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DEATH OF A MERCENARY

LA MUERTE DE UN MERCENARIO

A play in three acts
By John Rivera-Resto

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is the story of Agustin, a man who has the opportunity, the skills and the resources to achieve the rewards of the American dream. Instead, he is forced to return into a world of violence, intrigue and deceit in order to honour a friends last wish. And, in spite of later fame and success in his life, he remains alone; an outcast who waits until the physical end of his existence to be liberated from the terrible nightmares he holds inside. Because he knows that in choosing the life he lived, he lost his closes friends, the woman he loved, and his will to live.

Death of a Mercenary is a tragedy set in the final years of the dictatorship of Nicaraguan president 'Anastasio Somoza', and concludes a decade later during the Reagan Era of covert operations in Central America. Against this turbulent historical background, *Death of a Mercenary* vividly portrays the lives of the mercenary -professional adventurers, soldiers of fortune, men and women living only for the present, with no record of the past and no cares about the future. The story explores some of the motives, background and circumstances that created them and provides some clues to explain why most of them are pulled back into this kind of life -until eventually- violent death catches up with them.

Yet, *Death of a Mercenary* simply tells a story. It does not create excuses for the actions of many of the characters and it probably raises more questions than provide answers. Still, the telling is unnerving because if forces the audience to examine their morals and beliefs if they, like the characters in the play, were forced to choose sides and commit actions that are justified only by the primal need to survive. However, the tragedy in *Death of a Mercenary* is not only about Agustin's slow and painful downfall into darkness, but the realisation that he, like most of the other characters, are victims and pawns of invisible powers and circumstances beyond their control.

Death of a Mercenary is a fictional narrative based on life experience and other accounts witnessed or researched by the author. The main characters represent real-life counterparts so names, places and times have been changed in order to protect the identity of those still living. While the depiction of locations, historical background, and military operations is accurate, many elements have been simplified for the sake of story telling.

Ultimately, *Death of a Mercenary* is a story about human nature's inability to remain unchanged, when all the options of living are reduced to one: survival.

DEATH OF A MERCENARY

LIST OF CHARACTERS

MR. GUNTHER	Israeli arms dealer and leader of covert operations unit. British citizen of German birth. Served with Israeli secret service. Intelligence gathering expert. Age 61 (ACT I-1, ACT III), age 52 (ACTS I and II).
AGUSTIN	Puerto Rican-American artist and mercenary. Fluent in Spanish and Latin American dialects. Trained in surveillance and strategic planning. Age 39 (ACT I-2, ACT III), age 28 (ACTS I-II).
JIM	Unit leader. Son of an American missionary and Nicaraguan native. Fluent in Spanish and in Miskito Indian dialect. Operations planner, field commander, 39.
SEAN	Irish-American Vietnam veteran. Weapons and explosives expert, 26 (ACT II and I), 35 (ACT III).
HELENA	Daughter of a Venezuelan oil baron and politician. Trained in surveillance, small weapons expert, 25 (ACT I), 35 (ACT III).
CAMACHO	Assassin. Educated Mexican of Native American heritage, 42.
CASIANO	Argentinean mercenary of Italian heritage, 32 (ACT II), 42 (ACT III).
FREDDIE	Mexican mercenary, 26.
CHEWY	Salvadoran mercenary, 23.
McCORMICK	U.S. military advisor in Nicaragua, CIA case officer 36 (ACT II), 46. (ACT III).
El CORONEL	Officer in the Nicaraguan National Guard, 55.
JULIO	Owner/bartender of ‘Club La Tasca’ in Panama City, 49.
CAPT. MERCADO	Cuban Intelligence officer, 46.
MARIA	Nicaraguan peasant girl, 17.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT I

Scene 1	A College Dormitory	Fall 1986, Washington, DC.
Scene 2	A Latin American Dance Club	Fall 1977, Panama
Scene 3	Same	Same evening
Scene 4	Same	Same evening
Scene 5	Same	Same evening
Scene 6	Helena's Apartment	Later that night

ACT II

Scene 1	National Guard Post	Nov. 1977, Nicaraguan Village
Scene 2	Same	Later that evening
Scene 3	A Jungle Ravine	Costa Rican Border, days later
Scene 4	An Old Barn	Rebel Camp, 2 days later
Scene 5	Same	Nightfall same day
Scene 6	Same	Sunrise next morning
Scene 7	A Hut	Nicaraguan Village, weeks
Scene 8	National Guard Post	Jan. 1978, Nicaraguan Village
Scene 9	A Hut	Same afternoon
Scene 10	A Dirt Road	Same afternoon

ACT III

Scene 1	Outdoor Patio	Fall 1986, Sean's Arizona Resort
Scene 2	Briefing Room	Daybreak, weeks later
Scene 3	Same	Same morning
Scene 4	Agustin's Suite	Later that evening
Scene 5	Outdoor Patio	Same evening
Scene 6	Briefing Room	next evening
Scene 7	Agustin's Suite	Later that night
Scene 8	Military Warehouse	Fall 1986, Siuna, Nicaragua
Scene 9	Agustin's Suite	Sean's Arizona Resort
Epilogue	Auditorium Lobby	Years Later, Cleveland State University, Ohio

ODE TO A FALLEN FRIEND

It was not a Judas-friend who died
In that unceremonious place of old,
It was I who reached the end
Of living life without a soul.

All gone…

The friends, the lovers -days of glee
When bonds of friendship made it seem
That nothing could destroy that calm
That hate and treason ripped apart.

Justice was done…

But as a thousand times repeats
The horrid scene before my eyes,
I ask myself with tortured screams
-My God, why can't I cry?

I'm dead…

And yet I feel her pain so great
It cramps my body into stone
As bullets pierce that flawless skin
And spit their venom through her guts.

She's gone…

And as the thunder of the penetrating shots
Betrays the throbbing of my wounded heart
I try to shed the silent tears of blood
For someone I have fallen for…

I aimed.

FOREWORD

In writing this play, I am indebted to international award winning author Mary Doria Russell *(the Sparrow, Children of God)* for her friendship and her invaluable assistance in discussing the manuscript with me in detail; to Sophie Campos de Orsini in helping me harness the inner demons into a story; and my keeper, my brother Ricky Nelson Rivera for putting up with me. Above all, I would like to express my gratitude to those whose aid was enlisted to read and criticised various scenes and those who allowed me to use them as role models for my characters. Your knowledge, acumen, and helpful suggestions have infused the work with life.

JRR

Cleveland, Ohio
September 11, 1997

DEATH OF A MERCENARY

ACT I

ACT I

SCENE 1

COLLEGE DORMITORY ROOM -- WASHINGTON, DC -- FALL 1986

STAGE BLACKOUT

OFFSTAGE, the sound of a jogger doing his run fades in: rhythmic breathing, feet pounding the pavement, the crunching of dry leaves, and the noises of a busy metropolitan street filtering in and out.

THE MUSIC of a Michael Jackson's "Thriller", played by a local radio station fades in and the jogger fades out. The song concludes, immediately followed by station identification, followed by the voice of a FEMALE DISK JOCKEY.

[Disk-jockey's dialogue will be improvised by the performer]

DISK-JOCKEY *(OFFSTAGE VOICE OVER)*

After a weather update, a commentary about the upcoming Oliver Stone film, 'Platoon'. She talks about Stone's other movie release early in the year, 'El Salvador', and ends her commentary by stating the fact that Oliver Stone wrote the screenplays for two of the most violent and controversial drug-related movies in recent years: 'Midnight Express' and 'Scarface'.

STAGE LIGHTS UP

A Small COLLEGE DORMITORY with Spartan furnishings is revealed. The furnishings are arranged galley style (all alongside one wall) on the right sidewall (up stage) to the entrance. The furniture arrangement along the wall is as follows: a WOODEN CLOSET with floor to ceiling double doors -a LONG MIRROR on one door- is at the right corner next to the entrance; the closet is followed by a BUNK BED.

After the bed, follows a DESK and CHAIR with an overhead BOOKSHELF; a READING LAMP folds over the desktop. The bookshelf contains a few art related BOOKS, several VIDEO and AUDIOTAPES, a RADIO-CASSETTE player, and an 8 x 10 framed PHOTOGRAPH. On top of the desk is a TELEPHONE.

On the floor next to the desk, at the end corner of the wall, is a small REFRIGERATOR with a compact TELEVISION-VIDEO CASSETTE PLAYER placed on top of it. The wall across the entrance is made-up of glass windows extending from mid-wall to the ceiling.

Original OIL PAINTINGS and a CLEVELAND INDIANS (baseball) POSTER decorate the wall above the bed. AN EASEL with a painting in progress is set near the window. An area rug is spread along the side of the bunk bed.

MR. GUNTHER (61) examines the painting on the easel through thick dark-framed reading spectacles. He has the look of a college professor, dressed in a woollen weave square pattern sport coat (European cut), shirt and tie (silk), dress slacks and 'very shiny' black leather oxfords. On his head, a pecan colour wool-felt fedora; tucked under his arm, a black nylon umbrella with curved wood-grain handle and silver-tone metal tip.

DISK JOCKEY *(V. O. CONTINUES)*
She continues with a news bite in which president Ronald Reagan speaks about the (Nicaraguan) 'Contras' and his commitment to assisting the 'freedom fighters' struggle against the communist regime (a.k.a. the Sandinistas) threatening to spread their tactics and ideology in Latin America. Then, she concludes the segment with the sound of another top ten hit.

While the song plays on the room's radio, sounds of students going about their business in a crowded and congested area begin to filter in.

Enter AGUSTIN (39). He is dressed in running cloths. His shirt is wet with perspiration after his late-afternoon jog. He stops at the entrance overtaken by complete and total surprise when he sees Mr. Gunther waiting for him.

GUNTHER *(TURNING AROUND, 'FAVOURITE UNCLE' ACT)*
Stop staring at me; I'm not a ghost yet! *(he turns off the radio)* Come in and close the door. We've lots of catching up to do.

AGUSTIN *(CLOSING THE DOOR, ANNOYED)*
Mr. Gunther, what the hell are you doing here?

GUNTHER *(SHRUGGING INNOCENTLY)*
I was in town and stopped for a visit -clear the blood. *(genuinely bewildered)* Now, how in blazes did you manage a room in an all girls' school? -and a Catholic one at that!

AGUSTIN *(LACONIC)*
It's a gift. *(he grabs a towel from the closet, dries his face and changes to a clean sweatshirt)*

GUNTHER
Back in college without missing a beat -I'm proud of you! Even though you don't seem happy to see your old mentor.

AGUSTIN
I want to be left alone; you're the last person I expected to see. *(then, with a questioning look)* I thought you went back to Israel?

GUNTHER *(SNEER)*
The Mossad has no sense of humour. Besides, it's too early to retire and something new has come up. Might be of some interest to you...

AGUSTIN *(HAVING GONE THROUGH THIS BEFORE)*
There is *nothing* you can say that could be of interest to me. *(he gets a can of soda from the refrigerator and opens it)*

GUNTHER
Don't be such a bore! Hear me out! Just for a minute. Then, if you feel the same, I'll be on my way. You'll never hear from me again.

GUNTHER gives him his most endearing smile. AGUSTIN studies him for a moment making up his mind. He then sits at the edge of the bed and drinks from the can.

AGUSTIN, face neutral, gestures Gunther to have a seat. GUNTHER places his hat and umbrella on top of the desk and, as he pulls the chair away, he notices a framed photograph resting on the bookshelf and picks it up.

GUNTHER *(LOOKING AT THE PICTURE WITH INTEREST)*
Ha! All the family is here! The 'Tasca Club' in Panama City, yes?

AGUSTIN *(HIS FACE REVEALING NOTHING)*
Yes. Back in 77. *(then)* -The year that Elvis died.

GUNTHER *(SURPRISED)*
Has it been that long? My Lord! Almost… ten bloody years! *(then, looking up at Agustin)* But you! Haven't aged a day and looking better than ever.

AGUSTIN *(EMBITTERED SARCASM)*
It's all a result of the happiness I felt when I made it passed the age of thirty… *alive.*

GUNTHER *(SCRUTINISING AGUSTIN'S FACE)*
You've done better than survive! You are a bloody miracle! Even the scars have disappeared.

AGUSTIN *(TIRED OF THE CAT AND MOUSE GAME)*
Look deeper. Everything hurts. *(then)* If you have something to say, say it. I have plans for the evening.

They stare at each other without giving in. After a beat, Gunther drops all pretences of joviality and his usual no-nonsense self emerges.

GUNTHER

Very well -you ungrateful pup. *(he sits)* Are you familiar with the present situation in Nicaragua?

AGUSTIN *(SHRUG)*

Not really. Peter Jennings is all I get.

GUNTHER

Then you don't know much. It's a clusterfuck. Even worst than before!

AGUSTIN *(GOING TO THE POINT)*

Which means, business is good.

GUNTHER *(WITH A SATISFIED GRIN)*

Can't complain. It's a sellers market. But since Reagan's been president, the war has taken a new twist.

AGUSTIN *(PUZZLED)*

War? Which war?

GUNTHER

The war on drugs! Or haven't you heard?

AGUSTIN *("SURPRISED")*

Oh, *that* war. *(then)* What happened to the Sandinistas?

GUNTHER

We're still fucking them -bloody bastards! But things were getting a bit dull until the Almighty smiled upon mercenaries and gave us Ronald Reagan. He wants to teach the Sandinistas a lesson but Central America is too far away for Americans to give a damn. *(with a sigh)* And why would they? Violence is fine when it's ten thousand miles away! But Reagan knows that if he can get the American voters on his side, he can fart whenever he wants. So instead of focusing on Central America, he singles out the nation's greatest fear, then shoots and declares a '*war on drugs'* on national television!

AGUSTIN *(TRYING TO FOLLOW)*

So what? Nixon did the same in 71.

GUNTHER

You're right. But this time, is not just rhetoric! This man deserves an Oscar! The nation thinks he's so bloody marvellous that Congress caved in. Handed him everything he asked for. All the resources of the federal government -and I mean everyone: DEA, FBI; even our old friends -the Christians In Action *[the CIA]*; Departments of Defence, Customs, and State; Coast Guard -and even NASA; all involved one way or the other with one single goal in mind: to win the ratings war on the telly!

AGUSTIN *(GETTING BORED)*
Wonderful! Who's winning?

GUNTHER *(WITH A FUNNY LOOK)*
Who do you think?

AGUSTIN makes a face that says, "of course".

GUNTHER
Mind you, The Sandinistas and the drug traffickers are all feeling the pinch. So they formed a business alliance that is making things here look down right humiliating. The buggers are bloody good at the game, you know. Makes the Mafia look like Shriners.

AGUSTIN
And this is where you come in -just like old times. *(with a look)* -unless, you are working now for the government.

GUNTHER *(WITH AN EXPRESSION OF DISGUST)*
Oh please, don't make me puke! -Too many rules and regulations and not much profit to show for it. *(then with delight)* Fortunately for us, the game is still the same. The Americans can not legally carry on a war in another country without an act of Congress. So, they have hired me to bring in the goodies. *(smiles expectantly)* Should I go on?

AGUSTIN *(INTERESTED, BUT SARCASTIC)*
Oh, please, Mr. Gunther, do tell! What kind of goodies are we talking about?

GUNTHER
They need *information,* my boy! The kind that could end a lot of distinguished careers if the press gets a hold of it; the kind that can not be obtained through legal channels or bought from illegal ones -they already tried. The deal, literally, is to go in and get it! Just like old times! *(wide smile*) Interested?

AGUSTIN feels drawn by Gunther's words and becomes angry for his own weakness. He decides to put the business at an end.

AGUSTIN *(MOVING TOWARDS THE DOOR)*
I don't have time for this. *(opening the door)* You better leave.

GUNTHER *(IGNORING HIM, CALMLY)*
Let me finish. It gets better.

AGUSTIN remains still by the door, silent. Gunther continues.

GUNTHER *(GRINNING SEDUCTIVELY)*
To get to *this* information we have to go in deep inside the jungle, make our way through hostile territory and infiltrate a base full of east Germans, Bulgarians, Cubans and other foreign commie scum -not to mention the locals. But to pull it off -and this is were *you* come in, we are going to need help from some of your old friends, the Miskito Indians. They control the pathways. *(then, wide smile again)* Don't you love it?

AGUSTIN *(CHUCKLES IN STUNNED AMUSEMENT)*
I think you are mad. *(then, knowing perfectly well he is serious)* Why not send in the Contras and blow the place up?

GUNTHER
Oh, they will! -after we take out the goodies. They just don't know it. *(then)* So what do you say?

AGUSTIN *(NOT GIVING IT A SECOND THOUGHT)*
Fuck off.

GUNTHER *(CONFIDENTLY PRESSING ON)*
You will be paid a thousand dollars a day, plus expenses, and a bonus upon completion. I know you can use the money.

AGUSTIN *(QUIETLY BUT ADAMANT)*
Fuck... off.

GUNTHER *(TAKING A DEEP BREATH)*
Agustin, listen to me, you bull-headed mule! *(then)*. All you have to do is help me plan the operation, make some introductions and supervise the training. *(wheedling)* You won't have to go in. No risk involved. *(then, reasonable, one businessman to another)* You can finish this internship in a couple of weeks, spend the rest of the fall in a warm place, and be back with your family to enjoy the holidays! The job will take no more than a month and then you can do what ever you want. I'll even pull some strings for you.

AGUSTIN
You came a long way for nothing. *(then, with finality)* The answer is no.

GUNTHER *(TAKING A BITE)*
So that's it. You're just going to quit? Hide away in a girl's dorm and feel sorry for yourself?

AGUSTIN *(SCOFFS, NOT FALLING FOR THE GUILT TRIP)*
Go try that shit on someone else! *(then)* Did you really think I was going to say yes?

GUNTHER *(WITH MALEVOLENT CONFIDENCE)*
Yes! I did. *(then)* And I think that you might still change your mind.

AGUSTIN *(SUSPECTING A TRICK)*
And why would I do that?

GUNTHER *(WITH TOTAL CONVICTION)*
Because I know you better than you know yourself! I... *made*... you.

AGUSTIN remains still, a painful wound opened inside. For a couple of beats he looks back at Gunther with defiant eyes, his darker side emerging, unconsciously turning the ring on his finger. The gold band with images of panthers over a field of enamel black is identical to the ring Gunther is also wearing -the symbol of a very exclusive group. Then quietly he closes the door and turns to Gunther.

AGUSTIN *(A CHARGED WHISPER READY TO ERUPT)*
Mr. Gunther, I have partial hearing in one ear, I'm going blind in one eye and my face has been put together... twice! The man you made is broken. He doesn't work anymore. He lives only in my nightmares and I'm not letting him out.

GUNTHER remains quiet; eyes locked in silent confrontation. Slowly, AGUSTIN regains his composure.

GUNTHER *(LOOKING AWAY, IN A KINDER TONE)*
Well, perhaps I was wrong. I'd figured you missed the excitement... (s*ighs, then takes a card from his pocket and places it on the desk)* But just in case, I will leave you a number where you can make contact. It will be active until noon tomorrow and receptive to your old code. *(he stands to leave, hat in hand)*

AGUSTIN *(CHILLY AND WITH A SHOW OF FINALITY))*
Good bye, Mr. Gunther. *(extending his hand)*

GUNTHER *(SHAKING HANDS)*
Cheerio, my boy. I wish you well. Judging by these paintings, you're in your way to a new life.

GUNTHER puts on his hat, collects his umbrella, and, as if catching his attention for the first time, picks up the photograph from the desk.

GUNTHER *(PONDERS)*
Jim, Sean, …Helena. *(then)* Do you keep in contact with them?

AGUSTIN *(AFTER A SECONDS HESITATION)*
No. *(then, wanting to know but cool)* Have you heard from them?

GUNTHER
Oh yes! *(frowns)* Jim, well, I miss dearly; we all do. Helena, now using her real name, lives in France, with her husband; a diplomat from Venezuela. *(smiling)* She's still a stunning woman. The French adore her! *(chuckles)* She berates them and they love it!

AGUSTIN, for a moment, is lost in memories.

GUNTHER *(HANDING BACK THE PICTURE, AS IF READING HIS MIND)*
And yes, she mentions you all the time. *(then, serious)* She asked me, if I was to see you, to tell you that she misses you and that she was wrong -whatever that means. She also wants you to know that she would like to see you again, but that if you do not want to, that she understands.

AGUSTIN *(ABSORBS THIS, NODS, THEN)*
And Sean? How is he doing?

GUNTHER *(LIGHTING UP)*
Sean has retired to a respectable life -at least by his standards, and is doing quite well at it. He owns and operates a *(some hesitation)* tourist resort in Arizona. You should stop in for a visit. It's quite a place! *(then, with calculated timing)* Oh, and there is something else you should know. *(a beat)* Sean is the other person I had in mind for the job, if you turned it down.

AGUSTIN is shocked by this revelation but his only visible reaction was to blink once. He maintains his cool businesslike persona.

AGUSTIN *(AFTER A BEAT)*
You can't be serious! He's not qualified!

GUNTHER *(NOT CARING FOR ARGUMENTS)*
That is your opinion. I say he is! I trained you both myself.
You have the edge, but he can do it!

AGUSTIN *(BLOWING IT OFF)*
If Sean wants to do it, so be it! Only, tell him to remember Jim's prediction.

GUNTHER *(CURIOUS)*
Which was...?

AGUSTIN *(OMINOUS)*
"This life's a killer. If a bullet doesn't do it, the pressure will."

GUNTHER *(ABSORB THIS, THEN STOICALLY)*
Jim was right.

MR. GUNTHER turns and exits.

AGUSTIN walks to the entrance and looks down the hall following Gunther with his eyes. Then he turns back, locks the door and crumples against it with an explosive sob. The strain of keeping up his cool self-controlled persona intact has been an act has left him drained. Visibly upset, he pulls himself together as he studies the photograph he has been holding. He then returns it to its place on the desk top .

Next he picks a Ruben Blades CASSETTE TAPE from the shelf, puts it in the player, and the song "Buscando a America" plays. He sits on the bed and takes off his running shoes. Then he grabs the still unfinished soda can, takes another sip, and leans back against the wall staring at the painting, trying to regain his composure.*

For a while he remains still, listening to the music. Then again he reaches out for the photograph on his desk and lays down on the bed holding the photo at arms length above his head. As the music plays and increases in volume, Agustin's arm (holding the photograph) slowly drops to his chest as he falls asleep.

THE NIGHTMARES return and he relives the past.

_____

* See lyrics at the end of play

TRANSITION TO SCENE 2

OFFSTAGE, background noises of a busy Central American dance club begin to filter in. A spotlight focuses on Agustin's sleeping form and the rest of the room goes into total darkness. Then the lights around Agustin fade in low revealing a blurred club scene around him. In the shadows, people are dancing, sitting at the bar and in tables around the dance floor engaged in drinking and animated conversation. Then the spot light on Agustin fades out to black, and when all the light comes back on, the previous set is gone and the club setting for the next scene appears.

END OF ACT I - SCENE 1

ACT I

SCENE 2

PANAMA CITY, PANAMA -- LA TASCA CLUB -- FALL OF 1977 -- EVENING

THE CLUB is a cavernous space with a high ceiling spotted with fans. TRAVEL POSTERS from Latin American sites adorn the whitewashed concrete rendered walls. TROPICAL PLANTS and SMALL PALMS planted in large TERRACOTTA URNS complete the decor.

The MAIN ENTRANCE opens to a balustrade-veranda from which a stairway leads down about four feet to the main dance floor. SMALL TABLES covered in white cloth are positioned along the walls leaving the centre clear for dancing.

The club is packed with a mixed crowd of animated REGULARS and TOURISTS. Some are standing in the veranda chatting or looking towards the dance floor. Others drink at their tables, the rest dance salsa to the beat of 'Ruben Blades'.

Passed the dance floor, to the left, is a BAR surrounded by high stools. Across the bar, to the right, is a smaller room, which is an open-view extension from the main area. From here, the bar is visible but not most of the dance floor or the entrance. This semi-private area is reserved for small gambling parties who enjoy playing card games or dominoes.

CAMACHO (42) is playing 'briskas' (Spanish cards) with his friends, CASIANO (32), FREDDIE (26), and CHEWY (early 20's). They pour drinks from a bottle of Don Q and smoke cigars. They are dressed in Latino tropical semi-casual attire (which excludes jeans, tee shirts or shorts).

JIM (39), dressed in colourful civvies and a wide-brim Panama hat, dances with a pretty girl while holding a piña-colada in one hand, the other around the girl's waist.

HELENA (25) enters through the main entrance. She is dressed in dark-colour slacks, ladies boots, and a low-cut pastel-coloured blouse. A ladies bag is strapped around her shoulder. Her hair is long and worn loose. When she enters, she stops at the veranda and looks down at the dance floor. She spots Jim, waves at him and he -noticing her, waves back. Smiling, she walks down to the dance floor, gives her bag to Jim's dancing partner, and takes over. Helena, who is an excellent dancer, dances seductively around Jim, who remains moving on the same spot while still holding his drink in one hand. As the song concludes, Jim gallantly bows to her and Helena returns the courtesy with a warm hug. Then Helena gets her purse back, takes Jim's arm, then goes and sits at the bar.

CAMACHO *(NOTICING HELENA)*
Helena, Mi Chula! Come over here and keep me company! *(then, pointing at a Band-Aid on his neck)* Maybe we can finish what we started last night, eh?

HELENA *(WITH NAKED HATRED AND COOL DISDAIN)*
Go fuck yourself, Camacho! When I need company I like to have a man with big 'cojones'! *[balls]*

THE PEOPLE around the table laugh; those who knew better tried not to.

CAMACHO *(CURSING, UNDER HIS BREATH)*
¡Cállense! *[shut up!] (The people comply immediately)* Puta pendeja… *[You fucking bitch…]*

HELENA, visibly upset, orders a 'Cuba Libre' [Bacardí rum and coke drink] and then places her bag on the table. JIM stares serenely into his piña colada. He is a thoughtful, controlled man of calm disposition and easy manner who misses nothing and seems to be intimidated by even less.

JIM *(TRYING TO SOUND UNINTERESTED)*
Mi amor, what was that all about?

HELENA pulls a pistol from her bag, checks the clip, and puts it back.

HELENA *(MURMURS WITH VENOM)*
I'm going to kill that sonofabitch!

JIM *(PLACING HIS HAND ON HERS)*
Take it easy.

JULIO (49), the owner of the Club, takes over from the bartender, and brings a bottle of rum, a can of Coka-Cola and a couple of glasses with ice.. JIM smiles at him in recognition. Julio is a small but elegant middle age man with thick moustache and pushback snow-white hair, impeccably groomed like Humphrey Bogart in 'Casablanca'.

JIM *(MIXING HER A DRINK)*
Here. *(then)* What's bothering you?

HELENA *(SWALLOWS HER DRINK)*
I had to work with that slime for the last two weeks.

JIM *(POURING HER ANOTHER)*
You where out in the jungle with him?

HELENA *(DISTANT LOOK)*
Yeah, we just got back. *(then)* Every fucking day he would try something on me, but last night, he went too far.

JIM *(LOOKING INTO HIS DRINK, EXPRESSIONLESS)*
Go on.

HELENA *(SIPPING AT HER GLASS)*
He waited until I went to sleep. I woke up when I felt someone touching me. He had a knife to my neck and was working his way down my clothes.

JIM *(CALMLY REFILLS HER GLASS AGAIN, THEN)*
Did he…?

HELENA *(SNAPPING OUT OF HER TRANCE)*
No! Agustin taught me to sleep with a gun under my pillow. *(then)* I took his knife and put a mark on him. *(spitting bullets)* I should have shot the bastard while I had the chance!

JIM *(PLACING AN ARM AROUND HER)*
He's not worth it. Forget about it, -at least for now. We'll deal with it later. *(pushing the bottle away)* And you better take it easy with this.

HELENA grabs the bottles and pours two drinks. She gives one to Jim.

HELENA *(FEELING BETTER)*
I'm okay. You're the only one who ever gave a damn about me.
(she picks up a napkin to clears her nose)

JIM *(TURNING TOWARDS HER)*
To friendship! *(they have a toast and drink. then)* And speaking of friends, have you seen Agustin?

HELENA *(SHRUGGING)*
I thought he was here.

JIM *(SHAKING HIS HEAD)*
I haven't seen him all day. *(then)* Does he know you're in?

HELENA
No. We come and go. You know how it is.

JIM *(TEASING)*
You mean, between you and Agustin? Oh yes! I know how it is.

HELENA *(SMILES)*
Don't you start with me. There is nothing between us.

JIM makes a face that says, "Oh, right. Sure!"

HELENA *(WEARILY)*
Agustin is incapable of love. All we do is fuck!

JIM *(PHILOSOPHICALLY)*
Well, that's a start! And… how good is he?

HELENA *(BIG LAUGH, BIG TEASE)*
Very creative.

JIM *(REALLY INTERESTED)*
Oh, come now! Really? *(then)* I knew there had to be something about him.

HELENA *(MOUTH OPENED IN DISBELIEF)*
Excuse me?

JIM *(PLAYING THE INNOCENT)*
I'm surprised you two got together. He is not your type.

HELENA *(CHALLENGING HIM)*
Oh. Really?

JIM
Querida, you always go for tall, dark, and stupid. I mean, there's nothing wrong with Agustin, but he doesn't fit the pattern. *(conspiratorial)* So tell me, what's the secret?

HELENA *(DEFIANTLY)*
The secret? Indifference! *(sighs shrugging away all pretences, then with a distant look)* He doesn't want me! Can you believe that?

JIM *(EXAGGERATED RESPONSE)*
A dish like you? Never! The nerve of that man!

HELENA *(TRYING TO SOUND UNINTERESTED)*
Of course, I never wanted him either.

JIM *(MAINTAINING THE PRETENCE)*
Of course you didn't. *(a beat, then)* But…?

HELENA *(TRYING TO SAVE FACE)*

It's the principle of the thing! *(shaking of Goosebumps)* ...very sexy! *(shrugs)* I like a challenge. *(Jim gives probes with a look, then she sighs, hopelessly lost)* To tell you the truth, I don't even know what happened. One night I was bored; hot; lonely; so I took a walk to cool off, have a smoke. And there he was, laying on the ground, gazing at the stars -like an idiot! *(then)* It was so corny! So I said to myself -"Oh, what the fuck," and walked to him -you know, to say -"Hi, what you looking at"? Then he looked at me and gave me one of his crooked smiles, and I was... gone! *(recoiling)* The man's got a pact with the devil or something!

JIM

And...?

HELENA *(BLANK LOOK)*

Nothing! I just sat next to him and… we just talked until the sun came out. *(a delightful smile forming)* There was this strange beauty about him.

JIM *(AN INQUIRING LOOK)*

Strange beauty?

HELENA *(HER OLD SELF AGAIN)*

That's what I call it. Magnetism, charisma, the evil eye! *(sigh)* I just know that I have never met anyone like him! *(then)* But he makes me feel… invisible!

JIM *(GRINNING)*

Then why you keep seeing him?

HELENA *(GRINNING BACK)*

I keep seeing him because he is one hell of a lover! That's all.

JIM *(KNOWING THERE IS MORE)*

That's all? *(he sips his drink, collects his thoughts and, with a piercing look)* Girl, you got it bad!

HELENA *(AFRAID TO GO THERE)*

What? What are you talking about?

JIM *(TAKING A DEEP BREATH)*

Helena, you are not fooling anyone. You're in love with him!

HELENA *(FEELING VULNERABLE AND ANGRY)*

Oh please, Jim! Get real! *(then, snapping back angrily)* Besides, what do you know about love between a man and a woman? *(immediately feels sorry for the remark)*

JIM *(UNDERSTANDING SMILE)*
I know that love is love; I know how it feels when it hurts; and I know we all need a little bit of it. *(then)* Could you live your life without it?

HELENA *(SOFTLY)*
No! Not anymore.

JIM *(WANTING HIMSELF TO HEARD IT)*
Then just say it!

HELENA *(SCARED)*
Say what?

JIM *(PRESSING)*
How you really feel!

HELENA *(MORTIFIED)*
I don't know how to do that.

JIM
Just say it! Are you in love with Agustin?

HELENA *(TURNING TO FACE HIM, ANGER)*
Yes! Damn you, I am! I love him! Are you happy now?

JIM *(A BEAT, THEN SOFTLY)*
Yes.

JIM simply stares into his drink and, for the first time, HELENA realizes Jim's feelings for Agustin. With a tender look of understanding, she puts her arms around him and kisses his cheek.

HELENA
Oh, Jim… I'm so sorry. He doesn't give a shit about either of us, you know.

JIM
You should tell him how you feel, before... *(thinking better of it, he stops before confessing what Agustin has already confided in him)*

HELENA
Before what?

JIM *(HALF SMILE)*
Before you miss your chance.

HELENA *(ROLLING HER EYES)*
That'll be the day! *(then, wondering aloud)* Confess to a man that I love him? *(scoffs)* Never! *(a beat, with deep sadness)* Unless…

JIM
Unless what?

HELENA *(FEELING MISERABLE)*
-Unless he tells me first.

END OF ACT I - SCENE 2

ACT I

SCENE 3

LA TASCA CLUB -- 30 MINUTES LATER

SEAN (26) enters the club. He is dressed in white pants, white leather slip-ons, and a blazing flower print shirt, opened at the chest exposing a huge gold medallion. From the entrance he moves up to the steps, quickly surveys the place, takes a deep breath, and spreads his arms wide in salutation.

SEAN *(AT THE CROWD)*
My peoples*! I have arrived! *(to an offstage disk jockey)* Joaquín, hit me!

SEAN strikes the famous John Travolta pose from 'Saturday Night Fever' and the movie's theme song begins to play. The delighted crowd erupts in laughter, applause and cheers of "Viva Sean!" Displaying great showmanship, Sean descends the stairs shaking hands and kissing pretty girls on the cheek as he makes his way toward the bar.

JULIO walks over and greets him enthusiastically with a hug and kisses.

When SEAN gets to the bar, he strikes the John Travolta pose once more and makes a funny expression. HELENA and JIM stare at him in stunned amazement.

SEAN *(HOLDING THE POSE)*
You likes? Muy macho, eh? Does this say tourist or what!

JIM and HELENA explode in laughter.

SEAN *(SNOBBISH TONE)*
Peasants! *(then at Julio, already behind the bar)* Julio, serve me something to match my outfit!

HELENA *(HUGGING SEAN)*
Sean, you are what I call a living fashion statement!

JIM *(MUTTERS)*
He is what I call one crazy motherfucker!

** Yes, he says: -"peoples" and "likes". This is not a typo!*

SEAN *(AS HE SITS HIMSELF ON A STOOL)*
Jim, you always have a way with words -you dog-breath, half-breed, scum-sucking bastard.

JIM *(WITH AN AMUSED LOOK)*
Why thank you, Sean. I learned it all from you.

JULIO places a huge 'margarita' in front of Sean.

SEAN *(RAISING THE GLASS IN SALUTE)*
You are more than welcome. Plenty more where that came from. *(tasting the drink and making an expression of delight)* Aaaah! *(raising the glass towards an expectant Julio)* Mucho fine fucking-tastic!

Delighted with such high praise, JULIO walks away all smiles.

SEAN *(AT JIM AND HELENA)*
Becoming a partner in this club has to be the best investment of my life!

HELENA *(IN COMPLETE BEWILDERMENT)*
Sean, what has come over you? You have been in mourning for over a month and all of a sudden this complete change?

SEAN
Wait until I tell you guys what happened.

JIM *(GIVING HELENA A CONSPIRATORIAL LOOK)*
This is going to be good.

HELENA *(EXCITED)*
Well, tell us!

SEAN
Woman, hold your horses! *(drinks and puts the glass down)* Okay. You know how destroyed I was when I hear the news that Elvis died -God rest his soul!

HELENA *(DEEPLY "AFFECTED")*
It was a shocker!

JIM *(PLAYING ALONG)*
A lost to the world!

SEAN *(OVERCOMED BY EMOTION)*
A goddamn conspiracy by those fucking communist and liberal democrats!

JIM *(CONSOLING HIM)*
Sean! Take it easy! *(then)* We are with you.

SEAN
Sorry guys. Sometimes it just comes out. *(raising his glass)* Here's to The King! *(they toast "TO ELVIS!", then)* Well, there I was, mourning the loss of the greatest American hero that ever lived, locked inside my room, drinking like a stinking camel, and threatening to shoot whoever tried to come through that door. And no one dared until Agustin, who'd been asking me for days to come out, finally lost his patience -and you know what a sonofabitch he can be at times.

HELENA *(NODDING IN AGREEMENT)*
An insensitive bastard!

