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Coco Fusco

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The Incredible Disappearing Woman

Coco Fusco

*T*his play is dedicated to the memory of the 220 women, most of whom were maquiladora workers, who disappeared from the city of Juarez between 1993 and 1999.

Cast (on stage):

Magaly Valdez.... a middle-class Chilean in her 40s, fair skinned, dark hair, medium height, thin.

Chela Flores.... a working class Norteña in her late 30s, buxom, mestiza, lots of layered hair and makeup.

Dolores Zepeda.... a working class Salvadoran in her 50s, mestiza, small build, heavy set.

They are all custodial employees at a museum in California. Chela and Dolores are cleaners. Magaly is a security guard. They all wear their uniforms.

On screen characters:

Sandra Beltran.... Upper-class Mexican in her 30s

Donald Horton.... American artist in his late 40s

Four museum docents

A small crowd of Gala opening guests

A Mexican man in his 40s, mestizo, slightly pudgy

Two Chilean men in their 30s

A Chilean man in his 50s

Set: *This play takes place in 1998 in the United States. The set consists of a diorama inside a contemporary art museum in southern California. Actors enter and exit via a side entrance that is downstage, stage left. The back wall*

facing the audience is a rear projection screen. All projections described below take place on that screen. When there is no moving projection, what one sees on the back wall are two large photographs from the 1970s, one a portrait of a white man in a donkey mask and another of the same man standing with his back to the lens. He is shirtless and wears bell-bottoms and stands in a hotel room with a group of hippie types around him, watching him. Against the wall, stage right, is a low metal medical cabinet, and a straight-backed chair. Upstage right, set at a diagonal to the audience, is an old medical examining table with a life size female mannequin on it, covered by a white sheet. Next to the table is a small bed table with a tape recorder on it and another straight-backed chair on the other side of the examining table.

Just beyond the doorway, stage left, is a small anteroom. The three custodial workers are sitting there conversing as the action begins.

On the screen, we see a museum curator materialize with four docents. The curator, an upper class Mexican named Sandra Beltran, is wearing a black A-line skirt, a white sleeveless tight fitting knit top, black leather slip-on pumps, hot pink lipstick, and a bob haircut. The docents all wear variations on this style, in grey and brown. They gather around her with their backs to the mannequin.

Beltran:

This is the last section of our new exhibition, "Making a Scene: Art in L.A. in the 1970s." The museum decided to create dioramas to help our audiences imagine a moment in the history of performance art. As you know, performance is a rather slippery medium. We want to show more than pictures. We want our audiences to have a feel for what a performance was really like. But *you're* going to have to do a lot of explaining.

Now with this piece here by Donald Horton, known as "Live Male Seeks Dead Female," we've really pushed the envelope. We've made a diorama for a crucial part of the artist's performance that was actually never seen by anyone but him. (*Voice lowers as she walks over near the photos and starts pointing at them. The docents follow her.*)

(Three women are in the anteroom, waiting for the curator to finish. Chela waves a rag she has in her hand in circles as if to indicate to the curator to hurry up and finish. Dolores carries a bucket and mop. Magaly takes the last drag on her cigarette and tries to straighten out her pantyhose.)

Magaly:

I will never get used to these American Marlboros. I never got used to the Mexican ones either.

Dolores:

Which ones do you like?

Magaly:

These just don't taste like the ones I used to have in Chile.

Chela:

So it's your first day here, ¿qué no? *(Throws down the rag and unwraps part of a torta full of carnitas and avocado and mayonnaise and takes a bite.)*

Magaly:

Yes, I'm glad to have work. It's my first real job since I got to California. I've never been a security guard before. What do you have to do?

Chela:

(Offering torta to Dolores while she chews.) Lola, you want some torta?

Dolores:

Gracias hija, I'm fine. *(Chela wraps up the torta and puts it back in her uniform pocket. Dolores is shoving the hair that has fallen out of her hairnet back into the hairnet.)* We have so much to do tonight and we don't have much time.

Chela:

It's not just about bathrooms and mopping the floor. *(She wags her finger emphatically.)* Every case, every windowsill, all the cobwebs, all the *mugre* in the air vents, all the banisters, and all the smudges around the elevator buttons.

Dolores:

I hate the men's room. Their pee stinks.

(Magaly puts her cigarette out on the bottom of her shoe, and then continues to try to straighten out her pantyhose. Chela realizes that she needs to lift her skirt to fix the hose, so she gets up and holds a towel in front of Magaly so Magaly can raise her skirt up. This is going on while the curator is speaking on screen.)

Beltran:

(On screen, finishes discussing the photographs and is turning to the examining table.) We at the museum have decided that it is not our position to

judge any work or the artist on moral grounds. The artist did enrage many of his peers when he confessed that he had gone to Mexico in search of a dead woman so that he could, uh, well, ejaculate into her. I'm not sure really whether to call what he did—sex—

(Chela, Dolores, and Magaly stop moving and listen to the curator.)

—but he is returning to the United States tonight for the first time in twenty years and we are very glad he has agreed to attend our opening. *(She ushers the docents off.)*

(Magaly, Dolores and Chela enter the diorama. From Magaly's walkie-talkie comes the following sound:)

Walkie-Talkie:

The museum is officially closed for ninety minutes. You have one and a half hours to prepare all exhibition spaces. Where are you, Valdez?

Magaly:

(To walkie-talkie) I am with Zepeda and Flores on the 3rd floor.

(Magaly stands by the left entrance. Dolores and Chela turn the chairs over and lift the sheets off the floor to get under the table. Dolores starts sweeping, and Chela starts dusting with her rag, around the doorways, the cabinet, the bed table, etc.)

Magaly:

What are you going to do with the mannequin?

Dolores:

Pues, clean her up! *(She leaves her broom in a corner, gets a bottle of cleaning fluid from her bucket, and goes over and sprays the mannequin with cleaner and then starts wiping her down and arranging her hair.)*

Chela:

(Coming over to look at her.) ¿Bien chula, no? They picked a good one. *(To Magaly)* So what did you do before you came here?

Magaly:

I was a schoolteacher.

Chela:

Oh boy, we've got a maestra with us.

Dolores:

(She stops fussing with the mannequin and holds onto the edge of the examining table.) Chela, move her. I need to lie down. I'm feeling very weak.

Magaly:

You're already asking for a break? We just started!

Chela:

No, mujer, she's got some kind of condition. She has fainting spells. *(She goes over to Dolores, moves the mannequin onto the floor, and pushes it under the table.)* Maybe it's the detergents we use. Give me hand, no? *(She beckons Magaly over and they help Dolores onto the table.)*

Magaly:

So what's her problem? Blood pressure?

Chela:

Who knows? She just drops off every once in a while. I try to cover for her so she doesn't get fired.

(Dolores lets out a sigh and goes limp.)

Magaly:

I'd love to have an excuse like that. *(She goes over to the photos on the wall and points to the one of Horton in a donkey mask.)* I find nothing redeeming in this.

