, checks that the coast is clear and nods. Silently, Jorge leaves. Rosendo looks after him – with a certain admiration -- as the lights on the mainstage fade to black.)*

**La Canta**

A drunken remark – a man takes offence.  
 A squabble at cards – the night becomes tense.  
 Some guapo believes he's the best.  
 Reputations are put to the test.  
 A flash of a blade settles the rest...  
 They dance the tango of men.

Passion and power are the essence of man.  
 His worth is the strength of his will.  
 Honor and pride lie deep in his soul.  
 But the pride that redeems is the pride that can kill.  
 Forever they've danced the tango of men.

**El Cantor**

Two bodies in darkness – one falls to it's knees.  
 A whispered command – a hunger to please...  
 A rebuff, then a yielding breast...

The crush of a chest to a chest...  
One who possesses and one the possessed...  
Ah, to dance the tango of men!

Passion and power are what makes the man.  
In life to submit is to die.  
Always the climb to the head of the pack.  
but the will can be drained if the summit's too high.  
No choice but to dance the tango of men.

### **Los Cantores**

Passion and power are what make the man.  
His worth is the strength of his will.  
Honor and pride lie deep in his soul.  
But the struggle may sadden and the burden can kill.  
And ever they dance the tango of men.

**ACT 2****Scene 1**

*(The spot comes up on El Cantor as he begins a light milonga.)*

**El Cantor**

I often saw them as they sat in the park  
They laughed and they cuddled and kissed.  
Away from each other they would pine in the dark,  
Writing odes of how the lover was missed.

At night 'neath the eye of a stern chaperone,  
of the years ahead they would dream.  
In bliss with each other and in misery alone,  
With giggles and coos to make a grown man scream.

I found them easy to deride as a sophisticated lad.  
But now, I'd give my youth to have just half of what they had.

For innocent joy is uncommonly rare,  
And more prudent arrangements the rule.  
But as I think back on that foolish young pair,  
How I'd love to be just such a fool.

*(Two weeks later, early in the morning. As the lights fade on El Cantor, they rise on the patio. Rosendo's shirt is slung over a chair. He's wearing boots and trousers, his shirt tossed over a chair. He bends over a basin scrubbing soap out of his hair as Jorge pours a pitcher of water over his head. Rosendo comes up sputtering and shakes his head like a dog, splashing water all over Jorge. They're both laughing, the mood uncommonly congenial.)*

**Jorge**

Hey! Watch it!

**Rosendo**

Take advantage – you could use a bath.

**Jorge**

So could you. Here.

*(Jorge tosses him a towel.)*

**Rosendo**

Don't have time. Have to meet somebody. Mucho dinero.

**Jorge**

¿Pichicata?

**Rosendo**

Like the tops of the Andes.

**Jorge**

You want me along?

**Rosendo**

Next time. Too many people make him nervous.

*(Rosendo finishes drying his hair and starts to put on his shirt.)*

**Jorge**

Wait – you got water on your back.

**Rosendo**

Here.

*(He tosses Jorge the towel back. Jorge dries his back. Rosendo clasps his hands behind his head and stretches – enjoying the attention.)*

Not bad... Little lower... Ah! Such treatment. Guess you're good for something...

**Jorge**

Ass!

**Rosendo**

That too...

*(Jorge digs his fingers into Rosendo's ribs. Rosendo hollers and jumps away.)*

Hey! Hey, watch it. Can't turn my back on you for a minute.



**Jorge**

Says the corpse to the hanged man.

**Rosendo**

I got some water there too...

*(Indicating his chest and stomach)*

*(Jorge throws the towel at Rosendo's face)*

**Jorge**

Do it yourself.

**Rosendo**

You're no fun.

*(He finishes drying and starts putting on the shirt again.)*

**Jorge**

It's nearly noon. People might be coming out.

**Rosendo**

Jorge – it's a whorehouse. Nobody gets up 'till four.

**Jorge**

Yeah... Still...

**Rosendo**

You're right.

*(This brings down the mood slightly.)*

**Jorge**

That's why I like mornings. It's about the only time... You know, nobody else is around.

**Rosendo**

Sorry about last night.

**Jorge**

Hey... When it works out it works out. No big deal.

**Rosendo**

Things have been crazy. By the time... Too many people running around here at night.

**Jorge**

Really. It's OK. I can go for a while – if I have to.

**Rosendo**

I can't.

**Jorge**

You got Sophia.

**Rosendo**

So join us.

**Jorge**

Fuck you.

**Rosendo**

Can you see the look on her face?

**Jorge**

Please – I want to keep my cajones, thank you.

*(Rosendo is putting on his jacket and hat, ready to go.)*

You going to carnaval later?

**Rosendo**

No. Too crowded. Too many pickpockets.

**Jorge**

Again says the corpse.

**Rosendo**

Who needs the competition? No, I'll stay around here. It'll be quieter.

*(Manon, Lorenzo & the three musicians enter from the house. She's quite dolled up in a very proper afternoon dress and carries a parasol.)*

*She is making an entrance.)*

**Manon**

I am ready for my grand premiere!

**Lorenzo**

Que bella signorilla!

**Manon**

*(with a curtsey)*

Grazi tanto. See! I'm learning Italian.

**Lorenzo**

Your French is better.

**Manon**

Lorenzo! Be a gentleman.

**Jorge**

Very nice.

**Rosendo**

Why so dressed?

**Manon**

You haven't heard? My fame has not yet spread to this small inconsequential corner of the world?

**Jorge**

What?

**Manon**

Tonight is to be my premiere! I am to perform at the Palacio Royal!

**Lorenzo**

The music hall.

**Manon**

Special performance, for Carnaval. Tonight – I am a star!

**Lorenzo**

And I am the star's husband.

**Manon**

Actually, I'm just opening for that fat cow, Lucrezia. But the producers will see me... And Carnaval! Everybody who is anybody will be there.

**Rosendo**

Good for you.

*(Manon yells back into the house.)*

**Manon**

Sophia! Alejandro! We're going to be late!

**Jorge**

The show is so early?

**Manon**

No. I've got to rehearse. I only get the stage for ten minutes at one.

*(indicating the trio)*

My orchestra! I prefer simple accompaniment.

