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CORDELIA, *joking*. I'm very predictable: never any money. *They laugh*.

JAMES, *to CORDELIA*. Would you accept going to Florida then.

CORDELIA. Are you sure that you didn't have any Mexican ancestors? You are stubborn as a Mexican cow.

JAMES. Does that mean "yes"?

CORDELIA. Instead of going to work, you just want me to quit, don't you?

JAMES. Hurry up! *To BERNABE*. Grandpa, can you get sick in two hours?

BERNABE. Let me tell you a secret. I used to do it when I got tired of the shelter. Food at the hospitals is better, but the people there aren't quite as entertaining. *They laugh*. However, your idea isn't clever enough. Why don't you take me to a hospital... but in Florida?

*They laugh, while lights slowly dim.*

## **SCENE TWO**

*Outside the house. Five months later. Late evening. The main door was open. CORDELIA arrives from her new job, in the company of James. They are wearing summer cloths and carrying food bags. Inside, the living room is dark and Spanish voices are heard because the television is on. She turns on the lights.*

JAMES. Anybody home?

CORDELIA. Grandpa!

CORDELIA. He's gone again!

JAMES. He will be back soon. You'll see.

*They puts the groceries on the kitchen shelves and the milk in the refrigerator. JAMES turns off the TV. She opens the garage door, but BERNABE is not there either.*

CORDELIA. I don't know where to look for him. He must have left just after breakfast because the dirty dishes are still there.

JAMES. You have to face reality.

CORDELIA. I just can't.

JAMES. Act like an American girl, not like a Mexican.

CORDELIA. What's that got to do with it?

JAMES. He's not the same person who came here almost a year ago. There are places for old people.

JAMES. Why are you trying to save him?

CORDELIA. Because he's a man with no choices.

JAMES. It's as if you had to pay for someone else's sins.

CORDELIA. *infuriated*. Stop talking like a damned playwright! I'm not going to abandon him now. That's for sure!

JAMES. *assertively*. Why didn't you ever mention that you grandpa was Mexican?

CORDELIA. That was not part of my life.

JAMES. Are you ashamed of being Hispanic?

*The doorbell rings. The black POLICEMAN MAN of Act I brings BERNABE back again. The old man seems distant.*

POLICEMAN. Your grandfather seemed to be lost.

CORDELIA. Thank God he's back!

JAMES. Where did you find him?

POLICEMAN. Wandering several miles from here.

CORDELIA. I'm so grateful.

POLICEMAN. It's a good thing that I recognized him.

CORDELIA. Grandpa, do you feel OK?

*BERNABE doesn't answer, as if in another world.*

POLICEMAN. We came by before, but you weren't home, so I kept him in the car for a couple of hours. Your Grandpa enjoyed the ride very much. We had time to chat, he doesn't remember the time I brought him here last year.



CORDELIA. He hasn't been well.

POLICEMAN. Is he on medication?

CORDELIA. Yes.

POLICEMAN. That's why he seems so distracted. My grandpa recently died, but I couldn't attend the funeral. Day shift, you know. Black people always have lots of Grandmas and Grandpas, even in the police department. *He smiles warmly.* Take good care of him. He couldn't even remember this address.

CORDELIA. He just can't memorize it.

POLICEMAN. My name is Glover, call me if you need anything.

CORDELIA. Thank you again for your help.

JAMES. Come on in, Pancho Villa, you shouldn't wander off like that.

POLICEMAN. Good night.

CORDELIA. You too, Mr. Glover.

*The POLICEMAN exits. BERNABE goes silently to a chair.*

CORDELIA. You really scared me. What happened?

BERNABE, *still distantly.* I went for a walk, it was so hot.

JAMES. What time did you leave?

BERNABE. I walked just a few blocks.

CORDELIA. Do you know what time it is? *Bernabe shrugs his shoulders.* It's almost ten in the evening. Aren't you hungry?

*Without answering, BERNABE goes to the refrigerator and pours a glass of milk, but doesn't drink it.*

CORDELIA. Don't you want any milk?