Chela:

Pobrecita, she's out. *(She stares at Dolores for a moment.)* Wouldn't it give that little machito of an artist a heart attack if he came back and found a real woman here?

Magaly:

What are you saying?

Chela:

Pinche gringo crossed the border looking for his muertita. So what if he finds another one here?

Magaly:

Don't be ridiculous. She'd be discovered when the guests arrive and we'd all get fired.

Chela:

Oh, I doubt it. The gabachos will be too busy eating hors d'oeuvres and drinking wine. And they never notice that we're here anyway.

Only that sicko will really want to take a look at her. (*Chela fixes the sheet over Dolores and takes off her hairnet to arrange her hair.*)

Magaly:

What about the other guards?

Chela:

They won't come in if they see you here. Just hang around this room.

Magaly:

But I thought I was supposed to move around and check different rooms.

Chela:

So you stay here long enough for this and then you move on. No big deal.

(*Dolores starts mumbling and moaning.*)

Dolores:

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

Magaly:

That would definitely frighten any man.

Dolores:

(*Coming out of her fainting spell and sitting up.*) My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come—(*she opens her eyes*)—Oh! (*she holds the sheet tight to her chest.*)

Chela:

(*Putting her arm around her.*) Are you ok, Lola?

Dolores:

Yes, wait. (*She pulls a piece of paper out of her pocket and begins to read.*) He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angels who seem to be all afire.

Magaly:

So pious yet so perverse, Dolores. Who gave you that?

Dolores:

Padre Ignacio, the priest who would listen to my confessions when I lived in El Salvador. He helped me a lot when I could not stop my husband from getting mad at me for passing out.

Magaly:

What did he do?

Dolores:

He told me to read Santa Teresa. *(She continues to read.)* "In his hands I saw a long spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire."

(Magaly begins to recite with her.) "With this he seems to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it, and he left me completely afire with a great love for God."¹

Chela:

(To Magaly) So you know it too. So why give her a hard time, mujer?

Magaly:

Sixteen years in a Catholic school, you bet I know it.

Chela:

(To Dolores) Does it really help you, Lola? You're still fainting.

Dolores:

Sí, Chela, but I started to dream that Jesus loved me so much I could feel his caress in my sleep—a warmth would begin at my middle and spread to my fingers, and then I wake up with a smile and hot cheeks.

Magaly:

(Knowingly) And what about your husband?

Dolores:

(Looks pained.) He kept complaining. I prayed. He tried to hit me while I was unconscious but he could never wake me up. Sometimes afterwards I would have red marks all over my face. See this? *(She points to a scar on her face.)*

(Magaly looks skeptical and steps away. Dolores goes back to reading her piece of paper, but silently now.)

Chela:

(To Magaly, pulling her over.) Stop asking her about it. The guy left her years ago. You're just upsetting her.

(Chela paces across the room a couple of times.)

Chela:

Lolita, can you look like you fainted even if you haven't?

Magaly:

Excuse me, but fainted and dead are not the same thing.

Dolores:

I don't know. Does this look right? *(She holds herself stiffly on the table in an unconvincing pose.)*

Magaly:

Why don't you just make her sniff some detergent?

Chela:

(Glares at Magaly.) Don't upset her. What's your problem anyway?

Dolores:

Chela, can I unfreeze now?

Chela:

Sure, Lolita. Do you feel well enough to get down now and walk a bit? *(She gestures to Magaly to help her off the table. They are on either side of her, holding her as she takes a few steps to a chair and sits, fanning herself with her hand.)*

Dolores:

I'll be ok in a minute.

Magaly:

(Pointing to the mannequin under the table.) We'd better put the mannequin back. If it's not on the table when people come in, we're going to get in a lot of trouble. *(She pulls the mannequin out and it comes up without a head.)*

Chela:

Ah caray, ahora síestamos jodidas. Where is the pinche head for that thing?

(Magaly goes under the table again and comes back with the head. She tries to attach it to the neck of the mannequin, but it keeps falling off and hitting the

floor with a big bounce. After a couple of tries, she holds the head up facing her and stares at it for a long moment. Dolores and Chela are giggling.)

Chela:

You think he found the real muertita with her head on or off?

Dolores:

¡Ay, no digas eso!

(A voice comes over the walkie-talkie.)

Walkie-Talkie:

Valdez, how are things progressing? One hour to reopening.

(Magaly quickly puts the head on the neck and grabs the walkie-talkie. Dolores and Chela run over to the mannequin and hold the head in place.)

Magaly:

(To walkie-talkie) Everything is fine. We're on schedule. *(She puts down the walkie-talkie and says to Dolores and Chela)* They can't see us through the walkie-talkie. What are you doing?

Chela:

Holding the damn head so it doesn't fall and make a huge noise! *(They let go of the head and it stays on the mannequin.)*

Dolores:

Chela, why do you want me on the table?

Chela:

Oh, I'd like to see if anyone notices, you know what I mean? When I go into the bathrooms to put in new toilet paper, if anyone is there they don't really look at me. Some people just run out of the bathroom right away when they see me working in there.

Dolores:

Ay bueno, that's how it is. But even if I'm lying down quiet, they're not going to speak to me. It's like they get sad when they see me.

Magaly:

You never know. Some people might feel more comfortable if they think you're dead. They finally start to say or do what is really on their minds.

Dolores:

You mean like my husband?

Chela:

I'll be there, Lola, and I'm not going to let anybody hit you. I just want to give that pinche macho a little welcome home present.

Magaly:

Dolores, can you stay still even if you're not unconscious? She should rehearse, you know.

Chela:

Come on, Lola. Let's get you back on the table. *(She goes first to move the mannequin, picking up its head first and fixing its hair. Then she beckons Dolores.)*

Dolores:

No entiendo bien esto. Me parece un poco raro. But I'll do it for you. *(She gets on the table and lies down, stiff.)*

Chela:

Relax. Let your arms go soft. How about a little smile on your face, Lola?

Magaly:

(Stepping in to take over the director role.) Now people are filing into the room, Lola.

(On the rear projection, museum visitors come into the room but do not face the table. Beltran is now accompanied by Horton, a medium sized, grey haired man in his 40s, wearing black jeans and a leather jacket and boots.)

Magaly:

The curator starts to talk to them about the work.

Chela:

No, no, she's going to introduce the pendejo and let him talk.

(In the projection, we see the action being described.)

Magaly:

Ok. So they come in and are standing in front of the pictures. Except for that curator y ese hombre who face the group. She says, "It's a great honor for me to introduce Mr. — ¿cómo se llama?"

Dolores:

(Enunciating exaggeratedly) Hor-ton.

Magaly:

Yes, Mr. Horton, who is with us tonight after twenty years abroad and who has graciously agreed to meet with us and discuss his piece, "Live Man Seeks Dead Woman."

(In the projection, the guests applaud.)

Magaly:

And then Mr. Horton says, "Thank you very much. I'm very excited to be here."