**Lorenzo**

She couldn't afford to have parts written for the orchestra.

**Manon**

Why do I love you? Tell me.

**Lorenzo**

*(suddenly shy)*

I don't know.

**Manon**

Then I'll tell you. It's because you're a man. You fight for the downtrodden workers of Argentina! You take care of me – you even gave up drugs for me. You're *my* man.

**Lorenzo**

And you're my baby.

**Manon**

We could get married! No – really. Marco and Carmine did it last year – well, he's Carmen when he's a she... It was beautiful. Some fat, old, very rich marica had it at his house. And the bride! You should have seen her! All that white – well that was a stretch. She had pictures made. I'll show you.

**Lorenzo**

Whatever you want.

**Manon**

You lie! Now you'll be there tonight. You promise!

**Lorenzo**

Yes. Yes, I will be there. The meeting will be over in plenty of time.

**Manon**

Meetings! Meetings! You didn't have your damn meetings, Sophia and Alejandro wouldn't have to take me to rehearsal. Sophia!!!

**Lorenzo**

This is the big one. The general strike is tomorrow. Right in the middle of carnival. They will have to pay attention this time.

**Manon**

Like they paid attention to you last time?

**Lorenzo**

Tomorrow we all meet in the square. Then we march to the Casa Rosada. There will be thousands of...

*(Sophia and Alejandro enter from the house.)*

**Sophia**

Hey! Look at you!

**Manon**

Now sit... sit... I want to practice one more time before we go. You be my audience.

**Rosendo**

Sorry. I've got to go!

**Manon**

No!

**Rosendo**

I'll be back later. Hey, Jorge – you going to carnival?

**Jorge**

I don't think so. I'll just stay here. It'll be quieter. Besides, too many pickpockets.

**Sophia**

Hey. Watch it!

**Manon**

You've got to come. We're all going. Mama is meeting us... You'll be here all alone.

**Jorge**

It's all right. I've got things to do.

**Rosendo**

So do I.

**Sophia**

Alejandro is escorting me.

**Rosendo**

Oh good. I'd hate to have you on the streets alone.

**Sophia**

Puto.

**Rosendo**

Later.

*(He exits through the house.)*

**Manon**

OK. Everybody ready? You ready?

*(She begins her vaudeville number – very broadly.)*

I'm the lady of the house, you see?  
 Every afternoon there's tea at three.  
 I adore my precious man  
 give him everything I can  
 The perfect honest woman, that is me!

Of course an old man's kisses might be smothering!  
 But it's how an honest woman acquires another ring...

I bear my wifely obligation  
 a bed is just for procreation.  
 But the good lord does provide  
 I get a little on the side  
 The stable boy provides some consolation.

*(She does a little dance break – only slightly bawdy – with her parasol. The last verse begins reverently.)*

Piously I pray on bended knee,  
 in my pew in the cathe... dral.  
 Should he go into decline,  
 The estate would all be mine!  
 The perfect honest woman, that is me!

*(The little group applauds as Manon takes many bows. Jorge watches them all leave, a smile on his face, as the lights fade to black.)*

## Scene 2

*(Around dusk that evening. At first, the patio is empty. Then, suddenly, we hear rambunctious shouts from above. Rosendo appears in trousers, suspenders and a thin, linen under-coat. He is racing down the stairs, a bundle of clothing held high over his head. Jorge is in hot pursuit. He's wearing an old union-suit, the arms cut off and the legs cut short for coolness. He's only managed to get the bottom few buttons done up, however before the chase began.)*

### Jorge

Give me that!

### Rosendo

Come get it...

### Jorge

Stupid pendejo!

*(They feint back and forth around a table for a moment before Rosendo makes a break for the house.)*

No you don't!

*(Jorge leaps, tackling Rosendo and they roll around on the patio, Jorge grabbing and tickling, trying his best to get the clothes that Rosendo is doing a good job of keeping at arm's length. Rosendo, choked with laughter, finally surrenders.)*

### Rosendo

All right! All right! Peace!

*(He holds up the shirt and pants and Jorge snatches them. He is gasping – totally out of breath.)*

You win. Let me up.

### Jorge

No. I don't think so.



**Rosendo**

*(Squirming – but not trying too hard.)*

Get off. You're heavy like a horse.

**Jorge**

No. I think I like you like this.

**Rosendo**

You do?

**Jorge**

Yeah I do. Something different. I could like being the one on top.

**Rosendo**

Yeah? Well don't get used to it...

*(Rosendo makes a sudden push, throwing Jorge to the ground. There is another moment of struggle and Rosendo is on his feet, again in possession of Jorge's trousers. He holds them behind his back.)*

You should know when to surrender, my little guapito...

**Jorge**

Never. Come on. Give it up. I should get dressed. They might come back.

**Rosendo**

It's carnival – it's barely turned dark. Nobody will be back 'till morning. Besides – I told you – I like you like that. You look good that way.

**Jorge**

*(Flattered at the complement, but...)*

You're a fucking idiot.

**Rosendo**

No – I should just keep you like this all the time. Easy to get what I want.

**Jorge**

You already got what you want.

**Rosendo**

Yeah. I did.

**Jorge**

Fucking pig.

*(half serious)*

**Rosendo**

Didn't you?

**Jorge**

Give me my pants.

**Rosendo**

No – tell me... Didn't you?

*(a brief silence – for once, Jorge's defenses are down. He actually smiles a little.)*

**Jorge**

Yeah. I did.

**Rosendo**

*(a little cocky, but sincere.)*

Good.

*(Rosendo drops the trousers on the ground and moves into Jorge. He puts his hands on the younger man's waist and pulls him close – just rough enough to make it clear who's boss.)*

**Jorge**

*(a little turned on)*

You stink.

**Rosendo**

So?

*(Rosendo has begun to pull Jorge's top back off his shoulders. He bites Jorge's neck.)*

**Jorge**

Potro loco.

**Rosendo**

Sí.

*(Rosendo takes hold of the back of Jorge's neck. He's going to kiss the other man, but Jorge turns his head.)*

What?

**Jorge**

Don't be crazy.

**Rosendo**

What?

**Jorge**

Men don't kiss.