JIM *(MIMICS)*
Oh, absolutely!

SEAN *(CONTINUES)*
So he comes by, and showing no respect for private property, breaks down the door. I wanted to shoot him but, being so wasted, I couldn't get off the floor. So he gets some people to help him and before I know it, I'm staying at his place sobering up and getting cleaned. You know, that man is a saint!

HELENA *(SARCASTIC)*
Oh yes! A real Samaritan!

JIM *(AGREEING)*
A fucking boy scout!

SEAN
But that's only half of the story. *(then)* Agustin thought it would be good for me to go to church and light a candle for Elvis, and -what the hell, maybe say a prayer. I told him he was fucking crazy and there was no goddamn way I was going to set foot in church - much less pray! Actually, considering that Agustin is an atheist, the whole thing was pretty bizarre. I mean, not that I'm not a believer; I just don't do religion.

JIM *(BECOMING INTRIGUED)*
So, did you go?

SEAN
Yes I did. Mind you, only to make Agustin feel better and so he would shut the fuck up. Besides, we were talking about Elvis here and the idea began to gain some merit. Anyway, there I was inside the church, lighting a candle in one of the chapels and trying to say a prayer with no four-letter words -I have my fear of God, you know.

JIM *(ASIDE TO HELENA)*

I would have paid to hear that!

HELENA

That qualifies as a miracle!

SEAN

Now grab a hold of something because you aren't going to believe what happened next. So there I was, making a prayer, and when I opened my eyes I saw the most beautiful creature I had ever seen!

HELENA *(CROSSING HERSELF)*

¡Ave María Purísima! The Virgin Mary?

SEAN

No, but close.

JIM *(REALY FALLING FOR IT)*

Elvis!?

SEAN *(FROWNING IN DISMAY)*

No, not Elvis!

HELENA *(UNABLE TO HOLD THE EXCITEMENT)*

Well, God damn it, tell us! Who did you see?

SEAN *(WITH GREAT SOLEMNITY)*

I saw the woman of my dreams! *(sighs)*

JIM and HELENA do a double take and stare at Sean in disbelief.

JIM *(ASIDE TO HELENA)*

Did he say… a woman?

HELENA

I think that's what I heard.

SEAN

But not just any woman, but my prototype of the perfect woman!

JIM *(MUTTERS)*

Here we go.

SEAN

She had beautiful golden skin and long dark hair made into a braid that reached past her ass. Gorgeous hazel eyes with long sexy lashes and pearly white teeth, so perfect, they had to come from a dentist's office. Her chest… firm, round, immense! And a body with so many curves I almost crashed!

JIM *(COMMENTING TO HELENA)*

No one looks that good. I think he must have fallen asleep. It happens to me all the time when I'm in church.

SEAN

Satan! Let me finish. It gets better. *(then)* Where was I…?

HELENA

You were about to have an orgasm in church.

SEAN

I was about to have… *(he stops catching on to Helena's sarcasm and gives her a look, then)* As I was saying, I see this heavenly creature and all I could think was, -I have to have her!

HELENA *(DISGUSTED)*

You pig!

SEAN *(DEFENSIVE)*

Hey! I was in love.

HELENA

That's what they all say.

JIM

Pray continue.

SEAN *(CONTINUES)*

So I followed this goddess to find out all I could about her -after all, my middle name is Sherlock. Soon I knew that she was the daughter of an important rancher, who I will not mention to protect her identity, and was staying in the city while her old man checked into a hospital -heart problem. So everyday I kept visiting the church and lighting candles just to get to know her, which I did on a friendly basis. But my Spanish was not good enough for me to get past the door. So I asked Agustin for a little help and he wrote some verses for me to give to her.

HELENA *(SHADES OF JEALOUSY)*

Oh, did he?

SEAN

You know, the man is a poet. A true artist!

JIM *(ASIDE TO HELENA)*

-A con artist.

SEAN

Well, I don't know what he was lacing those poems with, but it worked! Before I knew it, she started giving me all the right signals and finally, last night, she invited me to stop by her house so that we could be alone -if you know what I mean. So following her instructions, I went to the house and found the front door opened. That was part of the plan. Knowing that her father was not going to be home, I went upstairs to where her room was and knocked on her door announcing myself. I heard her sweet voice from the other side telling me to come in, and when I did, I almost came in my pants! Waoh, I'm hot! Someone get me a drink!

HELENA *(EXCITED AND AROUSED)*

Oh, fuck the drink! Don't stop now!

JULIO, who's been listening, places a glass of beer on the counter and stays close-by cleaning another glass.

JIM *(HANDING OVER THE BEER)*

Here! Now, give us details!

SEAN *(AFTER TAKING A DRINK)*

So, here I was, with my mouth wide opened and my jaw hitting the first floor, and there she was, lying on the bed, leaning on some pillows; her hair loose and her body naked from head to toe. I just stood there, speechless; my heartbeat rocking the room. She looks at me and smiles seductively. I mean, this was better than a fantasy.

JULIO *(EXCITED WITH ANTICIPATION)*

So what you do?

They all turn and give him a reprimanding look and Julio answers with an "I'm sorry" one.

SEAN *(CONTINUES)*

For a while I just froze. Mind you, I knew what I had to do, I just didn't know where to start. Finally, I stripped without taking my eyes from her and approach the bed. When she noticed the size of my erection, she gave out a little cry and I smile. She was ready; I was born ready! Then, just when I was about to make my country proud, I heard a noise behind me.

JIM

Oh, oh…

SEAN

Make that a big fucking "oh, oh"! I was going to ignore the noise when I noticed the expression of horror on her eyes. So I turned to look and, standing in the doorway, his jaw hitting the basement, was the girl's father.

HELENA, JIM, and JULIO break into laughter.

SEAN *(SLIGHTLY ANNOYED)*

Oh, you think this is funny, eh? Wait until you hear the rest. You are going to piss in you pants.

HELENA *(WIPING A TEAR)*

We're sorry, Sean. Please go on.

SEAN *(CONTINUES)*

Well, for a while, no one said anything. We just kept staring at each other, just like in a fucking movie. She stared at me and then at him. He stared at her and then at my pecker! I stared at her and when I turned to him, he was holding one of those fucking machetes people around here are so fond of! I still can't figure out where the fuck he got it from.

HELENA *(GASPING SHE GRABS HIS ARM)*

¡Ay Dios mío! What did you do?

SEAN

What any true blooded Republican-American would do: I looked at the machete, then I looked at my pecker! Then I looked at her, and I looked back at my pecker, and something inside of me said *(screams)* -"holy shit!" Before I knew what happened, the old man comes rushing at me swinging his machete. The girl screamed something that sounded like -"run, motherfucker!" So I ran around the bed and he ran after me screaming words that are not in the dictionary. Lucky for me, the room was dark and he tripped on something and landed his ass on the floor. That was enough for me to pick up my clothes and hustle buns out the room and down the stairs. Now, you're not going to believe this, I can hardly believe it myself, I mean, you had to be there to see it. While all this shit was happening, I am still keeping one hell of an erection! So as I was running down the steps, all you could hear was -bing-bang, bing-bang, bing-bang, as my pecker bounced around.

JIM *(HOWLING IN TEARS)*

Sean, thank God for *'small'* favours, you got to keep your pecker! Maybe next time you might get to keep the girl.

SEAN smiles ruefully and curls the ends of his moustache.

SEAN

And who said I didn't get the girl?

HELENA *(IN AMAZEMENT)*

You did? You sonofabitch!

JIM

Well? Are you going to tell us or what?

SEAN *(CONTINUES)*

Okay. When I ran out of the room and down the stairs, I didn't have any clothes on. So instead of running out of the house, I hid behind the sofa. Since the lights were off and the room was very dark, the old man ran past me and kept on going. I could still hear him screaming as he ran down the street. I was about to put my pants on when I saw that my pecker was still standing like a flagpole. I took this as a sign from God! I mean, staying hard after all that shit I went through had to be a miracle. So, I took a deep breath, and humming the Stars and Stripes, I went right up those stairs.

JIM *(INCREDULOUS)*

You crazy gringo motherfucker!

SEAN

Since I am a gentleman, I will spare you the graphic details of the night's performance. All you have to know is that I scored a big one for my country.

HELENA

I can't believe you did that! Did you think about the old man coming back to the house?

SEAN

Oh, I forgot to tell you. I later found out that the minute he started running down the streets, he had a stroke and the neighbours rushed him to the hospital. But don't worry. The old fart is a stubborn one and last I've heard my potential father-in-law was doing just fine.

HELENA *(SHAKING HER HEAD)*

Sean, that is one of the most amazing stories I have ever heard. It would make one hell of a movie.

SEAN

Well, actually, I already thought about it, I mean, can you see Gene Wilder playing my part?

JIM

More like Benny Hill. Who do you have in mind to play the girl?

SEAN

Only one woman in the world can play that part, -Sacha Montenegro!

JIM *(SCEPTICAL)*

You're putting me on! *(pointing at a poster of Sacha displayed on the wall)* Does this girl look like Sacha Montenegro?

SEAN

They could be twins.

JIM *(THINKING ALOUD)*

Damn! Even I would sleep with Sacha!

HELENA *(AT SEAN)*

Now *that* I'd pay to see!

SEAN *(FEELING DEFLATED)*

Oh, what the fuck. Let's stop dreaming. I asked Agustin, him being an artist and all, what he thought about putting my life experience on paper, but he said that no one would believe it.

HELENA

He's got a point there. It's pretty hard to take. *(She turns to Jim who "dies" when she holds her thumb and finger half inch apart as lips read, "small dick", then turning to Sean)* Ay mi vida *[oh my darling]*, you better slow down from now on and stay away from women. You already have enough excitement in your life and I want you to be around for a long, long time. Okay?

SEAN

Thank you querida. Knowing that you care brings tears to my eyes.

JIM

Sean, I think your comeback deserves a toast. *(then)* Julio!

SEAN

Now you're talking!

JULIO re-fills their glasses.

JIM *(RAISING HIS GLASS)*

-To Sean, a good friend and a man of action!

HELENA

-To Bullshit!

SEAN

-And to one hell of a big shovel. Bottoms up!

They drink the toast and simultaneously land their glasses on the counter.

END OF ACT I - SCENE 3

ACT I

SCENE 4

LA TASCA CLUB -- HALF HOUR LATER

COUPLES walk to the dance floor and slow dance a bolero in dimmed lights.

SEAN, JIM, and HELENA continue their conversation at the bar.

A BARMAID clears empty bottles and spent glasses from Camacho's table leaving behind a fresh bottle of Don Q and clean glasses. The card game has ended with Camacho the big winner. The players get up; some to relieve themselves while Camacho flirts and enjoys the attentions of his female entourage.

CAMACHO *(SHOUTING OVER AT SEAN)*

¡Oye gringo!

JULIO gains Sean's attention and points towards Camacho.

SEAN *(ROBERT DeNIRO IMPRESSION)*

Hey, Camacho! You talking to me?

CAMACHO *(ALL WARMTH AND CHARM)*

¡Si, Roberto de Niro! I'm talking to you. We have an empty seat. You feeling lucky tonight?

SEAN

Give me a minute and I'll show you!

HELENA *(SERIOUS, CONCERNED)*

Sean, stay out of it. He only wants to make trouble.

SEAN *(FINISHING HIS BEER)*

Baby, don't you worry. Jim will keep an eye on me. Besides, the man himself will be here any minute now.

JIM

He's late. Where is he?

SEAN *(UNCONCERNED)*

I've no idea. *(teasing Helena)* Could be that some other señorita has need of his services and, on account that he's been deprived of your lovely company for some time, he felt obligated to bestow his gift.

HELENA *(PEEVED ICY LOOK)*
If he is, that's not the only thing he'll find himself deprived off.

SEAN *(MAKING A FACE)*
Ooh! Why are all you Latin beauties so jealously sadistic?

HELENA *(DISMISSIVE HAND GESTURE)*
Swine should be humbled when women have no more use for them.

SEAN
Okay, lady! That does it! From now on we are keeping our relationship strictly professional. No more begging for my body!

HELENA *(WITH A PURR AND A CARESS)*
!Ay, si, papi! *(then, with a slap of the wrist and a wicked grin)* In your dreams!

SEAN
Listen to her Jim, she's suffering from denial, *(kissing her hand and sighing)* but there might still be hope for her. *(Helena purrs a soft laugh of delight)*

CAMACHO *(IMPATIENT)*
Gringo! Are you coming or not?

SEAN
Well, I better get going. The natives are calling and getting restless.

SEAN pulls out money from his shirt pocket and drops it on the counter.

JIM *(SERIOUS)*
Remember Sean, we have an early call.

HELENA *(SURPRISED)*
When are you guys leaving?

JIM
Five in the morning.

HELENA *(DISAPPOINTED)*
So soon…

SEAN
Oh, come now! We'll be back before you have time to miss us, *(at Jim)* right buddy? *(then, at Helena)* How about a hug to remind you what a real man feels like?

HELENA *(HUGGING HIM WITH AFFECTION)*
¡Cuídate! *[Take care!]*

SEAN
You too. *(at Jim)* And you, old man, don't worry. I'll keep it short.

SEAN leaves and joins Camacho at the card table. CASIANO and FREDDIE join them in the game.

At the bar, HELENA and JIM sit in silence, without making eye contact.
Helena looks sombre. She is having a bad feeling. She finishes her drink and turns to Jim but before she could get a word out, he interjects.

JIM *(STARING INTO HIS GLASS)*
Don't say anything. It's bad luck.

HELENA *(SHE LOOKS AWAY)*
I better get going. *(she opens her purse looking for money)*

JIM *(STOPPING HER)*
Nah, don't. It's on me.

HELENA *(CLOSING HER PURSE)*
Thanks. *(then)* After all these years, it doesn't get any easier, does it?

JIM
Nope. In love and war, saying good bye never is.

HELENA
Tell Agustin I need to see him before he leaves. I'll stay up.
(hugs and kisses) ¡Ciao, querido! ¡Cuídate!

JIM *(SOFTLY)*
Ciao.

HELENA exits , Jim's eyes following her. Next, he checks on Sean.
Satisfied, he swings around to the counter and remains pensive for a few moments.

JIM *(LOOKING UP, SEARCHING)*
Julio! Un café con leche, por favor.

END OF ACT I - SCENE 4

ACT I

SCENE 5

LA TASCA CLUB -- ONE HOUR LATER

SEAN and CAMACHO, both smoking cigars, are the only players left in the game. Between moves, they play a dangerous cat-and-mouse game of bluffs and words. CASIANO, FREDDIE, CHEWY and a small but captive audience have gathered around to watch.

CASIANO is the acting card dealer. He deals SEAN a card from the top of the card deck. Sean recovers the card from the table and studies his hand. With a dignified look, he combs the ends of his mustache giving Camacho an affirmative nod.

CAMACHO *(EYES RIVETED ON SEAN)*

¡Una! *[one more]*

CAMACHO picks his card, looks at it, then back at Sean. Sean returns the stare and his eyebrow arches in comic fashion. Camacho curbs one corner of his lips into a smile and signals for another card. He picks the card and inspects his hand. Satisfied, he looks again at Sean and smiles.

CAMACHO

Me quedo *[I stay]*. A ver, let's see what you have.

SEAN *(TASTING HIS DRINK)*

Um… You know Camacho, I've heard rumors that you have a reputation for being a mean old bastard -hombre, no offense!

CAMACHO *(IN A "CONGENIAL" TONE)*

None taken. Those are just stereotypical slurs by Yankee-gringos who expect everyone to kiss their white-ass. No offence, eh? *(laughs)*

SEAN *(IN A "AMICABLE" TONE)*

Oh, none taken. But as a white-ass gringo I have to tell you -and this may come as a shock to you, I think you are a real sport!

CAMACHO *(AMUSED)*

Oh?

SEAN

No, really! I mean it! After the way you been losing tonight, you are taking it like a true gentleman. A real caballero! *(at the crowd)* ¿Verdad, amigos? *[Isn't it so, my friends?]*

CAMACHO *(TEETH FLASHING IN A FORCED SMILE)*

Thank you, señor. Such deep and deserved praise is very generous of you. *(then)* Now, could you do me one great favour?

SEAN *(LOOK OF INNOCENCE)*

Certainly!

CAMACHO *(COLDLY)*

Could you please cut the bullshit and get on with the game?

SEAN *(VERY "ACCOMMODATING")*

Oh, pardon me! How inconsiderate of me! Hum... Let's see what we have here. *(then, with a great show of "surprise")* Sweet Mother of Jesus…!

SEAN lays down his hand and Camacho stares at it in disbelief. Camacho, in a rage, throws his cards against the table.

CAMACHO

¡Maldito sea éste cabrón! ¡Coño!

SEAN *(GATHERING HIS WINNINGS)*

No one tell me. I think I know what he said. I won, right?

CAMACHO *(LOUD AND CLEAR)*

I said, God-damn-you-sara-man-bish!

SEAN *(BLINKS ONCE)*

I'll take that as a yes! *(then, organizing the bills)* Camacho, my friend, have some Pepto-Bismol for that temper of yours. That shit does wonders for me. *(puts the money on his shirt pocket)* Well, my peoples, it has been a pleasure. We must do this again some other night.

CAMACHO *("CHARMING" MODE)*

¡Mi amigo, un momentito! *[Just a minute my friend]* Me and my friends would be greatly offended if you leave now without giving us the opportunity to win back our money. *(big smile)*

SEAN *(ON HIS GUARD, SERIOUS)*

Your money…? You have no more money. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Tonight, you lost. *(then)* If you will excuse me, I really have to get going.

As SEAN tries to leave his seat, CAMACHO pushes the table toward him forcing him to sit down again.

CAMACHO *(WIDE SMILE, MENACING EYES)*
Maybe I didn't make myself clear.

SEAN grabs the sides of the table, rises ominously, but before anything can happen, AGUSTIN steps out of the crowd from behind Sean and places a hand on Sean's shoulder.

AGUSTIN (29) is dressed in dark pants, western boots, and white shirt with cuffs rolled up his arms, and a brown leather vest. His long hair is gathered into a ponytail.

CAMACHO gives Freddie, Casiano and Chewy a questioning look but they seem as puzzled as he does. None of them has ever seen Agustin.

CAMACHO *(CURIOUS BUT CAUTIOUS)*
Who is this guy?!

AGUSTIN *(HIS MOST "ENDEARING" ACT)*
I am a tourist.

SEAN *(MURMURS)*
How long have you been here?

AGUSTIN *(SMILE FIXED ON CAMACHO)*
Long enough.

SEAN
Did you see what that scumbag was trying to pull?

AGUSTIN *(SOFTLY AT SEAN)*
Ah, ah, ahhh…! No need to get excited. *(then, at Camacho)* I think what we have here is a communication problem. ¿No es así, señor Camacho? *[Isn't it so, Mr. Camacho?]*

CAMACHO *(SURPRISED BUT DELIGHTED)*
¡Vaya, caballero! You are absolutely right. No need to get excited! Señor, your accent… Cuban? Nah. *(concentrating)* Puerto Rican, right?

AGUSTIN inclines his head expressing both respect and assent.

CAMACHO *(TAPPING ON THE TABLE)*
A blood brother! And I can tell that you are also an educated man. Being one myself, it's refreshing finding another person with whom one can hold a meaningful conversation. *(then)* Have a drink!

CAMACHO pours Agustin a drink and one for himself. AGUSTIN (a non-drinker) takes the drink.

CAMACHO *(RAISING THE GLASS)*

¡A su salud!

AGUSTIN *(TASTING THE DRINK)*

¡Muy bueno! *(then)* Now that we are friends, how about telling me what the problem is.

CAMACHO *("CONFUSED")*

Problem? There is no problem! -Only a minor misunderstanding. *(then, with a look of concern)* You see, all we want, mis amigos y yo, is señor gringo here, to give us la revancha *[a makeup game]*. Eso es todo *[That is all]*.

SEAN *(NOT UNDERSTANDING)*

Somebody light a candle! What the fuck is he saying?

AGUSTIN *(STILL SMILING)*

Mr. Camacho and his associates want a chance to regain their losses.

SEAN *(MURMURS)*

Like hell they will!

AGUSTIN *(TAPPING SEAN ON THE SHOULDER)*

Ah, ah, ah…! *(then, at Camacho)* Señor Camacho, I believe that this, eh... -white ass gringo, has the right to leave the table since you have run out of money.

CAMACHO *(COLLECTED)*

Compadre, you are missing the point. We don't mind losing. That's part of the game. *(then, unable to hold his back his anger)* It's the way he kept on winning!

AGUSTIN *(WITH CALM RATIONALE)*

Bueno, el es un Americano de sangre Irlandesa. *[He is an American of Irish blood.]* The Irish are… very lucky people.

CAMACHO *(UNCONVINCED)*

No one is that lucky unless he cheats!

AGUSTIN *(THOUGHTFUL)*

I see. *(then)* Did anyone see him do anything wrong?

CAMACHO *(FRUSTRATED)*

That's the problem! We are sure he did it! We just can't figure out how he did it!

AGUSTIN

Señor, be reasonable! You can not accuse a man of cheating without proof. People are going to say that you are just a bad loser! So what do you say if we just say good night and forget about the whole thing. *(big grin)*

CAMACHO *("HURT")*

¡Ave María Purísima! I can not believe my ears! *(playing the crowd)* Did you hear that? Ah? I find it hard to believe that a man like you, who is one of us, can take sides with this gringo norteamericano!

AGUSTIN *(TAKING A DEEP BREATH)*

Señor Camacho, let me explain. This gringo happens to be one of my best friends. We are like family. Mi casa es su casa, and his problems are my problems.

CAMACHO *(TAKEN ABACK)*

Coño, hombre, where is your pride? These are the kind of friends you have?! What kind of a Latino are you?

AGUSTIN *(CHOOSING HIS WORDS CAREFULLY, SMILES)*

I am a man who happens to be muy puertorriqueño, and, like all Puerto Ricans, a loyal U.S. citizen. I think that makes me… an improved Yankee?

CAMACHO *(LAUGHS)*

My friend, I admire your sense of humor and your loyalty. You also got some big cojones! So I'll tell you what we'll do. You can turn around and walk away and I'll forget this whole incident. Friends, eh?

AGUSTIN *(SMILE, RAISING HIS GLASS)*

I'll drink to that. ¡A su salud!

CAMACHO

¡Bueno! *(they drink)*

AGUSTIN

Now, if you excuse us, we'll be on our way. *(placing his glass on the table)* Thank you for the drink. Let's go, Sean.

CHEWY draws a weapon and points it at Sean. A nervous JULIO joins the spectators; JIM positions himself close by.

CAMACHO *(COLD GRIN)*

Señor, I said you could go. The gringo stays.

SEAN *(THROWING HIMSELF BACK INTO THE CHAIR)*

Oh, fuck!

AGUSTIN *(CALMLY ARGUES)*
Compadre! Guns?! This is not good. You're going to give Texans a bad name. What will the "brothers" say?

CAMACHO *(CHUCKLES)*
They'll say that you're a fool if you stay. *(mocking him)* You know, I'm beginning to understand why you are so attached to the gringo. *(He eyes lasciviously run up and down Agustin)* Forget this guy. You can find another mariposa *[homosexual]* for the night in no time at all. Eh?

CAMACHO blows him a kiss and burst out laughing. THE CROWD laughs. AGUSTIN joins in the laughter as he turns around scanning the crowd. Suddenly, he pulls a Walther PPK pistol from behind and points it a Camacho's forehead. CASIANO and FREDDIE pull 9mm pistols and aim at Agustin. Nobody moves for a couple of beats.

AGUSTIN
Damn you, Sean! See what you made me do?

SEAN *(DEFENSIVE)*
Me? He is the one who called you a fag!

AGUSTIN
He was talking about you!

SEAN
Fuck him!

AGUSTIN *(CALM, SERIOUS)*
Never mind. *(at Camacho)* Tell your men to put down the weapons.

CAMACHO *(HISSING IN CONTEMPT)*
You don't have the balls to pull the trigger.

AGUSTIN *(CALMLY AMUSED)*
Never tried that before! *(he cocks the gun's hammer; his face turns cold and deadly)* I always use the finger.

CAMACHO *(HESITATION, THEN)*
¡Hagan lo que dice! *[Do as he says!]*

FREDDIE and CASIANO lowered their weapons. CHEWY hesitates, looking at Camacho as if to confirm the order.

CAMACHO *(THROUGH HIS TEETH, CALM IRRITATION)*
Chewy! *(Chewy does as he was told)*

AGUSTIN *(AT A NERVOUS JULIO)*
Julio, put them away. *(Julio grabs the weapons and carries them off)*
Sean, put all your winnings on the table.

SEAN *(SHOCKED)*
Say what?!

AGUSTIN *(WEARY)*
I am really pissed at you, so just fucking do as I say.

SEAN puts the money on the table grumbling at him.

AGUSTIN *(THE CHARM RETURNING)*
Now, gentlemen, each one of you is going to draw one card from the top. Winner takes all. Is this agreeable to you, señor Camacho?

CAMACHO
As long as you have a gun pointing at my head, I find it hard to disagree.

AGUSTIN *(AS IF JUST NOTICING THE GUN)*
Oh, how inconsiderate of me! Please forgive my bad manners.

AGUSTIN uncocks the weapon and calmly places the pistol on top of the table. Then he crosses his arms over his chest and stands back. CAMACHO stares in disbelief.

AGUSTIN
Now, do you agree?

CAMACHO
Yes, I agree.

AGUSTIN
Good! We have a game! *(then)* Señor Camacho, you may shuffle the cards.

CAMACHO picks the deck of cards and shuffles them. He places the deck at the centre of the table. SEAN picks a card, looks at it, smiles, and shows it around. -A Ten of Spades. Camacho picks his, looks at it and starts to laugh. He throws his card on the table, a King of Spades, and the crowd erupts in cheers. AGUSTIN recovers his pistol and pulls Sean away.

CAMACHO *(HAPPY AGAIN)*
¡Eh, mi amigo! Have a drink with us! No hard feelings, eh?

SEAN *(MURMURS TO AGUSTIN)*
Nothing that a baseball bat won't fix!

AGUSTIN *(PUSHING SEAN ALONG)*
¡No hombre! Some other time!

CAMACHO *(CURIOUS FROWN)*
Tell me something, would you have pulled the trigger?

AGUSTIN takes out the pistol, aims at the ceiling and pulls the trigger several times. The gun is empty.

CAMACHO *(SURPRISED AND CONFUSED)*
You are either a very brave man or a very stupid one.

AGUSTIN *(WITH A LOOK OF AMUSEMENT)*
Me? *(he shrugs)* I am a Puerto Rican.

AGUSTIN signals Camacho to direct his attention towards Jim, who had been standing along side, holding his hat in his hand. JIM moves the hat to reveal a Mini-Uzi submachine gun. CAMACHO laughs nervously as if all had been a joke. Agustin gives him a mocking smile and a wave of the hand. SEAN grabs his crotch making a gesture. Jim drops money on the bar to cover the tab, and after tipping his hat at Camacho -using his middle finger, joins his friends. They exit the club.

CAMACHO *(IN A RAGE, AT THE CROWD)*
¡Qué carajo miran! ¡Lárgense! *[What the fuck you're looking at! Get out of here!]*

The room clears. CAMACHO turns to his men.

CAMACHO *(IN EARNEST)*
I want those three pendejos! You hear me?

CASIANO *(HESITANT)*
Hombre, that's not going to be easy. Didn't you recognize the guy with the hat? He works for Gunther. And the rings they wear. I'll bet they are all Gunther's men, including the girl. You don't want to mess with Gunther.

CAMACHO *(GRABS HIS SHIRT, HISSES MENACINGLY)*
Don't argue with me, Casiano. I hate it when people argue with me.

CASIANO *(CAUTIOUSLY EXHALING)*
We have to work with them on our next job.

CAMACHO *(LETTING GO AS HE PONDERS THIS)*
Is that so? *(grins)* The jungle is a very dangerous place. Many people don't make it back. Accidents! Then perhaps, after things cool down, I will pay a visit to that bitch and when I am done with her you guys can have her. *(Chewy smiles salivating at the thought)*

FREDDIE *(CAUTIOUSLY)*
Jefe, you are angry. Is not a game anymore. Perhaps you should think this over.

CAMACHO *(GRABBING HIS HAIR AND SLAMMING HIS HEAD ON THE TABLE)*
No one fucks with Ernesto Camacho!

CAMACHO directs a challenging look at Chewy.

CHEWY *(RAISING HIS HANDS SUBMISSIVELY)*
What ever you say, jefe. What ever you say.

END OF ACT I - SCENE 5
ACT I

SCENE 6

THE BEDROOM SUITE IN HELENA'S APARTMENT -- LATER THAT NIGHT

The light of a full moon cast long contrasting shadows on the bedroom's white-coloured concrete rendered walls. No lights have been turned on; darkness is reflected on the floor's polished terra-cotta tiles. On the back wall (up stage), a set of GLASS PANED-DOUBLE DOORS exit towards an outside balcony. A gentle breeze bellows the sheer cloth curtain panels that hang from wooden rods at each side of the doors. The blades of a CEILING FAN turn languidly from the centre of the ceiling.

On the foreground of the right side-wall is a wood framed entree leading towards the bathroom. In the space between this entrance and the corner of the wall is a RECORD PLAYER/BAR COMBINATION CABINET. Framed reproductions of MODERN ART decorated the walls, POTTED PLANTS, the corners.

A BED is centred on the left side-wall with its foot-board extending towards the right side-wall. There is walking space at both sides of the bed and NIGHT TABLES at each side of the TALL WOODEN HEAD-BOARD. Resting on top of the left side night table is a LAMP. To the foreground of the left side-wall is an opening that leads to the rest of the apartment, and the exit.

The record player is playing the song "Memorias" by the Spanish singing idol, Camilo Sesto. HELENA and AGUSTIN are in bed engaged in passionate, slow moving lovemaking that seems to be choreographed to the rhythm of the music. As the song finishes and the record stops, they climax and remain panting in each other's arms, Helena's body laying on top of Agustin's.*

HELENA *(PANTING)*
God! Where'd you learn how to fuck?! *(gasp)* I can't breath! *(as her breathing normalizes, she kisses his face repeatedly, gently)* Your are such a prick! *(moans in surrender)* God, I hate you! *(more kissing)*

AGUSTIN *(STARING AT THE CEILING, DISTANT)*
Helena, stop being so melodramatic.

Stung by the words, her face a mask of fury, HELENA sits upright, and slaps Agustin's face hard.

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*See lyrics at the end of play

HELENA *(COLD)*

You fucking sonofabitch!

She tries to hit him again but AGUSTIN reacts quickly and grabs hold of her arms. He pulls her towards him, rolls over her, and pins her to the mattress, his hands holding hers wide. She struggles to get free and curses at him. He holds her more tightly, smiles mischievously, bends over and kisses her hard on the lips. Helena tries to resist but the effort is in vain. Agustin looses his grip and she embraces and kisses him with renewed passion. He pulls away slowly, eyes locked with hers.

AGUSTIN *(FEELING HIS JAW)*

Has anyone ever told you that you have a nasty temper?

HELENA *(ANGRY AT HIM AND AT HERSELF)*

Did anyone ever tell you that you're a lousy lover?

AGUSTIN

You should consider some serious therapy. Mood swings can be treated, you know.

Abruptly, HELENA pushes him aside as he mocks her with a low guttural laugh. She reaches for a wrap-around robe that hangs from the bed's headboard and covers her naked body.

HELENA *(WITH AN EXPRESSION OF DISDAIN)*

Such'a prick. Men!

AGUSTIN remains laying on his back staring at the ceiling. HELENA turns on the table lamp and sits staring at him as she works her long hair with her fingers.

HELENA *(THINKING)*

Agustin?

AGUSTIN *(BUSY WITH HIS OWN THOUGHTS)*

Um…?

HELENA

I want to ask you something, and I want you to give me a straight answer.

AGUSTIN *(YAWNING)*

What?

HELENA stops playing with her hair and nails him with a piercing look.

HELENA *(A BEAT)*

Are you faking it?

AGUSTIN *(STUPEFIED)*

What…?!

HELENA *(GROWING AGITATED)*

When we make love, are you for real… or just an act?

AGUSTIN *(DISBELIEF, ANNOYANCE)*

Jesus fucking Christ! What do you think?

HELENA *(ANGER AND FRUSTRATION)*

God damn it! I don't know what to think! *(then)* When I'm with you is like it doesn't get any better and I have no doubts. But then, you turn into something else -a thing, no feelings, no emotions, and I feel like I wasn't good enough for you -like now!

AGUSTIN does not reply; he turns on his side and ignores her. HELENA looks at him with cold controlled rage.

HELENA *(HISSING DISGUST)*

You're so hollow inside all that's left is an echo!

AGUSTIN *(EXPRESSIONLESS)*

It's a gift.

HELENA'S feelings of jealous fury, doubt and passion release like a torrent, and she grabs a knife from the top of the night table and sticks it hard into the headboard.

HELENA *(AS SHE SWINGS THE KNIFE)*

Bullshit! I'm fucking serious! Agustin, look at me! Is this your sick way of telling me that you have another lover?

AGUSTIN'S initial shock turns to rage. He grabs the knife and throws it away. Then, he grabs Helena by the shoulders shakes her violently.

AGUSTIN *(SCREAMS)*

Stop it!

HELENA begins to sob. She's left drained, lost and miserable.

Startled by his own violence, AGUSTIN releases her. His mask of anger slowly recedes and his hand (and heart) reach out to her and gently wipe away the tears. She grabs his hand with both of hers and with closed eyes, she holds it to her cheek. His other hand gently removes loose strands of hair from her face. She opens her eyes and looks at him, and he answers with a tender smile.

AGUSTIN *(SOFTLY)*

Tú, sólo tú, has suspendido la pasión a mis enojos, la suspensión a mis ojos, la admiración a mi oído. Con cada vez que te veo nueva admiración me das y cuando te miro más, aún más mirarte deseo. *[You, and only you has overruled the passion of my anger, the distraction of my eyes, the whispers in my ear. And every time that I see you, you give me new admiration and the more I look at you, to see you more I desire (from "Life is a Dream", Act I).]* The day I met you I knew that I would never want to want another woman but you.

HELENA *(ROLLING HER EYES AND EMBRACING HIM)*

Oh, you are soooo corny!

They remain silent for a few moments. Then, abruptly, HELENA moves away, ashamed of her vulnerability; angry of her weakness, afraid of rejection. She takes a deep breath, and gradually -painfully, the words come out.

HELENA

I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I just want things clear between us. So let's keep it simple. Whenever you get tired of me, or I get tired of you, we just move on. No strings attached, no hard feelings. Understand?

AGUSTIN understands, but remains silent. HELENA gets out of bed and ties the robe's cord around her waist. AGUSTIN grabs her hand as if to say something, but she tenses, and he knows that the time for conversation is over. He lets her hand drop. HELENA opens the drawer from her night table, pulls out a large envelope and throws it at him.

HELENA

Here. This is for you.

Before Agustin can say anything, HELENA exits into the bathroom and the shower goes on. Agustin opens the envelope and pulls out a couple of 8 x 10 black and white photographs. He studies the pictures, returns them to the envelope, and lays back staring at the ceiling, thinking. He runs his fingers through his hair trying to clear his mind. Then he sits over the side of the bed and begins to dress pulling clothes out of black duffel bag. He begins to dress: khaki field pants, jungle boots and olive-green cotton shirt. Helena enters as he is retrieving his pistol from under the pillow.

HELENA *(DRYING HER HAIR WITH A TOWEL)*

One of these days, that gun is going to fire and blow your head off.

AGUSTIN

Maybe so, but it won't be my head.

HELENA moves to the cabinet to fix herself a drink.

HELENA

Want me to fix you something?

AGUSTIN *(TYING HIS BOOTS)*

I'd love some coffee -but you don't cook.

HELENA *(PRIVATE JOKE, HALF SMILE)*

You remembered! -Good boy.

HELENA prepares two glasses and hands one to Agustin.

AGUSTIN

What is this?

HELENA

Lemon water.

AGUSTIN *(WAVING THE ENVELOPE)*

No, this?

HELENA *(TASTING HER DRINK)*

I believe those are pictures of the place you guys are heading. I got them from the pilot who did the recon. Same guy who flew us back this morning.

AGUSTIN *(A LOOK)*

These are classified. He just… gave them to you?

HELENA *(QUIET LAUGH)*

Darling, don't be silly. He was trying to be friendly and told me about his work to impress me. I got curious and helped myself to these. He doesn't know they are missing. And who knows, they might come in handy.

AGUSTIN

One of these days you're going to go too far.

HELENA (SHRUGS DISMISSIVELY)

What do you care?