Horton:

(On screen, continues.) Not every artist can say that making a piece really changed their lives, but *(chuckling)* this one certainly did. It comes from a time in my life when I was restless and wanted to push myself and everyone else over the edge. I was having some trouble with my personal relationships and I finally decided I was going to do something very extreme to my body, to my genitalia, actually. Some other artist in, uh, Vienna, had already castrated himself, so I decided to get a little operation. And that was before Orlan started having doctors operate on her as art, by the way. But I wanted to do more than that. I wanted to deposit my last seed in the body of a dead woman. *(Audience gasps, and two people immediately leave.)* I looked around California, and didn't really get anywhere. Every time I'd ask about how to find a body, people thought I was sick or something. I was thrown out of almost every sex shop in Los Angeles. . . . Then I found a porn store on Broadway downtown. I went up to the guy at the counter and asked him my usual questions and instead of getting mad, he apologized and said he could only offer me kids! And I thought, whoa, I think I found the place. I turned around and saw this Mexican guy looking at some pretty gruesome snuff videos, so I went up to him and asked, you know, did he know about that kind of thing? And he said, sure, I can put you in touch with somebody I know in TJ, if you're willing to pay. I said, sure, how much? And he said, oh, maybe 70 or 80 bucks an hour.

Magaly:

And as he gets to the point about Mexico, he turns and begins to move towards you.

(Horton starts moving toward the table but looks out to the audience.)

Horton:

So the next thing I know, I'm in my Mustang driving down Route 5. I ended up in a seedy bar off the Avenida de Revolución. Some guy called Pancho shows up to take me to another place, can't say where, and then there I was in a room, much like this one, and there she was. She must have been in her 30s, dark curly hair, fleshy but not fat, no visible wounds. Her body was cold, so you know it was—difficult, at first. I had promised not to take any pictures, but I did make a recording, which I'd like to play for you now. *(Film pauses.)*

Magaly:

He will absent-mindedly run his hands over you once and then stop. *(Magaly does this and Dolores cries out.)*

Dolores:

¡Ay!

Chela:

Lola, stay still!

Dolores:

(Sitting up) Chela, I can't stay still. That man is going to touch me?

Chela:

He might not. He might be too scared. Probably.

Magaly:

When that recording starts, people will start leaving. No one wants to hear the sound of something so vile.

(Film resumes. Horton turns on the recording, and a high-pitched frequency sound comes out. The microphone originally had picked up the noise from the lighting system in the room, which masks Horton's grunts, though they are occasionally audible. Visitors leave frame of projection one by one.)

Magaly:

(Yelling over noise) You will hear the people leave and the room will be full of those horrible sounds, but you can't move until it's completely over.

Dolores:

(Moaning) I can't, I can't. I don't like this noise.

Chela:

Please try, Lola. Be brave.

Magaly:

Then just as the sound ends, (*sound ends, film fades*) he's going to come back, alone. (*Magaly stands in the room as if she were Horton.*) He knows you're not a mannequin and he's curious to know who you are. He'll stare at you for a while, and then touch one of your toes to see if you move. (*She pulls off Dolores's shoe and grabs a toe.*)

(*Dolores remains still.*)

Magaly:

(*Moving about as if she were Horton.*) When you don't move, he's going to step away and check to see if he can lock himself in. He won't be able to, which will make him nervous. He'll come back to you but he will keep on checking the doorways until he's sure no one is around. Then he'll run his hand over the sheet again, and touch your hair. He'll feel that you're still warm and then he will hesitate, and then pull off the sheet covering you, so he can gaze at you once again. (*She tears off the sheet.*)

Dolores:

(*Pops up*) Do I have to be naked?

(*Chela looks at her in silence.*)

Dolores:

I can't do this, Chela. It's too much for me.

Chela:

But just when he pulls the sheet, Lola, you can pull back — and that will make him jump. (*She pulls Magaly's arm.*) I promise you, he will scream! You won't have to show yourself to him, mujer.

Dolores:

I'm not strong enough, Chela. What if he isn't scared?

Magaly:

It's true. He could just throw himself on her and try to cover her mouth, Chela. He looks pretty big in that picture. ¿Y entonces qué?

Chela:

Pues, you bite his hand, Lola. Punch him. Allíen esa cosa asquerosa that he turned into his work of art!

Dolores:

I can't do that, Chela. I would be much too scared to touch that man. You know, I...*(she hesitates)*...I never *(she fidgets a bit.)*

Magaly:

(To Dolores) Never?

Dolores:

Never.

Magaly:

(To Chela) Never?

Chela:

(With gestures to Magaly to cut off the conversation.) Pobrecita, never.

Magaly:

Madre santa, never. *(She genuflects in an exaggerated manner.)*

Dolores:

I'm sorry, Chela. I want to help you, but I can't stay still with a strange man looking at me.

Magaly:

Dolores, are you saying that your husband...

Chela:

¡Ay! I told you not to talk about him.

Dolores:

(As she wraps the sheet around herself very tightly) Ay, ese hombre, ese hombre...*(she's rocking herself slightly and whimpering.)*

Chela:

Leave her alone. *(She puts her arm around Dolores for a moment.)*

Magaly:

(To Chela) What happened to her?

Chela:

What do you think, you maestra pendeja?

Magaly:

Hey, wait a minute.

Chela:

You keep pushing her. She can't handle this.

Magaly:

She needs help. A doctor, counseling. I don't know.

Chela:

Ay mujer, she confessed enough already with her priest, ¿qué no? She just needs not to be harassed by you. What's done is done. Let her be. She'll calm down. She has her prayers, and they help her.

Magaly:

So the husband did what?

Chela:

Listen, husband nothing!

Magaly:

What are you saying?

Chela:

Ay, cómo eres. Can't you tell? ¡Véla nomás con sus oraciones!

Magaly:

She talks like my mother.

Chela:

(In a loud whisper)

Well, why don't you go ask your mama how things were with *her* confessor?

Magaly:

¿Cómo?

Chela:

Quiet.

Magaly:

Are you saying she was...?

Chela:

Ahora sí, cállate.

Magaly:

You mean she doesn't know?

Chela:

Of course not. She thinks an angel visited her with a golden spear, remember? *(Imitating Dolores)* "With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails."

Magaly:

Well, don't you think she should know what her priest was doing?
(*Dolores moans.*)

Chela:

Now you've done it.

Magaly:

Why are you blaming me for what the priest did?

Dolores:

(*In a kind of delirium*) The priest didn't do anything. I swear, I swear. Oh, my God, please stop. I swear, I swear. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. (*She pulls the paper out again and reads, sitting.*) The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God.

(*Chela goes over to hold her again. She glares at Magaly. Dolores falls back down on the examining table and passes out.*)

Chela:

Her husband beat her really badly when he figured out what the priest was up to.

Magaly:

How did he know?

Chela:

I'm not sure. Maybe she talked in her sleep. Maybe she got pregnant. Anyway, he messed her up and then went after the priest. No quiero imaginar lo que ese bruto le hizo. I think his family sent her here to get rid of her after that.