**Rosendo**

Men do whatever they want. I kiss whoever I want.

**Jorge**

Oh? And why me?

**Rosendo**

Because you're... a challenge. And because – you're afraid of it.

**Jorge**

I'm not afraid of you.

**Rosendo**

No... I don't think you are.

*(More firmly this time, Rosendo takes Jorge by the neck. He kisses him. This time, Jorge allows it. There's no more talking. They come up for air, staring at each other. Taking his time, Jorge bends back enough to unbutton Rosendo's under-coat. He slides his hands up*

*Rosendo's chest and kisses him again. Things are getting a little steamy. Rosendo's hands wander down onto Jorge's ass. Jorge is tugging the under-coat back off Rosendo's arms. It is at just this moment that Sophia, Alejandro and La Madre appear at the gate. The lovers don't hear them. Jorge starts to undo the front of Rosendo's trousers. The three newcomers just stand there, speechless for a brief moment. Then...)*

**Sophia**

*(Her words are like a knife.)*

That's so sweet.

*(Rosendo whirls, pulling the front of his trousers back together. Jorge just stares, aghast. It is his worst fear.)*

**Rosendo**

I didn't hear...

**Sophia**

Obviously. So that's where you've been spending your nights...

**Rosendo**

Shut your mouth. This is none of your business.

**Sophia**

Why bed a woman when you can be one?

**Rosendo**

*(Barely able to get the words out he is so angry.)*

I said shut it, puta.

**Sophia**

What you going to do? Maricon.

**Rosendo**

Why you stinking rea.

*(Rosendo grabs her as if to smack her, but*

*Alejandro grabs his arm.)*

**Alejandro**

What? You kiss men and you belt women?

**Rosendo**

*(Pulling back. To Sophia)*

Get out of here.

**Sophia**

Or is your little boy the marica? Hmmmm? Come on, which is it?

**Rosendo**

*(grabbing her again)*

I'll show you who's the marica...

**Sophia**

Yeah – come on show me.

**Rosendo**

You're not worth...

**Sophia**

Go on – show me how he does you... Trolo.

**Rosendo**

*(shaking her, roughly)*

I do him exactly like I do you, puta. Understand?

**Alejandro**

Rosendo...

**Sophia**

Let go of me.

**Rosendo**

*(Shaking her harder)*

You got that? You got it?

**Alejandro**

Rosendo!

*(Not releasing Sophia, he turns on Alejandro, his voice deadly.)*

**Rosendo**

You want some too?

*(To Sophia.)*

You understand me?

**Alejandro**

Rosendo... Nobody thinks...

**Rosendo**

*(Another shake for Sophia)*

No – you say it.

*(She manages to yank herself away.)*

**Sophia**

*(Deliberately contemptuous.)*

Yeah. I understand. It's cold. I just came back for my shawl. Wait for me, Alejandro.

**Alejandro**

Calm down, Rosendo. She was just trying to get you.

**Rosendo**

If she were a man...

**Alejandro**

But she's not. What you going to do?

*(Silence. The next is with a slight sneer toward Jorge.)*

So – you got another one for your stable?

**Rosendo**

I...

*(He looks toward Jorge. Jorge has put on his trousers. He is breathing hard – his face beet red.)*

**Alejandro**

Good for you. Damn, you're getting more pussy than me, flaco – one way or another.  
*(Rosendo doesn't respond. Sophia reenters with her shawl and walks past Rosendo not acknowledging his presence.)*

You ready?

**Sophia**

Very ready.

**Alejandro**

You coming Mama?

**La Madre**

No. I'm tired. You go on.

*(Sophia and Alejandro exit out the gate. La Madre looks between Jorge and Rosendo for a long moment – they are each looking away from the other, faces set in stone. Wordlessly, La Madre exits into the house. Finally, Rosendo tries to speak.)*

**Rosendo**

Jorge...

**Jorge**

*(even)*

You bastard.

**Rosendo**

What was I supposed to...

*(Jorge just meets his gaze, evenly, saying nothing.)*

What in hell did you expect me to...

**Jorge**

*(Cutting him off with contempt.)*

Nothing. I don't expect anything.

*(He turns for the stairs, but Rosendo grabs his arm.)*

**Rosendo**

Jorge...

**Jorge**

DON'T FUCKING TOUCH ME!

*(Rosendo grabs both Jorge's shoulders and holds him in place.)*

**Rosendo**

I didn't mean...

*(Jorge slams his hands into Rosendo's chest – hard. Rosendo stumbles backward.)*

**Jorge**

*(a dangerous hiss)*

I told you not to touch me.

**Rosendo**

What the fuck was I supposed to do?

**Jorge**

Anything. Anything – but that.

**Rosendo**

No – go on. You know everything. What should I tell them? That I bent over for you?

**Jorge**

No. That might have taken some guts.

**Rosendo**

And you're such a big man...

**Jorge**

More of a man than you.

*(Jorge turns to leave but is stopped by Rosendo's voice.)*



**Rosendo**

No. I just told the truth. Maybe it's time you did.

**Jorge**

The truth?

**Rosendo**

*(exploding)*

Yes, the fucking truth. Who was the one with his legs spread, chico?

**Jorge**

And I trusted you – I fucking trusted you. I did what you wanted because...

**Rosendo**

No. What *you* wanted.

**Jorge**

I...

**Rosendo**

You can't have it both ways! You don't get it? Yeah, we can sneak around and hide in corners – but somebody's gonna find out. Like that. And when they do?

*(silence)*

Every pair – there's a man and a woman. That's how it's always been – how it always will be. Which are you?

**Jorge**

You think... You want me to be some fucking... Like Manon...

**Rosendo**

She knows what she is.

**Jorge**

And that's what you want?

**Rosendo**

What?

**Jorge**

At night? That what you want to crawl into bed with? That what you want to sweat up against you? Some fucking half-man in...

**Rosendo**

Stop it.

**Jorge**

That what you want to kiss?

**Rosendo**

It doesn't matter. There's nothing in-between, chico. Man or maricon – you can't be both.

**Jorge**

I am *not* Manon.

**Rosendo**

At least she has the balls to admit what she is.

**Jorge**

And do you?