AGUSTIN gives her a peeved look but decides to leave it at that. He then puts the envelope in his bag and continues to dress. Ignoring him for the moment, HELENA walks towards the double doors, leans against the wall and stares into the night. Her previous argument left her feeling depressed.

HELENA *(FEELING THE COOL BREEZE)*

I can't sleep this time of night. It's just like the night we met -stargazing. *(without glancing back, she senses Agustin moving close to her, then)* When you look up, what do you feel?

AGUSTIN *(SEARCHING THE VOID)*

Loneliness. *(reflects, then)* -Makes me want to go home.

HELENA *(LOOK OF CONTEMPT)*

Home. That's the place I hate the most.

HELENA shivers as her mind recalls unpleasant experiences from her early life.

HELENA *(SADNESS)*

When I was a little girl, I used to spend a lot of time alone. My mother was very beautiful. More interested in her looks than in me. Every night I fantasized about her coming to my bedroom, reading me a story… telling me how much she loved me, -it never happened. Instead, I used to pray for a kidnapper! Someone who would come and take me away so they could miss me. But that didn't happen either and I stopped believing in fairy tales.

AGUSTIN folds his arms around her in a soothing embrace. With him, she feels safe. They remain silent for a few beats, AGUSTIN gently caressing her cheek and HELENA leaning into his hand.

AGUSTIN

What about your father?

HELENA

Never home. Business and politics are his life. One day, he and my mother had a fight, the last of many. She left and I never saw her again. I was only ten. *(then, with mounting bitterness)* Papi got rid of everything that reminded him of my mother. As I grew up, I resembled her more and more, so he... *(sigh, then moving away from his embrace)* And here I am, telling you my life story. Not that it matters much; talking to you is like talking to a priest.

AGUSTIN *(A BEAT)*

Elena, I… have to tell you something.

HELENA, sensing the hesitation in his voice, stiffens but remains silent. Is he going to tell her that he loves her?

HELENA

Yes?

AGUSTIN

Helena, *(hesitation, then firm and decisive)* I'm not coming back.

HELENA *(DISAPPOINTED)*

Of course you will. You always do. You've done this a dozen times before.

AGUSTIN *(TURNING HER TO FACE HIM)*

No. That's not what I mean. After this mission I'm quitting. -No more freelancing. I'm going home. -To stay.

HELENA , stunned and confused, swallows her drink and moves away.

HELENA *(TRYING TO KEEP HER VOICE FIRM)*

But why, Tino? Why now?

AGUSTIN

I'm tired. I'm tired of bluffing... I need to get away.

HELENA *(FEELING BETRAYED)*

I don't believe you! You need danger the way an addict needs a hit! That's why you keep coming back!

AGUSTIN

I keep coming back because pretending to be someone else is something I do well!

HELENA *(CONFRONTING HIM, ANGER)*

And what do you pretend to do with your life? Go back to Cleveland, or New York, or where ever the fuck you came from and live happily ever after? Because if you think that you can return and pickup things where you left off, then you are an idiot! *(silence, then pleading)* Agustin, this isn't pretend! I'm not pretend- You are making good money, you have friends that would die for you and we have each other. This is your life.

AGUSTIN *(EXASPERATION)*

I hate this life!

HELENA

It's a living.

AGUSTIN (GRABBING HER ARM)

You call this living? There's no life here -it's all death; people dying all around us!

HELENA *(BREAKING LOOSE)*

Is that what this is all about? *(cold indifference)* Well, it happens!

AGUSTIN *(STUNNED)*

It happens? Is that all you can say? *(rising rage)* Women, children, old people, simple people who don't know shit about politics or wars are butchered by their own government and all you can say is, -it happens?

HELENA *(SNAPS BACK)*

What do you want me to say, -I'm sorry? Hey, I don't like it any better than you do but we are not responsible for that. Why don't you blame the rebels and the socialists for starting all this shit in the first place? We're the good guys, remember?

AGUSTIN

Are we? I can't even tell anymore, and I'm sick of doing things I don't want to do. *(he moves away in frustration. then, with pensive clarity)* What is happening to these people is wrong, we know its wrong, and we're part of the problem.

HELENA

If you felt this way, why did you come here?

AGUSTIN *(UNSETTLED BY THE IRONY)*

Somebody pushed me. Somebody set me off in this direction and a bunch of other hands have pulled my strings. For had I been in my right mind, I would not have picked this life for the world.

HELENA *(CONTEMPTUOUS)*

Welcome to reality. *(then)* We don't make the rules, Tino. We just play the game as best we can...

AGUSTIN *(FIRM)*

Then I am out of the game! *(turning to her, sensible)* Elena, I don't know what I want to be. All I know is that I don't like what I am. I don't want to fight with you. I didn't mean to hurt you. *(offhand, softly)* I don't want to hurt anybody anymore.

HELENA stares at him for a moment as a feeling of foreboding pulls a tight knot in her stomach. Unnerved, she goes to the bar, pours herself a stiff drink and swallows.

HELENA *(HER BACK TO HIM)*

What about us?

AGUSTIN *(MOVING CLOSER)*

If I were to ask you to leave with me, would you come?

HELENA *(TIGHTLY CONTROLLED)*

You haven't asked.

AGUSTIN

You didn't answer.

HELENA *(ALMOST A WHISPER, EMBITTERED)*
You'll never ask, will you?

AGUSTIN places his hands on her shoulders and leans close to her ear.

AGUSTIN
Will you come with me?

HELENA *(TURNING TO FACE HIM)*
No.

AGUSTIN'S lip part to say something but words fail him. Then, he let's go and turns away to recover his bag from the bed.

HELENA *(AVOIDING HIS EYES, HERS GLAZED)*
Will I see you before you go -or is this good-bye?

AGUSTIN *(HE STOPS, LIFELESS)*
No strings attached; no hard feelings.

As he leaves, AGUSTIN looks at her for the last time, then he turns around and exits. For while, HELENA remains frozen in place like a salt statue. Then slowly, her masked features begin to crumble as tears roll down her face and she begins to sob.

END OF ACT I - SCENE 6

ACT II

SCENE 1

MERCENARY BASE CAMP – NICARAGUA -- NOVEMBER 1977

A LARGE HOVEL sits on a hill that slopes gently into the village below. The village is near the Costa Rican border. The structure, a sturdy construction in the rural manner, is opened from all sides, its canopy providing protection from the constant rain or the occasional sun. Once used for sheltering cattle, it now serves as a temporary command centre.

A WOODEN TABLE occupies the centre of the space; SACKS of animal feed and CRATES containing supplies and survival gear, clutter in and around the structure. Off stage, sounds of the village's daily life mix with the pounding noise of boot steps as soldiers practice marching drills over the soft ground. A HELICOPTER flies overhead.

Inside the hovel, SEAN -shirtless but dressed in army fatigues, dances to the loud disco beat of "Staying Alive" pouring out of a beat-up PORTABLE CASSETTE PLAYER.. FREDDIE and CASIANO, also dressed in army fatigues, are standing by one of the massive wood support posts, exchanging glances and trying hard not to laugh at Sean who seems oblivious to everything and everyone around him.

OFFSTAGE, in the village, a quarrel is taking place.

OFFSTAGE

MARIA *(PLEADING)*
¡Déjeme señor, me está lastimando! *[Let me go, you're hurting me!]*

MARIA'S FATHER *(TRYING TO REASON WITH CAMACHO)*
¿Pero señor, cómo le vamos a hacer? ¡Qué ésta es mi hija y ella no es mujer de la calle! *[But sir, how can you do this? She is my daughter, not a woman from the streets -a whore!]*

CAMACHO *("OFFENDED")*
¿Y qué está usted insinuando de mi? *[And what are you insinuating?]*

MARIA'S BROTHER *(DEFIANT)*
¡Qué sus intensiones no son buenas. Mi hermana no tiene nada que ver con usted! *[That your intentions are not good. My sister has nothing to do with you!]*

CAMACHO *(ENRAGED)*

¡A ver, a ver! ¡Eso es un insulto que yo no le aguanto a nadie! ¡Lárguense par'carajo antes que me los eche a los dos! *[How dare you! I don't take that kind of insult from no one! Get the fuck out of here before I do you both!]*

MARIA *(TERRIFIED)*

¡No, por favor! ¡Señor, se lo ruego, no les haga daño! *[No, please. I beg you, don't hurt them!]*

CAMACHO

Está bien, mi chula. Pero solo si te quedas conmigo, no? *[All right, my precious. But only if you stay with me, no?]*

FATHER *(ADAMANT)*

¡De ninguna manera! ¡Le digo que la suerte! *[No way! I tell you to let her go!]*

CAMACHO

¡Viejo entrometido! *[Nosy old man!]*

CAMACHO hits the old man; MARIA screams.

BROTHER

¡Papá! *(To Camacho)* ¡Canalla! ¡Bandido! *(he lunges at Camacho)*

MARIA *(HYSTERICAL)*

¡Auxilio! ¡Socorro! ¡Qué matan a mi hermano y a mi papá! *[Help! Somebody, help! He is going to kill my brother and my father!]*

CAMACHO

¡Hijos de perra! ¡Los voy a matar a todos! ¡Chewy, agárralo! *[Son's of bitches! I'm going to kill you both! Chewy, grab him!]*

The shouts and screams intensified as more villagers join the fracas.

SEAN *(ANNOYED AT LOOSING HIS CONCENTRATION)*

What the fuck! *(he stops the tape-player and, pointing at Freddie and Casiano, yells in a fury)* You know what your ass hole friend Camacho is? A fucking animal! Don't just stand there stroking your dicks! Go stop him before we have a war in the fucking village!!!

Startled by the unexpected outburst, FREDDIE and CASIANO exit to do as they were told. SEAN looks at Camacho and screams as the noise of a helicopter landing is heard:
-"M o t h e r f u c k e r...!!!"

OFFSTAGE

CAMACHO

¡Chulita! ¡Ahorita si que no te me escapas! *[You won't get away!]*

MARIA *(SCREAMS)*

¡Suélteme! *[Let me go!] (she bites him and flees)*

CAMACHO *(YELLS)*

¡Puta!!! ¡Chewy, agárrala! *[Bitch! Chewy, grab her!]*

FATHER

¡Corre, mi'ja, corre! *[Run, daughter, run!]*

MARIA (17) enters, one hand over her breast holding up her torn blouse. AGUSTIN enters from the opposite end, dressed in fatigues, carrying his equipment pack and M-16 rifle in one hand and, as the helicopter takes off again, holding his hat in place with the other. María, looking back as she flees, runs into him and falls. Agustin drops his gear and helps her up. They stare at each other.

CAMACHO *(OFF STAGE, LAUGHING)*

¡Corre, corre, galliñita, que tarde o temprano yo te cojo! *[Run, run, my little chickadee, but sooner or later I'll have you!]*

MARIA turns to look back, terrified, then returns her gaze to Agustin, and finally runs off. AGUSTIN stands perplexed. He looks after the girl, then towards the commotion, and finally at Sean.

AGUSTIN *(WITH A HEADACHE EXPRESSION)*

What the fuck's going on?

SEAN *(BREATHING HARD)*

Camacho! That's what's going on!

AGUSTIN

What's he doing here?

SEAN

Trying to fuck every girl in the village and pissing everyone off! I'd love to do a contract on that goddamn piece of shit taco-breath motherfucker! *(then)* The shit-head who plan this operation has the National Guard, us, and fucking Camacho working together.

AGUSTIN *(IRRITATED)*

Great. Where's Jim?

SEAN *(UPSET)*
With Gunther, taking care of business. *(then)* You were due back two days ago. What kept you?

AGUSTIN *(SITTING ON A STACK OF SACKS, FROWNING)*
The weather. Got any aspirins? *(pulls a water bottle from his bag)*

SEAN *(THROWING HIM A SMALL BOTTLE -AND HOLDING A GRUDGE)*
Here, keep the bottle. You're going to need it.

AGUSTIN
That bad? *(he takes a couple of aspirins and then gives Sean a questioning look)* Oh, for Christ's sake! You' still pissed at me?

SEAN
Damn right, I am! You took off that night without giving me an explanation.

AGUSTIN
Sean, let's not get into it. You figure is out.

SEAN
I can't! You make no fucking sense to me. You had them nailed. We could have walked out of there richer by several thousand bucks. But no! You had to be dramatic! And do you want to know what I think of it? …Ah?

AGUSTIN *(WEARY)*
What?

SEAN
You wanted me to lose that money! Didn't you? Ah? I have been going through some major emotional stress lately and that money could have bought me a lot of relief. You owe me an explanation -damn it!
(a beat) I'm waiting!

AGUSTIN shakes his head not knowing weather to laugh or cry.

AGUSTIN
You're fucking serious. *(then)* Okay. I'll explain things to you *if* first you give me an honest answer. No bullshit.

SEAN *(PIOUS FACE)*
I got nothing to hide. Shoot.

AGUSTIN *(A LOOK)*
Were you cheating?

SEAN *(DISCONCERTED)*
I… eh…? Fuck! (stamping his foot on the ground) That's not the point!

AGUSTIN *(COVERING HIS EARS)*
I don't want to hear it!

SEAN *(GRUDGINGLY ACCEPTS THAT)*
Okay, you got me. Fine! I have offended your fucking sense of justice. I should have known better. Happy? *(a beat)* I said I was sorry! Stop treating me like my mother.

AGUSTIN *(DRINKS FROM THE WATER BOTTLE)*
One of these days, Sean... One of these days. *(then)* Are we done with this?

SEAN
It's forgotten.

AGUSTIN
Good. Now, want to give an update?

SEAN *(LOOKING TOWARDS THE ROAD)*
You'll get it soon enough. Looks like the whole fucking circus came to town! *(he puts on a shirt)*

Sounds of VEHICLES driving into the village; TROOPS standing in review; men getting off the vehicles and words of greeting.

Enter McCORMICK (36) followed by the CORONEL [Spanish for Colonel] (53) and his young female AIDE (20's), then GUNTHER and JIM. McCormick gestures the Coronel towards the table as the aide unrolls a large operation MAP over it. She then proceeds to pour coffee out of a THERMOS into a tin cup and hands it to the Coronel.

Enter CAMACHO, CHEWY, FREDDIE and CASIANO dusting their clothes.

McCORMICK *(SERIOUS, MILITARY UPTIGHT)*
Sir, cream and sugar?

EL CORONEL *(INDIGNANT LOOK, THEN)*
I'm a man!

The CORONEL calmly proceeds to look over the map as he sips his coffee. McCormick stands at his right, Gunther at his left, followed by Jim, Sean and Agustin. Camacho joins in from the left, Chewy, Casiano and Freddie behind him.

As the Colonel studies the map, he makes grunts and gestures of approval. He finishes his coffee and, without looking away, raises his cup, which is promptly picked by his aide who then shies quietly behind the group. Chewy can't get his eyes off the aide.

CORONEL *(LOOKING PLEASED)*

¡Bueno! ¿Ya estamos todos? *[Good. Is everyone here?]*

McCORMICK

Yes sir. Everyone is here. *(gesturing to Gunther's unit)* These agents are members of Mr. Gunther's surveillance unit. They will be responsible for safe infiltration of the strike force into the target zone. *(now gesturing at Camacho and his team)* Mr. Camacho and his sniper team will also assist in the operation. They will hit their targets before the assault.

CORONEL *(GRANDIOSE MANNER)*

Gentleman, the order from our commander in chief, mi Presidente Anastasio Somoza, is this: -"we begin the operation tomorrow." We must make sure that this action is a complete and total success. Failure will not be acceptable. While I will be in command of the force, Mr. McCormick will be in charge of the operation. He is our top military advisor and has personally trained our elite commando team both here and in the United States. He will be conducting the rest of briefing. Please direct all questions to him. - Mr. McCormick?

McCORMICK

Thank you, Coronel. *(going over the map)* Since September and throughout the month of October, the Sandinistas have carried out small but well-publicised attacks on National Guard posts near the border of Costa Rica here, here, and here. Our intelligence tells us that this renewed insurrection has been led by a new group of younger, more radical leadership in the Sandinista movement. They call themselves 'The Terceristas'. *(showing some pictures)* The leaders of this group are Humberto and Daniel Ortega. While support to rebels is still very weak and they do not have the backing of all Nicaraguan parties, Costa Rica and elements in other Latin American countries are lending them assistance. Cuba -we now have concrete evidence- is supplying logistics and weapons through undercover operatives. Intelligence and surveillance reports gathered by Mr. Gunther's team has lead us to suspect of the existence of a main rebel camp along the border and… *(dropping another picture)* here it is. Aerial reconnaissance of the area tells us this is the centre for all their smuggling operation. The camp, we estimate, has 20 to 30 rebels; big enough to carry out their illicit activities but small enough to avoid detection -until now.

CAMACHO

Why not just do an air strike?

McCORMICK

Since the camp is situated deep inside the jungle, we couldn't be sure of hitting all the targets. Besides, we have reason to believe that the Ortega brothers and most of the Sandinistas leadership will be at the site conducting a meeting two days from now. Mr. Camacho, those are your marks. Once you take them out, we strike the camp.

CAMACHO *(STUDYING THE PHOTOS OF THE ORTEGAS)*
Do we have executive order to deal with them?

CORONEL
Yes, señor Camacho. All the way from the top.

McCORMICK
Surprise is essential. Our forces will be flown to this drop zone, a days march from the target to avoid detection.

CORONEL *(LOOKING DOUBTFUL)*
Hum. That is very difficult terrain. There're a few farmers living in the area. They could be siding with the rebels and sound the alarm.

GUNTHER
Not a chance. My men are familiar with the area and have established friendly relations with the natives. They will guide you and advise you on hostile movements. But I want to make it crystal clear; they are not to get involved in the fight. The same goes for my unit.

McCORMICK *(SNEERING)*
With all due respect to your men, we don't need them and we don't want them in the way of a highly trained professional strike force. *(chuckles)*

CORONEL
Are there any other foreseeable problems?

CAMACHO
Watchdogs. That could be a problem especially if we have to get close to the target before the strike.

JIM
We'll silence them with puppy chow.

CORONEL
Puppy chow?

McCORMICK
Tranquilliser capsules mixed in ground beef. Dogs will be asleep for some hours allowing our troops time to take positions.

CORONEL
Good! I don't like to kill animals.

McCORMICK
Any other questions?

SEAN grunts disapprovingly but says nothing.

CORONEL *(AT SEAN)*

Sir, is something troubling you?

SEAN

Colonel, I was just wondering, why are you taking a small army to simply blow up a camp that size?

McCORMICK *(HOSTILE)*

That is none of your concern.

CORONEL *(RAISING A HAND TO SILENCE McCORMICK)*

No, no, no, Mr. McCormick. That is a fair question that deserves a straight answer. *(snaps his fingers)* ¡El periódico! *(his aide hands him a newspaper)* Recognise this? This is a recent issue of 'The New York Times' in which some 'mama huevo' *[cocksucker]* reporter has written a series of articles making the Sandinistas look like Robin Hood and us like the big bad wolf! *(he slams the paper on the table)* This is irresponsible! Using the human rights excuse based on lies published by the American press, el presidente Jimmy Carter has cut off all military aid. Mr. Gunther has made arrangements with the Israeli government to secure weapons but that will not hold us long. So we are going into this camp to show proof of how the communist Cubans are arming these terrorists and to put a stop to all these false allegations.

SEAN *(ASSUMPTION)*

So then, you'll blow up the weapons?

CORONEL

No. We are going to confiscate them.

McCORMICK

Sir, I don't think they need to know the particulars of the mission to carry out their orders.

JIM

Chances are there are more camps in the surrounding area, and the minute they hear the fireworks, they are going to come in.

McCORMICK

My men are capable of handling any contingency. We will secure the area until the stockpiles are airlifted.

SEAN

Sir, with all due respect, I'm sure your commandos are a highly trained and trigger happy bunch of fellows. But before they whip out their dicks and go in like John Wayne -I want to know, do they have real combat experience?

McCORMICK *(DAGGER LOOK)*
What are you trying to say? *(then)* Mr. Gunther, if your men have any reservations about this job -for which you have been paid top American dollars, you'd better speak your mind now.

GUNTHER
Mr. McCormick, my men are not paid to go into combat. They are a highly disciplined team of watchers trained to conduct physical surveillance. But they are also a highly effective fighting force with considerable combat experience. They will take you in safe and sound so that you can do your job. That's what you're paying us for. Your part of the bargain is to get them out safe and sound once you are done.

CORONEL
Gentlemen, gentlemen, please! If everything goes according to plan, the operation will be completed within a few hours. I doubt the rebels will put much resistance. Their forces are made up of students and peasants who always run away when confronted by regular troops. The minute we hit, they will run all the way to Costa Rica. *(chuckles)*

McCORMICK
We leave tomorrow at o'500. That will be all.

CASIANO and FREDDIE exit immediately. Aside, McCORMICK, CAMACHO and el CORONEL go over the pictures. THE AIDE recovers the map from the table. CHEWY makes a pass at her, she sneers at him twisting her lips in disgust. While the colonel and Camacho continue their discussion, McCORMICK moves away putting the pictures in their envelope.

JIM *(AT McCORMICK)*
Hey Mac, just curious. I thought it was against policy for U.S. military advisors to go into combat.

McCORMICK
This will be nothing more than a military exercise. Just giving the boys a chance to wet their feet.

CAMACHO and el CORONEL finish their discussion. CAMACHO calls Chewy and they exit. El Coronel goes to Gunther.

CORONEL *(SHAKING HANDS)*
Mr. Gunther, I am preparing a small fiesta at my hacienda in anticipation of our victory. I will not forgive you if you do not come. I have acquired some new European paintings for my collection and I would like you to see them.

GUNTHER
I'm honoured, sir. Wouldn't miss it for the world.

CORONEL

Good. Mr. McCormick, you lead the way.

McCORMICK

After you, sir.

The COLONEL, followed by McCORMICK and THE AIDE, exit. AGUSTIN, JIM and SEAN gathered around GUNTHER.

GUNTHER *(MUTTERS)*

Pompous ass! And McCormick close enough to smell his farts. *(turning to the group)* Agustin, is everything in place?

AGUSTIN

Sir, I've made the arrangements. *(handing Gunther a paper)* These are the co-ordinates.

GUNTHER

Good! Jim, lets see that photo again. *(Jim pulls the photograph Helena had given Agustin from the envelope and places it on top of the table)*
Comment.

JIM

It is basically a more recent photo of the one shown by McCormick, but… *(pulling out a magnifying glass)* there is one significant change. Notice this over here. Looks familiar?

GUNTHER *(SCEPTICAL)*

Fuel drums? In the middle of the jungle?

AGUSTIN

More like chemical drums.

GUNTHER

A lab. A processing lab. Narcotics?

JIM

That's our conclusion. We think the rebels are using drugs to pay for weapons.

GUNTHER

So, our friends are not telling us everything there is to know.

SEAN *(SNEERING)*

Cuban weapons my ass. They want the drugs. Good as cash...

GUNTHER *(FROWNING)*

Yes, but, who is they? McCormick and the colonel, or is the colonel freelancing?

SEAN

I wouldn't put it pass him.

GUNTHER

He could bugger off the whole affair. Anything else?

AGUSTIN

Maybe it's just my imagination, but if you wanted to hide a weapons depot, why build a shed on a clearing that's visible from the air?

GUNTHER

It's almost as if they were waving a red flag. An invitation maybe?

AGUSTIN

Smells like a trap.

GUNTHER

No way of telling until you're there.

SEAN

I guess we'll soon find out.

JIM

Shouldn't we talk this over with McCormick?

GUNTHER

Bloody waste of time! We are getting paid to get them there and that is the end of the contract. Let them have their fun. *(then)* Jim, at the first sign of trouble, pull back and disappear. Understood?

JIM *(WITHOUT ENTHUSIASM BUT GRIMLY DETERMINED)*

Yes sir!

JIM, SEAN and AGUSTIN remove their panther rings and hand them to Gunther (a practised ritual).

GUNTHER *(POCKETING THE RINGS)*

Cheers, gentlemen. I'll see you off in the morning. *(as he walks away)*
Oh, Agustin, want to see some paintings?

AGUSTIN

Love to! ...as long as I don't have to kiss el Coronel's ass.

GUNTHER *(CHUCKLES)*

You won't be popular with the critics.

GUNTHER and AGUSTIN exit.

END OF ACT II - SCENE 1

ACT II

SCENE 2

MERCENARY BASE CAMP – SAME DAY -- DUSK

Distant thunder announces the coming of rain. In the hovel, JIM sits among sacks of cattle feed playing chords on an old guitar. AGUSTIN prepares coffee on a huge metal pot that sits over a portable stove. Kerosene lamps that hang from the rafters illuminate the area. The village is dormant.

AGUSTIN hands Jim a mug.

JIM *(PLACING THE GUITAR ASIDE)*
Thanks.

AGUSTIN joins him and they both sit in silence, gazing into the peaceful distance.

JIM
It's always so calm and peaceful before the coming of a storm.

AGUSTIN
Nature's way of telling us to prepare for the worst...

JIM
Oh, I'm not so sure. Nature is indifferent to us. I personally find it hard to prepare for a future that scares the hell out of me. I'm going to spend the rest of my life there and it doesn't look good.

AGUSTIN
I think you can better the odds if you come back to the States with me; go home to your family.

JIM *(STANDING)*
I am home! *(reflects for a moment, then)* Look, see those pines over that mountain? About ten miles heading that way toward San Carlos, there's a small village -much like this one. That's where I was born! It was in that village that my dad came preaching and where he met my mom. Only time I remember the old man being happy. *(remains thoughtful as he takes another sip from his cup)* When my mother got sick and passed away, my dad left the mission and returned to Indiana. He said he wanted me to get an education and grow up to be an American -God, country, apple pie and all that bullshit. Lord, was he disappointed! *(sigh)* I didn't have to wait for the last judgment, it took place everyday. After he ruined the first half of my life trying to make me the god-fearing

JIM *(CONTINUE)*
Christian that he failed to be, he ruined the other half trying to turn me into the man I wasn't born to be. When I couldn't take it any longer, I returned to the only place I've ever felt wanted. Been here ever since, taking great pleasure in doing all the things my dad said I couldn't do. I love this country better than my family. Here's where I belong!

AGUSTIN
Is that why you give all your money to the mission? -I had to ask. It's embarrassing the way people around here worship you.

JIM
All the money in the world doesn't compare to the love and respect I get from these people. I am the luckiest sonofabitch in the world!

AGUSTIN
Your father would be proud.

JIM
Hell no! He'd be so steamed up he'd burst a blood vessel!

AGUSTIN
I don't get it.

JIM
Think about it. I'm living proof that a heathen and a queer can become a saint!

They enjoy a laugh and then grow quite as their thoughts wonder. JIM goes over to the coffee-pot and refills their cups.

JIM *(SITTING DOWN AGAIN)*
Agustin, you're doing the right thing, getting out now. I'm going to miss you but I won't keep you. The truth is that your time is over and you don't belong here. Your life is waiting for you somewhere else.

AGUSTIN *(CONFESSING HIS DOUBTS)*
It is, but Helena's not coming with me. *(then)* Jim, have I made the right choice?

JIM
The choice was made for you, Tino. She's got her own life. You would be all wrong for each other back in the States. Your kind of relationship needs action and risk to make it work. Without it, I don't think it would last six months. Can you imagine Helena having children and joining the PTA?

They chuckle at the thought, but Agustin soon returns to a sombre mood. JIM tries to cheer him up.

JIM

I know you're hurting, kid. It's very hard -if not impossible, not to need love around so much despair. But when two people love each other under these conditions, there can be no happy end to it. *(then)* Move on, Tino; don't look back and burn the bridge. If Helena wants to join you, she'll have to build her own way across. Besides, unlike Helena, you have an affliction that prevents you from being a good mercenary.

AGUSTIN

Oh? And what would that be?

JIM

Your conscience. Keeps you from enjoying the work! *(Agustin smiles)*

SEAN enters carrying his M-16 rifle and gear, and his Browning 9mm MK 1 pistol in a belt and holster looped around his neck. He is like a kid before Christmas.

SEAN *(TOUCHING THE COFFEE POT)*

Nice going, ladies! The pot is on and the coffee is hot! *(he puts his gear down and pours coffee in a tin cup)*

AGUSTIN

There's milk and sugar inside the box.

SEAN *(EL CORONEL IMPRESSION)*

I'm a man! *(he takes a sip and spits it out)* What the fuck is this shit! Tar? Where's that milk! Sugar, more sugar! Got any more sugar? *(he hangs his side arm from a peg on a post and sits down)* Hey, I got something to show you. *(pulling a magazine from his pocket)* Look at this guy. You think I could look like him?

JIM *(LOOKING AT THE PICTURES)*

Damn, the man's a monster!

AGUSTIN

Why you want to look like that?

SEAN

Are you kidding? I'll be one mean looking sonofabitch! The reincarnation of Hercules!

AGUSTIN

Jim, who are the toughest hombres you have ever met?

JIM

It's got to be either the Yaqui or the Miskito Indians.

AGUSTIN

And you Sean?

SEAN

No doubt about it, those tiny mother-fucking Vietcong.

AGUSTIN

Now think about it for a minute. Do any of them look like this?

SEAN *(FEELING DEFLATED)*

Point taken.

JIM

Hey, wait a minute! Who's this guy?

SEAN *(TRYING TO READ THE NAME)*

Some fag named… eh… Schuwar-ze… Schwarz-ner… Hamburger… Oh, fuck him! He got a name as long as my dick! *(he throws the magazine at Jim)*

JIM *(AFTER A QUICK GLANCE)*

Arnold? You call that long?

SEAN

Oh, fuck you too!

Thunder roars and it begins to rain. SEAN sits and begins to clean his rifle. FREDDIE and CASIANO enter seeking shelter. Wiping off the rain, they give the customary nod greeting but keep their distance from the others.

JIM *(GESTURING)*

Gentlemen, there's coffee in the pot. You are welcome to it.

FREDDIE and CASIANO put down their weapons, pour themselves coffee, and taste it with satisfaction.

SEAN

There is no more sugar but there's milk in the… box.

FREDDIE

This is fine, thank you. -Very good coffee.

AGUSTIN

Have a seat.

CASIANO *(AFTER GIVING FREDDIE A LOOK)*

Don't mind if we do. Whose guitar?

JIM

Yours and mine.

CASIANO

Oh, I don't play at all. Wish I could. *(at Sean)* How about you, señor?

SEAN

I only sing.

AGUSTIN

And very badly. *(laughter)*

FREDDIE *(PAINED RECOLLECTION)*

We have heard. (more laughter)

A WOMAN'S screams and a man's yells are heard in the distance, coming from the village (offstage). She is being raped.

AGUSTIN *(TRYING TO PLACE THE VOICE, UNCERTAIN)*

Is that Camacho?

The cries and pleads for help (in Spanish) go on for some time as everyone listens in silence.

SEAN *(AT THE END OF HIS PATIENCE)*

That does it! *(going for his side arm)* I'm going to take that sonofabitch!

JIM

Grab him!

CASIANO and FREDDIE restrain him. AGUSTIN grabs the pistol from Sean's hand.

SEAN *(STRUGGLING)*

God damn you! Let me go!

JIM *(GETTING UP CLOSE)*

Sean! Stay out of it!

SEAN stops struggling and calms down. CASIANO and FREDDIE release him.

AGUSTIN

This is not the time to pick a fight.

SEAN *(BITTER)*

What do you care! After we finish this mission you're walking out on us.

JIM
Soldier, that's enough! *(then)* Agustin is right. No matter what we do, someone is going to end up dead.

SEAN *(WITH A LOOK OF REPROACH)*
So we're just going to sit here and do nothing?

SEAN sits down. All remain silent looking embarrassed.

JIM puts his mug next to the coffee-pot, then takes the pistol from Agustin.

JIM *(WITH A LOOK THAT INVITES NO ARGUMENTS)*
Wait here. *(without much ado, he exits)*

No ones says a word; all exchange suspenseful glances as they strain to anticipate what's going to happen next. A few beats and more screams. Then, a shot echoes in the night. Now is the man's turn to scream. Except for Agustin, they all jump to their feet.

AGUSTIN *(TRYING HIS BEST NOT TO LOOK WORRIED)*
Wait! *(gives them a "not to worry" smile when they look back at him)*

They comply, sit down and sweat it out as they try to keep cool. After a couple of anxious beats, JIM enters wiping rainwater away. AGUSTIN breathes easy.

JIM goes straight to the coffee-pot, puts the gun down and calmly refills his cup. The rest of the men just stare at him barely able to contain their excitement and thirst for details.

JIM *(PHILOSOPHICALLY, AFTER SIPPING THE COFFEE)*
This life's a killer. If a bullet doesn't do it, the pressure will.

Before anyone can dwell on this, they hear the sound of someone approaching at a run. Enter CAMACHO, revolver in hand and murder in his eyes. He stops and looks at Jim, who drinks his coffee with maddening calmness.

CAMACHO
¡So Cabrón! *[You motherfucker!]* You shot Chewy!
CAMACHO raises his revolver at Jim. Simultaneously, SEAN aims his rifle at Camacho, and AGUSTIN aims his pistol at Freddie and Casiano. They remain motionless. JIM sips his coffee.

FREDDIE and CASIANO, have no intention of intervening. While Freddie looks nervous, Casiano keeps his cool and makes a slight gesture of peace by raising his palms to Agustin and smiling. AGUSTIN returns the smile, but keeps his aim.

CAMACHO'S heavy breathing accentuates the tension.

JIM *(COOL)*

Is he dead?

CAMACHO holds his aim and his stare on Jim for a tense beat. Then he lowers the weapon and holsters it.

CAMACHO *(GRUDGINGLY)*

No. He'll live. *(then)* What do you care about a peasant girl in the middle of nowhere?

JIM

My village.

CAMACHO gives him another murderous look. Then he glances at the others and wisely exits.

AGUSTIN *(MATTER OF FACT)*

He's going to come after you.

JIM *(NODDING)*

I know.

CASIANO

He's going to kill you all; means to collect for that past embarrassment. *(all eyes lock on him, then)* Tomorrow, keep an eye on Camacho.

JIM

We've been keeping an eye on all of you. *(then, after a curious look)* Why do you tell us this?

CASIANO *(GRINS)*

Men who share their coffee are better company than a beast.

SEAN *(DISTRUSTFUL)*

I figured you guys on his side.

CASIANO *(SHRUGS)*

Strictly business.

JIM *(AT FREDDIE)*

And you?

FREDDIE

I have four sisters. I wouldn't hesitate to kill any man who tries to hurt them.

JIM nods, then smiles to himself at the irony.

JIM *(EYES STEADY ON FREDDIE AND CASIANO)*
Tino, what do you think about our odds for tomorrow?

AGUSTIN *(GRINNING BACK)*
I think they have greatly improved.

THE TENSION breaks and smiles of relief are exchanged. JIM grabs the coffee-pot and refills Freddie and Casiano's cups.

JIM *(AS HE SERVES)*
Gentlemen, mi casa es su casa. *(raising his cup in a toast)* To us and another sunrise! Salud!

CASIANO and FREDDIE *(CROSSING THEMSELVES)*
¡Con Dios y la Virgen. ¡Salud!

SEAN
Amen to that. ¡Salud!

AGUSTIN
¡Qué así sea. ¡Salud!

END OF ACT II - SCENE 2

ACT II

SCENE 3

A RAVINE IN THE JUNGLE – TWO DAYS LATER

THE RAVINE in the Nicaraguan jungle is surrounded by lush vegetation. Similar to a siege trench work, the ravine is about five feet deep with inwardly sloping sides. Thick canopies of trees filter sunlight between patches of shadows.

OFFSTAGE, the sounds and echoes of automatic weapons fire and the noise of explosions mixed with the cries of men fighting and dying resonate in the distance.

AGUSTIN and FREDDIE enter fleeing from the battle. Freddie is badly wounded on one leg and can barely support his own weight. With Agustin's help they huddle through the underbrush and collapse exhausted into the ravine. For a few moments, they lay immobile catching their breath. Armed with a pistol, Agustin spins around and cautiously scans his surroundings. Once he feels secured, he inspects Freddie's wound and applies a dressing. The sound of someone's approach puts him on the alert. Gun in hand, he lays in ambush.

CAMACHO enters armed with a bolt-action sniper's rifle and looking back as he flees. He jumps into the ravine and lands hard on the ground next to Agustin and Freddie. Startled, each man points his weapon at each other and freeze as recognition registers. Agustin tucks away his gun, signals Camacho to keep watch and then continue tending to Freddie's wounds. More running footsteps. Camacho warns Agustin to be still. He aims his rifle at an approaching target and waits for the kill. Suddenly, Agustin places a hand over Camacho's trigger hand and signals him to stop.