BERNABE. What milk?

CORDELIA. The glass you're holding in your hand.

*BERNABE looks at his hand as if discovering the glass for the first time.*

BERNABE. Why didn't you warm it up the way you always do?

CORDELIA. It's Summer, Grandpa. But I can do it. *She warms it an old microwave oven.* What's wrong with you, dear Papá Totote?

*CORDELIA gives him the milk, he drinks it like a child would do.*

CORDELIA. Now go to bed.

JAMES. Where did you go?

BERNABE. Who?

JAMES. You.

BERNABE. I didn't go anywhere today.

CORDELIA. You were lost, and a policeman brought you back.

BERNABE. Me? The police are no good.

CORDELIA. Finish your milk.

BERNABE. I'm not hungry.

CORDELIA. Didn't you have anything to eat?

BERNABE. Tacos.

JAMES. That was yesterday.

BERNABE. I just wanted some fresh air and... he forced me to return.

CORDELIA. You went too far.

BERNABE. Who is he?

CORDELIA. A good officer.

BERNABE, *looking at JAMES.* Where's his uniform?

CORDELIA. This is James, Grandpa.

*BERNABE continues staring at JAMES without recognizing him.*

JAMES. He needs help.

CORDELIA, *defensively*. He was lost, that's all.

BERNABE. Am I lost now?

CORDELIA. No, you're at home. Don't you know my name?

BERNABE, *smiling*. Nena.

*BERNABE drinks the last sip of milk, gives a good-night kiss to CORDELIA, and exits to the garage like an obedient child.*

JAMES. What's he doing in the garage?

CORDELIA. He's been sleeping in the car ever since we got back from Florida.

JAMES. You've got to face it. Your Grandpa is really sick. The diagnosis was definitive.

CORDELIA. But the doctors said that he could live forever.

JAMES. He might, but his memory is deteriorating very quickly. We were lucky to have left him at the hospital. My trick allowed us to find out the truth. There's no cure for Alzheimer's. You've got to decide, sooner or later.

CORDELIA. I've lost my parents, quit college, and got a damned job, just to take care of him. And now you want me to let go of him.

JAMES. Cordelia, I want to marry you.

CORDELIA. What a moment to propose!

JAMES. Don't you want to marry me?

CORDELIA. What about him?

JAMES. It's not your responsibility.

CORDELIA. Give me time... I'll find some way to make both him and you happy.

JAMES. Well I want to know now.

*BERNABE enters the living room in a bathrobe, goes to the refrigerator without noticing them.*

CORDELIA. Do you need something?... Hey, Grandpa!

BERNABE, *suddenly becomes alert*. I feel like having a glass of milk.

JAMES. You just had one.

BERNABE. Me? It was only water.

*BERNABE takes out the milk bottle from the refrigerator, and pours out milk until the glass spills over.*

CORDELIA, *running to help him*. You're spilling the milk all over!

*She takes the bottle away from BERNABE, who suddenly drops the glass on the floor, and exits to the garage without realizing it. CORDELIA wipes up the floor in silence.*

JAMES. Do you accept?

CORDELIA, *following with the argument*. Yes, he is really sick!

JAMES. That's not what I meant.

CORDELIA. Oh, James... Would you accept him?

JAMES. I've helped you a lot. But life doesn't last forever.

CORDELIA. There's a reason to wait.

JAMES. Cordelia, I love you. All this suffering has helped me to know you better. No one else would go through so much pain to help someone they're practically not related to. At least I couldn't. I've shared you with him for almost a year, and I don't want this to go on any longer. *She doesn't answer*. I want to help you think things out more clearly. *Pause*. I'm telling you once and for all: I'm not coming back until you've made up your mind about him.

CORDELIA. Don't leave me now.

JAMES. You have the solution in your own hands. This time you have to be the one to look for help... Bye.

*JAMES kisses CORDELIA on the cheek, and exits silently, leaving the door open. CORDELIA looks in tears toward the front door as he drives away. When the car is gone, she slams the door in rage.*

CORDELIA. I hate you! I hate my mother! I hate my father! I hate...