**Rosendo**

What? What are you saying? You saying I'm not a man?  
*(quietly)*

**Jorge**

No. You're a coward.

**Rosendo**

At least I'm not a marica.  
*(stung – striking back)*

**Jorge**

No. Maybe *I* am.

*(Jorge turns and walks into the house. Rosendo looks after him a long moment. He picks up Jorge's shirt from the ground, stares at it, then*

*flings it violently across the patio. Looking for a way to vent his rage, he picks up a chair, smashing against a wall until it splinters. He stands, impotent, breathing hard. La Madre has entered.)*

**La Madre**

You pay for what you break.

*(Rosendo looks at La Madre, about to say something sharp, then stops. Expressionless, he digs into his pocket and tosses a coin to La Madre. She inspects it.)*

So much. This is good for another two or three. The one by the fence is old.

**Rosendo**

I'll save it for later.

*(La Madre pulls a flask from her back pocket and offers it.)*

**La Madre**

You look like you need it. No charge.

*(He takes the flask, drinks then starts to return it.)*

No. Keep it.

**Rosendo**

Thanks.

*(He wanders to a table, sits, drinks again.)*

**La Madre**

Where's Jorge?

*(Rosendo shrugs. A long silence.)*

**Rosendo**

Sometimes...

**La Madre**

What?

**Rosendo**

Sometimes – there is no right thing to do.

**La Madre**

No. Sometimes there's not. Mind if I sit?

*(He shrugs, looking suddenly very drained.)*

You look like shit.

**Rosendo**

I'm... Tired.

*(There is a long silence as he drinks again. He hands it back. She drinks.)*

You heard?

**La Madre**

They heard on the pampas.

**Rosendo**

Am I wrong?

**La Madre**

Why ask me? I'm not a man.

**Rosendo**

No. You're lucky.

**La Madre**

Am I?

**Rosendo**

My father... now there was a hell of a man.

**La Madre**

Where is he?

**Rosendo**

Died. In a bar. Long time ago.

*(He takes another drink.)*

Used to beat the shit out of me.

**La Madre**

You deserve it?

**Rosendo**

I don't know. No. Probably not. He just enjoyed – doing it. God, I hated him. But I respected him... He was real good at it.

**La Madre**

What?

**Rosendo**

Being a man. Always knew exactly what he wanted.

**La Madre**

And what was that?

**Rosendo**

Booze. Women. Fights. More women... Being top dog – especially being top dog. He ran my mother... He ran me... Hell, he ran the whole barrio.

**La Madre**

And now you do.

**Rosendo**

And now I do. Just like him.

**La Madre**

That's what you want, isn't it?

**Rosendo**

Yeah. That's what I want.

**La Madre**

They say it's a happy man who gets what he wants.

**Rosendo**

Yeah. I'm happy.

**La Madre**

If you say so.

*(La Madre takes another belt.)*

**Rosendo**

People respect me. Most don't like me. But I have respect.

*(She shrugs)*

**La Madre**

People like you.

**Rosendo**

Do you? Straight talk. Can you say you *like* me?

**La Madre**

Doesn't matter. It only matters if you like yourself.

**Rosendo**

You're dodging the question.

**La Madre**

No. You are.

**Rosendo**

OK. I'll answer. But you first.

**La Madre**

Straight talk?

**Rosendo**

Yeah.

**La Madre**

OK. Yes. Well... Sometimes. When you're not acting like an ass.

*(He toasts her with the flask.)*

**Rosendo**

Muchas Gracias.

**La Madre**

Your turn.

**Rosendo**

No.

**La Madre**

Hey, we had a deal.

**Rosendo**

No – that’s my answer. No. I don’t like myself.

**La Madre**

Right now? Because of...

**Rosendo**

No. For a while.

**La Madre**

Not too healthy.

**Rosendo**

No. Probably not.

**La Madre**

You mind if I ask?

**Rosendo**

Is it any of your business?

**La Madre**

No.

**Rosendo**

Then I'll tell you.

*(He drinks again.)*

I... can't.

**La Madre**

OK.

**Rosendo**

No. I mean I don't know why. I know when it happened. But I can't tell you why.

**La Madre**

OK.

**Rosendo**

There was a bar fight. Two... Three years ago?

**La Madre**

Paco?

**Rosendo**

Yeah. When I fought Paco. I mean, he had it coming. I don't regret that. He drew.

**La Madre**

So?

**Rosendo**

No it was just that moment. I was looking at his face when he died. He was there – he was fighting it, you know. And then he wasn't. His face... It changed. He let go of it – everything. He... surrendered – to death.

**La Madre**

He gave up.

**Rosendo**

No. That wasn't it. In that moment he looked almost...

*(A silence. It's hard for him to find the words.)*



When I was fourteen, I had my first woman. She was a puta. In an alley. I... It doesn't matter except – I took more than I had paid for. She was struggling and then... She gave in to me. That moment when she... submitted. That's what I saw – her face -- right at that moment as Paco died. In some crazy way – they looked just the same. Not exactly happy, just sort of – a relief... a release – that the struggle was over. The release was... Never mind. It sounds stupid.

**La Madre**

No. Tell me.

**Rosendo**

*(very simply)*

The release was – ecstasy. Not pleasure, not pain, just... I don't know. Something I can't describe because I've never felt it. You know since then I have never fought? Not once. Oh, I've posed and I've threatened. But never fought.

**La Madre**

Sometimes... You don't have to.

**Rosendo**

No. I am top dog.

**La Madre**

Because you want to be.

**Rosendo**

Yes. Except when I am tired. Like now. Then I just... envy them... their release.

*(He takes another drink.)*

Which brings us back to your question. I can't tell you why I – sometimes – don't like myself. See, I don't know if it's because I'm ashamed of things I've done – or because I'm ashamed of that – envy. You understand?

**La Madre**

I told you, I'm not a man. You don't have to, you know.

**Rosendo**

What?

**La Madre**

Be top dog. Just...

*(Rosendo is suddenly very intense.)*

**Rosendo**

Yes, I do, Goddamn it.

**La Madre**

Why?

**Rosendo**

Because there's nothing else. Don't you see? I saw from the time I could walk. Either you're first, or it doesn't matter where you are because there's someone higher who can hurt you.