SEAN and CASIANO, armed with an M-16 and a FAL rifle respectively, enter holding a wounded McCORMICK between them. They get into the ravine and lay low. Agustin signals to Sean and Camacho and they move each to the opposite side of the ravine scanning for enemies. Casiano looks over Freddie while Agustin tends to McCormick's shoulder wound. Sean and Camacho return.

AGUSTIN *(AS HE WORKS ON McCORMICK)*
Where's Jim?

SEAN *(PANTING)*
He's holding the rear. Give him a couple minutes.

AGUSTIN *(CALM, MATTER OF FACT TONE)*
Captain Kirk, we're fucked!

SEAN

Beam us the hell up, Scotty!

McCORMICK *(GASPING)*

Would you two idiots stop joking? We got to go back; regroup!

CAMACHO

Are you fucking crazy! They're killing all your men and when they finish with them they'll be coming for us!

McCORMICK

Our pick-up point is down there! We have to be there for the choppers!

SEAN

You can kiss that ride good-bye, you miserable sonofabitch! *(grabbing McCormick by the shirt)* There were no rebel leaders and no fucking weapons! You came for the drugs!

McCORMICK *(ANGRY, PULLING HIMSELF LOOSE)*

No! I knew about them but that was not the plan! The colonel was freelancing for himself!

SEAN

And where's that piece of shit?

CAMACHO *(CALMLY)*

Ran into a bullet.

McCORMICK *(SHOCKED)*

You murdered him?

CAMACHO *(AIMING AT McCORMICK)*

I gave him a refund.

AGUSTIN *pushes the barrel of rifle away from McCormick and stops Camacho with a "don't fuck with me" look. At that instant, a hail of bullets ricochets around as the enemy (offstage) fires their M-1 Garand and FAL automatic rifles towards the ravine.*

AGUSTIN is hit on the forehead by a one of the rebounds as the others return fire. The gun battle is short but furious. A GRENADE thrown by Sean explodes in the distance (offstage) showering them with debris. The next second, they finish of the remaining attackers with precision fire.

SEAN goes to Agustin and inspects the wound. Rapidly, he proceeds to wrap his scarf around the wound.

AGUSTIN

Got any aspirins?

SEAN *(WORRIED)*

You scared the shit out of me! It's only a scratch.

CASIANO

I'm out of ammo!

They all check their weapons and belts for extra clips.

CAMACHO

My last bullet!

McCORMICK

Nothing!

AGUSTIN *(CHECKING HIS PISTOL)*

One clip left.

SEAN *(THROWING AWAY HIS RIFLE)*

Fuck! Now what!

The sound of nearby gunfire and command shouts puts everyone on the alert.

McCORMICK *(WHISPERS)*

Who are they shouting at?

AGUSTIN

They are after someone!

SEAN *(TRYING TO GET A BETTER LOOK)*

Jim! It's him! *(Agustin and Casiano glance over)*

CAMACHO

Stay low! If they spot us we are dead!

SEAN

Come on Jim! Run!

AGUSTIN

Signal him. *(Sean makes a bird call)*

CASIANO

What the fuck is he doing?

CAMACHO

Running away from us! Down!

The voices grow nearer and louder. Suddenly, the gun firing stops.

SEAN

Oh fuck! They got him!

AGUSTIN *(READY TO MOVE OUT)*

We got to do something! *(the others grab him and pin him to the ground. SEAN takes the gun away)* Let me go!

SEAN *(AT AGUSTIN, FRUSTRATED)*

They're too many of them!

CAMACHO

I'll try to get a closer look. *(he exits)*

OFFSTAGE, more voices.

McCORMICK

What are they saying?

AGUSTIN *(STRAINING TO LISTEN)*

They're asking about us.

SEAN *(NOTICING McCORMICK´S WORRIED LOOK)*

Jim won't talk.

OFFSTAGE: more voices. Heated argument.

McCORMICK

What now?

SEAN

They are forcing him down... Jesus! *(a beat)*

A GUN SHOT. SEAN covers Agustin's mouth to muffle a cry and hold him tight as Agustin struggles to free himself in vain, eyes wide staring at the scene in horror. After a few seconds, he stops struggling and buries his face in the dirt. The voices of the enemy grow loud and confused. Finally, they go away and Sean releases his grip on Agustin.

SEAN *(MUTTERS)*

Tino, I'm really sorry.

CAMACHO re-enters.

CAMACHO
The one in charge was a Cuban. A lot of the men were Cuban regulars. Those cabrones will do the same to us if we don't get out of here.

McCORMICK
Then let's go back the way we came in.

CAMACHO
They must have closed the path by now. Probably waiting for us. I say we wait for darkness and then, every man for himself.

AGUSTIN turns around, eyes sharp, expressionless, controlled.

AGUSTIN
You'll be lost and dead before sunrise.

CAMACHO
I'd rather take my chances with the jungle than wait here and get fucked. *(at Casiano)* Cuco, let's go!

CASIANO
No. I'm with them.

AGUSTIN
Are you finished?

CAMACHO glares at them but doesn't move. AGUSTIN checks a compass that hangs from a chain around his neck, then pulls out his knife and draws a map on the ground.

AGUSTIN
Listen up. We have to sneak past the enemy ring through the river and then we got two days to make it to this elevation.

McCORMICK
But that will take us in the opposite direction!

AGUSTIN
They won't be searching that way.

CAMACHO
Why that hill?

SEAN

We figured this mission was going to be a fuckup so we took precautions. Gunther will meet us there with a chopper.

McCORMICK *(DUMBFOUNDED)*

You guys could have escaped instead of coming back for us!

SEAN

Don't remind me.

CASIANO *(GESTURING AT FREDDIE AND McCORMICK)*

These two will never make it on their own.

CAMACHO *(PULLING A KNIFE FROM HIS BOOT)*

Then we won't leave them for the enemy.

SEAN *(POINTING THE PISTOL AT CAMACHO)*

Sit down Camacho, and put away the knife.

McCORMICK *(STUNNED, ANGER)*

You were going to kill us, you miserable rat!

CAMACHO

I was going to do you a favour. If they catch you alive, you'd wish you were dead.

SEAN

Shut up, both of you!

AGUSTIN

We'll carry them.

CASIANO

Through this jungle? With the rebs on our asses?

AGUSTIN

I will lure them north while you make a run for the river.

SEAN

I'm not leaving without you!

AGUSTIN

There's no other way! I'll loose them and catch up with you.

SEAN

I don't like it.

AGUSTIN *(SLIPPING OUT OF HIS BACKPACK)*
Jim bought us time with his life; let's not waste it.

CASIANO
I'll go with him. Two have a better chance in case one runs into trouble.

AGUSTIN looks at him, grateful, and accepts the offer with a nod.

SEAN *(HANDING OVER THE PISTOL)*
Here.

AGUSTIN
Keep it… *(looking at Camacho)* just in case.

SEAN *(HE NODS, THEN)*
Okay everyone; let's get ready! As soon as Agustin and Casiano make their move, we make a run. *(turning to)* Agustin, if you two don't make it back on time, I'll have Gunther leave a radio behind. *(then)* And do me a favour.

AGUSTIN
What?

SEAN
Don't make me come and get you.

They smile. AGUSTIN and CASIANO give a final cautionary scan to the area and exit through the ravine. The remaining men wait in silence.

OFFSTAGE, new cries and shots resonate in the distance and gradually die down as the rebels pursue Agustin and Casiano.

SEAN
Let's go! Go!

SEAN holds FREDDIE and exit followed by McCORMICK assisted by CAMACHO.

END OF ACT II - SCENE 3

ACT II

SCENE 4

AN OLD BARN -- TWO DAYS AFTER

THE BUILDING is a rectangular shaped edifice with a gable roof covered in corrugated sheet metal. The structure's framework is made of rough lumber sided with a combination of wooden boards and corrugated metal. Its dimensions are about 20 feet in width (backstage) and twice that in length. The floor is mostly gravel and packed dirt.

Three main support ROOF BEAMS run parallel to the width from one side of the building to the other side, spaced equidistant every ten feet. The roof beams are then supported by two round WOODEN POSTS per beam spaced at approximately six and a half feet from one another. This arrangement creates a centre passage flanked by three posts and another passage at each side.

A PARTITION wall running along the roof beam nearest back stage divides part of the barn's interior into a separate room. The space between the roof and the beam has not been covered. The wall is made up of boards running horizontally with a couple inches gap between the succeeding board. A FLAP of cotton duck canvas at the centre of the partition covers a wide passageway.

The building's MAIN DOORS are centred on the left side-wall. 55-GALLON STEEL DRUMS and some WOODEN CRATES are staggered along the side of the walls, but despite this, the place looks cavernous and empty.

SUNLIGHT passing through cracks and holds on the walls and the roof provides the only means for visibility. AGUSTIN is unconscious, sitting on the dirt floor, slumped to one side, his hands tide behind and around the extreme left posts (upstage). One side of his face is covered with dried blood from his earlier wound plus a new one over his right eyebrow.

Across from him, on the right side post, tied in the same manner, is JIM. His face is pale and covered in perspiration. His lower lip is swollen and bloodied; the right side of his shirt is completely covered in blood down to his pants.

AGUSTIN'S body jerks as he begins to regain consciousness. He moans softly as his head tilts from one side to the other and then back. His lips part as words try to form but only guttural sounds come out at first.

AGUSTIN

(Weakly, to the tune of "the Oscar Mayer Wiener ") "Yo… yo qui… yo quisiéra ser… un wiener de Oscar Mayer… Eso es lo que yo quisiéra ser… Por que si yo… fuera un Winner de Oscar Mayer… Todos me tendrían que querer… da, da, da…da."

JIM *(WEAK, RASPY VOICE)*

Agustin… Agustin… *(cough)* Agustin!

AGUSTIN *(REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS)*

Ah…?

JIM *(LABOURED)*

Tino… is that you?

AGUSTIN *(AS IF SEEING A GHOST)*

Jim…! Jim?! *(overcomes with joy, he tries to pull away not realising until now his present condition, then)* You're alive!

JIM

I hate that… stupid song.

AGUSTIN

I saw you dead!

JIM

The bullet went right through me… can't feel a thing except… cold.

AGUSTIN *(CURSING)*

Those bastards!

JIM

No Tino. *(then)* It was a sniper's bullet.

AGUSTIN frowns as he tries to make sense of this. Then, as realisation dawns on him, vile rises to his lips.

AGUSTIN *(A TEETH CLENCHED MURDEROUS HISS)*

Camacho!

JIM *(MATTER OF FACT, WITH NO REMORSE)*

He killed me.

AGUSTIN *(DREADING THE WORST)*

Just hang on! We'll get out of here and then get that sonofabitch!

JIM

Ha!

AGUSTIN *(EXPLAINS)*

I was not alone! Casiano was with me and he got away! They'll come for us!

JIM

Sean…? The others?

AGUSTIN

They made it!

JIM *(SIGH)*

My god, what a fuckup... my fault.

AGUSTIN

Those guys walked into that trap with eyes wide opened. All you did was try to warn them.

JIM *(HARD ON HIMSELF)*

My job was to keep our unit safe! If it weren't for me, you wouldn't be here.

AGUSTIN *(KINDLY)*

Don't try that hero crap on me. I took my own chances.

JIM *(ANGUISH, RELIVING THE SCENE)*

...I just couldn't sit there and do nothing. They were being cut to pieces and I just snapped! I tried to get them out but they just ran; and screamed, and dropped their weapons... -some were crying.

AGUSTIN

They panicked; there was nothing more you could do! *(then, soothing)* Be quiet; try to save your energy. *(a couple of beats)*

JIM *(WITH IRONY)*

What a pity. Just when you were going home.

AGUSTIN *(TRYING TO SOUND CHEERY)*

You sonofabitch! You promised to throw me a retirement party. *(a knot forming on his throat)* Don't let me down, Jim!

JIM

I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you. God just granted me an audience. Any messages for him?

AGUSTIN *(TEARING INSIDE)*
Just... give him hell! His timing sucks!

AGUSTIN'S breathing becomes laboured as he fights to hold back sobs. Stillness fills the room.

JIM *(CONSOLING HIS FRIEND)*
The worst part is waiting. After a while, staying alive is the hard part. *(then)* Did they hurt you badly?

AGUSTIN *(TAKING A DEEP BREATH)*
Not too bad. They just kicked me around.

JIM
You seem to have lost your charm... along with a couple of teeth.

AGUSTIN
I'm not the smiling type.

JIM makes a coughing noise that sounds like a chuckle. Then, it starts to rain; the sound of the water hitting the metal roof has a calming effect on the two men. Water leaks form pools around the floor. Drops fall on Jim's shoulder. He turns his head up, sticks out his tongue, and drinks, quenching his thirst. For a while they listen to the silence, each man lost in his own thoughts.

AGUSTIN
What are they waiting for? Must be saving us for something special.

JIM
You, yes. Me? I won't last till morning... *(then)* If you break, they'll kill you. *(with urgency, feeling himself fade away)* Agustin, do whatever is necessary to remain alive until help arrives!

AGUSTIN *(DREAD AND FEAR RETURNING)*
Jim, don't....

JIM *(FADING)*
Anything... *(his head drops)*

AGUSTIN *(PULLING HIS BONDS IN FRUSTRATION, THEN ANIMATE)*
Jim, remember the time Sean took us to serenade the mayor's daughter and it turned out to be the mayor's wife?

JIM'S eyes come to life as his mind focuses on a vivid recollection.

JIM *(TRYING TO HOLD A PAINFUL LAUGH)*
I've never seen Sean run so fast… or someone shoot so badly…! *(bad cough, then)* Keep an eye on Sean. Try to keep him out of trouble.

AGUSTIN *(WITH A CHUCKLE)*
Mission impossible... *(then serious)* I'll try.

JIM
Promise me you'll do it!

AGUSTIN
I promise. *(then, with reverent wonder)* I swear to God, Jim. You are the only real man I have ever known.

JIM turns his gaze slightly towards Agustin and the end of his lip curve into a grateful smile.

JIM
Takes one to know one.

JIM sustains his smile for a few seconds. Then his eyes grow dim, his head drops lifeless to the side, and he fades away.

AGUSTIN, with a surreal feeling of peace, says a silent prayer as he witnesses his best friend's life drain away.

END OF ACT II - SCENE 4

ACT II

SCENE 5

OLD BARN -- LATER THAT EVENING

THE RAIN has ended and the place is in complete darkness. OFFSTAGE, several men approach the building, their footsteps accented by water and mud. Someone works the lock and the barn doors open with a low squeak. Three figures enter, one of them carrying a KEROSENE LANTERN.

The one in charge is a CUBAN OFFICER with a thick moustache. He is dressed in an olive-green uniform, wears a cap, a pistol holstered at his waist and smokes a cigar. The other two are dressed in an eclectic makeshift of hunting gear. Each wears a distinctive RED BANDANNA tied around their necks. REBEL 1 carries an M-1 carbine at the ready, the other, lifts the lantern high above his head to see better in the darkness.

After getting used to the dark, they come forward toward JIM and AGUSTIN who seem to be asleep or unconscious. The man with a lantern -REBEL 2- moves the light closer to see their faces. THE CUBAN nods and REBEL 1 pokes at Agustin. He awakes with a sudden jerk that makes the startled guard react by pointing the gun at him. REBEL 2, lantern held high, kicks Jim to bring him to but gets no response. He then kneels to take a closer look by bringing the light closer to Jim's face.

CUBAN

¿Está muerto? *[Is he dead?]*

REBEL 2 leans over, opens one of Jim's eyelids and checks the pupil.

REBEL 2

Casi casi. *[Almost.]*

CUBAN

¡Traiganlos! *[Bring them!]*

REBEL 2 puts the lantern on the floor and proceeds to untie Agustin while the REBEL 1 covers him with the rifle. Agustin remains laying on the floor while the guard secures his hands again. Then he helps him to his feet..

AGUSTIN, now alert, remains expressionless. The CUBAN studies him for a moment.

CUBAN

¿Norteamericano? *(no response)* ¿Latino? *(no response, then at the guards)* ¡Vamos! *[Let's go]*

They move Agustin across the barn and go through the curtain into the next room. A new lantern is lighted and placed on the floor casting giant shadows on the back wall and roof. Then they tie Agustin's hands to a rope that hangs from the ceiling and lift him up so that his feet don't touch the floor. Then they proceed to carry Jim and tie him in similar fashion next to Agustin. Then, REBEL 2 goes out for a moment and brings a bucket with water. He closes the curtain after him.

CUBAN

Revívelo. *[Revive him.]*

REBEL 2 throws water at Jim who responds with a moan but remains unconscious. THE CUBAN studies his face closely, then Agustin's. He blows a puff of smoke on his face and Agustin coughs.

CUBAN *(AMUSED, THEN SERIOUS)*

¿Durmiendo, no? *[sleeping?] (no response)* Muchachos, voy a necesitar su cooperación. ¿Me están entendiendo? *[Boys, I need your co-operation. Do you understand what I'm saying?] (no response)* ¿Hablan español… English… Deutsche? *[Do you speak Spanish; English; German?] (no response)*

THE CUBAN changes tactics. He picks A WOODEN ROD from a nearby crate and slowly walks around them. Suddenly, he strikes Agustin hard on the lower back and is rewarded by a cry of agony.

CUBAN

You scream well. Now, can you talk?

AGUSTIN remains silent, eyes distant. THE CUBAN studies him for a moment while puffing his cigar. Then continues.

CUBAN

I'm sorry about your friend. This was not our doing. *(then he adds)* I'm not a murderer. You have nothing to worry about. *(he lets this sink in)* All I'm asking is for your *cooperación*. *(no response, he patiently continues)* I want some answers to some simple questions! For example, why not start by telling me your names?

AGUSTIN *(RAISING HIS EYES TO MEET HIS)*

You first.

THE CUBAN *(CONSIDERS THIS)*

Very well. My name is capitán Mercado. Now, what are your names?

AGUSTIN remains silent and smirks victorious at his torturer. THE CUBAN realises that Agustin turned the tables around, and got information out of him, without giving away any. Feeling like a fool, his professional demeanour turns into rage. Suddenly, in a violent frenzy, he starts beating him with the rod.

CUBAN *(AS HE BEATS ON THEM)*

Stop... wasting... my... patience! *(then, panting)* Let me remind you of your situation. *(deep breath)* You are mercenaries and hired killers working for the American puppet dictator, Anastasio Somoza. You are men with no past and no future; your countries of origin do not acknowledge you; you have no conscience and no political ideology; you fight for money and profit; you have no loyalty but to yourselves, and not even your names are your own! You are alone; no one will miss you or claim you! Coño, is this getting through to you? Eh?

AGUSTIN, trying desperately to catch his breath, nods.

CUBAN *(GASPING, PLEASED)*

That's better! *(a beat, then)* I want the names, real or nom de guerre, of all the men working with you, your contacts, Nicaraguan sympathisers, training camps, armament, intelligence, radio codes and present operations.

AGUSTIN

Get a doctor for my friend, and I'll tell you whatever you want to hear.

CUBAN *(MAKES A SNEERING SOUND, THEN MENACING)*

No. You will tell me the truth even if I have to get it out of you one piece at a time! And you will talk! And you will beg me to kill you! And you will wish you were never born…!

AGUSTIN *(ALMOST A HISS)*

Fuck you!

CUBAN *(DROPPING HIS CIGAR AND CALMLY STEPPING ON IT)*

Why Gringos have this tendency to identify manhood with a capacity for bad language and physical violence is beyond me? *(then, at the rebels)*
¡Sujétenlo! *[Hold him tight!] (they hold Agustin's head so he faces Jim, then at Agustin)*
So you can remember me!

THE CUBAN pull out his revolver, aims at Jim's head and pulls the trigger. AGUSTIN screams as Jim's brain splatters him. Disgusted, THE REBELS release their grip and clean themselves with rags while the Cuban calmly lights another cigar. Then Rebel 1 cuts the rope holding Jim and his body drops to the ground with a dull thud.

THE CUBAN puts the barrel of his revolver on Agustin's forehead and cocks the hammer.

AGUSTIN *(QUIETLY, MURDEROUS HATRED)*
Go'head, shoot! Kill me -you fucking piece of shit! Do it…!
Pull the trigger…! *(a beat)*

CUBAN *(PUTTING THE GUN AWAY)*
No, I'm not going to let you die that easily. My two comrades will break you down but they won't kill you. You and I will become very good friends and I'll come to see you several times a day so that we can have our friendly conversations. *(then)* Now, what's your name?

AGUSTIN *(ALMOST A WHISPER, EYES DISTANT AGAIN)*
Oh I wish I were a winner, Oscar Mayer…

Startled, they exchange looks, and then THE CUBAN gives his men a signal and the beating starts.

END OF ACT II - SCENE 5

ACT II

SCENE 6

OLD BARN -- DAYBREAK

STAGE BLACKOUT. OFFSTAGE, a chorus of roosters follows the sound of a rooster flapping his wings as he announces the arrival of a new day. Then, voices and laughter of a family gathering. Children singing -a birthday party.

GRANDFATHER *(WITH WONDER AND DELIGHT)*
...Oh my lord, look at him! He is making another drawing! I tell you, he is going to be an artist!

MOTHER *(PROUD AND DIGNIFIED)*
Ha! He can be anything he wants to be.

GRANDFATHER
God bless him! Look at the way he draws his letters, so perfect! When the Holy Spirit anoints one with a gift it's because the Lord has a greater destiny in mind. It is not uncommon for men who were anointed with the Holy Spirit to show artistic talent. Look at King David. He played the harp and wrote poetry. But that is only a sign of their personality. Their lives have a greater purpose.

MOTHER
And what would that be?

GRANDFATHER
Only God knows! But when the time comes, he'll know. Until then, his soul will be purified through many trials and tribulations.

MOTHER
But that sounds so terrible. Why would God want him to go through such an ordeal?

GRANDFATHER
It is a blessing! But to have the gift requires great sacrifice and discipline. Only by surrendering his will completely to the Lord will he be able to fulfil his destiny.

MOTHER
And what if he follows his own desires?

GRANDFATHER
He won't be able to deny what he is. The gift is a part of you. It is who you are. To deny the gift is to deny yourself.

MOTHER

¡Ay, papi! You make everything sound so serious. He is only five years old! He doesn't know about gifts. Why don't we let him be and see where his inclination take him? Perhaps he already has a liking. Why don't we ask him?

GRANDFATHER

Oh, very well. Come to grandpa -that's it! Your mama and I have a question for you. Now, I want you to think very hard before you answer. Take your time. So listen to me closely, -what would you like to be when you grow up?

A RAY OF SUNLIGHT breaks through the darkness illuminating the spot where Agustin lies, once again, tied to a post. His face is swollen and covered in blood. His features are difficult to recognise.

MOTHER *(VOICE OVER)*

Go, ahead. Don't be shy. Say the first thing that comes to your mind.

AGUSTIN *(DELIRIOUS)*

Grandpa, I… I…

GRANDFATHER *(V.O.)*

Yes?

AGUSTIN

I want to paint pictures.

GRANDFATHER *(V.O. WHISPER TO MOTHER)*

I told you!

GRANDFATHER *(V.O.)*

Then, my grandson, you will be an artist. -A great artist! But that won't make you happy; that is not your destiny.

OFFSTAGE, sounds of helicopters closing in followed by explosions and small weapons fire. The rebel camp awakes in panic and commotion. Someone opens the lock and the door to the barn swings open. REBEL 1, carbine in hand enters, disoriented, as his eyes grow accustomed to the dark. He walks towards Agustin and points the rifle at Agustin's head ready to fire.

REBEL 1

¡Vaya con Dios, amigo!

SEAN enters at that instant and fires two shots from his pistol in rapid succession. REBEL 1 drops dead. CASIANO follows close behind, M-16 rifle at the ready. Sean moves forward, gun aimed at the dead body. Casiano stays guarding the entrance.

SEAN *(EYES NARROW, SEARCHING FOR RECOGNITION)*
Agustin…? *(horror)* Jesus…!

Enter THE CUBAN and REBEL 2. They came running and are caught off guard by Casiano.

CASIANO *(POINTING HIS WEAPON)*
¡Quietos! ¡Manos arriba! *[Freeze! Hands up!]*

Taken by surprise, THE CUBAN and REBEL 2 drop their weapons, an AK-47 and a shotgun respectively*, and raise their hands. Casiano pushes them against the wall and kicks the weapons aside.*

AGUSTIN *(VERY WEAK)*
Grandpa?

SEAN
(Pouring water from his canteen to Agustin's lips) It's me buddy. We are going home. Goddamn sons of bitches! *(at Casiano)* If they move, drop'em!

SEAN unties Agustin, picks him up and moves to the exit.

AGUSTIN
Wait! Jim! We have to bring him too.

SEAN
It's okay. Don't try to talk.

AGUSTIN *(POINTING)*
No! Over there… JIM…!

SEAN and CASIANO look at each other. Sean looks around and notices the curtain to the other room.

SEAN *(AT CASIANO)*
Hold him.

CASIANO grabs hold of Agustin. SEAN picks the AK 47 from the floor, cocks it and pushes the two prisoners to the far wall where he can keep an eye on them. Cautiously, he grabs hold of the curtain, pulls it down and enters into the room, rifle at the ready. After a few long seconds, he utters a pained moan.

CASIANO
What is it? Are you all right?

SEAN walks out with murder in his eyes. Slowly, deliberately, he stares for a moment at the two prisoners and then open fire on them, emptying the metal jacket. Once out of bullets, he strikes them furiously with the butt of his rifle screaming like a wild animal.

CASIANO *(SHOCKED WITH HORROR)*
Stop… Stop! Goddamn you! *(firing a shot into the air)* STOP!

SEAN stops, breathing heavily as he catches his breath. He throws down the rifle, spits at the corpses before turning to Casiano.

SEAN
Take him to the chopper. I'll be right back.

CASIANO *(DISCONCERTED)*
Where are you going?

SEAN
To get a friend! Now go!

Without anymore words, CASIANO exits carrying Agustin with him. SEAN picks the canvas curtain from the floor and goes back into the room.

END OF ACT II - SCENE 6

ACT II

SCENE 7

A VILLAGE HUT – MERCENARY BASE CAMP – 3 WEEKS LATER

AGUSTIN lies on a cot, his body covered with perspiration, glazed eyes staring at the ceiling as flies buzz loudly in the sweltering heat. Purple bruises mark his face and gauze is wrapped around his head covering his forehead and his right eye. White bandages are wrapped around his upper body up to his arms and his left hand is in a cast. His right arm rests on his chest. Under his hand, A LETTER.

OFFSTAGE: sounds of a busy hospital over which VOICE-OVERS are heard.

DOCTOR *(V.O. SPANISH ACCENT)*
Cracked bones, bruised muscles and torn ligaments all healing nicely. I am simply amazed at his recovery!

GUNTHER *(V.O.)*
But doctor, why doesn't he speak? It's been three weeks! He doesn't respond to any of us.

DOCTOR *(V.O.)*
He took some severe blows to the head. There's always some kind of brain damage with severe concussion. We won't know until he comes out of this.

GUNTHER *(V.O.)*
Can't you do something about it; give him some drug or anything that can help?

DOCTOR *(V.O.)*
I've done all I can. All we can do now is wait -and pray.

HOSPITAL SOUNDS fade out; then VILLAGE SOUNDS fade in as another scene is heard.

SEAN *(V.O.)*
Hey buddy, look what I got here. Can you smell it? Ah…! Love that perfume! Here, take it. What, don't you want to read it? Okay, it's okay. I'll read it to you, hope it's in English, my Spanish still sucks. Good! We're in business. Are you listening? Feel free to join in. Ah, well, here it goes, -"Mi querido Tino: I am back home. The day…

HELENA *(V.O. CONTINUES)*
…after you left I received a message informing me that my father was very ill and that he wants to see me before he dies. *(it is apparent from her tone that she loves him)* He will not live long. Maybe cancer can get him to say things love couldn't do. So I'm going to give the old bastard a second chance. I think you would like that. A few days ago Gunther called and gave me the news about Jim -I haven't stopped crying since. It made me realise that the important things in life are those that are never said… but should be. I'm not the easiest person in the world to deal with but somehow you managed to make the years seem wonderful. I thought it would never end. Now I fear I lost you forever. I don't want it to end like this. If you want me Tino, call me, and I'll come to you…

SEAN *(V.O.)*
Wow! Pretty heavy stuff. Here man, you might want to stick to this. I'll just put it in your hand just in case you want to read that number… and you know, make a call. Hey, is anyone home? Damn, you sonofabitch! Come on man! Snap out of it before you make me cry! *(then)* You would love that, won't you?

Then, AGUSTIN'S hand slowly closes into a fist crushing the letter into a ball. After a moment, his grip relaxes and the crumple paper falls to the floor.

FADE OUT TO BLACK

FADE IN *(TWO WEEKS LATER)*

MARIA is washing Agustin with a cloth and water from a container next to her. AGUSTIN'S head bandage has been removed leaving only a small Band-Aid over his right eyebrow. The bruises have also cleared making his paleness more noticeable. His condition remains unchanged. As soon as María finishes, she begins to spoon-feed him some chicken broth.

SEAN enters carrying a pizza box.

SEAN *(HOLIDAY SPIRIT)*
¡Felíz Navidad, María! How's your patient doing today?

MARIA does not answer. She simply moves aside and busies herself with something. SEAN sighs and then sits on a stool next to Agustin's bed.

SEAN
Look buddy, you won't believe what I got for you! Pepperoni and cheese, extra cheese - your favourite! *(taking out a slice from the box and biting into it)* Uhm, uhm, uhmmmm, uhm! The shit I had to pull to get this pizza delivered! *(he places the box on the floor)* Well, I guess this can't compete with Maria's soup. I got to hand it to you, even when you're as quiet as a mummy you manage to get the prettiest girl in the village to serve you hand in foot. And she won't let anyone else take care of you -won't talk to anyone either.

SEAN *(CONTINUES)*

(then) Well, anyway, I just wanted to tell you that in a few weeks we're having a memorial service for Jim. It's been five weeks since we buried him and we never got around to saying good-bye to him in a proper way. People from all the surrounding villages will be coming to pay their respects; I had no idea he had so many friends. Gunther tells me Jim left all his money and property to the village. *(then)* I know you can hear me from where ever you are and I'm begging to come back to us, Tino, so that you can say some words at the service. Because if you don't do it, I'll have to do it -and hell, you know how bad I am at speeches and I don't want to fuck it all up for everyone; and if I do fuck things up -which is highly probable, I might come here and strangle you for having me go through all that shit all by myself. I better leave; you're pissing me off. Well, don't fail me now. Okay?

SEAN exits. Then, as a light rain begins to fall, a flood of memories surfaces in Agustin's mind. Jim's final words echo in his head and he begins to sob, gently at first, then uncontrollably. MARIA raises her head and with an expression of both concern and hope, stares at him. Then she kneels next to him and holds him in her arms, and he, welcoming the comfort, puts his arms around her.

END OF ACT II - SCENE 7

ACT II

SCENE 8

VILLAGE BASE CAMP – JANUARY 1978 -- 3 WEEKS LATER

The NATIONAL GUARD is evacuating their base camp in the village. Stockpiles of materials and supplies are being loaded into trucks and being driven away.

FREDDIE, CASIANO, and SEAN are going over an inventory list on a clipboard. Sean is in a state of animated exasperation as he tries to communicate instructions -in Spanish- to guards doing the moving.

GUNTHER enters and casually surveys the scene. He puts down a paper shopping bag he had been carrying, calmly pulls out a cigar, lights it and takes a couple of puffs.

GUNTHER *(SHOUTS OVER TO SEAN)*
Keeping you busy?

SEAN *(GLANCING TOWARDS GUNTHER)*
Like a fucking mule!

He gives the clipboard to Freddie and walks over to Gunther.

SEAN *(HOT AND UNCOMFORTABLE)*
God, I hate moving! *(wiping perspiration from his forehead)* Now that you're back, would you mind telling us what the fuck's going on?

GUNTHER *(UNDISTURBED)*
We're pulling out tomorrow morning. *(pulling a six-pack from the bag and passing it to Sean)* Happy New Year!

SEAN *(TAKEN ABACK)*
Man, I love your style but your timing sucks! We should be celebrating and getting laid senseless now that we have the place all to ourselves.

He pulls the tab from one of the beer cans and drinks.

GUNTHER
Sorry for spoiling the party, but with a national strike going on, I don't thing Somoza is going to last much longer. And when he goes, all gringos go -you get my drift?

SEAN *(GRUDGINGLY ACCEPTS THAT)*
So much for paradise. *(then)* At least those cock-breath National Guard assholes are leaving the village before turning it into a Spanish-speaking Vietnam. These bastards are so paranoid they would shoot their dicks off at the sound of a fart.

GUNTHER
When Somoza's boat sinks, they're going to drown. We, on the other hand, will be cruising on the Love Boat. *(then)* So, are you almost done?

SEAN
Fuck no!

SEAN glances over towards FREDDIE and CASIANO.

SEAN *(CALLING OUT)*
Hey Freddie! *(he throws them a couple of beers)* Compliments of Mr. Gunther!

FREDDIE *(WAVING A HAND, BIG SMILE)*
¡Gracias Jefe!

GUNTHER smiles back, does a two finger salute, and Freddie and Casiano go back to work.

GUNTHER
Looks like you and the boys are hitting it off.

SEAN *(OPENING ANOTHER BEER)*
You know me, an ambassador of good will to all men -especially those who have four sisters. Besides, they kind'a grow on you.

GUNTHER
I'm glad you feel that way because I've decided to take them in tow.

SEAN
Fine with me. With Jim gone and Agustin leaving, we're going to need manpower.

OFFSTAGE, a CHORUS OF VOICES begin to sing "Cuando aquí mi obra termine ya." SEAN and GUNTHER look towards the village and listen for some moments.*

GUNTHER *(PUZZLED)*
What's going on?

---

* See lyrics at the end of play

SEAN *(SHRUGS CASUALLY)*

It's Sunday.

GUNTHER *(PROVING)*

Yes, I know it's Sunday. But why are they singing and why so many people?

SEAN *(SUDDEN INSIGHT, SORROW)*

I thought you knew: it's a memorial service for Jim. People have been coming all day. It's their religious tradition to sing songs and offer prayers before the actual service begins. That'll be around four. *(beat, then)* Are you coming?

GUNTHER *(DISTANT)*

Yes, of course.

SEAN

Agustin is going to be saying a few words. I was hoping you would translate them to me.

GUNTHER *(DISTRACTED, THEN ALERT)*

No... I mean... yes. -Absolutely.

OFFSTAGE, a MILITARY VEHICLE enters the village and stops nearby. Enters CAMACHO.

SEAN *(SARCASTIC)*

Well, well, well! Look what the cat dragged in! Camacho, mi amigo, have you lost your way?

CAMACHO *(MIMICS)*

Not at all, gringo. I'm here to make sure the evacuation goes according to plan.

FREDDIE and CASIANO approach the group but remain quiet.

SEAN

The last truck is about ready to go. We are the only ones left.

CAMACHO *(HIS DARKER SIDE EMERGING)*

And when are you gentlemen expecting to leave?

SEAN

Oh, I don't know. Kind'a like it here. Rather peaceful, don't you agree?

CAMACHO *(GLANCING AT FREDDIE AND CASIANO)*

Very. Staying is good. But when you leave, remember to take the trash with you.

CAMACHO laughs at his own wit; no one else does. Insulted, Freddie and Casiano look at him with icy stares.

GUNTHER *(JOVIALLY)*
You'll have to excuse Mr. Camacho for being so jolly this morning. He is moving up in the world. *(then)* El señor Camacho is now a member of Somoza's personal bodyguard.

SEAN *(WITH EXAGGERATED GESTURE)*
Really?! You kept this from us?

CAMACHO *(WITH FALSE MODESTY)*
You know me, I don't like to brag, but El Presidente has an eye for talent. He is really a wonderful man.

SEAN
You don't say! To bad someone decided to kill the leader of the opposition party. Bad mistake! It has turned the whole nation against him -even the undertakers.

They all laugh -except Camacho.

CAMACHO *(PEEVED)*
That was an unfortunate... accident.

GUNTHER *(WITH A KNOWING SMILE)*
You wouldn't happen to know anything about it, would you?

CAMACHO *(PIOUSLY)*
Don't look at me. I had nothing to do with the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. I think it was a CIA plan to discredit Somoza.

GUNTHER
You don't say!

CAMACHO
It's all a conspiracy! But who am I to say, eh? *(then)* Well, don't let me keep you from whatever it is you're doing. I'm just going to check around for a while. ¡Hasta la próxima! *[Until next time!]*

SEAN
Yeah, don't let the door hit you.