*BERNABE opens the garage door.*

BERNABE. Is James gone?

CORDELIA, *hiding her tears.* Yes.

BERNABE. Why are you crying? *She shrugs her shoulders.* El amor lo puede todo.

CORDELIA. Please, not in Spanish now!

BERNABE. Love is almighty.

CORDELIA. Whose love? Not my kind of love!

BERNABE. You've been studying too hard. You need a vacation. *In a mental lapse.* Have you ever been to Florida?

CORDELIA, *losing her control.* No!

BERNABE. Go with James. When a couple has problems, a vacation is the answer... You'll see the ocean... Horizons without limits.

CORDELIA. When was the last time you went to the ocean?

BERNABE. Never. Just in the movies.

CORDELIA. Would you like to go to a Mexican beach?

BERNABE. I'm too old for traveling. Go with James to Cancún, and bring me back a bag full of sand. Living here with you is better than any vacation. One day I thought that I was Papá Totote to nobody, que la vida se me había ido de las manos y la soledad más me iba a durar...

CORDELIA. I can't follow you!

BERNABE, *mistaking CORDELIA for ABBY.* ¿Por qué me hablas en inglés, Abigaíl? Te lo tengo prohibido!

CORDELIA. I'm not Abby. She's my mother. I'm Cordelia.

BERNABE, *simultaneously.* Eres una muchacha berrinchuda que mereces una paliza, y eso es lo que te voy a dar por aparentar que eres una gringa! Tú eres mexicana, me oyes! Nada de hablar inglés, ni conmigo ni con nadie!

CORDELIA, *simultaneously*. Stop!... Granpa, no... Please!... I'm your Nena...

BERNABE. Te voy a pegar si me vuelves a hablar en inglés, maldita chiquilla! *BERNABE hits CORDELIA with both hands.*

BERNABE, *simultaneously*. Me tienen harto, tú y tu madre, se avergüenzan de mí. Todos me creen un indio. Ten para que te sirva de escarmiento. ¿Vas a hablar español o no?

CORDELIA, *simultaneously*. Calm down. Please don't hit me! I don't know how to speak Spanish! I love you! I'm Cordelia, please, Papá Totote, yo te amo!

*As soon as BERNABE hears the Spanish words, he stops hitting her.*

BERNABE. ¡Ves como sí hablas español! Yo te voy a enseñar a perfeccionarlo a golpes. ["See, you know how to speak Spanish. I'm going to beat you until you get better at it!"].

CORDELIA. ¡Soy Nena!

BERNABE *confuses CORDELIA with her dead brother.* Nena murió en Linares, se cayó en un pozo seco.

CORDELIA. That was my brother. He was the one killed in an accident.

BERNABE, *insane*. ¡Inglés no, inglés no! No lo entiendo. *He starts destroying everything.* ¿Por qué vine a trabajar a estas tierras? Abandoné mi familia y mi país, todo por dinero. Money, money! *The English words are pronounced with a heavy Hispanic accent.* Not in English! I don't understand it... Why did I come to work here? I left my family and my country, and only because of money, money!

*CORDELIA runs to the telephone and dials the emergency number.*

CORDELIA. 8367 Mayfair. A sick man! No, crazy! Hurry up!

*BERNABE violently grabs the telephone from CORDELIA.* Te dije que hablaras español! No English! No English! *The pronunciation is heavily Hispanic now. The lights go off suddenly.*

### **SCENE THREE**

*CORDELIA's house, several hours later. ABBY, in an elegant summer dress, and CORDELIA, in short, tattered blue jeans, in extended conversation.*

ABBY. I came as quickly as I could. *CORDELIA doesn't answer.* I know how you feel. It must be terrible for you. You did the best you could, but he did not even notice it.

CORDELIA. How do you know that?

ABBY. The police informed me. I didn't have the slightest idea that he was so sick, did you? *No answer.* I suppose that you are going back to college in August. We are willing to pay your tuition, and your allowance too... with a raise. You have proven you're a grown up, living on your own, and with such a promising young man in sight. By the way, your father says that I don't talk about anything but James and you. I bet you love him very much, don't you?. *Silence.* Don't you love him?