**La Madre**

There's always someone stronger, Rosendo – no matter who you are.

**Rosendo**

Is there? Maybe I just haven't -- stumbled on to them. Never mind.

**La Madre**

I told you I don't understand.

**Rosendo**

No. You don't. Maybe I don't either...

*(There is a noise from the porch. A woman is there, mostly in shadow.)*

**La Madre**

Manon? I thought you were at...

*(She sees that it's not Manon. The woman takes another step forward. A bit out of it, Rosendo doesn't realize what's going on. He starts for the house.)*

**Rosendo**

I'm tired. Going to bed. I...

*(Then he sees. In front of him is Jorge, dressed in drag. He's in the dress that Manon brought home earlier. He is barefoot. A mantilla covers his head. Rosendo is beyond disgusted.)*

Jesus... Jorge...

*(Jorge is silent, his face a mask. Rosendo walks away.)*

God... Don't you have any... Take that off.

**Jorge**

Not what you wanted?

**Rosendo**

Don't be an ass.

**Jorge**

You said it was. Well. Here I am.

**Rosendo**

You look like a...

*(He trails off.)*

**Jorge**

Woman? Marica? You told me to choose.

**Rosendo**

I didn't tell you to...

**Jorge**

Come on. Kiss me, Rosendo.

**Rosendo**

I wouldn't touch you.

**Jorge**

No. I didn't think so.

*(But someone is coming in the back gate. It is  
Francesco, impeccably dressed.)*

**Francisco**

Excuse me...

**La Madre**

Francesco, this is not...

**Francisco**

I was looking for Julia. She was supposed to meet me at Carnival...

**La Madre**

She's not here.

**Francisco**

Hell. I need to talk to her.

**Rosendo**

She said she's not here.

**Francisco**

OK. Tell her I came by?

**La Madre**

Yes. I will.

**Francisco**

Hey – You got a new girl?

**Rosendo**

No.

**Francisco**

Come on, who is she?

*(Rosendo steps in front of him threateningly.)*

**Rosendo**

You have business here?

**Francisco**

I...

*(Rosendo shoves him.)*

**Rosendo**

Get out.

**Francisco**

Hey... Watch it. I was just...

*(Rosendo gives him another shove that sends him sprawling.)*

**Rosendo**

I said go!

*(Francisco picks himself up & dusts himself off.)*

**Francisco**

Yeah. Yeah. I'm going.

*(He beats a dignified but hasty retreat out the gate.)*

**La Madre**

I better go too.

*(She goes to the door, looks back at the men for a moment, and leaves.)*

**Rosendo**

Jorge...

*(Jorge turns. He's somewhere between humiliation, rage and tears.)*

**Jorge**

What?

**Rosendo**

Nothing.

**Jorge**

You fucking hypocrite.

*(He rips the mantilla off his head and throws it on the ground.)*

Should have known... All along...

**Rosendo**

Get inside.

**Jorge**

Don't you fucking tell me what to do.

**Rosendo**

*(yelling back)*

Then fucking don't. What do I care?

*(Jorge rips open the buttons from the front of the dress, struggling to get out of it.)*

**Jorge**

Shit...

**Rosendo**

No. Stay in it. It suits you.

**Jorge**

You stinking bastard.

**Rosendo**

Big words from a little girl.

*(Jorge throws the dress to the ground. He's left in some ragged old-style boxers.)*

**Jorge**

Why do you do this? Why do you make me...

**Rosendo**

I didn't make...

**Jorge**

What do you fucking want from me? Why is it always a battle?

**Rosendo**

I didn't start...

**Jorge**

The hell you didn't. The only time you want... only time you even... Is when I fight you. Why? Go on. Tell me.

**Rosendo**

Shut up.

**Jorge**

Come on. Say it. Tell me what you want.

**Rosendo**

What the hell you want me to say?

**Jorge**

I just want to hear it. I just want to hear you say it.

**Rosendo**

Fuck you.

**Jorge**

You *are* a coward.

**Rosendo**

Don't you...

*(Rosendo slams Jorge against the wall. Jorge doesn't flinch.)*

**Jorge**

Go on. You want to belt me? You want to cut me?

*(Rosendo steps back, breathing hard, somewhere between arousal and murder.)*

Look at you. We both know.

**Rosendo**

Go to hell.

*(They stare at each other for a long moment. Then, Rosendo turns on his heel and exits up the stairs. Jorge stands, spent. Slowly, he walks over and picks up the discarded dress and mantilla. He stares at them for a moment, then tosses them onto the porch. He sits heavily, his head in his hands. Sophia enters from the gate.)*

**Sophia**

Oh. It's you.

*(He's silent. She is remarking on his state of undress.)*

You forget something, chico?

*(He stands.)*

**Jorge**

You've seen it before.

**Sophia**

Yes. Where's Rosendo?

**Jorge**

How should I know?

**Sophia**

I thought you might.

**Jorge**

Then you're wrong.

**Sophia**

Am I?

**Jorge**

Yes.

*(He walks away and drinks from the bottle Rosendo had. She stands, not quite sure what's going on. He turns back to her and holds the bottle out.)*

You want some?

**Sophia**

*(a shrug)*

OK.

*(She drinks.)*

Not bad. Mama's?



**Jorge**

Don't know.

**Sophia**

Sorry if we interrupted something earlier.

**Jorge**

You assume a lot.

**Sophia**

Do I?

**Jorge**

Think what you want.

**Sophia**

I think you roll over for Rosendo.

**Jorge**

Do I?

**Sophia**

Pretty obvious. Or does he?

**Jorge**

You know Rosendo.

**Sophia**

Rosendo's an ass.

**Jorge**

Rosendo is... nothing.

**Sophia**

No argument there. Hey – something else we have in common.

*(They both drink.)*

I'm tired. Thanks for the drink.

*(She starts to leave.)*

**Jorge**

Hey. Sophia.

**Sophia**

*(turning)*

What?

**Jorge**

*(Almost a command.)*

Don't go.

**Sophia**

Why? What...

*(He deliberately walks up to her, takes her head and kisses her firmly on the mouth. She allows it.)*

What was that?