(*Dolores regains composure.*)

Dolores:

I'm sorry, Chela. (*She gets up off the table and hands Chela the sheet.*) You're braver than me. You do it.

(*Chela takes the sheet with her two hands and raises it up to her neck, hiding her body behind it. She starts dancing around behind the sheet as if it were a scrim. Magaly feels awkward with Dolores and stands back from her, looking down.*)

Magaly:

I need a cigarette. (*She pulls her pack out of her uniform jacket and takes out a cigarette.*)

Chela:

Not here, mujer. You need to go back to the lounge. (*Magaly walks off stage through the left anteroom, leaving Chela and Dolores alone. Chela stops dancing around and puts the sheet on the table.*)

Esa tiene algo, Lola. I don't know what is bugging her, but something is.

Dolores:

She's so solemn. She's probably lonely. She just got here, right?

Chela:

Yeah, but she butts into your business too much for a new girl. That's not right.

Dolores:

Déjala. Give her time.

Chela:

Mira, Lola, I wanna see that guy freak out. But I don't want you to suffer, so let's try me out, ok?

Dolores:

I just can't see you lying there quiet, not with that energy of yours.

Chela:

Lemme try. (*She scrambles onto the examining table and kicks off her shoes. She wriggles out of her uniform and pulls her bra straps down. Then she undoes her hair, and pulls the sheet over herself.*) Ok, Lola, you turn on the tape and stand by me, like you were that guy.

Dolores:

(*Stuffing Chela's clothes under the table.*) Ay, that horrible tape. Such an ugly noise.

Chela:

Come on, help me please. You're going to have to be part of this for things to work.

Dolores:

¿Por qué te importa tanto, Chela? He's just another awful gringo.

Chela:

Ay, Lola, I know I'm being silly but I just want to do this, ok?

Dolores:

(Looks at her quizzically.) You have more to tell me, don't you mujer?
(She takes Chela's hand.)

(Magaly has come back from having a cigarette and enters the anteroom, stopping at the doorway to eavesdrop on the conversation.)

Chela:

Ok, Lola. *(She raises herself up a bit on the table.)* You know I told you that I used to work at the Mattel maquila just outside Tijuana, right?

Dolores:

Sí, me acuerdo.

Chela:

And that I used to go dancing at the Smyrna sometimes on Saturday nights?

Dolores:

Yes, and the nortehños there were better at quebradita than the guys here, right?

Chela:

Yeah, well, this is a little more complicated. When I started at Mattel, I was already a little old for the job, maybe 30. They like really young girls, but I needed steady work real bad so I begged the manager to let me in and said I'd do anything. They put me in the lousiest section, Lola, and I was going nuts. I thought we would be making Barbies. But *we* didn't make Barbies. We had to make the little plastic wheels for the little plastic cars that Barbies drive, and their little plastic phones, and all their little plastic mamadas. Pinches Barbies had cars and phones. You think any of us there could ever buy those things? So there I was, spending ten hours a day sticking blue wheels on orange cars. When I closed my eyes at night, I would see myself swimming in a sea of melted plastic. And then all of a sudden it would harden all around me and I'd wake up all stiff like a mummy. The smells made me sick. I was getting nauseous all the time, even at home after work. Those Barbies were poisoning me.

Dolores:

Pobrecita. *(She puts her arm around Chela. Then she sits in the chair at the side of the table.)*

Chela:

And it was lonely, even though there were hundreds of girls there. I couldn't even talk to the other workers to make the time pass. The machines were so loud, and we had to stand so far apart. When I'd get off work, I'd see most of the girls nodding off in the bus. Sometimes I'd fall asleep and miss my stop, and then I'd have to walk even further in the dark to get home.

Dolores:

Nothing ever happened to you?

Chela:

After a few months of this, I noticed that there was a supervisor who was watching me, extra long, you know, when he would do his rounds through my area.

Dolores:

Y ¿cómo era? ¿Bien guapo?

Chela:

Ok, a little bit of panza. Normal. Un señor cuarentón. Not too tall. Good strong build. Still firm.

Dolores:

Y te miraba mucho, ¿no?

Chela:

Yeah. So I started to smile at him a little bit. For about a week. He'd smile back and go on his way. I went out and got some nice barrettes for my hair. I started fixing my lipstick at every break.

Dolores:

¡Coqueta!

Chela:

Then he stopped me coming out of the bathroom one night and asked me to report to his office. I thought he was going to scold me for stealing time or slowing down the line because I was in the bathroom and I wasn't on break. I was really scared.

Dolores:

Y ¿qué pasó?

Chela:

He asked me out! Bingo!, I thought, for the next Saturday night I had off. We were going to the Smyrna to dance. Y se portó bien. He told me he'd just gotten divorced and he felt lonely. And that his kids were mad at him for leaving his wife so they weren't talking to him.

Dolores:

And what did he say about you?

Chela:

(Smiling) That he'd been watching me. He said he could help me get promoted, so that I could get off that horrible line.

Dolores:

So that was nice.

Chela:

(She sits up now on the table.) Ay, Lola, I knew what he wanted. I figured it was a gamble, but I wanted to take the risk. What other choice did I have? He seemed alright, and I wasn't going out with anybody. He wasn't being rude or anything. He just looked at me a lot, really intensely—you know, like he was undressing me with his eyes. So, to make sure he wasn't a pig, I made him wait one more date.

Dolores:

For what?

Chela:

Never mind.

(Projection begins inside the hotel room, which has the same furniture arrangement as the diorama, but instead of the table, there is a bed; instead of the shelf, a dresser; and instead of the photos, there are bad velvet paintings. We see the scene from Chela's perspective, focused exclusively on the man. Everything in this sequence is silent.)

Chela:

He took me to a motel in San Angel. *(We see a man leading Chela into the room.)* Not a great one, que digamos. It smelled a little, you know what I mean? And I heard fights and banging in the other rooms. I tried to forget about that and concentrate on him, loosen him up, play with his hair, and stuff like that. Then he asked me to sit down on the bed, and

gave me this whole big speech about how sweet and lovely I was and then he started saying that he wanted me to play a game with him. *(We see him whisper to her and then look at her coyly in the projection.)*

Dolores:

¿Qué es eso de jugar con él? A grown man?

Chela:

You know how guys can get. *(Pauses and looks at her.)* Well, maybe you don't. Anyway, he wanted me to shave off all my body hair, everywhere except on my head. So I'd be like a little girl.

Dolores:

¡Como una Barbie!

Chela:

Yeah. He gave me a razor and I went in the shower and got everything off. Ya vez que soy bien pelona, so it took me a while. *(Projection goes dark when she goes into the bathroom.)* It really itched afterwards! And then when I got out, *(Projection begins again)* he had taken off his jacket and unbuttoned his shirt to here *(She points to just below her breast. On screen, the man looks like he is trying too hard to act like a swinger and is raising two drinks.)* He made us cocktails with little bottles he'd bought at the front desk. I figured I needed a drink, so I downed mine pretty fast.

(We see him handing her the drink and smiling deviously.)