CAMACHO exits.

CASIANO *(WORRIED)*
What's he doing here?

SEAN
Looking for trouble.

GUNTHER

He's not a fool. As soon as he finds what he's looking for, he'll be gone. In the mean time, keep an eye on him. *(at Sean)* Oh, before I forget, I brought your mail.

SEAN *(EXCITED)*

Great! What did I get?

GUNTHER

The usual treasures of modern literature: Spiderman, Hustler, Playboy...

SEAN

There is a god! *(then)* Where are they?

GUNTHER

I left them in the lorry. Pick them up after the memorial service. *(then, with a nod)* Gentlemen.

GUNTHER exits. SEAN distributes the remaining beer.

SEAN

We are leaving in the morning. Did you guys finish?

FREDDIE *(BRINGING UP THE CLIPBOARD)*

Jefe, we loaded everything except this thing here: an... RS-6. What's that?

SEAN

That's an old portable short-wave radio station. It's in Agustin's jeep. Don't worry about it; I'll get it.

CASIANO

Is Agustin coming with us?

SEAN

Only to Managua. Then he's going back to the States.

CASIANO

He is a good man. I'm sorry to see him go.

SEAN *(FEELING DEFLATED)*

Yeah, me too.

FREDDIE *(LOWERING HIS VOICE)*

I don't know, jefe. But I think that when he came out of that coma, a part of him stayed behind. Look at him; he's not the same man! I say he's got the evil eye!

SEAN *(STRUCK BY THE COMMENT)*
Freddie, don't be an idiot! Go through the shit he did, you'd be acting a little strange too. It barely has been two months. He just needs some time.

END OF ACT II – SCENE 8

ACT II

SCENE 9

VILLAGE HUT -- EARLY AFTERNOON

AGUSTIN is packing his gear into a bag. While fully recuperated, his forehead bears the marks of his injuries. OFFSTAGE: the sound of distant thunder.

Enter MARIA. She is dressed in her Sunday best: long skirts of colour-bands (Native design), a white short-sleeve cotton blouse with an embroidered design around the square-cut neckline, and covered leather sandals. A flower adorns her hair. Not wanting to intrude, she stays by the entrance observing Agustin in sad silence.

MARIA (*SOFTLY)*

¿Ya te vas? *[You are leaving?]*

AGUSTIN *(TURNING AROUND, NODDING)*

Si. *[Yes.]*

MARIA goes near him, disturbed by his departure. Agustin gives her a kind smile and she hugs him. He puts his arms around her and they hold for a while. She pulls away sniffling away tears, putting a brave smile. The she searches her skirt pocket and pulls out a small hand mirror, which she gives to Agustin. Agustin held it up and studies his face noticing the changes, his fingers going over scars; he reaches to the back of his head still uncomfortable with his short haircut. Then he gives the mirror back to Maria.

MARIA

Te ves muy guapo. *[You look handsome.]*

AGUSTIN smiles at her remark. Then he searches under pillow and brings out a small gift wrapped in holiday paper. He presents it to Maria. Her first reaction is one of joy but when she looks back at Agustin her hand goes to her mouth in a vain attempt to hold back sobs and tears. Then she turns around and runs out of the hut. Agustin looks on in silence, then places the gift on the bed and continues packing.

Enter GUNTHER carrying an umbrella under his arm.

GUNTHER

May I come in?

AGUSTIN glances up, makes an assenting gesture with his head, and returns to his packing without as much as a word. GUNTHER drops a thick envelope on the bed. Agustin opens it and inspects its content.

GUNTHER
Papers, plane tickets, and a little something extra I thought you might need.

AGUSTIN *(LOOKING AT A LETTER OF CREDIT)*
You're being very generous.

GUNTHER
Oh, it's nothing; you earned every penny. *(then)* Sure you won't change your mind?

AGUSTIN *(PUTTING AWAY THE ENVELOPE)*
Nope. I'm out of here.

GUNTHER
May I ask what your intentions are?

AGUSTIN *(CLOSING THE BAG TIGHT)*
Finish school, get a job, find a girl, have some kids...

GUNTHER *(WITH A CHUCKLE)*
You're much too gifted for the normal life. When you get bored -and mark my words, you will get bored- come and see me.

OFFSTAGE: it begins to rain.

AGUSTIN
My father always told me: -"If the devil is going to tempt me, it better be with something good."

GUNTHER *(LAUGHS)*
I'll take that as a compliment!

Enters SEAN wiping raindrops off his face. He carries an object wrapped in cloth.

SEAN
Oh, I beg your pardon!

GUNTHER
Sean, I was just leaving. *(at Agustin)* Bring your personal gear to the airstrip; everything else goes in the lorry.

SEAN
Hey, do I get to fly too?

GUNTHER

No. You and the others drive with the equipment. Don't you worry; I'll hold the farewell party until your arrival. *(he opens his umbrella and exits into the thundershower.)*

SEAN

Man, I think the rain is going to spoil the service.

AGUSTIN *(SITS ON THE BED TO LACE HIS BOOTS)*

It will pass. We still have a couple hours. *(then)* Besides, Evangelicals never shy from the rain.

SEAN *(SITTING ON A STOOL)*

Now who the fuck told you that?

AGUSTIN

I grew up Evangelical.

SEAN

And I Catholic! What's that got to do with it!

AGUSTIN

If Catholics are having mass and it starts to rain, they run for cover. When Evangelicals are having a service and it starts to rain, they thank God for his bounty.

SEAN

Get the fuck out of here! So you're telling me that if it starts raining during Jim's service I'll be the only one running for cover?
(pondering) Shit!

AGUSTIN *(NODDING)*

Uhum. And all those nice evangelical girls will know that not only are you a gringo Catholic, but also what they call... *(with a look)* -"a paper man".

SEAN *(PUZZLED)*

What the fuck that means?

AGUSTIN *(A LOOK OF "HORROR")*

If you wet it, it goes limp.

SEAN *(LAUGHS)*

Fine! I'll stay put and get pneumonia. *(then, afterthought)* What about Jews?

AGUSTIN

What about Jews?

SEAN

Do they stay or run.

AGUSTIN *(SHRUGS)*

They bring umbrellas.

AGUSTIN laughs when the joke finally registers on Sean.

SEAN

Shit! *(he notices the small gift-wrapped package on the bed)* Hey, what's this?

AGUSTIN

A little something for Maria.

SEAN *(NODDING APPROVINGLY)*

Nice. Don't bother getting me anything.

AGUSTIN

I didn't.

SEAN *(SOMEWHAT DISAPPOINTED)*

(handing him the wrapped object) Here, take this before I use it on you! It's your pistol; I had it cleaned and tucked away.

AGUSTIN *(FEELING ITS WEIGHT, THOUGHTFUL)*

(handing it back) You keep it.

SEAN *(LOOK OF HORROR)*

You're not leaving for Japan! You're going back to America, where every fucking punk who thinks he's shit carries a cannon.

AGUSTIN *(HALF SMILE)*

I'm done with all that, Sean. If you don't want it, give it to Gunther.

SEAN *(GRUDGINGLY)*

All right. If you won't use it to prop your pillow, I guess I'll keep it. *(then, grinning)* By the way, are you going to be making any detours to maybe -Venezuela!

AGUSTIN *(TERSE)*

Drop it!

SEAN *(BACKING OFF FAST)*

Okay. Touchy, touchy, touchy! *(then)* So, Gunther letting you go easy?

AGUSTIN

With Gunther nothing is easy. He figures that given enough time, I'll come running back to him.

SEAN *(HOPING FOR A CHANGE OF HEART)*
If you think about it, you had a good gig. As a freelancer, all you do is a job for a week or two and then go back to whatever you do.

AGUSTIN *(SOLEMN)*
Sean, I don't want the phone to ring anymore. *(takes a deep breath and meditates for a beat, then shakes his head knowing that keeping Gunther away might not be easy)*

SEAN
Is not that bad, Tino. I think Gunther has a soft spot for you. I mean, you guys even think alike. Spooks the shit out of me sometimes!

AGUSTIN *(TORTURED EXPRESSION)*
Wise up, Sean! (*moving closer*) Just look at me. Take a good look. (then) When I started working for him, I was a young kid trying to scrape enough money to stay in college. This guy shows up, offers me lots of money and a free vacation if I decorate a wall on his villa. Next thing I know, I'm taking a lot of vacations on places like 'here' using what he calls: -"my real talents". (*chuckles*) And I thought I had died and gone to heaven! (then) That was three years ago. Now I feel like I'm a hundred. (*patting Sean on the back, sad smile*) Don't wait until your eyes look like mine, Sean.

SEAN stares at Agustin with a blank expression -he doesn't get it.

AGUSTIN *(TURNING AWAY IN FRUSTRATION)*
Grow up, Sean! This isn't a game!

SEAN *(AFRAID FOR HIS FRIENDS MENTAL STATE)*
You just need some time off -that all. *(a beat, then softly, trying to be cheery)* Besides, who wants to live forever? I'd rather live a short and exciting life than a long boring one.

AGUSTIN *(REGAINING HIS COMPOSURE, HALF SMILE)*
Well, I've had all the excitement I can take. Time to move on.

SEAN *(RELIEVED, EAGER TO CHANGE THE SUBJECT)*
Then maybe you'll be interested in a proposition of mine. There's a nice piece of property I want to invest in back at the States. Actually, it's a business -not much- but enough to retire. A girlfriend of mine will stay to manage it. Once I find a buyer for my interest in the Tasca Club, I may have enough money to make the move. Why don't you come and help me run things? Fifty-fifty. What do you say?

AGUSTIN
That's very kind of you Sean, but I can't. You wouldn't want me around; a businessman, I'm not.

SEAN

You could at least-

OFFSTAGE: faint screams in the distance muffled by the rain.

AGUSTIN *(ALERT, CUTTING HIM OFF)*

-What was that?

SEAN

What? I didn't hear anything.

AGUSTIN raises a finger gesturing Sean to remain silent. A beat, then another scream.

AGUSTIN

That!

SEAN

Sounded like a woman. *(then, with a frighten look)* Camacho! He's here!

Hearing Camacho's name triggers a murderous rage in Agustin. Hatred for the man contours his face into a mask of cold fury. Then his mind makes a connection.

AGUSTIN *(ALARMED)*

Maria!

Without another word, AGUSTIN speeds out the door.

SEAN

Agustin, wait up! *(grabbing the pistol)* Fuck!

SEAN runs to the door and exits after Agustin.

SEAN *(OFFSTAGE)*

Cuco! Freddie! Come with me!

END OF ACT II - SCENE 9

ACT II

SCENE 10

A VILLAGE DIRT ROAD

THE RAIN has slowed down to drizzle. Except for the occasional flares of lightning followed by the roar of thunder, the village is quite.

CASIANO is standing in the middle of the road looking from side to side. FREDDIE and SEAN enter from opposite directions and join him. They are drenched by rain as they searched for Maria -or Camacho.

SEAN

Anything?

CASIANO

Can't find them. We looked everywhere.

FREDDIE

Camacho's jeep is still here.

SEAN

Then he's got to be around!

Enter AGUSTIN.

SEAN *(AT AGUSTIN)*

No luck. We should split and look down by the river.

AGUSTIN

In this rain? *(shakes his head)* It's got to be one of these houses. With the people gathered by the church, most of them are empty.

CASIANO

Where do you want us to start?

OFFSTAGE: there is a muffled scream, followed by another. The men stayed still and looked around trying to figure the direction of the sound. Another scream; Sean looks at a hut off the road. More screams; this time they all turned towards the hut.

FREDDIE *(AT SEAN)*

It's coming from there.

SEAN

I'll go check. Wait here.

AGUSTIN pulls the pistol out of Sean's belt.

AGUSTIN *(CHECKING THE CLIP)*

I'll handle it.

SEAN *(GRABBING HOLD OF AGUSTIN)*

Is better if I...

AGUSTIN *(PULLING LOOSE)*

No! *(with a look that discourages arguments)* Stay out of the way -all of you!

SEAN looks at Agustin, nods and pulls back.

AGUSTIN tucks the pistol in the front under his belt. After calmly glancing at the men, he walks over to the hut.

CASIANO *(SOFTLY AT SEAN)*

Why'd you let him go? He's going to get himself killed.

SEAN *(ALMOST A WHISPER)*

I don't know, Cuco. I just don't know.

FREDDIE *(MURMURS)*

I told you jefe, he's got the evil eye!

AGUSTIN reaches the hut. He stops by the door, settles himself, and goes in. A beat.

CAMACHO *(OFFSTAGE, YELLS ENRAGED)*

¡Muérete, cabrón! *[Die, motherfucker!]*

OFFSTAGE: inside the hut, MARIA screams. A SHOT is fired followed by two more in rapid succession. CHICKENS scatter out the door frightened by the noise, then silence. A beat. No one moves or makes a sound.

Then, MARIA runs out, scared, trying to cover her naked body with what is left of her torn dress. She exits. SEAN, eyes frozen in an expression of horror, takes a few hesitant steps before being stopped by Casiano.

Finally, AGUSTIN comes out slowly, laconic, pistol in hand. He stops and looks down at the corpse, then forward in the direction of Maria's exit. He meditates for a second, tucks the pistol behind the small of his back, then slowly walks away and exits.

SEAN *(MUTTERS TO HIMSELF, THEN LOUDLY)*
Sonofabitch..! Sonofabitch! *(then, he calls out)* Agustin, wait up! Agustin! Agustin...!

SEAN doesn't move. He simply stares in Agustin's direction while CASIANO and FREDDIE run to the hut and remain staring inside.

More rain, then FADE TO BLACK. Someone knocks on a door.

FEMALE VOICE *(OFFSTAGE)*
Wake up, sleeping beauty...! *(more knocking)*

THE LIGHTS fade in revealing Agustin's room from Act I - scene 1. AGUSTIN is asleep (as shown at the conclusion of that scene).

FEMALE VOICE *(O.S.)*
Honey, wake up! You're late!

AGUSTIN stirs and wakes up with a startle -eyes wide, gasping. He focuses on the knocking noise. Then, he exhales a breath of relief and walks over to the door and opens it.

FEMALE VOICE *(O.S.)*
Darling, are you okay? You look like you just woke up from a nightmare!

AGUSTIN *(CLEARS HIS THROAT)*
I'm okay. What time is it?

FEMALE VOICE *(O.S.)*
It's five thirty. Our reservations are for seven but I decided to come early. I hope you don't mind.

AGUSTIN
No, no. It's okay. I must have fallen asleep.

FEMALE VOICE
You sure did! It took me forever to wake you up. Are you sure you're all right?

AGUSTIN
I'm fine. Listen, um... give me half hour or so to shower and change and I'll be right with you. How's that?

FEMALE VOICE
Sure! I was afraid you were going to cancel our date.

AGUSTIN

I'd rather shoot myself. *(she giggles)* Thirty minutes?

FEMALE VOICE

I'll be waiting. I'll call us a cab in the meantime. Don't be late!

AGUSTIN closes the door and locks it. He goes back to the bed and sits down, picks the photograph and looks at it. A beat. Exasperated by his dilemma, he pounds his fist repeatedly on the bed in frustration. Then, his mind made up; he reaches for the card left by Gunther, picks up the phone and dials.

AGUSTIN *(SPEAKING INTO THE PHONE)*

Yes, I would like to place a message. Thank you.

AGUSTIN waits a couple of seconds, enters a numeric code and hangs up. After a few seconds, the phone rings and he picks it up on the fourth ring.

AGUSTIN

We have to talk. *(then)* Under one condition. *(then)* No, not tonight. Tomorrow - twelve o'clock sharp. Pick me up.

AGUSTIN hangs up the phone. He sets the photograph on the desk and quietly moves up to the windows. He looks out to the nearby field and listens to the sound of students playing soccer. Soon, the sound changes into fervent exclamations of "Gloria a Dios" [Glory to God] and "Aleluya" as a huge crowd of mourners grieve the loss of their local saint. And as the voice of the minister delivering the eulogy becomes stronger, Agustin relives a scene from Jim's memorial service.

MINISTER *(VOICE OVER)*

… por la perdida de nuestro amigo James Francis Emerson. ¡Adorado el nombre de nuestro Dios! *[… for the loss of our good friend James Francis Emerson. Praised be the name of our Lord!]*

A guitar trio begins to play the string introduction to the hymn "Ocasos" [Sunset].

MINISTER *(CONTINUES)*

Dice la palabra de Dios, que el morir en Cristo, es vivir eternamente. Por eso Jim, querido hermano, no te decimos adios, sino hasta luego. *[The word of God says that to die in Christ is to live forever. So Jim, dear brother, this is not goodbye, but a short farewell.]*

Next, Agustin's heartfelt rendition of the song in Spanish, and Jim's voice-over of the lyrics in English. Slow fade to black.

Cuando ya de esta vida
deje yo de padecer;
cuando cierre la cortina
y se acabe mi función;
cuando mis canciones viejas
ya ninguno quiéra oir;
y el azul de primavera
no me preste su fulgor.

When from this life
I cease to suffer;
when the curtain falls
and the show is done;
when my old songs
no one wants to hear;
and the springtime blue
shine on me no more.

A las nubes amorosas
yo les voy a suplicar,
como lleva el viento a la hoja
que me vengan a llevar.

To the loving clouds of heaven
I will plead,
like the wind carries the leaf
come take me with thee.

Yo no voy aqui a quedarme
un lugar mas bello hay;
viene Cristo a mi encuentro
y a las nubes voy a ir.

I will not live here forever
there's this place I'd rather be;
God is coming to my rescue
like the clouds he'll set me free.

END OF ACT II - SCENE 10

ACT III

SCENE 1

SEAN'S ARIZONA RESORT – OCT 1986 – OUTDOOR PATIO -- DAYTIME

An OUTDOOR PATIO paved in herring-style bricks extending to a swimming pool; a low adobe wall with well-kept hedges encloses the area. A FIVE-PIECE PATIO SET, with cushioned chairs and circular umbrella, is next to the pool.

SEAN, dressed only in shorts and a straw hat, sits on one of the chairs. He has been drinking heavily. LIQUOR BOTTLES, most of them empty, litter the area. He looks unwashed, unshaven, in a foul mood and catatonic. A PORTABLE CASSETTE-PLAYER resting on the table plays -Debbie Boone's- 'You light up my life'. Suddenly, as the song ends, Sean grabs the player and -hesitating only for a second as to what to do- throws it violently into the pool. Then he resumes his previous inert state as if nothing had happened.

During this incident, JENNIFER enters. She is an athletic 27-year-old 'all-American' girl with graceful movements, short pale-blond hair and intelligent eyes. She is dressed in swim shorts, athletic top and a sheer and slightly oversized voile cover-up worn unbuttoned.

JENNIFER *(HANDS ON HIPS, FED UP)*
Is it time to change your diaper?

SEAN *(EXPRESSIONLESS)*
Fuck off, Jen! I'm not in the mood.

JENNIFER
Sean, what is it with you? For weeks all you talked about is this friend of yours, and the minute he gets here, you go into one of your binges, and he has the personality of a concrete wall! Are you sure this is the same guy?

SEAN *(DRINKING FROM A BOTTLE, BITTER)*
Oh, that's him all right -the back-stabbing-assoholic-son-of-a-bitch!

JENNIFER *(CONCERNED)*
What happened between you two?

SEAN *(SNAPS)*
He cut me off! That's what he did! The fucker cut me off! Him and *that* over-the-hill I'll-fuck-everyone because I-can't-get-it-up-anymore son-of-a-fucking-bitch -Gunther! That's what happened!

JENNIFER *(FANNING HER NOSE AND PULLING BACK)*
Christ, you smell bad! When was the last time you used soap? Woof! Want to run that by me again -in English?

SEAN *(BUILDING UP TO A RAGE)*
Those two lower-than-snake dirt-bags, hopped into the same bed and decided to cut me off from the job! You understand now? I am grounded, sitting on my ass and holding my huge dick while they get to have all the fun!

JENNIFER
How'd this happened?

SEAN *(BRUISED FEELINGS)*
He betrayed me! My ex-best buddy, back-stabbing friend -Agustin, told Gunther that he would only do the job if I stayed behind.

JENNIFER
And Gunther agreed?

SEAN
He's here, isn't he?

JENNIFER *(SUSPICIOUS)*
Was there a reason for this? *(no response from Sean, beat)* Sean…?

SEAN *(MUMBLES)*
I'd rather not talk about it.

JENNIFER *(SITTING NEXT TO HIM)*
Well, that explains why you been acting like a baby for the last two days. But what's eating him up?

SEAN
Who?

JENNIFER
Your 'ex-buddy' Agustin.

SEAN *(UNCONCERNED)*
What did he do?

JENNIFER *(UNCERTAIN)*
Well… nothing! It's just that I tried to go out of my way to make him feel at home but he keeps ignoring me. I'm beginning to think he is allergic to women.

SEAN *(SNEERING)*
Oh, he likes women all right. (mumbles) But he doesn't do blondes.

JENNIFER *(NOT SURE SHE HEARD RIGHT)*
I beg your pardon?

SEAN
I'm serious; he is not attracted to blondes -probably a genetic defect. Agustin is the most selective man I have ever known.

JENNIFER
You mean -he's weird! Wasn't he in-love with that friend of yours -what's her name…

SEAN
…Helena.

JENNIFER
…that's her!

SEAN
She wasn't a blond. Besides, I said he likes women; I didn't say he loved them.

JENNIFER
You said he was in-love with her!

SEAN
I never said he was in love with her; I said he was fucking her.

JENNIFER
Does he know she's coming in tomorrow?

SEAN
I don't think he cares. He just dropped her. Never looked back. *(then, as if just realising that side of Agustin)* He's as cold as they come.

JENNIFER *(EXPRESSION OF DISGUST)*
Right -like you're Mr. Warmth and Romance.

SEAN *(TAKING A SWALLOW)*
You got that right! *(beat)* Are you finished?

JENNIFER *(GIVING UP)*
Yes, I'm finished! I don't have time to put up with you, but I could use some help around here. So snap out of it and take a bath, Sean. Even better, take *two* baths -and go take care of your guests.

SEAN *(SETTLING BACK, EYES CLOSED)*
Fuck'em! Let the staff handle them. I don't want to see them.

JENNIFER *(LOW CONSPIRATORIAL TONE)*
I don't think that's possible.

SEAN *(CURIOUS)*
And why the fuck not?

JENNIFER
Because here comes your friend, Mr. Ice!

Enters AGUSTIN, dressed in leather hikers, cotton shorts and shirt, and wearing dark sunglasses. JENNIFER stands up to greet him.

JENNIFER *(BIG SMILE)*
Hi there! Hot enough for you?

AGUSTIN *(UNSMILING)*
Is getting there.

JENNIFER
I was just leaving. Can I bring you something?

AGUSTIN
I'm fine, thank you.

JENNIFER *(PERSISTENT)*
Are you sure? I know pink lemonade is your favourite.

AGUSTIN *(WANTING TO END UP THE EXCHANGE)*
If it's no inconvenience.

JENNIFER
Not at all. I'll be back in a sec. *(she exits)*

SEAN
Nice looking girl, ah?

AGUSTIN *(LACONIC)*
Lovely. *(awkward silence, he takes a seat)* Let's get this over with.

SEAN *(DRINKING ONE LAST SWALLOW, COLDLY)*
It's over.

AGUSTIN remains silent, meditating, eyes lost into the distance.

AGUSTIN *(FINALLY, EXHALING)*
Nice place you have here: stables, survival camp, training farm -not for the average tourist. Gunther tells me that a lot of agencies use your facilities; looks like business is booming. You, my friend, are set for life! So I have to wonder, why do you want to go off on some crazy venture, trek for days through swamps and jungles in 100-degree heat, and quite possibly, get yourself killed?

SEAN *(MATTER OF FACT)*
I miss the scenery. What's your excuse?

AGUSTIN *(CONTROLLED)*
I need the money.

SEAN *(ANGRY AND DISGUSTED WITH HIMSELF)*
Bullshit! I am your excuse!

SEAN rises from his chair, walks a few paces and turns to confront Agustin with unrestrained bitterness.

SEAN
I need this job, Tino. The last time I felt *alive* was when we were out there… together, you and I, doing what were born to do. And just when I was about to go out and get that feeling back, you took it away from me! Well, fuck you! I don't need a baby-sitter...

AGUSTIN *(CUTTING HIM OFF)*
I don't want you to die.

SEAN *(A BEAT, THEN YELLS)*
You are already killing me! *(then, feeling betrayed; in a low whisper)* I thought you were my friend.

AGUSTIN *(DISGUSTED)*
You're drunk. *(he gets off the chair and moves away, his back to Sean)*

SEAN *(SLUMPING BACK INTO THE CHAIR)*
(catching his breath) Aye... *(then)* I may be drunk but I'm not blind and I see you're nothing but a hypocrite! *(then)* You want the buzz, don't you, Tino. You're dying for it too... You hide it better than me but inside you're as empty as I am.

AGUSTIN
Let it go Sean. You're making me sick. Why don't you stop complaining and look around at what you have? Things couldn't be better for you.

SEAN *(SARCASTIC, DESPERATE)*
Oh, that's right, things are fine-fucking-tastic! I have everything a man could want: money in the bank, people who take care of me, politicians kissing my ass, and if I wanted to, I could fuck a different woman every night of the year for the rest of my life. But it doesn't make me feel good! *(then)* I am bored out of my mind and if I don't do something soon I think I'm going to shoot myself! When I had nothing but my dreams I had more. Now I got everything except the one thing I need! I'm begging you Tino, let me go with you!

AGUSTIN *(FACING HIM, TAKES OF HIS SHADES)*
Sean, I'm not going anywhere.

SEAN *(TAKEN BY SURPRISE)*
…What?

AGUSTIN
I'm only doing the planning. You will be flying to Honduras to hire support and co-ordinate operations. That's the deal.

SEAN *(NERVOUS LAUGH)*
You're telling me I'm in?

AGUSTIN *(KIND SMILE)*
You were never out. But neither one of us will be taking any unnecessary chances. Sergio and his unit will carry out the mission.

SEAN *(PROTESTING)*
But that's the fun part!

AGUSTIN *(STERN)*
I'm calling the shots. Take it or leave it.

SEAN *(HURT AND ANGERED)*
You think I can't cut it anymore, is that it? *(After failing to read into Agustin's silence)* Fine! We'll do it your way… for now. Just don't get in my way.

AGUSTIN *(SATISFIED AND RELIEVED BUT SOMBRE)*
I can live with that.

AGUSTIN takes the liquor bottle from the table, throws it in the pool, and walks away.

END OF ACT III -- SCENE 1

ACT III

SCENE 2

RESORT'S BRIEFING ROOM -- 3 WEEKS LATER – DAWN

A large CONFERENCE TABLE occupies the center of the room. A freshly brewed POT OF COFFEE and TWO MUGS sit on a nearby table.

GUNTHER stands near the window, smoking A CIGAR, watching the sunrise. Then, he moves towards the coffeepot and proceeds to pour two mugs.

Enter AGUSTIN.

AGUSTIN *(JUST WOKE UP)*
You send for me?

GUNTHER *(NO NONSENSE TONE)*
Come in and close that door.

Used to Gunther's manner, AGUSTIN ignores him with a yawn and closes the door behind him. GUNTHER hands him a mug of coffee, which he gratefully accepts. He sips the coffee (no sugar, grimace) and then gives Gunther an inquiring look.

GUNTHER *(BEGINNING TO RELAX)*
Sean's back from Honduras and on his way here. I want to have a word with you before they arrive.

AGUSTIN *(ADDING SUGAR TO THE COFFEE)*
They…?

GUNTHER
The Case Officer and his spook are coming with him. They'll give us last minute data to put the show on the road.

AGUSTIN *(TASTING THE COFFEE)*
Is about time. Who's the C.O.?

GUNTHER *(VAGUE)*
Oh, some highly placed government shit. *(then)* Sergio will be joining us too.

AGUSTIN *(RUBBING HIS EYES)*
Any last minute changes?

GUNTHER

None so far. We'll finalize details after the briefing. *(then, handing him a file)* Here, double-check this.

AGUSTIN *(AMUSED)*

Nervous?

GUNTHER *(DISMISSIVE)*

Cautious. Make sure I didn't miss anything.

AGUSTIN studies the notes on the file. GUNTHER pours himself some more coffee, adds cream, and moves back to the window. He smokes gazing at the horizon for a few moments.

GUNTHER *(CASUAL)*

How are the men?

AGUSTIN *(EYES ON THE FILE)*

Oh, as well as could be expected.

GUNTHER

Good. You may have lost the taste for the work but you haven't lost your touch.

Then, GUNTHER turns around to face Agustin and quietly observes him while exhaling a long puff of cigar smoke.

GUNTHER *(CHOOSING HIS WORDS CAREFULLY)*

How was the reunion?

AGUSTIN *(PEEVED, RAISING HIS EYES SLIGHTLY)*

Was that your idea?

GUNTHER *(SHRUGS)*

You don't approve?

AGUSTIN scowls at him but keeps silence.

GUNTHER (SERIOUS)

What happened between you two doesn't concern me. I need her -same as I need you. *(blows a cloud of smoke, then, in a lighter tone)* Seeing Helena might do you both some good. *(then, with a chuckle)* Why are you so angry with her?

AGUSTIN

We had our differences.

GUNTHER *(KNOWING HALF SMILE)*

Like you and Sean?

AGUSTIN *(CAUTIOUS, VAGUE)*

Sean and I have an agreement of sorts.

GUNTHER *(AMUSED, BIG SMILE)*

Well, I think that's bloody marvellous!

AGUSTIN *(UNSURE)*

Do you?

GUNTHER *(CHUCKLES)*

Positively! Besides, Sean can never stay mad at you for more than a week. *(a beat; then, with affection)* You two are great fun to watch.

AGUSTIN *(BECOMING ANNOYED)*

I'm glad you find us amusing. *(he turns to refill his mug.)*

GUNTHER

Oh, very much so, especially you. *(then, turning serious)* In fact, I wanted to ask you about poetry.

AGUSTIN *(NOT SURE HE HEARD RIGHT)*

What?

GUNTHER

Poetry -the only truth we have left. *(then)* Do you still write?

AGUSTIN *(SOUNDING TIRED, DISTANT)*

No, not really. *(a beat)* It's been a long time.

GUNTHER *(SINCERE)*

Pity! I always understood you best when I read your poems. *(then, quoting grandly)* "Inside every man there is a poet who died young, and then, he lives a lie."

AGUSTIN *(SURPRISED, IRONIC REALIZATION)*

(a beat) Then, I've been dead for years.

GUNTHER *(CONCLUDING)*

And you blame me for it.

AGUSTIN *(COLDLY)*

You should have left me alone!

GUNTHER *(SOFTLY BUT SINCERE)*

I care about you.

AGUSTIN *(SNAPPING BACK)*

And why am I so special?

GUNTHER *(TAKEN ABACK; A BEAT, WITH FULL CLARITY)*

You remind me of me.

AGUSTIN *(REPULSED)*

I'm nothing like you.

GUNTHER *(RUEFUL SMILE)*

Most of the time I'm not myself either.

They stared at each other. At that moment, OFF STAGE SOUNDS announce the arrival of SEAN and the others.

END OF ACT III -- SCENE 2

ACT III

SCENE 3

BRIEFINGS ROOM – 20 MINUTES LATER

GUNTHER, SEAN, and SERGIO, the commando team leader, are engaged in casual conversation as they go over data files. HELENA is seated at the table and from time to time participates in the chat. A PLATE OF DOUGHNUTS rests on the briefing table along with additional COFFEE MUGS.

PETERS, a portly Southern intelligence officer and electronics expert, adjusts a SLIDE TRAY to a PROJECTOR that also rests on top of the briefings table. They are dressed in wrinkled, well-travelled casual attire.

AGUSTIN stands looking out the window, reticent, coffee mug in hand.

PETERS *(PULLS DOWN A WALL SCREEN)*
Settle down, gentlemen! *(they all begin to sit around the table)* I'll be done in a minute!

SEAN *(SCANNING THE ROOM)*
Hey Peters, where's your boss?

PETERS *(BUSY WITH FINAL ADJUSTMENTS)*
He had to make an emergency stop on the way in.

SERGIO *(GRINNING AT SEAN)*
That's one mighty long piss -if you ask me.

SEAN
Yeah, Peters. Why don't you go over and give him a hand? *(laughter)*

PETERS *(UNRUFFLED BUT VENAL)*
My regards to your mothers.

Laughter followed by appreciative applause.

SEAN *(OFFERING SERGIO THE DOUGHNUT PLATE)*
Diet pills? *(Peters grabs one)*

SERGIO *(MAKING A FACE)*
Nah thanks. *(then)* But I'll tell you what, if that other spook doesn't hurry up and show up, you're going to have to make an emergency stop of your own.

Enters McCORMICK adjusting his belt.

McCORMICK *(NOT AMUSED)*
That won't be necessary! And that's *Case Officer* of Special Operations to you, chump!

AGUSTIN *(DUMBFOUNDED, MUTTERS AT GUNTHER)*
Why didn't you tell me?

GUNTHER *(QUIETLY EXULTANT)*
And miss the look on your face?

McCORMICK *(AT AGUSTIN, ENTHUSIASTIC)*
Hey, glad to see you again! *(moving closer and extending a hand)*
Never had a chance to thank you for what you did.

AGUSTIN, caught off guard, shakes his hand.

SEAN
Did he wash those hands? *(laughter)*

McCORMICK'S hand automatically goes to his shirt as he tries to wipe it clean.

McCORMICK *(BLUSHING)*
Eh… later...

PETERS *(INTERRUPTING)*
Sir, we are ready; the place is clean.

McCORMICK looks at the notes handed to him by Peters and positions himself at the head of the table.

McCORMICK *(GLANCING AT GUNTHER FOR APPROVAL)*
Mr. Gunther?

GUNTHER *(GRACIOUSLY)*
By all means.

McCORMICK *(CLEARING HIS THROAT)*
Gentlemen -miss, let me begin by emphasizing that this operation is as black as a devil's ass. *(scans the faces)* It means that you will operate as foreign agents and in no way will your actions be traceable to those paying for your services.

SEAN
So what else is new. *(chuckles)*

McCORMICK
Only the fact that the whole business must *also* be kept a secret from all military and federal security agencies.

SERGIO *(BLOWING A WHISTLE)*
That's some heavy-duty shit you're talking about.

GUNTHER *(GRINNING AT SERGIO)*
That's why we are doing it.

McCORMICK *(CONTINUES)*
In the interest of national security, only a handful of people have comprehensive knowledge of this affair. *(then, staring at each one for effect)* If any indiscretion is discovered, full and final measures will go into effect. Any questions? *(a beat, silence)* Good. Mr. Peters..? The briefing?

PETERS *(TURNING ON THE PROJECTOR)*
Sir, the lights, please?

McCORMICK turns off the wall light switch. The room is almost completely dark, framed light beam illuminating the screen.

PETERS
Thank you.

FIRST SLIDE.

This charming looking fellow and graduate of the Harvard School of Law is *Sebastiano Urbino Rojas*. Please take a good look at him, boys and girls, because mister Rojas is a genuine sonofabitch! *(chuckles)*

SECOND SLIDE.

Rojas, a native of Panama, comes from a wealthy family with ties to the military, and is a close personal friend of our friend and yours, el general Manuel Noriega. *(then)* In fact, they both received special military training in one of our bases. Since we expected Rojas to be an influential political figure in Panama, we kept an active file on him.

THIRD SLIDE.

Officially, Rojas helped run part of an extensive family business: agricultural exports, shipping related services, banking -that sort of thing. Besides being a big spending-jet-setting-socialite he likes to be seen in the company of beautiful women. He also has a passion for theatre shows and fancy restaurants. According to high-level intelligence reports, he is an excellent tipper. *(laughter)*

PETERS *(CONTINUES)*

FOURTH SLIDE.

Unofficially, mister Rojas, also known as "El Cubano" -don't ask me why, gets most of his income by being a consultant and middleman for certain Colombian and Mexican drug lords. Buying information and the informal transportation of designated materials are his specialty. *(then)* He was pretty high up their corporate ladder until about six weeks ago, when he made a big mistake: he got greedy. To his dismay, his drug-peddling buddies put a bounty on his head when they discovered that Rojas was skimming millions of dollars out of their profits.

FIFTH SLIDE.

No being able to charm his way out of this one, Rojas ran and tried to get some help from his old friend Noriega. But the general -venal bastard that he is- decided to stay in good terms with his other buddies -The drug lords- and gave Rojas the boot.

SIXTH SLIDE.