**Jorge**

You still assume things?

**Sophia**

Yes.

*(He kisses her again. He seems truly turned on.)*

**Jorge**

How about now?

**Sophia**

Not bad.

**Jorge**

Still open for business?

*(She looks at him for a moment. A decision.)*

**Sophia**

Yeah. I guess.

**Jorge**

Come on. I've got money in my room.

*(He starts for the stairs, but she stops him with her voice.)*

**Sophia**

Jorge...

**Jorge**

What?

*(She slowly walks to him. She reaches out her hand and caresses his chest.)*

**Sophia**

Don't bother. This I'll do for free.

*(Her hand slides down the front of his underwear. He reaches for her breasts, fondling them. They kiss again.)*

Come on.

*(She exits into her room. Jorge follows. The lights on the stage fade to black. In a moment, lights come up on La Canta and she begins to sing.)*

**La Canta**

His breath is on me.  
His face is so close.  
I try to smile.  
I feel his hands.  
His eyes caress me.  
I whisper what he wants to hear.

Con el beso de me amante nuevo;  
Siento los labios del viejo...  
Con el beso de me amante nuevo;  
Siento los labios del viejo...

I hold him close  
Stroking his hair.

My hands are cold.  
We fall together  
His body pressed to mine.  
There are tears in my eyes.

Con el beso de me amante nuevo;  
Siento los labios del viejo...  
Con el beso de me amante nuevo;  
Siento los labios del viejo...

And then I tell him that I love him.

Con el beso de me amante nuevo;  
Siento los labios del viejo...

With the kiss of my new lover  
I only feel the lips of the old.  
With the kiss of my new lover  
I only feel the lips of the old.

*(The lights fade on La Canta.)*

**Scene 3**

*(It is the next afternoon. Rosendo sits at a table in a corner, drinking, and morosely carving into the tabletop with Jorge's knife. Manon sits at another table with a bowl, snapping beans for dinner. Alejandro is beside her, idly practicing on his guitar – plucking the same phrase again and again. Francesco leans against the porch, waiting. Julia emerges from the house carrying a small, beat-up valise.)*

**Francesco**

You ready?

**Julia**

In a minute.

*(Manon gets up and moves toward Julia who goes to meet her. They hug.)*

**Manon**

I can't believe you're leaving.

**Julia**

I'm lucky.

**Manon**

You happy?

**Julia**

Yeah. Mostly.

**Manon**

You'll come back? See us?

**Julia**

Sure.

**Manon**

I'll miss you.

**Julia**

I know. I'll miss you too.

*(They hug again. La Madre appears on the porch with a couple of wrapped bundles.)*

**La Madre**

Julia?

*(Julia goes to her.)*

**Julia**

Yes mama?

**La Madre**

Here. A couple of things.

**Julia**

What...

**La Madre**

Not much. Take them with you. A little something for later.

**Julia**

Thanks.

*(They hug. La Madre finally releases Julia and walks over to Francesco.)*

**La Madre**

You have everything taken care of?

**Francesco**

Yeah. Everything's set. Oh...

*(He pulls an envelope from his coat.)*

Here... It's all here.

**La Madre**

What we agreed on?

**Francesco**

Count it.

**La Madre**

It's all right. I know where to find you. It's about half what she's worth you know.

**Francesco**

I know.

**La Madre**

You treat her right.

**Francesco**

I have her all set up. You'll see it. It's a great little place – not far from the office. It's on the second floor with a little balcony... Big windows looking out on the street.

**La Madre**

Sounds expensive.

**Francesco**

I got lucky. No... I don't mean that. My grandfather died. He left me a little. Not much.

**La Madre**

But enough to keep a woman.

**Francesco**

She's worth it. No more – of this.

**La Madre**

No. No more – of this.

*(She turns from him and talks quietly to Julia)*

You sure? This is what you want?

**Julia**

Yes.

**La Madre**

OK then. Make him get you some decent clothes.

**Julia**

I will.

**La Madre**

Take care of yourself.

*(She gives Julia a kiss on the forehead and exits into the house without a backward glance.)*

**Francesco**

You ready?

**Julia**

Yeah. Let's go.

*(Manon hugs her again.)*

**Manon**

Bye honey.

**Julia**

Bye.

*(Julia and Francesco exit out the gate.)*

**Manon**

Shit.

**Alejandro**

There'll be somebody else soon. I've got my eye out.

**Manon**

Stick to bringing in the Johns, Alejandro.



**Alejandro**

Hey, a man's got to keep moving up. I'll have a couple of you girls soon.

**Manon**

Yeah, all we need – more competition.

*(Sophia and Jorge emerge from her room. Sophia is in a wrapper, Jorge back in the boxers from the previous night. He stops short, embarrassed.)*

**Jorge**

Sorry... I didn't know...

**Manon**

Ooooo... More surprises.

*(Rosendo is on his feet, his face like thunder, but he says nothing.)*

**Jorge**

I... I better get dressed.

*(He turns to go, but Sophia wishes to make the most of the moment.)*

**Sophia**

Oh??? So soon?

**Jorge**

Sophia... Uh... Thanks.

**Sophia**

*(She pulls him in for a long kiss.)*

No. Thank you. You were... magnifico.

*(Jorge looks toward Rosendo, there is an uncomfortable moment as the two men stare at each other while the others stare at them. After a defiant moment, it is Jorge who looks away, then wordlessly exits up the stairs. Rosendo sits, staring at the table. He pours a shot of whiskey and throws it back.)*

So... How was carnival?

**Manon**

Wonderful. All the people – it was crazy.

**Alejandro**

You shouldn't have left so early.

**Sophia**

What did you do, Rosendo?

**Manon**

*(Jumping into the breach.)*

And you should have seen my debut. They went wild. I was... spectacular.

**Sophia**

Oh. Good. And you know what? So was I.

*(With this parting shot, she exits into her room.  
Alejandro looks nervously at Rosendo.)*

**Alejandro**

I got... Some things to do. I better go.

*(He nearly runs into Lorenzo who is coming in  
the gate.)*

Hey! Lorenzo. How you doin', flaco?

**Lorenzo**

*(In a daze.)*

Fine. I'm doing fine.