Dolores:

Y ¿qué era?

Chela:

Una margarita. He told me to get in bed, so I did. He asked me to get under the covers and take my lingerie off very slowly.

(We see him giving the orders to her and pointing to the bed.)

Dolores:

(Horrified) Y ¿lo hiciste?

Chela:

Lola, don't look at me like that! Of course, I did. I mean I started to. But my head got really heavy. It got so heavy, I couldn't lift it after a little while. Then I couldn't move my arms. Then I couldn't even open my eyes. I heard him chuckling, but the sound got more and more distant, as if he were floating away.

(Projection fades out slowly.)

Dolores:

You fainted, Chela, just like me?

Chela:

Sort of. He knocked me out. Not with a drink, but with something. There was something in that drink. I was so out I wasn't even dreaming or anything.

Dolores:

Y ¿qué te hizo, el diablo ese?

Chela:

Well, how I am supposed to know, Lola? I can't remember.

Dolores:

So this guy (*Pointing to the picture*) reminds you of your guy, right? But you weren't dead, mamita.

Chela:

I might as well have been. The thing is, I woke up. Before I was supposed to, I think. I started to hear him. (*We hear sounds of the man through the audio system though the screen is still dark.*) He was breathing hard and groaning a little, and I figured he was—you know (*she makes a masturbatory gesture*)—playing.

Dolores:

(Covers her face with her hands.) Que asco.

Chela:

He wasn't touching me or anything. Just himself. I was really scared because I didn't know what was going on, but I didn't want to open my eyes either—so he wouldn't know I was awake. I heard all kinds of fidgeting, and it sounded like he was walking up and down the room in front of the bed, picking things up and dropping them.

Dolores:

So is that what he was doing?

Chela:

I told you my eyes were closed. But, at a certain point, I couldn't take it anymore and I peeked.

Dolores:

Did he see you?

Chela:

Are you ready for this? (*Projection begins, and we see the man at the foot of the bed, practically naked, dancing alone in high heels. On stage, Chela jumps off the table and starts prancing around the room in imitation of the guy.*) The guy had my shoes and stockings on, and he had my bra around his neck. Nothing else on, of course. He was parading around como una loca.

Dolores:

(*Crosses herself and laughs.*) Díos santo.

Chela:

(*Laughing*) He looked so ridiculous. I tried not to react but I couldn't control myself. I started shaking at first, trying not to make noise. Then a little gasp come out of me, así—¡ah!—and then he knew.

Dolores:

Ay, Chela, y ¿qué te hizo?

Chela:

He started screaming at me, calling me a perra. (*We see the actions she describes happening on screen.*) Then he grabbed his shirt and put it on backwards, and he was pulling his pants up all frantic. I grabbed the sheet and held it tight to myself. (*She repeats the gesture on stage, jumping back to the bed.*) He was so hysterical he put things on inside out. Before I could say anything, he grabbed the pile of clothes that were left and run out the door. (*Projection fades out.*) He just left me there, naked. The little maricón took all my clothes.

Dolores:

What did you do then?

Chela:

What could I do? I wrapped myself in the sheet and started walking. At least it was dark and not so many people were out. It took me, like, two hours to get home. Imagine the looks I got. (*She pauses for a second, looking at the doorway to the anteroom.*) Where is Magaly?

(*Magaly steps back into the diorama and remains by the entrance.*)

Magaly:

Right here. I was waiting. I didn't want to interrupt you.

Chela:

But you heard the whole thing, ¿qué no, metiche?

Magaly:

Just the end.

Chela:

No te hagas. I don't know what it is yet, but there's something up with you.

Dolores:

Pero Chela, weren't you upset? He'd taken advantage of you!

Chela:

For Christ's sake, I didn't have time to feel upset about that, Lola. ¡Ese maricón se llevó mi ropa! My only nice blouse, my best dancing shoes, my lacey lingerie. Todo eso me había costado meses de trabajo, you get it? Who knows what he did with me or my clothes, hijo de la gran puta.

Dolores:

But weren't you bruised or anything?

Chela:

Bueno. You know, Lola, I was, like, coming out of fog. I was running barefoot in the dark with a sheet wrapped around me. (*Projection of Chela running outside in the dark wrapped in a sheet, low light, shot from a moving car that starts from behind her and ends ahead of her, speeding away.*) I thought I could find a sympathetic cab driver or something. No way. Every guy who passed me by in a car just made fun of me. Mírala, mírala, they pointed and jeered. (*She sits back on the table with the sheet around her. Projection fades out.*) Llegué totalmente humillada. Thank God I had left my kid with my mother that night. I washed off my feet and got in bed with a sweater and pants and socks on to get warm. That was when I could have a good cry.

Magaly:

(*Now sympathetic.*) Did you report him at your job?

Chela:

Ay, mujer, forget that. No way. Who was going to believe me? Who saw us? And what business did I have with him anyway? He was my supervisor, part of management.

Anyway, I went back to work the next Monday and couldn't find him. He didn't come out to the floor my entire shift. The next day, another supervisor called me to his office and said I was being moved

to a new section of the plant. He told me that he'd gotten reports that I talked too much. But who was I going to talk to with all that noise?

Magaly:

He wanted you out.

Chela:

Two weeks later, one of my coworkers told me that there were managers who were asking around to see if I was bringing information about unions into the plant. Imagine me, Chela the party girl, se volvió comunista, right? I worked in a bar until I had my kid, so what do I know about unions? So then another week passes and I get my lay off notice. I went around to the other maquilas and left applications, but nobody would give me a job. Sometimes I think that guy told everybody in town that I was trouble—to make me leave. So I left my kid with my mother and came here.

Dolores:

But Chela, this Horton guy is not your boss.

Magaly:

Doesn't matter. It's the talking that counts.

Dolores:

That's true. Praying helps me.

(Magaly and Chela look at her, then at each other. Chela shakes her head at Magaly, but Magaly starts moving towards Dolores.)

Magaly:

Mira, Dolores, I think you need to consult somebody about your fainting—and your praying.

Dolores:

¿Por qué? I talk to Jesus and he helps me.

Magaly:

Jesus can't help you if you are sick.

Dolores:

God helps me! Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me! *(She pulls her sheet of paper out again and starts reading.)*

Magaly:

This is exactly what I think you need to talk about!

Chela:

(She gestures to Magaly.) Ya déjalo, ¿no?

Magaly:

You want her to stay like this forever?

(Chela glares at Magaly and turns on the tape recorder again with the high pitched noise and grunting.)

Dolores:

Ay, ¡ese ruido! *(She runs over to shut it off.)* ¡No puedo con eso! I'm going to go and get more rags. *(She exits.)*

(Chela sits up and gets off the table, still wrapped in the sheet.)

Magaly:

What is wrong with you?

Chela:

She is not asking anyone to meddle in her life, so stay out of it.

Magaly:

It's not right for her to be so deluded.

Chela:

Ay, maestra, how many people really know anything about themselves? What difference does it make? She is safe here. She's happy with her prayers. Why do you want to destroy the peace that she has found for herself?