By the time we caught with Rojas, about a week later, he was having coffee with his new best friend, the 'El Supremo' leader of the Sandinistas, Mr. Daniel Ortega. *(then)* And that, boys and girls, is where we lost his scent. But we are almost certain that he is still hiding in Nicaragua under the protection of the Sandinistas.

SEAN *(COMMENTING)*

Sounds to me like a happy ending. They can keep him. *(laughter)*

AGUSTIN *(SUSPICIOUS)*

Why are the Sandinistas protecting him? For that matter, why are *we* interested in him?

McCORMICK *(TURNING ON THE LIGHTS)*

Because Sebastiano Urbino Rojas, gentlemen, was working for us.

SEAN *(MUTTERS)*

The plot thickens.

AGUSTIN *(MUTTERS BACK)*

Imagine that.

SERGIO *(A BEAT, CURIOUS)*

So what's the real story with this dude? Is he an agent or just a free-lancer?

McCORMICK *(FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS)*
More like a political necessity. *(clears his throat)* We contracted Rojas because we had a special problem on our hands. Our government's policy on Central America has been a difficult one at best. *(drones on)* The Reagan administration is committed to stopping Sandinista aggression in the region but Congress is under the absurd impression that our involvement in the conflict might drag us into another Vietnam. At present, we are training and maintaining over five thousand Contra fighters based in three camps along the Honduran border. But the funds initially voted by Congress to *help* the Contras, were only for *humanitarian aid*. It did not include weapons, and *that* put us in a bind.

SERGIO
No weapons, no Contras -right?

McCORMICK *(IN AGREEMENT)*
That's what it boiled down to.

SERGIO *(QUESTIONING LOOK)*
So how'd you managed it?

McCORMICK *(PLEASED WITH HIMSELF)*
Monies were made *available* from other funds and private contributors, and weapons were purchased. That was easy; getting them shipped to the Contras without raising any flags, was not.

HELENA *(LEANING FORWARD, INCREDULOUS)*
So you got Rojas to arrange the shipments through his drug network?

McCORMICK *(DEFENSIVE)*
Now, I didn't say that.

SERGIO *(DISGUSTED)*
Oh, for Christ's sake! We're not hauling that shit now, are we?

McCORMICK *(PIOUSLY)*
When it comes to the national security of the American people, we stop at nothing.

SERGIO *(CONFRONTING HIM)*
So how'd you managed to get dope dealers to do your dirty work?

GUNTHER *(ENJOYING THE EXCHANGE IMMENSELY)*
Trouble free, door to door shipment of their product to the insatiable American market - no questions asked- in exchange for transporting the weapons on their way out. Everyone wins.

AGUSTIN shakes his head in disgust.

HELENA

So what went wrong?

SEAN *(ASIDE TO SERGIO)*

Can't wait to hear this one.

SERGIO *(RETORTING)*

Gee, and me without my popcorn.

McCORMICK *(CLEARING HIS THROAT PROFUSELY)*

I… believe Mr. Gunther can better explain what happened.

GUNTHER *(MUSING)*

How can I put this delicately? Hum. It would appear that Mr. McCormick's superiors fucked up!

EVERYONE burst out in laughter; McCORMICK looks very uncomfortable.

GUNTHER *(GOING TO THE POINT)*

Their first mistake was underestimating Rojas' talent for exploiting opportunity. *(then)* Their second was forgetting that buying information and using it for blackmail *is* what made Rojas successful in the narcotics trade. So, with his new connections, a network of paid informants, and access to a seemingly endless amount of drug money, he was able to buy quite a few rotten apples connected to the agency -as well as add a few worms of his own. *(beat)* And, within a short time -to his utter and complete delight, I'm sure- he managed to hit pay dirt when a computer disk containing a highly secret file was sold to him by a disgruntled employee.

HELENA *(FASCINATED)*

What's in the file?

GUNTHER *(SAVOURING THE MOMENT)*

The names of some very prominent people involved in the Contra weapons operation and the *very illegal* diversion of funds.

SERGIO *(SHOCKED)*

Jesus! Who are we talking about?

McCORMICK *(QUICKLY)*

That's classified! *(a couple of tense beats)*

GUNTHER *(CONTINUES)*

I'll tell you this: if the information contained in that disk is revealed, it would put an end to the careers of some very prominent figures… all the way to the top *(pointing up)* -the very top.

SERGIO *(ABSORBING THIS)*
Imagine what the Sandinistas could do with that.

SEAN *(TORTURING McCORMICK)*
They're going to have a field day, and the press, a witch-hunt. "Government giving carte-blanche to drug smugglers while conducting war on drugs." "Agency trading guns for refine-processed 9-9-9 cocaine."

McCORMICK *(DEFLATED, REGAINING COMPOSURE)*
Let's not… dwell on that. *(then)* We did manage to discover the leaks and clean the system. Unfortunately, Rojas was already out of the country. We were expecting to catch him in Panama but he managed to get away.

SEAN *(TRYING TO BE HELPFUL)*
You can always cut a deal with Rojas. Pay him off.

McCORMICK *(HESITATION)*
That's… no longer an option. *(then)* He believes that we were the ones who tipped him off to the drug lords.

GUNTHER *(RAISING AN EYEBROW)*
My, my, my! Does he really?

AGUSTIN *(MURMURS)*
Imagine that.

HELENA
It's been… what, more than six weeks? How do you know he hasn't already sold the information to the Sandinistas?

PETERS
He can't -at least not yet. He does have the information on that disk but he can not access the data without the proper encrypted code. Until he does so, the disk is useless.

AGUSTIN
Codes can be broken.

PETERS
You're right. But this one's a pretty sophisticated one. We're certain that no one in Nicaragua -not even the Soviets presently stationed there- are capable of breaking it.

HELENA
But they can copy the disk and send it anywhere.

McCORMICK
Possibly, but we don't think they'll do that. Rojas can not leave the country and he won't let anyone else have it; it's his insurance policy. His only option is to bring in a computer expert to break the code.

AGUSTIN
And have they?

McCORMICK *(NODDING)*
A couple of days ago we tracked a group of Czech mining engineer on route to Managua. Their plane stopped in Cuba where another passenger has joined the group. *(then)* We have identified him as 'Yi Sun Hwan', a Korean national.

PETERS *(ADS)*
According to our analytical experts, the man's one *mighty nerd* -a computer hacker extraordinaire.

SERGIO
Take him out. Buy yourself some time.

McCORMICK *(CLEARING HIS THROAT)*
If we do that, they'll know we're on to them. On the other hand, we need him to lead us to Rojas.

SERGIO *(AT GUNTHER)*
So how much time do we have to find Rojas and recover the disk?

McCORMICK *(INTERJECTS, LOOKING GRIM)*
Four, five days. The plane is still in Havana. Once inside Nicaragua, it all depends on how long it would take Hwan to break the code.

SERGIO *(PONDERING)*
That doesn't leave us much time and we still do not know where Rojas is hiding... or do we?

McCORMICK *(WITH RENEWED CONFIDENCE)*
We have a pretty good idea. Those mining engineers Hwan is travelling with can only be heading towards one place: -

GUNTHER *(INTERJECTS)*
-the mining towns of 'Siuna' and 'Bonanza'.

McCORMICK, *unable to hide his surprise, looks at Gunther with a baffled look, followed by an inquisitive one.*

GUNTHER

The Sandinistas know only too well the extent you would go to get the disk back. Consequently, we discarded the possibility that Rojas was being held in Managua; too many eyes lurking around their capital. It made more sense to hide him in a well-defended and isolated military base. That narrowed the search down to the most secured sector in Nicaragua: their gold and silver mines in the North Atlantic region. *(then)* Following that premise, we alerted our own contacts. A man answering Rojas description was spotted. For the past three weeks, Agustin has been training Sergio's unit for infiltration into the area.

McCORMICK *(INCREDULOUS)*

For the past three weeks?!

GUNTHER

We had no way of corroborating the data. Now, we are certain. *(then)* Any objections?

McCORMICK *(GIVING IN GRUDGINGLY)*

When can your men move out?

GUNTHER

As soon as you supply transport.

McCORMICK *(GLANCING AT)*

Peters?

PETERS *(MENTAL CALCULATION)*

Tomorrow morning.

AGUSTIN

Who's flying?

PETERS

Rhodesian pilots; very experienced in covert operations. They'll fly the team to a safe house in Honduras and from there across the border into the drop zone.

GUNTHER *(AT SEAN)*

Weapons?

SEAN

They have a supermarket with anything you can name, including uniforms. You got to see it to believe it!

GUNTHER *(AT McCORMICK)*

And the Honduran military?

McCORMICK *(CONFIDENT)*

We own them.

PETERS *(TACTFULLY)*

One of our men will be joining the team at the safe house. He'll make sure you're getting the right disk. We want him to...

GUNTHER *(STERNLY CUTTING HIM OFF)*

That wasn't part of the agreement.

McCORMICK

We can't risk the chance of coming back with the wrong disk.

SERGIO *(REMINDING HIM)*

It ain't going to be a walk in the park.

McCORMICK *(REASSURING)*

You won't have to worry about our guy. He's one of our top field officers.

GUNTHER *(FINALLY)*

Very well. But remember, Sergio is in charge. *(then)* Any problems and your guy won't be coming back.

McCORMICK *(RELUCTANT BUT BOXED IN)*

Agreed.

GUNTHER scans faces ready for any new arguments, but everyone seem satisfied. Then he takes a deep breath and proceeds.

GUNTHER *(ASSURED)*

Everything is in place and we have surprise on our side. If our men can infiltrate the town without being spotted, I say the probabilities of success are very good. We have a good unit, eight men: all Spanish speakers, three of them natives, two of them Miskito guides and Sergio leading it. The addition of your man will make it nine. This room will be our command post and we'll communicate through satellite link. *(then)* Anything else?

PETERS

What about Rojas?

GUNTHER *(REMINDING HIM)*

Rojas is not the target; getting the disk back *is.* Hwan will lead us to it. Our intention to get in and out without fireworks.

McCORMICK *(SMILING)*

But if Rojas just happens to fall and break his neck that would be fine with me too.

SERGIO *(IRRITATED)*
We'll keep that in mind.

GUNTHER *(IN A LIGHTER TONE)*
Very well, let's take a break before Helena goes over the satellite pictures.

SEAN *(INTERRUPTING)*
Sir, if I may. I have an announcement to make. *(then)* You're all invited to a dinner party this evening. We serve at six; be there!

GUNTHER
Splendid! Anyone else? *(a beat)* Then, see you back in one hour. That will be all! *(then, calling out)* Agustin, a moment, please?

THEY talk among themselves as they exit.

AGUSTIN serves himself some coffee averting Helena's look and goes over to Gunther where they review papers.

END OF ACT III -- SCENE 3

ACT III

SCENE 4

AGUSTIN'S SUITE – ARIZONA RESORT – LATER THAT DAY

The ONE-BEDROOM SUITE is simple but nicely decorated in the 'Santa Fe" south-western style. Across the room, opposite to the entrance, is a door that leads to the bathroom.

AGUSTIN is the bathroom (offstage) getting ready for Sean's dinner-party. The bathroom door is partially opened. The faucet in the lavatory is turned on.

OFFSTAGE, someone knocks on the door. A beat, no response. Another knock, more insistent.

AGUSTIN *(OFFSTAGE, FROM THE BATHROOM)*
Door's opened!

HELENA enters, surveys the room, and then locks the door behind her.

AGUSTIN turns off the faucet, and after a beat, enters from the bathroom, adjusting the bottoms on his shirt. He notices Helena immediately and stops, taken by surprise, but quick to recover. They gaze at each other, like players in a chess game, neither knowing what to expect, calculating every possible move.

HELENA *(COLD AND EMBITTERED)*
This is a sick game you're playing. *(with a sneer, sizing him up and down)* Still a prick.

AGUSTIN *(POISED, UNREADABLE)*
And you the wife of a wealthy politician. *(then)* What are you doing here?

HELENA
Getting noticed. I'm not used to being ignored.

AGUSTIN
What do you want?

HELENA
Don't you know?

AGUSTIN
What would your husband say?

HELENA *(UNTROUBLED)*
It's a marriage of convenience. He needed a political wife. *(with a shrug)* I didn't mind the attention. *(then)* What happened to your wife?

AGUSTIN *(AFTER A BEAT, POISED)*
She wasn't you.

HELENA *(HOLDS HER BREATH, THEN, WITH FEELING)*
Tino... *(moves closer to embrace him)*

AGUSTIN *(STOPS HER)*
Don't! *(then, gently)* Elena... *(sigh),* what you're searching for was lost a long time ago.

HELENA *(EVENLY, WITH A SUBTLE EXPRESSION OF TRIUMPH)*
You're lying!

Then, quietly, she extends her arm and with gentle fingers caresses his cheek, awakening a storm of memories; he doesn't move.

HELENA *(IN A LOW, HYPNOTIC VOICE)*
It's all here, Tino. The memories, the loneliness, *(in a whisper)* feelings... *(seductive smile)* I'm here.

Fighting the attraction, AGUSTIN grabs her hand, and slowly moves it away. She keeps staring at him, hurt but not showing it. Then she looks away, jealous and momentarily self-conscious of her age.

Is there someone else, or is it… the years?

AGUSTIN *(WITH A SLIGHT SHAKE OF HIS HEAD)*
No. You're even more beautiful than I remember you. Men would do anything...

HELENA *(CUTTING HIM OFF, ANGER)*
I know what men want! I want more! *(then, with reproach)* You didn't even try.

AGUSTIN *(UNBENDING)*
It wouldn't have made a difference.

HELENA *(VENOMOUS)*
You never gave me a chance! *(then, searching his eyes)* What did I do that was so wrong, Tino?

AGUSTIN *(SAD BUT SERENE SMILE, THEN TIGHTLY)*
You broke my heart.

They stare at each other in silence. Helena's lips part; Agustin's confession was so unexpected it took her breath away.

HELENA *(SOFTLY, RECOVERING FROM THE SHOCK)*
So many years I waited... not a word, nothing! Why didn't you call?

AGUSTIN *(FEELING REMORSE)*
It was... complicated. *(struggling to put his feelings into words)* It took me years... thinking of you. Until one day... I felt... no more pain.

HELENA *(HOPEFUL)*
What about now? I've changed...

AGUSTIN *(TRAGIC SMILE)*
We both have. But not enough to be happy together.

HELENA stares at him with a look full of sorrow, as if feeling sorry for both of them, and then looks away. She walks to the door, opens it, but turns around before leaving.

HELENA *(BLUNT, MAKING HER LAST MOVE)*
Tino, don't you want me?

AGUSTIN does not answer. He wants her more than ever, but giving in, would lead to more pain.

HELENA *(SAD, OMINOUS SMILE, GOING FOR CHECKMATE)*
After this job, I won't be coming back.

HELENA exits, and Agustin remains more alone than ever.

END OF ACT III - SCENE 4

ACT III

SCENE 5

SEAN'S ARIZONA RESORT-- OUTDOOR PATIO – DUSK THAT SAME DAY

Patio TORCHES on poles add a warm glow to the scene. OFFSTAGE, people dance and laugh to the beat of Latin music. SEAN, McCORMICK, SERGIO and AGUSTIN sit around the patio table engaged in after-dinner camaraderie.

McCORMICK *(CONTINUES, IMPASSIONED)*
...nah, nah, nah! You're both wrong! Patton was the man!

SEAN enthusiastically agrees with him; the others, equally argumentative, do not.

AGUSTIN *(MUSING, GRINNING AT McCORMICK)*
Okay, I give you that. He was good, but Rommel was better.

SEAN *(BURST OUT)*
Overrated! George Patton could have kicked his ass any day!

SERGIO *(ROLLING HIS EYES, UNRUFFLED)*
Man, you are way off! Didn't you see that movie with *(snapping his fingers)* -what's his name...

AGUSTIN *(AT LAST)*
George C. Scott.

SERGIO
Yeah, that's him!

SEAN *(REVERENT, RAISING A FINGER)*
Now there's a great actor!

McCORMICK *(NODDING)*
Fantastic!

SERGIO *(CONTINUES)*
...remember the scene in which they show him in bed reading Rommel's book on military strategy?

SEAN *(PAUSE, PUZZLED)*
So?! I read in bed!

AGUSTIN *(INTERJECTING)*

Hustler.

SEAN *(INDIGNANT)*

I enjoy the interviews! *(turning back to Sergio)* Anyway, what's your point?

SERGIO *(RUNNING OUT OF PATIENCE)*

The point is that Patton was learning about Rommel because Rommel was the master!

Loud disagreement as they argue back and force.

SEAN *(RAISING HIS HANDS, SHOUTING OVER)*

Wait a minute! Hold your horses! *(then)* Shut the fuck up, everyone! Listen!

They all stop and look at Sean expectantly.

SEAN

Ask Gunther!

Pause, an exchange of questioning stares.

SERGIO *(SATISFIED)*

Gunther? You're on!

McCORMICK

Sounds good to me!

AGUSTIN *(GIVING SEAN A LOOK)*

Best damned idea you had all day!

SEAN *(PLEASED)*

Then it's settled! *(then)* Here he comes.

Enters GUNTHER, with JENNIFER holding his arm, both enjoying a laugh.

GUNTHER *(AMUSED)*

What in blazes are you fellows yapping about? All that ruckus is drowning away the music!

SEAN *(MISCHIEVOUS GRIN)*

You are just in time to settle an argument.

GUNTHER *(ASIDE, PATTING JENNY'S HAND)*

Careful, my dear, better stand aside; this could come to blows. (then)
Very well, I'm listening.

SEAN

Is like this: me and Mac say that George Patton was the greatest tank commander of all time. Serge and Tino -who should know better- say it was Rommel. (then) Who's right?

GUNTHER *(WITH CONSIDERABLE DELIGHT)*

Well, military history is a minor obsession of mine; I'll be happy to help out! *(musing)* What makes this argument such an intriguing dilemma is that 'old blood and guts' and 'the dessert fox' never actually engaged each other in battle. Nevertheless, they were both positively brilliant, but utterly outclassed by the best tank commander of modern warfare!

SEAN *(DUMBFOUNDED)*

Who's that?

GUNTHER

Ari Sharon -The legendary tank commander of the Israeli Army with whom I had the pleasure of serving during the campaign on the Sinai!

Loud protestations with words like "Oh, come on" and "bullshit". Arguments fly back and force with Gunther in the middle.

JENNIFER *(SHAKING HER HEAD)*

Boys! Excuse me, boys...? *(silence)* I hate to interrupt such an entertaining debate, but if anyone is going for seconds -or thirds- you better go now before the kitchen closes.

SEAN *(LOOKING AWAY, FUNNY GESTURE)*

Wow men! No time to argue! Let's go, but I warn you, it could get ugly!

McCORMICK

What'd you mean?

SEAN

Peters is already there!

SERGIO *(LOOKING AWAY)*

Oh shit! We're doomed!

SEAN

Hurry then, to the buffet table! Charge...!

SEAN, McCORMICK and SERGIO exit at a run.

GUNTHER *(GUIDING HER, CHARMING)*

Have a seat, my dear. You make an old man feel young again!

AGUSTIN *(ASIDE, PRETENDING DISCRETION)*
That's his pick-up line. *(then)* If you excuse me, I'm going to get something to eat. *(he exits)*

GUNTHER
Don't listen to him. He's always been jealous of my British accent.

JENNIFER
I find it *very* sexy!

GUNTHER *(AT AGUSTIN AS HE EXITS)*
Did you hear that?

JENNIFER *(LOOKING AT HIM WITH INTEREST)*
So Sean was telling the truth.

GUNTHER *(PUZZLED)*
About what?

HELENA
You really did serve in the Israeli Army.

GUNTHER *(CHUCKLES)*
I volunteered! Moved from Cambridge just in time to fight in the Sinai Campaign of 56 and later during the Six-day war. Been fighting ever since!

HELENA
Don't you ever want to quit; retire; go back to your family?

GUNTHER *(A GENTLE SMILE)*
Of course I would, but... there's no one waiting for me.

JENNIFER *(PROBING)*
Oh, I'm sure there must be someone; an aunt, a daughter; grandchildren?

GUNTHER *(SETTLING BACK)*
Most of my family died in Germany during the war when I was just a kid. I was once married but got separated before moving to Israel. My wife decided to stay in England and our son stayed with her until she passed away.

JENNIFER *(HESITANT BUT CURIOUS)*
Your son?

GUNTHER *(WITH A PAINED, WRY SMILE)*
Yes. He was killed fighting in the Golan Heights during the Yom-Kippur War. He never married.

JENNIFER *(DEEPLY MOVED)*
Oh... I... I had no idea. I'm so sorry.

GUNTHER *(COMFORTING HER, CHEERY)*
Don't be. It's the way of life.

JENNIFER looks thoughtful. GUNTHER, sensing her discomfort, gives her a reassuring smile.

GUNTHER
What's on your mind?

JENNIFER *(UNEASY)*
Can I ask you something?

GUNTHER
You may ask me anything.

JENNIFER *(HESITANT, THEN DIRECT)*
You are so gentle and courteous, and yet... Do you enjoy killing?

GUNTHER *(STIFLES A LAUGH, THEN SERIOUS)*
No. War is a horrendous waste of human life. But I do enjoy the skills it takes to be a successful at it.

JENNIFER frowns and emits a low groan mortified by Gunther's standpoint.

GUNTHER *(READING HER EXPRESSION, CONTINUES)*
It's nothing to be ashamed of! The way I see it, we are doing the world a great service.

JENNIFER *(TAKEN ABACK)*
By killing people and getting paid for it?

GUNTHER *(REFLECTING)*
No. Mindless patriotism, fanatical ideologies, moral indignation, corrupt political agendas: that's what kills people. These things are like a virus infecting society and must be stopped before it spreads and destroys it. (then sober) And we happen to be the government's surgical instruments to do the job.

JENNIFER *(THOUGHTFUL)*
And what prevents you from being infected?

GUNTHER *(WITHOUT HESITATION)*
The first rule of the mercenary: we approach war as a business. Our profession requires thinking and indifference to irrational acts and ideas -because we take life seriously. *(then adds with a grin)* Dead heroes are bad for business; they bring no profits.

JENNIFER *(SCEPTICAL GRIN)*
You have a way of putting things that is really quite disturbing. There is a lot of truth in what you say, but it's very difficult to accept.

GUNTHER
That's because the truth doesn't always make sense.

JENNIFER
But how can that be?

GUNTHER *(GLANCING AWAY AT AGUSTIN)*
There, take Agustin, for example. A man who's at heart an artist; a lover of perfection -a creator of harmony in things both beautiful and hideous. A person of deep moral convictions, the very things that people admire and desire. Those are the facts. But the truth is that in spite of all this, he has an aggressive nature with the uncanny ability to approach war with a cool business head; thoroughly trained, absolutely pragmatic, fully confident. It excites him and he takes pride in professional excellence. And yet, he despises himself for it. A living contradiction that makes no sense -but the truth.

JENNIFER remains silent, still not convinced, but conceding that Gunther's logic is beginning to make sense.

Enter HELENA.

HELENA *(AT GUNTHER)*
Excuse me sir. You have a call in five minutes.

GUNTHER *(CHECKING HIS WATCH)*
Ah, yes! *(then with a broad smile)* Helena! Why don't you tell this lovely lady why we kill people for a living?

Expressionless, HELENA glances at Gunther, and then back at Jennifer.

HELENA *(DEADPAN)*
Money, secrecy, great public interest, *(icy grin)* and sex.

JENNIFER *(INNOCENT LOOK)*
Or lack of it? *(returns the grin)*

GUNTHER *(LAUGHS, ENJOYING THE EXCHANGE)*
You ladies should get together and take this further!

HELENA
Some other time, I'm sure. *(then, glancing at Gunther)* We still have work to do, Sir.

GUNTHER *(AT JENNIFER)*
Duty calls. *(glancing offstage as he gets off the chair, he notices Agustin)* Ah, Agustin! Will you take care of Miss Leighton for me? *(back at Jennifer)* Don't waste your evening on my account.

JENNIFER *(WITH WARY AFFECTION)*
Good night, Mr. Gunther.

GUNTHER *(KISSING HER HAND)*
Good night, my dear. I leave you in good hands.

Enter AGUSTIN, coffee cup in hand, as Gunther and Helena exit. HELENA gives Agustin a charged look as they pass each other.

JENNIFER *(IRONICALLY)*
What a fascinating man!

AGUSTIN *(LACONIC, AS HE TAKES A SEAT)*
Charming.

JENNIFER *(CAREFUL)*
Helena, she's very beautiful.

AGUSTIN *(STUDYING HER FOR A MOMENT, CHANGES THE SUBJECT)*
Let's talk about you.

JENNIFER *(NERVOUS LAUGHTER)*
Me? There is nothing interesting about me.

AGUSTIN *(INTENSE GAZE)*
I find you very interesting.

JENNIFER *(ANGER FLARING)*
Is this one of your pick up lines?

AGUSTIN *(CALM)*
That was my desperate attempt to make table talk.

JENNIFER *(CHASTENED)*
What do you want to know?

AGUSTIN *(FROWNS IN CONCENTRATION, A BEAT)*
What's your sign?

JENNIFER *(OUTBURST OF LAUGHTER)*
Sean warned me about you.

AGUSTIN *(SMILING RUEFULLY)*
You seem to care a lot for Sean.

JENNIFER
Of course I do! He's like a big brother.

AGUSTIN *(CLEARS HIS THROAT TO HIDE HIS SURPRISE)*
Brother?

JENNIFER
Yes! What were you thinking?

AGUSTIN *(HALF SMILE)*
I wasn't thinking.

JENNIFER
Sean and I grew up together. My grandfather sold him this place when he retired from the service and I stayed as the manager. Once I save enough money -or find the right guy- I plan to move on, possibly go to graduate school. Until then, I'm stuck here baby-sitting Sean.

AGUSTIN
He must trust you a lot.

JENNIFER *(CHUCKLES)*
I guess he does. I know he worships you. *(then, heartfelt)* Thank you for looking out for him.

AGUSTIN *(SHY SMILE)*
You're the one doing all the work.

JENNIFER
You know what I mean.

They stare at each other. A Beat. Enter SERGIO and SEAN holding beers.

SERGIO
Hey you two, come and join the party!

SEAN *(SHAKING HIS BUTT)*
Time to boogie...! Come on, Tino. Show us some your Latin moves.

AGUSTIN *(RAISING A HAND)*
Not tonight, Sean.

SERGIO *(STARING AT JENNIFER, BROAD SMILE)*
Then you won't mind if I borrow this lady for a little spin, would you? *(extending a hand at Jennifer)* Miss?

JENNIFER *(GIGGLING)*
I'd love to!

SERGIO *(SING SONG VOICE)*
See you later...

JENNIFER and SERGIO exit. SEAN sits next to Agustin.

SEAN *(SIPS HIS BEER)*
What's the matter, buddy? Constipated?

AGUSTIN *(LAUGHS)*
Not after listening to all your dinner jokes!

SEAN *(SEATING DOWN)*
So, how's it going?

AGUSTIN
Not bad. This business will be over in a few days and I can go on with my life.

SEAN *(HOPEFUL)*
Any chance of staying around a bit longer?

AGUSTIN *(SINCERE)*
I'll come to visit. Promise.

SEAN
You must have a good reason to want to get the hell out of here. I know I been a little irrational and-

AGUSTIN *(INTERRUPTING)*
-Stop! *(pulls a photo from his wallet and hands it over)* I'll give you two reasons why I can't stay.

SEAN *(SURPRISED)*
Wow! They're gorgeous -boy and a girl. Not bad for a guy who doesn't like kids.

AGUSTIN *(PLACING THE PHOTO AWAY)*
I still don't; but I adore these two.

SEAN *(DISBELIEF)*
I can't picture you married!

AGUSTIN *(RECTIFYING)*
Was married. She needed a nine-to-five kind of guy and that wasn't me.

SEAN *(CHUCKLES)*
Sorry to hear that. We sure have a lot of catching up to do. *(a beat, then thoughtful)* What happened to us, Tino?

AGUSTIN
Life happened. That's all.

SEAN *(PENSIVE)*
How'd you manage it… getting out? I can't see anything but more of the same thing for me.

AGUSTIN
You will move on.

SEAN
How?

AGUSTIN
You can start by getting out of bed every morning.

SEAN *(HALF SMILING)*
And after that?

AGUSTIN
You bury the past, make new friends; go see the real world and learn to love it.

Starring into Agustin's eyes, Sean absorbs this. For a minute, they sit in silence comforted by the warmth of their long friendship and the glow of the setting sun.

SEAN *(GETTING UP FROM THE CHAIR)*
Well, looks like things are winding down a bit. You're coming? *(then, batting his eyelashes)* Got some romantic music you might like.

AGUSTIN

You go'head. I'd like to stay here a bit and just take in the view.

SEAN

See you in the morning, then. Good night.

SEAN exits. AGUSTIN stands from the chair, walks a few paces towards the pool, and contemplates the night sky. THE SONG: "Yo te amo", by Brazilian singer 'Roberto Carlos' is played offstage.

JENNIFER enters. She quietly looks at him for a few seconds.

JENNIFER *(GRINNING)*

You owe me a dance.

AGUSTIN *(CALMLY TURNING TOWARDS HER)*

Do I?

JENNIFER

Yes, you do. I'm going for the record. I have danced with everyone else -except you.

AGUSTIN

What makes you think I will?

JENNIFER *(MOVING CLOSE TO HIM)*

You can always say no.

AGUSTIN looks into her eyes for a minute, and then they gently fall into each other's arms and slow dance.

END OF ACT III -- SCENE 5

ACT III

SCENE 6

BRIEFINGS ROOM -- THE FOLLOWING NIGHT

GUNTHER, McCORMICK, PETERS and HELENA are waiting in silence, avoiding eye contact, stunned by sobering news.

An AUDIO-PLAYER rests on top of the table.

Enter AGUSTIN.

HELENA *(LOOKING UP, SOMBRE)*
Where were you?

AGUSTIN *(SCANNING THE FACES, UNEASINESS)*
What's going on?

GUNTHER *(RESTRAINED)*
It's about the unit.

AGUSTIN
They should be in Honduras by now. Haven't they checked in?

GUNTHER
Yes, they did.

AGUSTIN *(EASING UP, A BEAT)*
Then, what's the matter?

GUNTHER *(GLANCING AT THE AUDIO PLAYER)*
I think you better listen to this.

HELENA pushes the 'on' bottom on a reel to reel recorder.

TAPE PLAYER *(SERGIO'S VOICE)*
"... established contact with local agent and secured weapons and equipment. We're be moving out at O400 to air... *(loud explosion)* What the hell...! *(another explosion followed by automatic weapon's fire and screams)* Get cover! Move back...! *(more explosions and screams)* I'm hit.. damn it, I'm hit...!" *(screams, static, the line goes dead)*

HELENA turns off the machine. AGUSTIN stares dumbfounded. Silence.

AGUSTIN *(ALMOST A WHISPER)*

...Sergio?

McCORMICK *(SOFTLY)*

Dead.

AGUSTIN *(COLD, TIGHTLY CONTROLLED)*

Casualties?

McCORMICK *(WITH FINALITY)*

They're all dead.

AGUSTIN

How?

McCORMICK *(UNCERTAIN)*

We still don't have complete reports...

GUNTHER *(LETTING LOOSE)*

Damn the reports; just tell us what you know!

Enters SEAN. He remains standing quietly by the entrance.

McCORMICK *(REGAINING HIS COMPOSURE)*

As far as I can tell, it was a hit -an ambush. My people are going through it right now.

GUNTHER *(BUSINESSLIKE)*

Who did it?

SEAN *(INTERJECTING)*

Hired guns assisted by Honduran army units. I've just confirmed it with one of our spotters.

GUNTHER *(TURNING ON McCORMICK)*

You bloody shit; this is no time to fuck with us! What else are you holding back?

McCORMICK *(FEAR AND SHOCK)*

Nothing! I swear it! I'm as shocked as you are!

GUNTHER *(REMINDING HIM)*

You said you owned the Honduran army!

McCORMICK *(AT A LOSS FOR WORDS)*

Someone must have bought them off.

HELENA
Yeah, someone with a lot of money. Someone like Rojas.

AGUSTIN *(TROUBLED)*
How did they manage to organise an ambush in so little time?

GUNTHER *(STUNNED, SUDDEN INSIGHT)*
They were waiting for them! *(ominously)* The bastards knew before our men arrived!

McCORMICK *(BLINKING IN SURPRISE)*
But that can't be! Security is airtight.

GUNTHER *(QUIET BUT AT THE END OF HIS PATIENCE)*
There are eight good men and one of your own blown to pieces in that bloody mess so don't talk to me about your goddamn security! Someone sold us out; find out who!

McCORMICK *(UNDER HIS BREATH)*
We will. That I promise.

PETERS *(DEFEATED)*
Well, it's finished. All that work for nothing.

GUNTHER *(RESOLUTE)*
We're not going to let them get away with this!

McCORMICK *(FIRM, THEN SOFTLY)*
This operation is over. We'll get our chance to get even with Rojas.

GUNTHER *(ADAMANT)*
Rojas is not the mission; getting the disk is.

PETERS *(PLACING THE COVER ON THE AUDIO PLAYER)*
If you have a miracle up your sleeve, now would be a good time for it. I've got to go make some unpleasant calls.

GUNTHER
Wait! We can still do it if we procure another unit.

AGUSTIN
We don't have another team. And even if we did, it would take time to train them.

GUNTHER
Our plan is still intact. I can bring sleepers and McCormick can provide us with another agent.

AGUSTIN *(AMAZED AT THE BOLDNESS)*
You can't be serious!

GUNTHER
They think we're licked so they won't be expecting another attempt.

McCORMICK *(TRYING HARD TO KEEP UP)*
It's not that simple. *(then)* I don't have another officer authorised for this job.

GUNTHER *(BLANK STARE, A BEAT)*
You're authorised.

McCORMICK *(INCREDULOUS)*
You expect me to go?

GUNTHER
Do you want that disk?

McCORMICK gives Peters questioning look, PETERS shrugs and then nods in agreement.

McCORMICK *(RESOLUTE)*
If you can field the men, I'm willing to take the risk.

GUNTHER *(SLOWLY NODDING)*
Oh, I can get them, but it's going to cost you more.

McCORMICK *(WITHOUT BLINKING)*
Do it!

AGUSTIN *(SHAKING HIS HEAD, REALISTIC)*
Even if you can put together another unit, you still won't have enough men to carry out the plan.

GUNTHER
We'll just have to make adjustments and work the details on route.

AGUSTIN *(TRYING TO REASON)*
Sir, without someone in command, who knows what the hell he's doing, it won't stand a chance. Sergio is dead. McCormick isn't-

SEAN *(STEPPING IN)*
-I can! *(then)* You're not going; that leaves me.

AGUSTIN *(VOICE LACED WITH FRUSTRATION)*
You won't be able to make it through Honduras! *(then, choosing his words carefully)* There is a leak and you're running the risk of being compromised. And even if you managed to get past the border, you'll be two or three days behind schedule.

SEAN *(SOBER)*
I know all the contacts and have all the details. If you and Gunther work out a plan, I can get the job done.

GUNTHER
Then it's settled! Sean will lead the unit!

AGUSTIN *(VOICE TEMPERED BUT FIRM)*
This is still my operation; I decide who goes! *(eyes fixed, unreadable)* Sean, I can't stop you from going. I respect your decision, but you can't do this alone.

SEAN
Don't fuck with me now, Tino. I don't need a baby sitter.

AGUSTIN
No, you don't. But if I go, we *both* have a better chance of making it back.

SEAN *(SMILES, HAPPY AND REVIVED)*
Buddy, you'll get no argument from me there! *(jubilant)* Yes!

GUNTHER can't hide a look of surprise. AGUSTIN meets his gaze and for a beat both men say nothing.

GUNTHER *(SOFTLY)*
Welcome back!

McCORMICK
I'll start calling my men to get things ready.

GUNTHER
Hold it! We have a leak and I won't trust anyone outside this room.

PETERS
You're going to have to! We have superiors to report to. We can't just leave them in the dark.

GUNTHER
Tell them the truth, that the operation was a failure. That will hold them for a while and give us more cover. Furthermore, going back through Honduras would be suicide. We won't be making that mistake.

McCORMICK
But we have to! How are we going to get weapons and supplies without raising attention?

GUNTHER *(RAISING AN EYEBROW)*
Agustin, are you thinking what I'm thinking?

AGUSTIN *(GRINNING AT GUNTHER)*
Who's your contact in Panama?

GUNTHER *(SMILING APPROVINGLY)*
Sean?

SEAN *(EXCITED)*
I sold Casiano my interest in the Tasca Club. Whatever we need, he can get.