*(Alejandro exits. Manon runs to Lorenzo.)*

**Manon**

Baby! Where have you been? I was worried...

**Lorenzo**

*(Walking past her and throwing himself in a  
chair.)*

They shot at us. Everybody came. Just like we planned. Filled the square – right at dawn. We started to march... And then there were soldiers...

**Manon**

Are you hurt... Lorenzo...

**Lorenzo**

I don't know how many got shot. Everybody ran. Somebody got trampled...

**Manon**

Lorenzo. Look at me.

*(He does.)*

Jesus.

**Lorenzo**

Don't be mad.

**Manon**

No. I'm not.

*(silence)*

Just tell me. Why?

**Lorenzo**

It doesn't matter. Nobody really cares. Not enough, anyway. They're stronger. Might as well...

**Manon**

You... Promised.

**Lorenzo**

It won't happen again. I promise. I just had to... Get away.

*(Manon just turns and heads for her room.)*

Manon?

*(She stops.)*

Hey... You got a cigarette?

**Manon**

Sorry.

**Lorenzo**

Take me inside?

**Manon**

No.

**Lorenzo**

I want to lie down... With you.

**Manon**

I want a man, Lorenzo.

**Lorenzo**

I'm...

**Manon**

No. You're not.

*(She exits into her room. Lorenzo, looking very lost, looks after her, then turns and leaves. Rosendo sits on the patio alone as he finishes his drink. The lights slowly shift. The stage darkens. The lanterns begin to dimly glow, mixing with the moonlight and shadow. Rosendo hasn't moved, just staring into space. Now distant tango music begins from a nearby street. Rosendo fills a shot glass from a bottle in front of him and drinks. He toys with the knife, refills the glass and drinks again. By now, he is very drunk. After a moment, Jorge enters from the stairs, a small bundle under his arm. He stops, then approaches Rosendo.)*

**Rosendo**

What do you want?

**Jorge**

I didn't know you were still out here.

**Rosendo**

Sophia – everybody's gone to bed.

**Jorge**

I know. It's past five.

**Rosendo**

So go to bed.

**Jorge**

No, I'm -- leaving.

**Rosendo**

Then leave.

*(Jorge turns and heads for the gate.)*

Hey. Chico.

*(Jorge turns back.)*

Take this. It's yours.

*(He holds out Jorge's knife.)*

**Jorge**

This isn't how...

*(Rosendo shrugs)*

**Rosendo**

I don't want it.

**Jorge**

Here -- your hat.

**Rosendo**

Keep it.

*(Jorge sets it on a chair.)*

**Jorge**

Look -- I'm sorry.

*(No response.)*

About Sophia -- everything. I just... I didn't mean for...

*(He trails off.)*

**Rosendo**

Doesn't matter.

**Jorge**

No. I guess it doesn't. I gotta go.

*(He would leave again, but Rosendo isn't ready for that.)*

**Rosendo**

Hey... you hear the music?

**Jorge**

Yeah.

**Rosendo**

Just like... That first night.

**Jorge**

Yeah.

**Rosendo**

Come here.

**Jorge**

Rosendo... No.

*(Rosendo seems less sodden now – there is an edge.)*

**Rosendo**

I said come here.

*(Jorge does. Rosendo holds out his arms as if offering to dance.)*

**Jorge**

Rosendo – you're drunk.

**Rosendo**

Don't count on it. Come on.

**Jorge**

Rosendo... I'm not going to dance with you.

**Rosendo**

Why not?

**Jorge**

Is there any point?

**Rosendo**

Still afraid of me?

**Jorge**

And I'm not going to fight with you either.

*(Jorge turns again to go. But Rosendo is surprisingly quick. His hand is on Jorge's arm. Jorge stops as Rosendo casually circles him.)*

**Rosendo**

You're not going.

**Jorge**

Yes. I am.

*(Rosendo is now between Jorge and the gate.)*

**Rosendo**

The gate is there. You can try and get to it if you want. But I wouldn't try.

**Jorge**

Look – what do you want from me?

**Rosendo**

A fight or a dance. You choose.

**Jorge**

No.

**Rosendo**

Look, you've called me a faggot. You've fucked my woman. You're lucky I haven't killed you.

**Jorge**

Why haven't you?

**Rosendo**

I don't hate you enough. Yet.

**Jorge**

I won't fight you.

**Rosendo**

*(Now very lucid. His adrenaline is up.)*

Yes. You will. One way or another.

*(Jorge again tries to leave, but Rosendo roughly shoves him back.)*

**Jorge**

Get out of my way.

**Rosendo**

*(A cat with a mouse.)*

Dance with me, Jorge. You a man?

**Jorge**

Don't start that.

**Rosendo**

Well this is a challenge. You don't back down from a challenge.

*(No response)*

Do I have to slap you to make it official?

**Jorge**

No.

*(Jorge sets down his little bundle. They stare at each other. Rosendo drops the taunting. Now he just sounds simple and direct.)*

**Rosendo**

Just dance with me. One last time. You owe me that.



**Jorge**

I don't owe... That'll make you happy?

**Rosendo**

Yes. That will make me happy.

*(Rosendo holds out his arms. Not a pose like the last time, but a simple gesture. Not quite sure why he's going along, Jorge slowly moves to him. They embrace. Then, they start to dance. It begins slowly, small movements, bodies held close. The moon may have gone behind a cloud because the lights seem a little dimmer – the music a little louder on the wind. Like the first time, there is a sense that we have stepped just slightly outside of reality. The two men move through the shadows. Slowly, they begin moving more like as they did before – a friendly challenge, two men, for a moment, enjoying a friendly competition. But for Rosendo, it is more. His dance becomes more aggressive. At first, Jorge matches it, but after a moment, steps back.)*

**Jorge**

Rosendo...

*(Rosendo yanks him in close again.)*

**Rosendo**

We're not finished.

*(Now it's not a dance. It's Rosendo jerking Jorge from side to side – shoving him – pulling him. Jorge takes a little, then breaks away.)*

**Jorge**

Enough.

**Rosendo**

No... No.