Magaly:

Because it's false.

Chela:

¿Tú qué sabes? She's been in love with Jesus, her Jesus, for most of her life. She believes he's gentle and kind to her. She believes he pays attention to her, especially her. She's got a great romance going.

Magaly:

(Standing by the photos.) Wouldn't we all, if life were like that.

Chela:

Exactly. And what is better, for her to be happy or tormented by a bad memory?

Magaly:

But she will have to face it one day.

Chela:

Why, so you can watch her writhe in pain?

Magaly:

No, because otherwise she will remain a trapped animal, just as you are.

Chela:

¿De qué hablas, cabrona? *(She stands face to face with Magaly.)*

Magaly:

It was your idea to start all this fuss with this guy.

Chela:

¿Y qué? I didn't see you protest. You thought it was fine to give that gabacho a hard time.

Magaly:

For what he did to her. *(She points to the mannequin.)* Not for what is happening to you.

Chela:

(She pushes Magaly away from her.) Now you're going to analyze me? I thought Lola was enough for you for your first day here! *(She turns and walks away in disgust.)*

Magaly:

(Backing off.) Ok, excuse me then, please. I don't want to annoy you or anyone else here.

Chela:

(Turning back to Magaly.) Who are you anyway? You show up to work as a security guard and you don't even know how to do your job, and then here you are telling us what to do with our lives already. Pinche maestra arrogante. I'm not your student, ok? I do just fine, thank you. I like my life here, and this job takes care of me, so lay off! *(She pulls the sheet off herself and puts her uniform back on. Magaly looks at her silently.)*

Chela:

(She stops dressing and looks at Magaly.) You know what, mamita? You're going to play la muertita.

Magaly:

¿Cómo?

Chela:

Yeah. You. Miss sábelotodo. You know everything about everything, right? You gave instructions to Dolores very well. Too well. So, teacher, why don't you show us how it's done? Please. *(She gestures to the table and hands Magaly the sheet. Magaly hesitates at first, and so Chela folds the sheet over her arm. Then Magaly goes over to the table.)*

Magaly:

But I just got here and I know nothing about this museum.

Chela:

That's better. The curator will definitely not recognize you. She's never even seen you before.

Magaly:

I don't know.

Chela:

Anyway, you should do it because Dolores can't, and I need to be on guard to make sure nothing really bad happens while that guy is here.

Magaly:

And what do you know about playing dead, right? You were knocked out and don't remember, so how are you going to be convincing?

Chela:

(Goes and stands in front of her.) ¡Atrevida! What right do you have to throw that at me?

Magaly:

And what right do you have to set me up so you can watch the scene you never saw?

Chela:

¡Hija de puta! *(She slaps Magaly.)*

Magaly:

That's all that really bothers you and that's why you want to drag me and that man into your little act.

Chela:

Shut up already! Don't do it if you don't want to. I'm fed up with you. *(She puts her shoes back on. Magaly stands up and goes over to the pictures. Dolores returns to find a tense silence between the two other women.)*

Dolores:

Y aquí ¿qué pasó? (*She turns to look at each of them and neither answers.*)

Chela:

Lola, estoy hasta la madre con esta. I don't want to work with her around anymore. Let's finish and go. Let her find other people to lecture to. (*They pack up the cleaning gear and leave the diorama. Magaly stands alone for a moment and then goes to pick up the mannequin to put her back on the table. Just before setting her down, though, she stops and calls out.*)

Magaly:

(*Loudly*) Chela! Chela, you're right. I should be the one.

Chela:

(*Walking back into the diorama.*) The one what?

Magaly:

The one on the table when that man comes in. La muertita. (*She slides the mannequin under the table again.*)

Dolores:

(*Walking back in.*) ¿Por qué hablas de muertas?

Magaly:

I'm the only one here who is alive because I knew how to play dead.

Dolores:

¿Qué dices?

Magaly:

I was very convincing. I was dead for years. Some people still say I'm dead.

Chela:

What are you talking about?

Magaly:

(*Going over to the wall of pictures.*) You see, I look at this man, and when I get beyond that stupid mask, I start to notice other things. His big collar, that corduroy jacket with the wide lapels, the shaggy hair coming out from under the mask. The long sideburns and the bell-bottoms in this other picture. That's how the men looked then.

Chela:

I don't get it, Magaly.

Magaly:

1975. December 23rd, 1975. Right before Christmas. It's warm in Santiago at Christmas. I left school that day at about four o'clock, and I was going to meet Ray at a cafe.

Dolores:

Who's Ray?

Magaly:

Ray was — wait a minute. *(She goes to the table and sits.)* Ray was my boyfriend. He wore a jacket just like that one, a brown one. He was a music teacher at the school where I worked.

Chela:

Otro maestro, ¡ay dios!

Magaly:

And he was starting a band, which was very hard to do then. *(She pauses, as if lost in her memories.)*

Dolores:

You were walking, no?

Magaly:

Yes, on the Avenida Macul. And then a grey car pulled over and two men came out in dark blue suits and grabbed me on either side and dragged me to the car.

Dolores:

Oh my God, didn't anyone see?

Magaly:

I don't know. They put a hood over my head and tied my hands behind my back. The hood smelled like sweat and blood. I was too frightened to talk. I think maybe I was in shock. *(She looks at Dolores.)* I started to pray, silently.

Dolores:

Of course.

Magaly:

When I finally asked where they were taking me, one of them laughed and said, "Don't you know? Your boyfriend is already there waiting for you!" And I cried out "Ray!" and one of them hit me hard in the face. I think he had something in his hand made of metal because I

heard a clanking sound against my teeth and then I could taste blood in my mouth.

Chela:

Misericordia, esto va en serio. (*She moves towards Magaly and brings a chair with her to sit by the table.*)

Magaly:

I thought it better not to say more. I don't know how long I was in that car but it seemed to me that we left the city because the air changed and there were no more sounds of trucks and buses. They dragged me out and led me inside a building until we reached a room where they sat me down and left me. I was still in shock and could barely move. Then I heard screaming coming from another room. Another woman, screaming "No, no, no."

Chela:

Put a madre, why did they grab you, Magaly?

Magaly:

Oh, I don't know really. Before the coup, when I was a student, I gave literacy classes in the poblaciones. Afterwards, I didn't want to leave my country. Ray didn't either. We planned to stay there together no matter what. (*She stops for a moment.*)

Dolores:

Where was Ray?

Magaly:

They said they had him in another room. When those Ratis came back they told me he'd been the one to turn me in, that he said I had leaflets in my house. I said that couldn't be right, that there was nothing in my house, and then they started hitting me again. I felt my lips swell, then crack open.

Dolores:

Magaly, forgive me, but who is this *they*?

Magaly:

The CNI, Centro Nacional de Inteligencia. They were the ones behind the sweeps then.

Chela:

Paciencia, Lola, we'll get the whole story. So was Ray there?

Magaly:

They kept saying he was, but I couldn't hear anyone who sounded like him to me. I was praying that he wasn't.