GUNTHER
Excellent! Panama will be our staging area so get ready to depart immediately while I make arrangements. I'll fly us in myself.

PETERS *(FEELING LEFT-OUT)*
What about me?

GUNTHER *(WITH A LOOK)*
Find that leak and plug it! Helena, work with him. *(then, at McCormick and Peters)* Now, if you two gentlemen excuse us, we need to do some planning.

McCORMICK and PETERS exit.

GUNTHER *(AT HELENA)*
Transfer all pertinent data to the flight computer. Also, get new maps, dead babies *[false ID's],* communication codes -you know the drill.

HELENA nods, moves aside and remains quite.

SEAN *(RUBBING HIS HAND IN ANTICIPATION)*
Great! So what's the plan?

GUNTHER and AGUSTIN look at each other with Machiavellian smiles.

BOTH *(IN UNISON)*
We go after Rojas!

SEAN expression turns from a dumb grin to a wicked laugh.

END OF ACT III - SCENE 6

ACT III

SCENE 7

AGUSTIN'S SUITE – ARIZONA RESORT – LATER THAT NIGHT

AGUSTIN is preparing to leave. He fastens his wristwatch, then goes to the bed and pulls out a pistol from under the pillow. He tucks the weapon behind his back and then puts on a lightweight jacket that was lying on the bed.

JENNIFER *(OFFSTAGE, KNOCKS ON THE DOOR)*
Agustin, may I come in?

AGUSTIN opens the door and she enters.

JENNIFER *(PUZZLED)*
What's going on? I just saw Sean pulling away in his truck. *(noticing Agustin's attire)* Are you going out?

AGUSTIN *(HALF SMILE)*
We're going into town to have a boys night-out.

JENNIFER
In the middle of the night?

AGUSTIN *(SOUNDING CASUAL)*
You know Sean. Things are warming up between us and I didn't want to disappoint him. *(smiles)* But don't worry, Gunther decided to come along and chaperone.

JENNIFER *(FLIRTATIOUS LOOK)*
You are not planning to run out on me, are you? You promised to take me dancing.

JENNIFER puts her arms around his neck and gives him a kiss. *He doesn't respond -this is not the time. There is an awkward silence. She is disappointed and a little offended.*

JENNIFER *(NOW SERIOUS)*
Do you have to go?

AGUSTIN *(PULLING AWAY)*
Listen to me Jenny. I wouldn't get to attached to me if I were you.

JENNIFER *(HALF SMILE AND DISMISSIVE SHRUG)*
Let's not talk about it and see what happens.

OFFSTAGE: the sound of an automobile horn.

AGUSTIN
That must be Gunther. I have to go.

JENNIFER *(SUSPICIOUS)*
Agustin, isn't it a little dangerous for all of you to leave with an operation in progress?

AGUSTIN *(WITHOUT MISSING A BEAT)*
Peters can get a hold of us at any time. Besides, nothing should happen for a few days. *(the horn sounds again, he holds her chin up with a finger)* Got'a go.

At that precise moment, HELENA enters, not expecting to find Jennifer in Agustin's suite. Thunderstruck by the tender scene and overtaken by feelings of jealousy and humiliation, she stops dead on her tracks by the entrance. There is an uncomfortable silence. Expressionless, AGUSTIN glances at Helena, then back at Jennifer, and exits.

OFFSTAGE: the sound of Agustin entering a car, closing the door, and then driving off.

HELENA stays by the door watching the car leave, regaining her cool composure. Then she looks back into the room and sees Jennifer looking back at her, no hostility in her eyes, only pity. There is a tense beat as they measure each other.

HELENA *(COLD BUT SMOOTH)*
We could do this all night.

JENNIFER *(UNEASY)*
I was just leaving. *(but she doesn't move, then softly)* Do you still love him?

HELENA *(TASTING EVIL)*
Enough to hate him.

JENNIFER
He is… *(can't quite place it)* not what you expect him to be. I think I know how you feel.

HELENA *(OMINOUS)*
You don't know him at all and you have no idea how I feel. If you did, you wouldn't be here.

JENNIFER *(AFRAID BUT EMPOWERED BY ANGER)*
Is that a threat?

HELENA *(CALM BUT MENACING)*
No. Friendly advice. You can't begin to imagine what you're getting yourself into.

JENNIFER
And you do? *(no reaction from Helena, then)* Helena, I'm not your enemy.

HELENA *(SNEER)*
I have eyes. *(she exits)*

JENNIFER remains still, looking past the door, embraced by a cold chill as she ponders what has taken place.

END OF ACT III - SCENE 7

ACT III

SCENE 8

STAGE BLACKOUT – A BRIEFING INSIDE A PLANE IN FLIGHT

OFFSTAGE VOICE OVER:

SEAN *(V.O.)*

So, what are we up against?

SLIDE 1 is projected: A map of Nicaragua showing the North Atlantic Region. The locations of the towns have been colour-highlighted.

GUNTHER *(V.O.)*

This is Nicaragua's North Atlantic mining region. Copper, silver and gold mines are located 'here' within the towns of Siuna, Bonanza, and Rosario; roughly 160 miles from Managua and 40 miles from the Honduran border.

SLIDE 2: A satellite shot of the mines.

GUNTHER *(CONTINUE V.O.)*

The mines are pumping 23 million in yearly gold revenues which the Sandinistas badly need so the area is heavily protected. *(then)* The terrain is hostile and extremely difficult to cross. Between the towns and the Honduran border we have high mountains, jungles and swamps. The average rainfall is about 150 inches a year throughout the year -it never stops. To the east, the Miskito coast.

SLIDE 3: A photograph of a Miskito refugee camp showing armed Miskito Indians.

GUNTHER *(CONTINUE V.O.)*

The Sandinistas have been especially rough with the Miskito Indians. About ten thousand of them have cross into refugee camps along the Honduran border. During the night, the Miskito own the countryside. They will be your escort.

SLIDE 4: A satellite shot of the town of Siuna with locations highlighted in colour.

GUNTHER *(V.O.)*

This is a satellite shot of our target area, the town of Siuna. Its radar installation constantly tracks CIA supply flights.

SEAN

Can we take that radar installation from the air?

McCORMICK
We have tried repeatedly but without success. It's located outside the town in Soviet build trailers that contain all their electronic equipment. East German and Bulgarian technicians operate the system and keep moving it around.

AGUSTIN
That's going to make the drop point more difficult.

GUNTHER *(CONTINUE V.O.)*
That's the least of your problems. Near the mining complex they have nearby garrisons, two military warehouses and an airstrip. Also, a main storage gasoline tank *and* a housing settlement usually occupied by Czech mining engineers!

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*
Bingo! That's got to be where Rojas is staying.

GUNTHER *(V.O.)*
It doesn't make it any easier. Besides regular military patrols, Rojas has his own private army of bodyguards. He won't have the disk on him, which means, you're going to have to make him take you to it. Be persuasive.

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*
Anything else?

GUNTHER *(V.O.)*
Yes. Don't stop to admire the scenery on your way back. *(Laughter)*

SEAN *(V.O.)*
God! I love this shit!

SLIDE OFF, LIGHTS, CONTINUE SCENE

MILITARY WAREHOUSE – TOWN OF SIUNA – NICARAGUA – 4 DAYS LATER

The building is made of concrete block walls with a timber-framed roof covered by corrugated galvanised metal sheets. At the end of the warehouse (downstage) is a steel door that leads to an office. The door is secured with latch and lock. Two metal garage doors, big enough for cargo trucks to pass, are located on one of the side-walls. Next to the garage doors is a smaller steel door that serves as the warehouse's main entrance.

High up on the walls, where the roof meets, are a series of white aluminium (Miami) windows that allow both light and ventilation inside. This warehouse used to store army rations and other food supplies, is filled with boxes, crates, steel drums and sacks of grain. There are also piles of used truck tires and old machinery parts in a state of disrepair.

It is a couple of hours past midnight and the only illumination in the warehouse comes from moonlight passing through the opened windows. Then, the entrance door opens and seven figures, five commandos and two hostages, enter quietly and rapidly.

THE COMMANDOS are dressed in a combination of black and military Camouflage uniforms. Their faces are concealed by balaclavas (similar to a ski mask) over which communication headphones are worn. Some carry backpacks and side arms; all carry individually modified assault rifles of various makes. Three of the commandos are Sean, McCormick and Agustin.

THE HOSTAGES are Rojas and Hwan. They had been pulled out of bed and not given enough time to dress. Their hands are tied behind their backs and their mouth gagged and secured with tape.

COMMANDO 1 stays by the entrance, climbs on top of some boxes and looks out the window. COMMANDO 2 and SEAN, both equipped with night vision goggles, move up and secure the warehouse. When they are satisfied, they signal the others to come forward. AGUSTIN and McCORMICK move the hostages to a spot near the wall and push them down on the floor. SEAN comes and joins the huddle.

AGUSTIN *(ADJUSTING THE HEADPHONE)*
Tiger 1, everything secured. Panther 6, any movement? *(then)* Stay in position. Panther 3, report. *(then)* Good. Wire the second generator, move back and hold. Tiger 1 out.

SEAN
So far so good. Let's get that disk and we're Scot-free.

AGUSTIN nods a signal to McCormick. McCORMICK takes Roja's gag off.

McCORMICK
Okay, we're here. Now, where's that communications room and where's the disk.

ROJAS *(UNAFRAID, NONCHALANT)*
Is inside the office, behind that steel door -but I don't have the key.

SEAN *(AT AGUSTIN)*
I'll go pick the lock. Give me a minute. *(he moves to the door, pulls out a lock-picking set from his pocket and starts working on the lock)*

ROJAS *(WITH AN IMPUDENT LOOK)*
Hey, you're my old friend McCormick! I thought I recognised your voice. *(mocking grin)* Long time don't see.

McCORMICK makes no response.

ROJAS
I got to hand it to you. You're very lucky to make it this far. And these new friends of yours, very persistent but not well mannered. Getting me out of bed in the middle of the night was very rude.

McCORMICK
Shut up, Rojas, before I shove a bullet down your throat. That disk better be there.

ROJAS *(SMIRKING)*
You will not kill me until you have the disk and you-

AGUSTIN *(CUTTING HIM OFF)*
-Shut up, both of you!

McCORMICK puts the barrel of his gun against Rojas chin. Then, SEAN signals Agustin that the lock is opened. AGUSTIN gives him the go to enter, and proceeds to join him, when the door explodes sending Sean hard against the wall, Agustin flat on his back and the rest of the men scurrying for cover.

The next seconds are pandemonium. OFFSTAGE (outside the warehouse), an alarm siren goes off and the base is flooded in light. Commando 2 helps AGUSTIN, dazed and confused, up. Then, getting back his wits, they go over to where Sean lies -his cloths on fire, pull him out of the way, and frantically put out the flames with their hands. Sean's body is smoking; his chest covered in blood; his guts exposed. He is making low guttural moans as he gasps for air.

COMMANDO 1 *(LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW)*
Here they come! *(jumping of the box)* Hit the floor!

THE MEN lay flat on the floor as a hail of bullets fired through the metal garage doors riddle the interior of the warehouse. After a few seconds of hell and noise that seem to last forever, the firing stops. Silence. Light coming in through the bullets holes look like laser rays piercing a cloud of dust. As soon at the bullets stop, AGUSTIN takes off Sean's balaclava, pulls out a small medical kit, and injects him with morphine. COMMANDO 1, having opened a compression pad, can only watch hopeless at the futility of any medical aide.

Then, OFFSTAGE, the squeal of amplifier being turned on.

MALE VOICE ON A LOUD SPEAKER *(OFFSTAGE)*
¡Están completamente rodeados! ¡Salgan con las manos en alto! *[You're completely surrounded! Come out with your hands up!]*

Silence. AGUSTIN takes of his mask. His face is contoured with shock and grief. He looks down at Sean's torn body as if not believing his own eyes. Only Sean's gasping moans break the silence. All eyes are glued on Agustin.

SEAN *(GASPING IN PAIN)*
Booby-trapped from the inside! A trap! They were waiting for us!

LOUD SPEAKER *(HEAVY SPANISH ACCENT)*
You are completely surrounded! There is no way out! Throw out your weapons and come out with your hands up or we will blow up the building!

COMMANDO 1 *(WITH COOL PROFESSIONALISM)*
Sir, your orders, sir. *(Agustin doesn't respond, a beat)*

LOUD SPEAKER
This is your last chance! Surrender immediately! *(a beat)*

COMMANDO 1 *(HINT OF NERVOUSNESS)*
Sir?

ROJAS *(A LOOK OF VICTORY)*
We had a tip you were coming. There's no way out.

McCORMICK moves over and stares at Agustin.

McCORMICK *(DESPAIRING)*
This is suicide! We're trapped here! *(then)* We have to give up!

AGUSTIN looks at him, anger rising. Then he violently pushes McCormick away.

AGUSTIN *(RESOLUTE, AT McCORMICK)*
We're not going to surrender and we are not going to die here!

Then, AGUSTIN goes over near the entrance door and climbs on a box to get near a window.

AGUSTIN *(SHOUTS OUT)*
Listen up! We have dead… we have wounded… and we have hostages! We need more time!

The loud speaker picks the muffled sound of men discussing this over. A beat.

LOUD SPEAKER

You have ten minutes and counting!

AGUSTIN *(AT COMMANDO 1)*

Decorate this door.

Without hesitation, COMMANDO 1 proceeds to set up a couple of trip-wired grenade booby traps on the door. AGUSTIN walks over to Sean, kneels down and grabs his hand in his.

SEAN *(TEARS)*

(grabbing hold of Agustin's shirt in a spasm of pain) Tino, don't let me die like this! *(Agustin tries to pull away free but Sean's grip is strong)* You are my one and only friend... *(he lets go)*

AGUSTIN moves back and begin to hyperventilate staring at Sean in horror. Then he pulls his head back and lets out a long wailing cry. Once his anxiety is released, he stops. His breathing begins to normalise, and his face becomes calm, expressionless. He pulls out his pistol and moves closer to Sean.

SEAN *(SMILING AT HIM)*

You never told me your real name.

AGUSTIN *whispers in his ear, then shoots him in the head. Then, he gets up and signals the two commandos to approach him.*

AGUSTIN

Move him away and find cover on this side.

As the commandos begin to move Sean's body away, AGUSTIN stops them, pulls a grenade from his belt and gives it to one of them. The commando nods and they proceed with his order: booby-trap the body.

AGUSTIN *(ADJUSTING THE HEADPHONE)*

Panthers, this is Tiger 1, do you copy? *(then)* Panther 6, do you have a clear shot? *(then)* We don't have a choice, just do it! Both of you, on my signal, five second delay -do you copy? Stand by.

Then, AGUSTIN kneels next to the hostages and faces Rojas.

AGUSTIN

I want the disk, I want the location of the communication centre, and I want it now.

ROJAS *(WITH A SNEER)*

Fuck you!

AGUSTIN shoots him in the heart point blank. Then, before Rojas' body hits the floor, he moves to Hwan who is screaming terrified under his gag, and stares at him intently.

AGUSTIN *(IN KOREAN)**

Listen to me, do you speak English? *(Hwan calms down and nods)* Good, I'm going to remove this gag. Listen carefully. Understand? *(Hwan nods again, Agustin removes the gag and switches back to English)* Do you know where the communication centre is? - just nod: yes or no. *(Hwan nods)* Do you know where the disk is? *(another nod)* Good. *(then)* Do you have children? *(Hwan eyes open wide in surprise, and then he nods)* Me too. *(then)* Help me get the disk and you will see then again. I promise.

HWAN *(RESOLUTE NOD)*

Yes, I help you. *(satisfied, Agustin simply nods back)*

AGUSTIN *(AT THE OTHERS)*

Stay down and get ready to move!

McCORMICK *(APPREHENSIVE)*

You're not going to do what I think you're going to do, are you?

AGUSTIN *(MOVING OVER TO THE WINDOW)*

You can always walk out that door.

McCORMICK *(MUTTERS AND TAKES COVER)*

You're fucking crazy! I'm fucking crazy! Everyone is crazy!

AGUSTIN *(SHOUTS OUT)*

We are moving out! Don't shoot! We surrender! Do you hear? Don't shoot! *(mutters as he joins the others)* Fuck you all! *(then, adjusting his headphone)* This is Tiger I - ready? *(then)* Now!

AGUSTIN goes for cover, then comes the sound of a couple of explosions as Panther 3 blows up the electrical generators, killing the lights on the base. Five seconds after, Panther 6's missile blows a huge hole on the side-wall of the building scattering dust and debris everywhere. OFFSTAGE, the base is in chaos and confusion.

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* For dialogue in Korean turn to *Dialogue and Pronunciation Appendix* at the end of the play.

AGUSTIN *(MOVING OUT)*

Go! Hurry up!

THE MEN hurry out pass Agustin and exit through the breech. Before Agustin exits, he turns and gives Sean a final farewell look. Fade to black. A couple of beats later, the front door booby traps explode as unseen soldiers try to rush in.

END OF ACT III - SCENE 8

ACT III

SCENE 9

AGUSTIN'S RESORT SUITE – ONE WEEK LATER

Early evening. AGUSTIN arrived from his trip only minutes before. Sombre and exhausted by the ordeal, he lays on his bed sideways, legs dangling on the side, like a rag doll who just dropped. His eyes look up at the ceiling; his mind scans the past and replays events.

Enters GUNTHER -Agustin had left the door opened. He carries two coffees in disposable cups. Agustin turns his head toward him, no reaction.

GUNTHER

I brought you some coffee. *(Agustin sits up and takes the coffee)* I scheduled you for a physical. The doctor will be in to see you in the morning.

AGUSTIN *(FEELING TIRED AND DEPRESS)*

I'm fine.

GUNTHER

Don't argue. Drink your coffee. *(he sits on a nearby chair)*

AGUSTIN

What's going on?

GUNTHER *(SLIGHTLY ANNOYED)*

The place is crawling with suits. They couldn't wait to read McCormick's report so they decided to come and hear it themselves. He's doing the debriefing right now and hogging all the glory. *(takes a sip of his coffee, then)* You haven't said a word in days.

AGUSTIN

There's nothing to talk about.

GUNTHER

Anything I could do for you? I'm sure I can convince that nice girl, Jenny, to accompany you on a Key West vacation. She might be able to cheer you up. I have a feeling about this!

AGUSTIN

I'll tell you what you could do. Find that leak and let me handle it.

GUNTHER *(SHAKING HIS HEAD)*
It's part of the job, lad. Making it personal will only make you feel worse! I'll take care of the leak. You get yourself some rest.

Enter PETERS.

PETERS *(EXCITED)*
I'd figured you two would be hiding in here. *(going over to Agustin and patting him on the back)* That's one hell of a job you guys did! Congratulations! There's a bunch of people out there that can't wait to meet you.

GUNTHER
Back off, Peters! He's not in the mood.

PETERS
Oh, yes... of course. I'll...ah, tell them something.

AGUSTIN
Tell'em I died!

Enters McCORMICK carrying a large envelope. He remains listening by the entrance.

PETERS *(AT GUNTHER)*
Is he going to be all right?

GUNTHER
Oh, yes, he'll be fine. *(then)* Now, Peters, why don't you move along and give us some space? This job isn't over until all the loose ends are nicely wrapped.

PETERS
You boys need not worry about it. We're taking care of it.

GUNTHER
What are you saying, Peters?

McCORMICK *(CUTTING IN)*
That we found the leaks -all of them. *(he closes the door and then passes Gunther the envelope)* It's all here.

GUNTHER takes the envelope, opens it and goes over its content. A beat. McCORMICK looks at Agustin.

AGUSTIN *(INPATIENT)*
And?

PETERS
Three people. A team of cleaners took them out a day after you left.

AGUSTIN
Who were they?

GUNTHER *(HAVING READ AND SEEN ENOUGH)*
Agustin, let them deal with it! You've done enough.

AGUSTIN *(ADAMANT)*
Who?

McCORMICK *(SIGHS, NO WAY AROUND IT)*
Two on the outside, they acted as go-betweens. The third was one of the staff –a cook. He was selling them information. Probably had no idea what they were using it for.

AGUSTIN
That would account for the leak on Sergio's team. But Rojas knew we were coming. *(then)* You missed someone. *(turning to McCormick)* Someone close.

GUNTHER *(RISING FROM THE CHAIR)*
It's better that you don't know.

AGUSTIN
I have a right to know! People died because of it!

McCORMICK
Listen to Gunther. You wouldn't want to dirty your hands in this.

AGUSTIN
I have Sean's blood all over them! You better tell me now before I go and find out myself!

For a moment no one says a word. PETERS and McCORMICK simply stare at the floor. Then, GUNTHER hands Agustin a photograph. AGUSTIN looks at the picture and his heart skips a beat.

AGUSTIN *(SOFTLY)*
Oh, God…

GUNTHER
It's all here. There's no mistake.

McCORMICK

We have her under surveillance. *(then, baffled)* Why did she do it? We haven't been able to establish any connection or motive. It doesn't make sense.

AGUSTIN

When will you pick her up?

PETERS

Tomorrow morning. She has no idea we're on to her and we're hoping for a last minute confession.

Enraged by Peter's callousness, AGUSTIN launch forward grabbing him by the neck and cursing as he squeezes it. Gunther and McCormick pull him away and Peters cowards away gasping for air and massaging his neck.

PETERS

He's not going to be a problem, is he?

GUNTHER *(DISGUSTED AND ENRAGED)*

Get out! Both of you, get out!

McCORMICK and PETERS exit. AGUSTIN remains distant, quiet. GUNTHER tries to think of something to say but there is nothing he can say. He just feels helpless.

AGUSTIN

Just when you think you have no more heart to break, someone finds a little piece that still hurts. *(then)* What will they do to her? *(but he knows)*

GUNTHER *(DISHEARTEN)*

It's out of our hands! There's nothing I can do about it and even if I could, I wouldn't put a stop to it. The minute she sold us out she signed her death warrant.

AGUSTIN looks around in mounting anguish knowing that Gunther is right and that he will not be able to stop it. He sits on the bed and drops his face into his hands gasping for air as he clings to his sanity. And, as he begins to accept the harsh reality, his trembling gradually subsides and his hands come down revealing a face that holds no expression, only coldness. Then he unzips his bag laying next to the bed, pulls out a pistol and inserts a full clip.

AGUSTIN *(GLANCING AT GUNTHER)*

You're right. She's dead. But I will get to her before those pigs have their way with her.

GUNTHER feels a chill as understanding dawns on him. This side of Agustin he has never seen before and it scares him.

GUNTHER

Pack your bags! I'm getting you out of here!

AGUSTIN

No! I have to finish this.

GUNTHER

Agustin, you're not a killer!

AGUSTIN

What choice do I have? If I go this nightmare is going to hound me for the rest of my life.

GUNTHER *(FIRM)*

This is different! (then) You still love her.

AGUSTIN *(HE EXPLODES IN AGONY)*

Then what's the way out? Tell me! *(unable to hold back his frustration, he cocks and gun and in one swift motion, puts the barrel to his head and cries out)*
-Is this it? *(silence)*

GUNTHER *(VOICE LOW BUT EVEN)*

Think of your children. *(then he slowly reaches for the gun and takes it away)*

AGUSTIN *(EXPLAINS SOFTLY)*

I don't want her to suffer. *(then)* I'll make it quick.

GUNTHER

If you do this you will kill both of you.

AGUSTIN *(ALMOST A WHISPER)*

I've been dead for years. *(then)* Please…

GUNTHER *(NODS, SAD SMILE)*

I can not help you, but I will not stop you.

GUNTHER throws the gun on top of the bed. He looks once more into Agustin's eyes, then turns around and exits.

FADE OUT TO BLACK

FADE IN – LATER IN THE DAY

AGUSTIN is laying on the bed, reclining against the headboard, his countenance sad and lost in thought. Then he glances up as someone puts a key in the doorknob and works the lock. He remains immobile and waits.

Enter HELENA, nervous and full of regret. She closes the door and leans against it. She looks at Agustin with fear in her eyes. He doesn't move or react, but in spite of the sad and weary look, he appears unharmed.

HELENA

Agustin, you're back!

AGUSTIN

Is good to be back. *(then)* Happy to see me?

Helena feels as if a weight has lifted from her. Overjoyed, she goes to him and hugs him, but he doesn't respond.

HELENA *(MOVING BACK)*

What's wrong?

AGUSTIN

Our boys' night out turned out to be most eventful.

HELENA

I... I was afraid you… And where's Sean? I haven't seen him yet.

AGUSTIN *(REVEALING NOTHING)*

He was detained. You'll see him soon enough.

HELENA *(LEANING AGAINST HIM)*

I only care that you're here. *(with remorse)* I was afraid that I wouldn't see you again.

AGUSTIN *(CONTROLLED)*

I will stay until the morning. Then I'm gone.

HELENA

Take me with you! I'm sick of this place! We can travel together and have some time to us. *(then)* Tino, all I want is another chance.

AGUSTIN

I am only a poor artist struggling to make ends meet.

HELENA

Let me take care of you. I have money. We can go to Spain. I have a house near the ocean. You'll love it there. You can paint during the day, and in the evenings we can dance and laugh -and have each other. Wouldn't that be great?

AGUSTIN

Why me, Helena. After all these years…

HELENA

I can't get over you.

HELENA looks at him with dreams in her eyes, his full of pain. Agustin wants to feel hate and disgust, but all the feelings he's having are of love and desire.

HELENA *(IMPLORING LOOK)*

Tino? *(she gives him a kiss, he doesn't respond, then whispers)* I know you want me.

Helena kisses him again, gently at first, and then, as love and desperation take over he gives in to passion. As they are consumed by each other, the song "Vivo por Ella" [I live for her] by Andrea Bocelli and Marta Sánchez plays in the background and continues playing throughout the scene (till the beginning of the next scene).

FADE OUT TO BLACK

Then, the light of the LAMP on the NIGHT TABLE fades in illuminating the room in soft light. Agustin and Helena are in bed, nude under the covers after making love.

HELENA lays asleep, face down, with her hands under her pillow. AGUSTIN lays awake, his back against the headboard, staring at nothing, his eyes drained of life. HELENA stirs, stretches her body in delight and her hands move out searching for Agustin. Without opening her eyes, she smiles wide and rests her head on his lap.

HELENA *(DREAMY AND HAPPY)*

Hum... Tino, since the first moment, I've been in love with you. *(she falls back to sleep)*

AGUSTIN plants a kiss on her and sobs quietly -bitterly, tears running down his cheek. Then, his right-hand searches under his pillow as his left-hand reaches out and turns off the night lamp. The room goes dark. A couple of beats. Then, a shot is fired; the light of the flash reveals Helena's head jerking forward when the pistol held behind the base of her head goes off. Total darkness; emotions intensified by the song.

END OF ACT III - SCENE 9

ACT III

SCENE 10 -- EPILOGUE

ENTRYWAY TO AN AUDITORIUM – CSU – FIVE YEARS LATER

THE ENTRYWAY is lit in dimmed lights. It leads from the lobby to one of the auditorium's stage entrances. The entrance door is opened allowing the bright light and sounds from the auditorium into the entryway.

A PRESENTATION is taking place at the Cleveland State University student auditorium. The guest speaker is Agustin, a controversial artist of rising popularity.

Enter GUNTHER. He walks slowly, with difficulty and with the help of a cane. His health has rapidly deteriorated making him age beyond his years. He stands out of the way, aside from the entrance, not wanting to be seen. He listens at the exchange taking place inside the auditorium reacting with a smile at some of the comments.

OFFSTAGE *(THE LAUGHTER DIES DOWN)*

AGUSTIN *(V.O., CONTINUES)*

Yes?

FEMALE STUDENT *(V.O.)*

Hi! First I wanted to say that I'm a great fan of yours and I'm just thrilled to meet you.

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*

Thank you.

FEMALE STUDENT

I wanted to know if you could answer this question for me: How do you know if you've got talent?

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*

(sounding amused) My dear, I have no idea. *(laughter, then)* It was Michelangelo who said: -"A man paints with his brains and not his hands." I happened to agree with him. I paint not because I have talent, or a magic formula or a supernatural gift. What I do is the result of reflection, study and a lot of practice; of inspiration, spontaneity and talent I know nothing. *(pause, then)* Yes?

MALE STUDENT *(V.O., PRESSING)*

But what about art for art's sake? What do you call an artist who paints with his feelings and simply lets his creativity take over?

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*
I call him a decorator. *(laughter, then)* -Or, an amateur whose work sells. *(laughter followed by applause)*

MODERATOR *(V.O.)*
Students, we have time for one more question. *(collective moan)* Maybe two, sorry. We have already extended our time by thirty minutes and I would like to thank our guest for being so gracious. *(applause)* Let's see... You!

FEMALE STUDENT 2 *(V.O.)*
The paintings in this show are very different from your previous work. They are very disturbing. What made you decide to do a series on this particular theme?

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*
A friend once commented that violence is fine against simple folk ten thousand miles away, but the minute it happens in your backyard, it becomes shocking injustice. I think this is wrong. No one can terrorise a nation if the entire world is watching. My paintings are intended to cut the distance and deliver this message to your doorstep: today's world is our backyard.

MALE STUDENT *(V.O.)*
What would be the best way to appreciate and understand these paintings?

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*
Hum, that's a tough question. *(then)* What's your name?

MALE STUDENT *(V.O., SURPRISED)*
Me? It's Mark.

AGUSTIN *(V.O.)*
And Mark, how old are you?

MALE STUDENT *(V.O.)*
I'm twenty-three.

AGUSTIN
Well Mark, my advice would be for you to get to know your neighbours in the house next door, then on the next block, the next city, and in other countries. Find out what their problems, their happiness and their concerns are. Then wait until someone breaks your heart and see my paintings again while you still hurt. *(then)* Thank you very much.

THE AUDITORIUM erupts in applause and then the crowd leaves. The auditorium lights are dimmed. Enter AGUSTIN, some grey showing. When he notices Gunther, he stops.

GUNTHER

Stop staring at me; I'm not a ghost yet!

AGUSTIN

Mr. Gunther, what the hell are you doing here?

GUNTHER

I got sick of hearing about this famous artist so I decided to see what that raucous was all about. It turned out to be you!

AGUSTIN goes to him with a smile, extends his hand, and after a firm handshake, they embrace.

GUNTHER

How are you, lad?

AGUSTIN

I am well. And you?

GUNTHER

I'm on my last mission. Back home, in Israel.

AGUSTIN

Your last mission? You old fox, you'll never retire!

GUNTHER

I'm being retired! -Cancer. Old mercenaries don't fade away; we simply die. *(then)* My last wish is to be buried next to my son. So I came to say goodbye, and perhaps, clear the blood between us.

AGUSTIN

The blood between us was cleared many years ago. Everything I am, I owe to you.

GUNTHER

The nightmares?

AGUSTIN

Only that I live and prosper. But I'm at peace. I'm content. So I wait, and confess my sins through my paintings. It helps.

GUNTHER

Then perhaps one day you will even find happiness... for a little while at least.

AGUSTIN

Perhaps.

GUNTHER pats him on the shoulder, smiles his goodbye, and walks away. But before he exits, he stops and turns around.

GUNTHER
Oh, I forgot to tell you. You have an admirer that came to see you -an art lover. I told her to wait until I was done. She's still waiting.

AGUSTIN *(SIGHS)*
Then I better go see her.

GUNTHER
You don't have to. She's right behind you.

AGUSTIN turns around and Jennifer steps out of the shadows through the auditorium entrance. She stops, smiles, and looks at him through misty eyes. He stares at her and tries to speak but words don't come out. He turns to Gunther with a look of wonderment. Gunther grins.

GUNTHER
Jenni has been a great help to me these past few years. I promised her a nice European vacation and thought that perhaps you could take her there.

AGUSTIN looks at Jennifer.

JENNIFER
You also have to take me dancing.

AGUSTIN looks back a Gunther with a questioning stare.

GUNTHER *(SHRUGS)*
Agustin, you and I, we lived a hundred lives, that's quite a gift. *(then, nodding toward Jennifer)* Don't be afraid to live once more.

AGUSTIN turns to Jennifer.

JENNIFER'S lips form a gentle smile as she moves slowly forward. She stops in front of him and they gaze at each other, getting reacquainted with the years. Agustin tries to smile but the pain and anguish kept locked within for so long betrays him. She embraces him and then slowly he returns the embrace, and they hold each other. GUNTHER witnesses the reunion in silence. He smiles and looks at them with hope and compassion, and then walks away.

THE END

DIALOGUE AND SPANISH PRONUNCIATION

To facilitate the pronunciation of Spanish (and Korean) names, words and dialogue into English, I have developed my own method for the non-Spanish speaker. Basically, you don't need to understand Spanish in order to be able to read or pronounce it correctly. After all, Puerto Rican students (grades 1 through 12) do it all the time with English without a clue of what they are saying! All you need to know are the pronunciation rules. If you follow the simple rules listed below, apply them to the Spanish dialogue -and practice- you will quickly master Spanish –at least what's required for in the script.

Rule 1

Spanish is pronounced *exactly* as written! All consonants and vowels will always maintain their sound. Their arrangement and combination in syllables and words will not change this fact.

Rule 2

Spanish vowels are almost the equivalent of English short vowels. And, when two vowels appear together, they both retain their original sound.

Vowel sounds in Spanish

a	as in *f<u>a</u>ther*
e	as in *r<u>e</u>d*, *p<u>e</u>t* or *f<u>ea</u>ther*
i	as in *mach<u>i</u>ne* or *p<u>ie</u>ce*
o	as in *c<u>u</u>t* or *r<u>ou</u>gh*
u	as in *b<u>oo</u>t* or *l<u>u</u>te*
y	identical to the Spanish **i** when not at the beginning of a word

Rule 3

Spanish consonants are basically identical to English consonants, except for a few important differences:

g	like the English ***g*** as in *gun* if followed by *a, ue, o,* or *u.* like the English ***h*** as in *hat* if followed by *i* or *e.*
h	is *always* silent. Ignore it!
j	becomes the English ***h*** as in *ha!*
y	becomes the English ***j*** as in *jump* when used at the beginning of a word or if followed by *i* or *e* in the middle of a word
ñ	like ***ny*** in *canyon*

Rule 4

Spanish accents mark the syllable receiving the force of pronunciation in a word. The accent always goes on a vowel. For example: in the word *Café* it is the second syllable that is emphasized when pronounced.
When no accent is present, pronounce the word evenly. Sometimes, the accent symbol is not needed to mark the pronunciation emphasis on a word. It's all part of the sentence rhythm. Since it takes a while for non-Spanish ears to get use to this rhythm, I have accented most of the words on the *Names and Words* listed below.

Names and Words

Ave María Purísima	A/ve Ma/rí-a Pu/rí/si/ma
Agustin	A/gus/tín
Tino (short for Agustin)	Tí/no
Cabrón	Ka/brón
Caballero	Ka/ba/yé/ro
Cállense	Ká/yen/se
Camacho	Ca/má/cho
Capitán	Ka/pi/tán
Casiano	Ca/si-a/no
Cojones	Ko/jó/nes
Coño	Kó-nyo
Coronel	Ko/ro/nél
Cuco (short for Casiano)	Kú/ko
Chewy (nickname for José)	Ché/wy
Elena (Spanish for Helena)	E/lé/na
Hombre	Om/bre
Julio	Jú/li-o
La Tasca	La -Tás/ka
Mercado	Mer/ká/do
Montenegro	Món/te-né/gro
Pendeja	Pen/dé/ja
Puta	Pú/ta
Rojas	Ró/jas
Sandinista	San/di/nís/ta
Señor	Se-nyór
Yi Sun Hwan	I/son/ju-án

Tutors

Go to the source! Find a Spanish speaker to read the lines, tape them, and imitate the sound and speech rhythm. But remember that Spanish accents are as varied as American English is from British English or Australian. For example: Puerto Rican Spanish is

sharper on the syllables and tends to roll the *r* more. Mexican and Central American Spanish has a more singsong quality to it and the ending word in a sentence tends to glide. Argentinean Spanish sounds a lot like Italian to the English ear and has a very elegant rhythm. Dominican Spanish is called "machine gun" Spanish because it is so fast one tends to catch only the last syllable or word in a sentence until your ear gets used to it. Castilian Spanish (most of Spain) is the *British* of Spanish. Let's not even go there.

Korean Dialogue for Act III, Scene 7, page 132

Unless you happen to be Korean, I doubt very much that you can say these lines without a lot of practice. But once you work at it, you can sound convincing. I have discovered that Korean vowel sounds closely correlate to Spanish vowels. So I have translated the English lines into Korean by writing the lines as
they would read in Spanish. Have fun.