*(Rosendo grabs for Jorge, but Jorge won't allow it this time. Jorge shoves. Rosendo grabs again. Jorge shoves harder and Rosendo backhand's him across the face. Now it is a*

*fight in earnest. Jorge tries to escape, but Rosendo tackles him. Jorge kicks him away and manages to grab a table and claw his way to his feet. Jorge throws a chair which Rosendo kicks aside and charges again. This time, Jorge belts him in the stomach. Rosendo falls to his knees. Again, Jorge starts for the gate. But when Rosendo comes up, this time he has a blade in his hand. He is between Jorge and escape. Using his blade, Rosendo flips Jorge's knife off of the table. It lands at Jorge's feet. Jorge picks it up.)*

*(The music is louder now, the knife fight brief. They circle. A thrust, a slash, a feint, another thrust. But this time, Rosendo isn't quick enough. He's been cut on the side. Like a wounded bull, he bellows as he charges again. Jorge sidesteps. Rosendo takes another deadly swing and misses. Jorge trips him. The knife flies from Rosendo's grasp. In a flash, Jorge is on top of him, the knife to his throat. He is within an instant of finishing the job. Everything stops. Dead quiet. Jorge doesn't move, his knee on Rosendo's chest, the knife to his throat. Rosendo speaks, his voice almost pleading.)*

Go on. Do it.

*(For a moment, Jorge might. But he takes a deep breath and stands. He turns away from Rosendo and throws the knife down – still angry enough to kill. Rosendo hasn't moved. He is almost pathetic.)*

Please?

*(Jorge turns. All emotion gone, Rosendo starts to get up. But Jorge plants a boot on his chest and shoves him back to the ground. Now, Rosendo tenses – not at all sure what's coming next. Jorge kneels. His hand reaches out and strokes Rosendo's face. Then he slaps it. Their eyes are locked. It is the last challenge. A moment of inner struggle, and this time it is Rosendo who looks away. Satisfied, Jorge stands. Rosendo manages to struggle to his knees, his head bowed, still unable to face Jorge.)*

**Jorge**

Rosendo.

*(Rosendo looks up at the younger man towering over him. His surrender is total. It is his moment of epiphany. He has finally found his release. Jorge looks down at him for a long moment, then offers his hand and helps the older man to his feet. Silently, Jorge turns and walks to the stairs. He turns back. It is a quiet command.)*

Come on.

*(Head bowed, Rosendo follows. Jorge puts his hand on the back of Rosendo's neck and guides him up the stairs as the music returns as the lights fade to black.)*

*(When the lights return, the lanterns are out. There is only shadowy moonlight. A lonely bandoneón wails softly in the distance. Rosendo stands alone on the patio, shirtless and barefoot, smoking. He dabs at the cut on his side with his shirt, then tosses it aside. Jorge comes down the stairs, likewise dressed – and a little wary. Cautiously he approaches the older man. Rosendo turns, then, as one, they move together and very gently kiss. A muted, infinitely sad violin continues under.)*

Are you all right?

**Rosendo**

Yes.

**Jorge**

*(With a faint smile)*

Should I have killed you?

*(There is no response, just a long silence.)*

It's almost morning.

**Rosendo**

Not much time.

**Jorge**

No.

*(They move into each other's arms and start to dance gently to the soft music of the Tango Final, Jorge leading, Rosendo's face buried in the young man's neck. Jorge seems to be holding back tears. The lights slowly fade to black on the stage as they rise on Los Cantores.)*

**La Canta**

I still can see his eyes,  
Inviting me,  
To a street dim with shadows.  
I still can see his arms.  
They beckoned,  
to a room that had no doors.

**El Cantor**

I see white pearls,  
touching her throat,  
where my hands once did.  
I see black hair.  
Its scent,  
the essence of my regret.

*(The lights rise again on the stage. It is early the next morning. Jorge and La Madre have been caught in the middle of a conversation.)*

**La Madre**

**He's really gone?**

**Jorge**

**His room is empty.**

**La Madre**

He's not coming back, is he?

**Jorge**

No.

**La Madre**

Are you all right?

**Jorge**

Yeah. I'm all right.

**La Madre**

Is there anything I should know?

**Jorge**

No.

**La Madre**

Good then. Get some sleep. You'll have see to the girls tonight.

*(She pulls back his jacket.)*

You know how to use that thing?

**Jorge**

I'm OK.

**La Madre**

*(A little smile.)*

You better be. You want some coffee?

**Jorge**

No. I just want to stay out here for a while.

*(La Madre goes to the door. She watches as Jorge puts the hat on. He lights a cigarette. Somehow, it seems to suit him. Jorge walks over to Rosendo's discarded shirt, holds it for a long moment, then very carefully folds it, and hangs it over the back of a chair. He leans against a wall staring into space. La Madre exits as the stage again goes dark.)*

**Los Cantores**

Why dance the night away with a woman who may turn cold?

Why try to lead when the steps of her dance can not be controlled?

Why grasp the thing you want, certain you already know  
how brief the grasp and how quick the pain of letting go.

*(Slowly, the lights return. It is night. Only moonlight. Jorge, hat pulled low, leans against the wall, smoking. Manon lounges on the porch*

*– waiting for a trick. Sophia sits on Alejandro’s lap, flirting. La Madre enters from the house and looks around. Satisfied that everything is in order, she reaches back inside the door, turns a switch, and the Chinese lanterns come on, bathing everything in a soft, unreal glow. Smiling, La Madre offers her hand to Manon and they begin to tango – just whiling away time.)*

### **El Cantor**

*(reciting the verse over the music)*

I wanted to love her. But to love someone stronger is madness.  
 How can you desire the thing that you most fear?  
 So much I wanted to give her my soul completely.  
 But to submit to the loved one...  
 Is it an act of shameful surrender,  
 Or of ultimate courage?  
 I will never know the answer because I couldn’t give all of myself.  
 And so, I have lost her.  
 And that is the one act for which I can never be forgiven.

*(The lights begin to dim on stage.)*

### **Los Cantores**

*(still in harmony)*

Todavía oigo tu voz.  
 Tu suspiro  
 traición a mis secretos.  
 Su única promesa  
 eres una brisa muy fría  
 a un hombre desnudo y sin vida.

*(The stage has gone black.)*