When they pulled the hood off I was so dazed by the bright light in my face that I couldn't see at first. There were two of them. I looked down to avoid the light and one of them grabbed my hair and yanked down hard so that my face was forced back up. Tears started coming out of my eyes even though I wasn't really crying. They asked me over and over again where the leaflets were and I kept saying that I didn't know. Then one of them showed me a notebook that he had gotten from my purse. He said there was subversive information in it. I told him no, that it was just records I kept for my classes. It was really my journal but I didn't want to say that. He screamed at me to stop lying. Then he tore a page out of the notebook and pried my mouth open and stuffed the paper in it.

Chela:

Pinches animales.

Magaly:

I was gagging and crying and they laughed and told me to eat it. My lip started bleeding again and I could feel the skin on my bruises get hot and tight.

Chela:

¿Cómo aguantaste, mujer?

Magaly:

I didn't know what to do. I was too stunned. I didn't say what they wanted so they finally picked me up and threw me on a table that was behind the chair. One guy with stringy black hair pulled out a knife.

Dolores:

(*Gasps*) ¡Madre Santa!

Magaly:

And began cutting my clothing off, until I was left naked. And then they walked out.

Dolores:

La pobre. (*She puts her arms around Magaly.*)

Magaly:

It was incredibly cold in that wretched place and I trembled like a frightened animal. (*Chela drapes the sheet tightly around Magaly's shoulders.*) I spit the paper out. I could feel my whole body growing so cold, and my bruises swelling more and more. Breathing hurt so much I could only take in a little bit of air. I strained to keep my mind on something, to stay conscious.

Dolores:

Did you pray?

Magaly:

A poem came to my mind. One I used to make my students memorize. It ends like this:

The stream that flows through my village
No longer speaks my name;
I am erased from my own land and air
Like a footprint on the sand.

With each stretch of road
All that was mine recedes,
A gush of resin, a tower,
A grove of oak trees.
My hands forget their ways
Of making cider and bread.
With memory blown clean by the wind,
I arrive naked at the sea.²

Chela:

Wow. Esta bien eso.

Magaly:

One of the men came back into the room. (*Projection begins, from Magaly's point of view, lying on the table in the torture chamber. We see the man enter and move toward her.*) My eyes were closed, but I heard him pause and gasp. I think he thought I was dead. Then he came towards me and touched my feet, and they were cold and stiff. He pushed me a bit on the table to see if I'd move and I did, and I heard him whisper "Menos mal." But I didn't open my eyes.

Dolores:

Por supuesto mujer, ¿quién podría ver eso?

Magaly:

After a minute or so, he bent down and whispered in my ear, “Mira, you’re completely frozen and I don’t even know if you can hear me. The other guy is coming back for more of you. If you want to get through this, hazte la muertita. He likes that a lot. Instead of finishing you off, he’ll just pretend he did and then drop you somewhere outside.”

Chela:

Cabrones, I can’t believe this.

Magaly:

Then I heard footsteps in the hall. I heard him leave the room quickly and then a few seconds later, the other man came through the door.

Dolores:

Me hubiera muerto de miedo. I don’t know how you lived through this.

Magaly:

By imagining myself dead, I tell you. I had to let the cold air penetrate my pores and enter my blood stream. I had to hold myself stiff without appearing to make an effort. I had to seem not to breathe.

Dolores:

Pero ¿cómo? You were conscious!

Magaly:

The less you move, the less air you need. I hardly breathed. The man felt far away from me. (*In the projection, we see him moving around her.*) Even when he ran his fingers over my thighs and forced my legs apart, he seemed to occupy a place where I was not. (*She pauses.*)

Chela:

Oyé, no te ofendes, but didn’t you hear the guy while he was — you know — doing it? Was he gross? Did he grunt, like on that tape?

Magaly:

I didn’t hear much. His breathing got fast, but I think he was trying to avoid being heard. His belt buckle hit the floor at one point. But he smelled. That I can’t forget. An acrid mix of stale tobacco and old sweat and cheap men’s cologne.

Dolores:

(*With her hands over her face.*) ¡Qué asco!

Chela:

Bueno ¿y cómo saliste de allí?

Magaly:

(Pulling her cigarettes out.) You've got to let me have one. *(Chela nods that it's ok and Magaly lights herself one.)* It was just as the other man had told me. Once this one had finished his business, he bound my hands and stuffed me into a big burlap bag, and tied it over the top of my head. Thank God that some air could get through. He carried me to a car and put me in the back, and drove out of the compound. After a while, he just stopped and dumped me in a field off the side of the road. *(She takes some drags on her cigarette and Dolores hands her a dish that was sitting on the metal cabinet to use as an ashtray.)*

I lay there for a long time in the dark, not knowing what to do. My body ached, and I thought I was losing circulation in my arms. I lay flat on my stomach and kept trying to move them, but the pain was too intense. I passed out.

Dolores:

But somebody must have come.

Magaly:

Yes, a little boy woke me up in the morning. He was on his way to school through the field and came upon me. He told me that at first he wasn't sure if I was alive or not, but then he saw me turn on my side in my sleep. He cut a hole in the bag and undid my hands and let my head out. I was so parched, I asked him for water, but the poor thing didn't have any and went back to his grandparents' house to get help. They brought me back to the house and let me bathe and gave me clothes.

Chela:

You're really lucky.

Magaly:

Yes, I owe that boy my life. His name is Damian. His grandparents hid me there for a long while. At first I could barely move, I was so destroyed by what had happened to me. It was hard for me to talk and I slept most of the time.

Dolores:

But why didn't you go back to your family?

Magaly:

A couple of days after I got to the house, the grandfather brought me a newspaper with a picture of me in it. It said that I had been killed in a car accident with Ray. Our bodies had been so badly burned that only dental records could be used to identify us. We'd been buried already.

Chela:

Eso esta rarísimo. How could they do that?

Magaly:

The grandfather told me I had to leave the country immediately and not even tell my parents that I was alive. He made arrangements to get me on a ship with other refugees that was leaving for Panama, and then going on to Mexico.

Dolores:

Asílegaste, entonces.

Magaly:

Asílegué. I was resettled by a Catholic charity, and was given shelter until I was able to find work. *(She puts out her cigarette.)*

Dolores:

Pero bueno, ¿y tu familia? Did you tell them you weren't really dead?

Magaly:

Not then. It was too dangerous to get in contact with them. If they had known I was alive they would have started making inquiries and that would have gotten them in trouble. I waited until later.

Chela:

How much later?

Magaly:

Seven years later, when the repression began to lessen. I found a nun who was going to Santiago and agreed to find my parents and bring them a message from me.

Dolores:

¿Y cómo reaccionaron?

Magaly:

My father was dead.

Chela:

Mujer, I'm so sorry.

Magaly:

He had died of a heart attack, shortly after he buried me. I mean after he thought he had buried me. My mother was alright, just older and more fragile. The nun told me she became very quiet when she read the letter. She was always very reserved.