AGUSTIN

Listen to me.	Yal dulr-ú se-ó.
Do you speak English?	Ion-ó Ja/chi/mí/ka?
Good.	Yo sú/mi/da.
I'm going to remove this gag.	Ye/kal-úl pul gue sú/mi/da,
Listen carefully.	Ye mar-úl yal dulr-ú se-ó.
Do you understand?	A chí gue/sú/mi/ka?

The Oscar Mayer song

When Agustin is in deep thought or distressed, he sings the *Oscar Mayer Wiener* song. It sounds the same in English or Spanish. However, this is more like an unconscious chant, not a Plácido Domingo recital! He is not even aware of it. The song is a mental and emotional defence, a way to focus and block away disturbing thoughts or difficult realities. It makes helps him reach a highly perceptive but relaxing state. □

PRODUCTION NOTES AND COMMENTARY

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Ethics

Death of a Mercenary *is a provoking play. It represents the darker side of the way things are -not the lighter side of the way things should be. Its subject matter is not appropriate for younger audience -or immature adults. It portrays a slice of American involvement in a not so distant period of our history. But that is also the attraction. How can these things happen in civilised society; how can cultured and educated people act with such barbarity? How does friendship, loyalty and love survive among violence, deceit, hatred and intrigue? These are the universal themes. Passion, romance, friendship, and survivor. This is what the* Death of a Mercenary *is all about.*

The play is like a comedy that turns into tragedy, ending with a glimmer of hope. The characters are not to be perceived as role models. They represent flawed individuals who defy convention. Yet some groups might take offence at the way –they might perceive- a character represents them. Hispanics will be outrage by the behaviour of Latin characters in spite of having a "Puerto Rican Yanqui" as one of the key leads. Some women will feel insult at the way women are depicted. Gay groups might comment that another key character -the son of a preacher man- *is not gay enough; and still other will be outraged at the way their government is portrayed. But* all *will be disturbed by the play in their own private way.*

Ethnic and national backgrounds

The characters in *Death of a Mercenary* represent seven Latin American nationalities of specific or mixed racial characteristic -European, African or Native American, North Americans proceeding from various regions of the United States, a European with of dual citizenship -both British and Israeli, and a Korean National.

Accents

Careful attention should be given to casting all the roles with actors that closely resemble the defined nationalities of the characters, especially with actors portraying Latin characters. There is no stereotypical or generic Latin look that could realistically represent Latin Americans from one country to the next. Their looks, accents and behaviours –while retaining common Spanish cultural roots- vary from one country to another. If Latin actors are not available to play Latin roles, then, a strongly suggest that non-Latin actors cast in Latin roles *say their lines straight!* Let me put it another way: *No fake accents!* To Latin American viewers, *this practice is INSULTING!* Can non-Latin actors do good Spanish-Latin accents? Possibly, but rarely. Let's take an example from the movies. In my experience, Al Pacino, Armand Asante and Marisa Tomei, are the only actors who have managed to play in Spanish-Latino roles with convincing Latin accents. Pacino's Cuban is passable, Marisa's is excellent; Asante, weather playing a Cuban or a Puerto Rican, is impressive. Has Meryl Streep even done a Latin?

Number of characters

There are eight main characters (two female and six male), nine secondary characters limited to a specific act, seven support characters with little or no dialogue, eight offstage (never seen) character voice-overs, and a number of extras for the Tasca Club scenes in Act II.

The following is a listing of all the main characters, and secondary characters that can be played by the same actor:

Main Characters

Actor 1	Agustin
Actor 2	Mr. Gunther
Actor 3	Helena, Sandinista Rebel 1 (if female)
Actor 4	Jim
Actor 5	Sean
Actor 6	Camacho
Actor 7	McCormick
Actor 8	Jennifer, Military Aide

Secondary Characters

Actor 9	Casiano, Rojas
Actor 10	Freddie, Sandinista Rebel 1, Commando 2
Actor 11	Chewy, Sandinista Rebel 2, Yi Sun Hwan
Actor 12	Captain Mercado, Sergio
Actor 13	Maria, Commando 1
Actor 14	Julio, El Coronel, Peters

Due to the specific theme and nature of this play, most parts are for male characters with the exception of the three female roles and about fifty percent of the extras. Individual notes on all the main characters are included in the last entry.

Staging

The author, being both a painter and designer by profession, wrote complete and extensive description of the various sets, props, fashions, times and locations involved in the production. One of the reasons for such elaborate descriptions was to provide the actors and production staff with an accurate background of the actual locations inhabited by the characters.

Another reason was trying to correct the stereotypical notion that Latin American locations all look a Chi-chi's restaurant. People of Latin American origin or those who have travelled through that part of the continent will know these differences. People who don't will be informed.

There is a total of thirteen different location scenes in the play, nine of those interiors and five exteriors. These locations are essential to the story. However, a good set designer with some ingenuity and creativity can successfully recreate the scene locations in a black-box stage with the use of minimal props. This is so because the main staging element used in the play is lights and sound. This is especially true of all the exterior scenes.

Music

Creating the right atmosphere is essential in this production. It draws from the viewer's mind memories and experiences specific to determined time periods thus supplementing the visual illusion and allowing for effective transitions between scenes. Sound and music have been used to this effect. For example, is hard for a viewer not to identify a particular Michael Jackson song with the 80's or a disco song by the Bee-Gees with the 70's.

The lyrics to the Spanish songs used in the play are included in this manuscript along with an English translation by the author. Besides aiding transitions between scene, they spice the setting of certain ones. For example: the Ruben Blades song -*Buscando América*, was like a battle cry for Latin Americans during the turbulent 80's. It embodied their social struggle for peace, liberty and the fight against injustice and oppression *(I took artistic license and used it to set up scene 2 of Act I in spite of it's 1977 setting, some years ahead from it's original release)*. This song is not only a national anthem to Latin America; it is also one hot song to dance to!

The English speaker will not understand the lyric -unless they read the translations perhaps from a program. But while understanding of the words would enhance the enjoyment of the play, it is not necessarily a negative for those who can not. This is so because the music of all the selected songs has such evocative quality that it assists and

carries the mood of the action being performed. For example: the bedroom scene where the Camilo Sesto song -*Memorias*- is played, beatifically builds up the intense heat of the scene until its final climax -no pun intended.

Sound

Sound in the play *is* a main character! It completes the picture and ads spectacle to a scene. For example: helicopters flying by, troop movements, fights, crowds and so forth. Sometimes sound is used in a symbolic way, like the sound of rain. Not only does it add authenticity to some locales, it is also used to heighten or regulated a distinct frame of mind in a scene. Pay particular attention to battle sounds (each weapon has a distinct sound). See next entry.

Stage combat

Gunfire and the sound of battle are an intrinsic part of this play. While competent direction and staging will place the audience in the middle of the action -so to speak, the battles take place offstage! This is not to say that the actors do not participate in them. They simply fight offstage enemies.

Death of a Mercenary is not a play that glorifies war; it exposes it for what it is -brutal and terrifying. The sounds of stage combat must convey this. They have to be loud to be believable. If you need proof of this, rent the movie *'Bonnie and Clyde'* and you will get the right idea.

Weapons

To a modern audience familiar with the look of weapons (as seen a zillion times on movies and television) than with the face of their current Secretary of State, a Russian AK-47 has such a distinct look -and sound, that it will never be confuse for an American assault rifle. The weapons used in the play must look and be handled in an authentic manner.

Fortunately, theatre rental houses in various parts of the country have firearms available that are identical to the real thing. They produce sound and flash when fired but no ammunition comes out of them! A real weapon (even one that fires blanks) must never be used in this play -or any other play! Unfortunately, renting is expensive. My suggestion is to make your own weapon props using the real thing as your model. Notice that the play names exactly what kinds of weapons are used and by whom. Make the weapons as realistic-looking as possible and let sound effects do the rest.

The characters in the play are armed in accurate-historical-manner. During the Somoza period of the revolution, as portrayed in the play (all of Act I and II), rebels had access to an eclectic collection of antiquated guns. Basically, anything that could be obtained on the streets or the black market, such as revolvers, shotguns, hunting guns and World War II (or WW I) vintage rifles or carbines. Cuba, Panama and Costa Rica provided support to the rebels. But the shipments of large quantities or weapons did not happen until the

fall of Somoza. Except for the Cubans (who provided a great number of military advisors after the Sandinista victory), no other groups had AK-47 Russian Assault rifles. The Cubans did provide a shipment of FAL rifles from Venezuela. The Fabrique National FAL rifle had become the standard in over 90 armies around the world, among these: Great Britain, Venezuela and Argentina.

The Nicaraguan National Guard (Somoza's men) had M-16's in stock, but in accordance to agreements made with the United States, could not use then against their own people (a rule not kept by some units during the final days of the revolution). So, the guard was equipped with M-1 Garand rifles (WW II U.S. army issue) and carbines. Provisions of military equipment were obtained from Israel but delivery of their famed Israeli Galil Assault rifle was reversed by the United States. During the final Act of the play, mercenary characters use the latest in gear and weapons, dictated by individual preferences. They could afford it.

Torture and death

A lot of people die in this play. There are one torture scene and three death scenes on stage. The deaths are violent and graphic but the viewer does not see them! Let's begin with the torture scene: when the two prisoners are being interrogated, they are in a separate room, the entrance covered by a canvas drop. The light of a lantern placed on the ground project high shadows into the back wall and silhouettes on the canvas! The audience sees everything as it happens, but it is their imagination that furnishes the details.

The death of Camacho, while suspenseful, happens inside a hut. Never seen. The death of Helena happens in the dark, visible only by the flash of the gun being fired. There is enough time to exchange the actors' head by a dummy head -in the dark, to avoid flash burns. This only leaves the most dramatic and climatic death of all: Sean's death.

How do you blow a body on stage? While there are several ways to blow a person on stage in a manner that appears real, I will only give you a few hints -you might come up with a better idea. But first consider this: the actor playing Sean is at the furthest point from the audience picking a lock before the door explodes sending him against the wall. Other actors playing in the foreground are distracting some of the viewers' attention. Also, no one is expecting an explosion to happen. Finally, when the explosion occurs, the 'powder flash' will blind the audience for a second or two.

With all these things considered, let us now reconstruct the sequence. Actor moves to locked door, he picks the lock, he signals when lock is opened and receives signal to open door and enter. As he pulls the door open, a bomb explodes; the force of the explosion throws the actor against a wall, his body burning by the flash. Pretty exciting but remember, it's all an illusion!

Here is one way of doing it: Actor goes towards door -obstacles and supply crates and containers are position on such a way as to obstruct some of the view, specially a few feet

off the ground. Here, a switch takes place! A dummy operated with rods -from below, will work the lock while the actor -on the ground, switches to the 'after explosion' make-up suit.

Then, dummy makes hand signal -since the actor is wearing a balaclava his face is not seen! Next, as the door opens a loud explosion sound with simultaneous powder flash occurs, and (if desired to enhance the illusion) a fireball from an offstage fire jet. And as the flash ignites, the dummy -which has been rigged to an offstage line or catapult, is pulled against the wall and then falls onto the ground -which as it was mentioned before, has its view obstructed by crates and containers. Finally, the other actors pull the Sean character to safety, makeup in place, ready prepared sections of his makeup suit on fire.

Add to the sequence the chaos that follows and the viewer will not have much time to think about it. Only a very real and vivid impression of the explosion sequence will remain in his mind. You can figure out the other technical problems in the scene like, for example, bullets holes materializing on the garage doors or bullets ricocheting inside the warehouse. Again, remember that sound is *the* key element.

Makeup and costume changes

The secret to fast transitions is to use doubles. This is especially practical when makeup changes have to be done. For example: A double can play the character of Agustin after the torture scene in Act II because he is under heavy makeup, unrecognisable. In the last scene of Act II, the actor playing Agustin enters Camacho's hut. But a double can be the one coming out because he will never face or speak to the audience during the rest of the scene, thus allowing the Agustin actor to be ready for the next scene. Staging and creatively go hand in hand.

Historical Locations

The locations mentioned in the play are real places. The model for the setting in Act I– scene 1, is Trinity College in Washington DC, a stone's throw from the Capital Building. Trinity, an all-girls college, rents dorms to students (including male students) from other internship programs. The dorms are tiny. But the campus grounds are peaceful, beautiful and well kept. It has an excellent track for jogging around the soccer field.

The Dance-club in Panama City, Panama (Act I) is one of the many popular night-spots in the city. The name of the club -"La Tasca" - is fictional. The description of the club and its ambience is pretty accurate. It should be noted that the atmosphere in Latin clubs is a completely different experience than most clubs in the United States. Latin Americans love to dress-up, sing, dance and party like one big happy family.

The Nicaraguan Village as described in Act II, is a recreation of one the many rural villages around the town of St. Mateo in Southern Nicaragua, near the Costa Rican Border. It does rain a lot in the region. Also, there is a strong Evangelical following

among the people of Nicaragua, as well as missionary groups from the United States and Latin American countries -like Puerto Rico.

The jungle, Act II-scene 3, is a rain forest. The only rain forest in the U.S. park service is *"El Yunque",* translated: the anvil, in Puerto Rico. But not even El Yunque compares to the Central American jungle. For one thing, there are no snakes in Puerto Rico. It rains every single day in the rain forest. And it's hot. And humid! Also, a sounds of a tropical rain forest are completely different to other forests.

The towns of Siuna, Bonanza and Rosario are real and exactly as describe in Act III, including the mines, Czech mining engineers, military bases, Soviet mobile radar installations and all. In the fall of 1987 the U.S. backed Contras, led a CIA planned assault on these towns destroying the warehouses and much equipment before returning to their bases across the Honduran border. Unfortunately for the planners, the military and political impact of this offensive on the region was completely overshadowed by the eruption of the Iran-Contra scandal in the United States. The press didn't even took notice. This spelled the end of the Contras and a shift on U.S. policy in Central America.

Final observations: Rhodesian pilots were employed to fly provisions to the Contra camps; the Honduran military could not always be relied on (I'm being kind here); drug smugglers did ferry weapons for concessions; the Yaqui and Miskito Indians are some tough hombres; and Sasha Montenegro (Mexican starlet), was a goddess.

Real-life Characters

Some of the characters in *Death of a Mercenary* represent real life counter parts that the author knew in various degrees of acquaintance. Some characters represent a combination of counterparts and others are purely fictional. What follows is a description on the background, behaviour and physical resemblance of the individuals who serve as models for the main characters.

Mr. Gunther was a Jew who, having lost his parents and most of his family in Germany during the holocaust, was brought to England where a family of economic means and social standing adopted him. A man of impeccable taste and education, he was groomed to enter into the family's publishing business. But after a falling out with the family (or because of it), he enlisted in the Royal British Air Force and afterward settled in Israel where he served for Israeli military intelligence. After leaving the army, he became a weapons dealer and military advisor.

Physically, Gunther was a handsome man of medium height and weight with a Peter O'Toole quality about him, especially in his speech and mannerism. He combed his fair hair sideways and always kept it in a military cut. His eyes were his most distinct features, crystalline like water. They could be cold, unreadable and terrifying at times. Gunther was left-handed and, on the field, always carried a side arm and wore aviator glasses. He spoke fluently in several languages, loved cigars, French art and good gin. While known to have several mistresses, he was attached to none.

He was a man of action in every way, with few scruples or reservations. Those who knew him best found a kinder side to him centred on a deeply troubled mind. He rarely lost his temper but when he did there would be hell to pay. He was not a practicing Jew and professed to be a 'disillusioned' atheist. He cared deeply about the men and women working under him -a very limited and restricted number, and took great pains for their safety, comfort and anonymity. Their loyalty to him was fanatical.

He was suspected to be very wealthy but his ways were always simple. A great deal about him remains a mystery and he never disclosed much about his past. He was only known by his nom de guerre. He retired to Israel and shortly thereafter died of cancer.

Jim is very much as described in the play. At almost six feet in height, he was considered to be a tall man by local standards. His hair was dark brown, thin at the top but long and held tight in a ponytail. He smoked cigars and pot (lots of it!); he had been a hippie during the 60's. He was generous to a fault, especially with money. Children adored him. He spoke Spanish with a slight Castilian accent, having spent time in Spain as a student. The locals always referred to him with the traditional hidalgo title of *"Don".* This seems appropriate because he reminded one of a benevolent conquistador.

Jim was a man's man despite his homosexuality. Even though he was opened about it, he always acted in a very virile manner that made people wonder about him. He had an engaging personally and a wonderful smile though his teeth were tobacco stained -he was terrified of dentists. Women considered him very handsome and love to flirt with him. Some even claimed that he was a perfect lover! When confronted, he only laughed and made you wonder more.

He was also intimately religious; his father had been a missionary near the town of San Carlos in Nicaragua. This part of him only surfaced when he was drunk, which only happened in his own privacy. He enjoyed gambling and was involved in minor illicit activities. His favourite time-out spot was Costa Rica where he owned a wonderful beachfront property. He loved to entertain, cook barbecues, and play practical jokes. When he was killed, his funeral was that of a Robin Hood.

Sean can only be described as a cross between the Benny Hill's soccer playing character with the carrot top hair and the shinning tooth, and actor Gary Busey. He had a barrel of a voice, was the soul of any party, and yes -he idolized Elvis! While two inches short of six foot in height, Sean was built like a tank and had the funny habit of unconsciously fixing his moustache with his thumb and finger. In his eyes, he was the Irish version of Errol Flynn and god's gift to women. He loved to read movie magazines and comic books. Pornography was an addiction.

Once at tavern in a small southern town near Chiapas, Mexico, an aggravated husband emptied the place while wildly shooting bullets from an old revolver. Naturally, he was shooting at Sean who was about to get killed by his own companions cowering behind a turned table. It seemed that during one of Sean's conquests, there had been a -misunderstanding. Luckily, the gun ran out of bullets and a strategic retreat was made.

While the bedroom episode in the play is ascribed to Sean, it did happen exactly as told but to another friend -not in Panama, but in Miami. This time the father was not Panamanian, but Cuban.

Sean's temper was dangerous and explosive but he was like a kid around women and very courteous to older folk. When irked, he had this funny look that was almost cross-eyed, but which invited no laughs. He was a heavy drinker but never on a job. No one drank on duty -period. He spoke enough Spanish to get by, but with such a heavy American accent, that it was almost impossible not to laugh. On the field, Sean was a changed man, fearless, focus and unstoppable, always ready to get a friend out of a tight spot. His knowledge of weapons and explosives was uncanny. He loved the thrill. He was killed during a botched operation in El Salvador while working for another outfit.

Helena grew up in high society. She was the product of private boarding schools and spoke fluent French, Italian and -though heavily accented- passable English. When not away in school, she spend most her time on the family ranch. She adored horses and loved being a tomboy. Like most people in the higher echelons of Latin American society, her appearance was European but her temper very Latin.

Helena was a striking woman -beautiful, sensual, voluptuous and intelligent, at the time resembling actress Marisa Berenson as seen in the 1975 British film, Barry Lyndon. Her skin was very fair, her hair raven black, and her eyes -one of her most striking features, sparkling hazel -more yellow than green. Behind her back, many called her -*"la gata,"* the cat, a nickname that she detested.

While in college, she turned to radical politics and drugs. She also made a lot of friends among members of other important Latin American families, some of them with shady associations. Her high birth, connections and beauty (not to mention a fiery and independent spirit) allowed her to move with ease in the circle of the power elite -a fact that was exploited by Gunther. Her childhood and early teens were troubled, as portrayed in the play, while drugs -not alluded to in the story, made an already difficult personality even worst to contend with.

Once she stabbed an important political official who tried abusing her. Back then only her connections got her off the hook and the incident was kept quite. Gunther's intervention helped her with her drug problem, but she remained distant from most of her friends except for a limited few. During her off times, she developed an interest in art and literature and practiced painting for a while. She hated her image on film and always avoided being photographed. And yet, one of her most cherished possessions was a commissioned nude painting of herself that she keeps to this day.

While many find it difficult to accept a woman in a mercenary role, it was not uncommon to see many women as active combatants in Central America. After the fall of Somoza in Nicaragua, Helena returned home. In later years she married and moved to Europe. Later she divorced and remarried again. She still loves horses, but her latter passion became skiing.

McCormick is the personification of the many U.S. military advisors and intelligence officers in the region. Most of them spoke no Spanish and where not well liked because of their superior American mentality (a.k.a. racism). They had good reasons to watch their backs. They basically ran the Contras and exerted military and political influence in most of the nations in the region. While not allowed in combat missions, many of them not only went along, but also lead operations. Some even conducted *'business'* on the side. All, with few exceptions, were experienced and seasoned operatives. To many Central Americans, the U.S. military advisors were simply considered American mercenaries.

Agustin is a character based on two people. While having an age difference and coming from completely different backgrounds, they resembled each other enough to be confused for brothers. The resemblance went much deeper than just physical and by pure coincidence; they shared the same first name. What separated them was their politics, their material concerns -and Helena. Despite this, they remained best of friends until one was shot dead in a vendetta while visiting relatives. The Agustin in the play is a reconstruction of the qualities they both shared. Perhaps the most common attribute was their intense curiosity of life, an addiction to coffee and a love for "Star Trek."

Agustin always tried to talk his way out of difficult situations. He could turn on the charm on cue and imitate local accents. The bar scene in the play is based on this fact and took place under similar circumstances. He never smoke or drank, his only vice -besides coffee, were women. His favourite drink was pink lemonade! Through Gunther and Helena, he was exposed to some of the best private (really private) art collections in the region and received several portrait commissions from wealthy clients -though he never signed his work!

While not physically threatening, he had a Humphrey Bogart quality about him that inspired both respect and apprehension. He never missed anything, suited both by training and distrusting nature. He could take in a difficult situation and make crucial decisions in seconds. If the occasion required it, he could be ruthless. In difficult situations he had the unique quality of maintaining a cool head and a sharp clear mind. Even in the most humid heat he seem not to sweat. He avoided hospitals, funerals and weddings because they deeply disturbed him.

Agustin never considered himself handsome in any way -or ugly in any way, just an average guy. He was a man of medium frame and height. He skin burned easily so he avoided the sun whenever possible. At the time he wore his hair long, gathered in a ponytail, and streaked with lighter highlights when sunburned. He hated barbers because being brought up evangelical, his father always made him get crew cuts. Sometimes he was bearded, other times he simply kept a moustache. His face was Mediterranean but with high cheekbones and possibly a hint of Native American. He eyes were his most striking feature -penetrating, intense. His nose, which had been broken during a basketball game, added a certain character to his features.

While not shy, he displayed a reserved and quite manner in public that made him appear distant and aloof. But interestingly enough, this made him attractive to women - especially beautiful ones with which he was rarely intimidated. The fact that he was an artist -a fact that he exploited to his advantage only enhanced his charisma. At any rate, he enjoyed the company of women and they enjoyed his. His taste favoured brunettes because they seem mysterious to him. And he favoured intelligence over looks. All his intimate friends remained women even during the time of his relationship with Helena.

Perhaps it was only natural that Agustin and Helena became romantically involved. They complemented each other. Gunther joked that they were a male-female version of the same person. Their relationship was stormy from the beginning but lasted a couple of years. What finally brought them apart, besides differences in their moral convictions and detrimental lifestyle was her addiction. They met again in later years; however, while the attraction was still there, their lives were too much apart, as they have remained to this day.

Agustin's experiences in Central America, while not long in duration, cause a profound change in him. He changed from romantic and idealistic to being realistic and cynical. He lost friends (some before his eyes) while he alone, despite some injuries and several close calls, survived physically unscathed. Emotionally, his moods became extreme and his unpredictable nature edged on the suicidal. It would take years for him to finally focus his life and work out some of his inner demons. Gifted with a visual memory capable of recalling the smallest detail, he sometimes feels that his *gift* has only been a curse. □

Songs used in the play

All the songs mentioned in the play are from recollections by the author. All of them are under copyright by the writers, artists and producers. They have been translated by the author for the benefit of English-only speakers, and song credits listed with each title.

These songs were not chosen by randomly. Their lyrics add to the narrative and the mood of the scene they have been placed. □

Music used on Act I, scenes 1 & 2

BUSCANDO AMÉRICA

Estoy buscando a América
y temo no encontrarte,
tus huellas se han perdido
entre la oscuridad.
Te estoy llamando, América,
pero no me respondes,
te han desaparecido
los que temen la verdad.

Envueltos entre sombras
negamos lo que es cierto,
mientras no haya justicia
jamás tendremos paz.
Viviendo dictaduras
te busco y no te encuentro,
tu torturado cuerpo
no saben donde está.

Si el sueño de uno
es sueño de todos,
romper la cadena
y echarlos a andar.
Tengamos confianza,
pa'lante mi raza
a salvar el tiempo
por lo que vendrá.

Te han secuestrado América
y amordazao tu boca
y a nosotros nos toca
ponerte en libertad.
Te estoy llamando, América
nuestro futuro espera
y antes que se nos muera
te vamos a encontrar.

Te estoy buscando, América,
te estoy llamando, América,
luchando por la raza
y nuestra identidad.

SEARCHING FOR AMERICA

I'm searching for America
and fear I will not find you,
your traces have been lost
within the murkiness.
America, I'm calling for you
but you do not respond to me,
you have been disappeared
by those who fear the truth.

Caught up in the shadows
we denied the truth,
as long as there is no justice
we'll never live in peace.
Living through dictatorships
I search but can not find you,
your tortured body
no one knows where is at.

If one's dream
is everyone's dream,
tear down the chains
and set on the path.
Have faith,
march forward my race
to save time
for what is to come.

America you have been abducted
your voice has been gagged
and it's up to us
to give you back your freedom.
America I'm calling you
our future is awaiting
and before it dies on us
we are coming to find you.

America, I'm searching for you,
America, I'm calling for you,
fighting for our race
and our identity.
(continua)

Te estoy buscando, América,
ésta es mi casa.
Te estoy llamando, América,
y vamos a encontrarte
entre la oscuridad

Te estoy buscando, América
te estoy llamando, América,
te han desaparecido
los que niegan la verdad.

Te estoy buscando, América,
Te estoy llamando, América,
y a nosotros nos toca
ponerte en libertad.

Música y Letra por
©Rubén Blades (1984)

America, I'm searching for you,
this is my home.
America, I'm calling for you,
and we will find you
within the darkness.

America, I'm searching for you,
America, I'm calling for you,
you have been disappeared
by those who fear the truth.

America, I'm searching for you,
America, I'm calling for you,
and it is up to us
to set you free.

Music and lyrics by
©Rubén Blades (1984)

Music used in Act I, scene 6

MEMORIAS

Con el alma entre los dientes,
con la fe de un invidente,
con un soplo de ansiedad,
puedo dibujar a oscuras
beso a beso tu figura,
cada rasgo de tu piel.

Cada línea, cada arruga,
allí sombra, aquí blancura,
el sabor de cada poro
se hace lágrima a mis pies.
Fíjata si he sido fiel.

Tu inspiración hizo de mi
un hombre totalmente nuevo.
Tu amor por mi hizo de ti
solo un reflejo de mi credo.
Se hizo el silencio
entre tú y yo,
te fuiste sin contar conmigo.

Como un eco en el vacío
se proyecta en torno mío
cada timbre de tu voz.
Tu presencia inconfundible
va quemando los fusibles
que conectan mi razón.

Cada lapso, dada instante
hacen tu abra mas palpable,
milímetro a milímetro
el verso se hace amor
y me fundo en tu otro yo.

Tu inspiración hizo de mi
un hombre totalmente nuevo.
Tu amor por mi hizo de ti
solo un reflejo de mi credo.
Se hizo el silencio
entre tú y yo,
te fuiste sin contar conmigo.

MEMORIES

With a trembling soul,
with the incisiveness of a seer,
with a breath of anxiety,
I can draw in darkness
kiss by kiss your figure,
every feature of your skin.

Every line, every wrinkle,
every shade and every highlight,
at the taste of every pore
tears keep forming at my feet.
Notice how true to you I've been.

Your inspiration made of me
a totally new man.
Your love for me made of you
a mere reflection of my beliefs.
Then came silence
between us,
and you left without letting me know.

Like an echo in the void
is projected around me
every timbre of your voice.
Your unmistakable presence
keeps burning all the fuses
that connect my reason.

Every lapse, every instant
make your absence more palpable,
millimetre by millimetre
the verse becomes love
and I become your creation.

Your inspiration made of me
a totally new man.
Your love for me made of you
a mere reflection of my beliefs.
Then came silence
between us,
you left without letting me know.

Y con el alma entre los dientes,
con la fe de un invidente,
con un soplo de ansiedad,
puedo dibujar a oscuras
beso a beso tu figura,
cada rasgo de tu piel.

Artista: Camilo Sesto
Música y Letra: Eduardo Bautista García
©1976

And with a trembling soul,
with the incisiveness of a seer,
with a breath of anxiety,
I can draw in darkness
kiss by kiss your figure,
every feature of your skin.

Artista: Camilo Sesto
Music and Lyrics: Eduardo Bautista García
©1976

Hymn Excerpt on Jim's memorial, Act II, scene 8

CUANDO AQUI MI OBRA TERMINE YA

Si yo ando por la senda estrecha,
si trabajo hasta el día final,
yo veré al gran Dios en su gloria
cuando aquí me obra termine ya.

Cuando aquí mi obra termine ya
y descanse hasta el día final,
yo sé que una corona me espera
cuando aquí me obra termine ya.

Por
Rev. Tomás Cruz

WHEN I ACCOMPLISH MY TASK

If I walk the narrow path,
if I work till the final day,
I will see the great Lord in his glory
when I accomplish my task.

When I accomplish my task
and I rest till the final day,
I know that a crown awaits me
when I accomplish my task.

By
Rev. Tomás Cruz

Music used in Act III, scene 5

NO ME DEJES

No me dejes,
necesito de ti y de tu amor;
yo te amo,
cada día este amor es aún mayor.
Y siempre que yo pienso en el pasado
pienso en las locuras que ya hice
para estar un poco a tu lado,
tu cariño... tu beso...

No me dejes,
no sé cómo te voy a olvidar;
pues mi vida comenzó en el momento
en que yo te vi.
Los sueños para mi son más bonitos
cuando en ellos yo te puedo hallar;
Yo te amo
y siempre te he de amar.

No te apartes de mi, sigue conmigo,
se lo que te digo,
queda en mi vida siempre;
se mi loca pasión, también mi amiga,
cuerpo que me abriga,
dime que naciste para estar a mi lado.

No me dejes...
Los sueños para mi son más bonitos
cuando en ellos yo te puedo hallar;
yo te amo
y siempre te he de amar.

Artista: Roberto Carlos
Música and Letra: Marcos Valle and Carlos Colla
©1991

DON'T LEAVE ME NOW

Don't leave me now,
I need of you and of your love;
I love you,
everyday this love grows even more.
And every time I think about the past
I think about the crazy things I did
to remain a little longer by your side,
your warmth... your kiss...

Don't leave me now,
I don't know how am I supposed to forget you,
because my life began
the moment I saw you.
Dreams for me are even prettier
when in them I can find you;
I'm in love with you
and will love you until the end of time.

Don't move away, stay with me,
be what I ask you,
stay in my life always;
be my insane passion, also my friend,
the body that warms me,
tell me that you were born to be by my side.

Don't leave me now...
Dreams for me are even prettier
when in them I find you;
I'm in love with you
and will love you until the end of time.

Artist: Roberto Carlos
Music and Lyrics: Marcos Valle and Carlos Colla
©1991

Music used in Act III, scene 9

VIVO POR ELLA

Vivo por ella sin saber
si la encontré o me ha encontrado
Ya no recuerdo como fue
pero al final me ha conquistado

Vivo por ella que me da
toda mi fuerza de verdad
Vivo por ella y no me pesa

Vivo por ella yo también
no te me pongas tan celoso
Ella entre todas es la más
dulce y caliente como un beso

Ella a mi lado siempre está
para apagar mi soledad
Mas que por mi por ella
yo vivo también

Es la musa que te invita
A tocarla suavecita
En mi piano a veces triste
la muerte no existe
si ella está aquí

Vivo por ella que me da
todo el efecto que le sale
a veces pega de verdad
Pero es un puño que no duele

Vivo por ella que me da
fuerza, valor y realidad
para sentirme un poco vivo...

como duele cuando falta
(Vivo por ella en un hotel)
Como brilla fuerte y alta
(Vivo por ella en propia piel)
Se ella canta en mi garganta
mis penas mas negras espanta

Vivo por ella y nadie más
puede vivir dentro de mi
Ella me da la vida, la vivo...

si está junto a mí
Si está junto a mí

Desde un palco o contra un muro
(Vivo por ella al límite)
En el trance más oscuro
(Vivo por ella integra)

Cada día una conquista
la protagonista es ella también

Vivo por ella porque va
dándome siempre la salida
porque la música es así
fiel y sincera de por vida

Vivo por ella que me da
noches de amor y libertad
Si hubiese otra vida, la vivo...
por ella también

Ella se llama música
Y es mía también
Vivo por ella créeme
Por ella también

Yo vivo per lei
Yo vivo, Per lei

Performed by Andrea Bocelli and Marta Sánchez
Lyrics: Luis-Gómez Escolar
Music: V.Zelli-M.Mengali-G.Panceri
© 1995 Insieme Srl

I LIVE FOR HER

I live for her since you know
I first met her
I don't remember how, but
she entered my soul and she stayed there.

I live for her because she makes
my heart vibrates strongly
I live for her and it's not a burden.

I live for her also, you know it
and don't be jealous for that
she belongs to everyone who
has an insatiable need
like a radio in a room
of the one who is alone but now knows
that she's also for him, and that's why
I live for her.
She's a muse that invites us
to softly touch her with our fingers
Through a piano
death is far away
I live for her.
I live for her, she often knows
how to be sweet and sensual
sometimes it hits you in the head
but it's a punch that doesn't hurt.
I live for her; I know she makes me
travel from town to town
I suffer a little, but at least I live for her.

I feel pain when she leaves
I live for her inside the hotels
She grows with a great pleasure
I live for her in a whirl.
Through my voice
it expands and gives birth to love.

I live for her, I have nothing else
and how many others will I find/meet
who have written on their face:
I live for her.

I live for her
up on a stage or against the wall...
I live on the edge for her.
...even if tomorrow will be rough.
I live to the limit for her.
Every day
a conquest
the protagonist
will always be her.

I live for her because from now on
I have no other way out
because you know
I've never truly betrayed music.
I live for her because she gives me
pauses and notes in freedom
If I had another life, I'd live it
I'd live it for her.
I live for her - the music
I live for her.
I live for her, she's unique
I live for her
I live for her
I live
for her.

Performed by Andrea Bocelli and Marta Sánchez
Lyrics: Luis-Gómez Escolar
Music: V.Zelli-M.Mengali-G.Panceri
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Rivera-Resto is an American artist of Puerto Rican ancestry. He lives in Lakewood, Ohio, USA. John was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in November 7, 1958. Between the ages of 5 to 19 years old, he lived in Puerto Rico.

In July of 1977, John returned to Cleveland to further his college education and to learn English. He earned a B.A. in Art Education from **Cleveland State University**, an M.F.A. in Studio Arts from **Vermont College of Norwich University** and became an alumnus from the prestigious **Washington Centre Leaders Fellowship Program** at our Nation's capital.

Since 1973, John has used his forty-five years of artistic training and experience working in the fields of fine arts, dramatic arts, art education, film making, creative writing and visual design. While mostly known to the Cleveland public as a master-muralist and designer, his works have actually made him a favourite of the public at large.

Scene Magazine featured John as one of Cleveland's most interesting people in their *'The Best of Cleveland'* 2015 Issue, and coined the moniker *"The People's Artist"*. In 2014 John was honoured with a *Neighbourhood Improvement Award* by **the Cleveland City Council**. His monumental work, *'It's up to us'*, has become a Cleveland Landmark.

In 2019 John returned to acting in the challenging role of Dr. Roberto Miranda in *'La muerte y la doncella'* -Death and the Maiden, and make his directorial debut at Cleveland's Playhouse Square Helen Theatre, were he crafted and directed the award-winning comedy *'The Unusual Case of Miss Piña Colada'*, by Carlos Ferrari.

But it comes as a surprise to many that, in spite of John's remarkable expertise with the paintbrush, this reluctant artist actually prefers the writing pen as his creative instrument of choice.

John was married to **María Espendez de Rivera** from 1984 to 1992. They had two children: **John Alexander** and **Selina Marie**. In 2010, John married **Nancy Anne Lewis**, a professional chef. In his spare time, John spoils his two Cavalier King Charles Spaniel pups, **Happy and Charlie**, plays computer strategy games, tries to practice at perfecting his fencing skills (el arte de la esgrima), and tries really, really hard to stay out of trouble.