(Projection: We see an old woman sitting at a table by a window, reading a letter that was just handed to her.)

I wrote "My dear parents, I am sending you this message to tell you that I am alive. For years I feared that if I revealed the truth, you would suffer at the hands of those who buried another woman in my name. I can no longer bear not being able to tell you that I still exist. Not a day has passed without my dreaming of you both. I am safe, and fortunately I can say that I have recovered from the ordeal that led to my departure. Please do not share this information with others if the situation at home is as grave as those outside believe. I have survived, all thanks to your love. I embrace you both and will send more news soon, your daughter."

Chela:

She must have been in shock.

(Projection: We see the old woman smile and look up and then the image fades.)

Magaly:

The nun said she took the news pretty quietly, only letting on that her prayers had been answered. She sent me a message back asking me if we could see each other again soon. She said her faith had given her a reason to live.

Dolores:

Que linda. ¿Y la fuiste a ver?

Magaly:

No, I couldn't possibly go back. The situation there got worse after 1983, when the protests started. When things got a little calmer a few years later, I thought I could save enough money to get her a plane ticket and bring her to Mexico. I set aside as much as I could from each paycheck for months and then started looking for someone I could trust to take her another message.

Dolores:

Did the nun go back?

Magaly:

My mother died. A brain hemorrhage. It came suddenly and took her quickly.

Chela:

How awful for you.

Magaly:

That was only the beginning. *(She sits up straight and then gets up, leaving the sheet on the table.)* I used to live alone in a big apartment complex near la Plaza de Tlatelolco. Once the government changed in Chile, I stopped being afraid of talking to people about myself and started to live a relatively normal life. Then last year, I got a notice slipped under my door. It said that the building complex was under new management, and that the new inspectors would be making rounds to appraise the property.

Dolores:

Were they going to paint?

Magaly:

On November 11, 1996, my buzzer rang at 10:30 in the morning. I had stayed home from work to let them in. I got to my door and looked through the peephole and stopped there for a moment.

Chela:

¿Por qué?

Magaly:

The smell. It came through the vents in the middle of the door.

Dolores:

¿De qué?

Magaly:

Stale tobacco and old sweat and cheap men's cologne.

(Projection of the guy looking through the peephole of an apartment door.)

Chela:

¡No puede ser!

Magaly:

Of course it could. I'd never really seen him clearly but I knew it was him.

Dolores:

¿Le abriste?

Magaly:

How could I? *(She goes back to the table.)*

Chela:

(Standing up and waving her arms emphatically.) Pero mujer, to identify him. You know, to go to the police y toda la chingada.

Magaly:

Ay, please, in another country, more than twenty years later, with no proof of anything? You must be crazy.

Dolores:

But didn't you want him to see you at least?

Magaly:

He knew I was behind the door. I hadn't changed my name.

Chela:

You were absolutely sure it was him?

Magaly:

He got annoyed when I wouldn't answer and started speaking loudly, telling me to open up for the inspection. The accent was — unmistakable.

Chela:

Pues, entonces ¿que hiciste?

Magaly:

He left eventually, cursing all the way down the stairs. I paced around my apartment for hours, trying to figure out what I should do. I was afraid to go out. I didn't want to meet him anywhere or give him a chance to get into my apartment without me there.

Dolores:

You think he would have broken in?

Magaly:

No, but you know, inspectors have master keys sometimes. I don't know. The day passed. I tried to sleep that night but I lay awake until dawn. I realized that I had to go.

Chela:

Go where?

Magaly:

I had to leave Mexico. I withdrew all the money I had saved for my mother's plane ticket and got a bus to Tijuana the next day. I found a coyote really fast in La Colonia Libertad, gave him his \$400, and he took me across and dropped me in San Ysidro. It would be easy for me, he said, because I am so guera. Once I was on this side, no one stopped me or asked me where I came from.

Dolores:

But your things, your apartment?

Magaly:

What good were they to me if he was there, Dolores?

Walkie-Talkie:

Attention, five minutes to reopening of the museum for the gala reception. Guards, please be at your stations, and make sure to notify all custodial staff to terminate preparation.

(Chela looks at Magaly.)

Chela:

Mujer, I don't feel like you should go through this. Me siento mal, de veras.

Magaly:

No, I think it's time. I'm ready now. *(She pulls her clothes off and Dolores takes them for her. Then she puts the sheet over herself and lies down.)*

Chela:

Let me put her guard uniform on and hold the walkie-talkie so I look like I should be here. *(She changes her garb and moves to position herself by the side entrance.)*

Dolores:

And what do I do?

Chela:

Lola, you'd better hide. When the crowd gets here, you can peek in but don't let anyone see you.

Dolores:

But I want to see! (*Chela gestures to the anteroom.*) Ok, me voy.

(*Projection: Noise of guests coming down the corridor, then entering the diorama. The curator leads Horton into the room.*)

Beltran:

It is an honor for us at the museum to have Mr. Horton with us tonight. He agreed to fly in for the opening after nearly twenty years of living abroad. Mr. Horton, would you care to tell our guests a little bit about your piece?

Horton:

(*Facing away from Magaly on the table.*) This piece comes from another time in my life, when I wanted to push myself and everyone else over the edge. I decided I was going to do something very extreme to my penis. Some other artist in, uh, Vienna, had already castrated himself, so I decided to get a little operation. But I wanted to do more than just give myself up to a surgeon. I wanted to jack off in the body of a dead woman beforehand. (*Audience gasps and two people immediately leave.*) I went in a porn store and I saw this Mexican guy looking at some pretty gruesome snuff videos, so I asked him, you know, did he know about that kind of thing. And he said, sure, but you've got to come to Tijuana ...(*Sound level lowers slightly.*)

(*Chela signals to Dolores to enter the room. There are sounds of visitors showing their disgust. Some of the crowd starts leaving the projection.*)

Horton:

...Some guy called Pancho shows up to take me to another place, and then, there I was in a room, much like this one, and there she was. Her body was cold, so you know it was—difficult, at first. I promised not to take any pictures, but I did make a recording, which I'd like to play for you now.

(*He turns on the tape. The visitors all leave the projection, leaving the curator and Horton. The curator looks at Horton awkwardly and gives him a fake smile and leaves. He stands alone and still for a moment, listening to the tape. When it ends, he looks at Magaly briefly but doesn't get close to her. Instead,*

he pulls out a comb and runs it through his hair, then he hoists up his jeans, and turns and leaves the projection.

Chela lets a minute pass before moving. Dolores comes back into the room slowly and they look at each other sheepishly for a while. Magaly sits up on the table and beckons the two of them to join her. They sit on the bed and wrap the sheet around the three of them and hover together, as the lights fade.)

The End.

Notes

1. *The Life of Saint Teresa of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa de Avila*, translated by E. Allison Peers from the critical edition of Silverio de Santa Teresa (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1991), pp. 274–275.
2. Gabriela Mistral, “The Immigrant Jew,” *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral*, translated and edited by Doris Dana (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), p. 135.