CORDELIA, *after a short pause.* Not anymore.

ABBY. Just wait. He'll come back soon.

CORDELIA. You came to see me just because it was the proper thing to do. I am all right. Now you can leave for good.

ABBY. Don't say words which you will later regret, my dear.

CORDELIA. Mama, I don't think I ever loved you.

ABBY. You are free to feel whatever you like, but I am your Mother, and always will be.

CORDELIA. Is he still your Father?

ABBY. Biologically, yes.

CORDELIA. I couldn't say it better myself.

ABBY. Whatever I did to you, it is nothing compared to the suffering he inflicted on me.

CORDELIA. That's why I don't hate you as much as you hate him.

ABBY. You'll understand my position someday.

CORDELIA. Do you mean when you die?

ABBY. Maybe then. You will discover someday that living in this country is no fiesta. You have heard about the melting pot, Europeans forget in two generations how to speak German or Italian, and soon lose their traditions. But not Mexicans, because they always dream of returning, year after year, without ever going back. It's a curse! Your Grandpa never melted, he enjoyed being a minority. Your Grandma and I suffered because of that. And later with your father. God knows what I have to endure to save my marriage! Neither your Grandfather, nor Mexico was to his liking. He is so typically American in that respect.

CORDELIA, *caustically.* It's ironic that both countries are so close geographically, and far apart spiritually. There must be a reason why God made them so incompatible, and yet so inseparable. Grandpa made me discover something latent inside of me. I belong to the "other" America, the one Columbus discovered.

ABBY. Go to Mexico and become a real Mexican, or stay here and be what you are. But no, you won't, because you are just as stubborn as your Grandfather.

CORDELIA. Why don't you ever call him Father?

ABBY. If you want to endure the one fourth Mexican blood you have, good for you, but you will also bear the consequences. I won't. To be a minority means having a perpetual disadvantage.

CORDELIA, *after a pause*. How did you really know Grandpa was sick?

ABBY. I told you, the police phoned me.

CORDELIA. That's a lie. The police don't know your name. James told you.

ABBY. Yes. He is waiting outside. I wanted to speak with you privately.

CORDELIA. I don't have anything to say to you anymore.

ABBY, *sincerely*. What did he give you that I couldn't?

CORDELIA. Love, mama, plain and simple love. *Pause*. Please leave.

ABBY. I better go. You don't love me, Cordelia. You do not seem capable of showing the sort of love you have for... for my father. I'm not jealous, but I want to be loved the same way. Could you forgive me?

CORDELIA, *after a pause*. No... at least not today.

ABBY. You are right. We too are incompatible, and yet inseparable... You have always understood emotions better than me because I was raised by my mother to be pragmatic. I am not good at speaking about myself. My brother's death was an accident that destroyed our family because we never learned how to forgive each other... Cordelia, teach me how to forgive!

CORDELIA. I feel that our family love also drowned at the bottom of that Mexican well... Are you willing to bring it back to life?

ABBY. I would do it with all of my heart!

CORDELIA. We would have to weave so many broken threads.

ABBY. Con amor lo haremos... Adios, Cordelia. *ABBY kisses her daughter who offers no response.*

*ABBY goes to the door and looks back to CORDELIA.*

CORDELIA. Mother, never say Adios!



*ABBY smiles with tenderness and leaves. The door remains open. She meets JAMES, who is waiting on the porch outside.*

ABBY. I don't know how to be a mother anymore. Take good care of her.

JAMES. Is she mad at me?

ABBY. I am afraid she is. Good luck.

*ABBY exits. James walks in timidly. CORDELIA notices him silently.*

JAMES. I just don't know what to say... in English or in Spanish.

CORDELIA. All right, you won. Grandpa was sick.

JAMES. I'm sorry I wasn't here.

CORDELIA. They took him away.

JAMES. Grandpa needs another kind of help.

CORDELIA. But they don't love him as much as I do.

JAMES. If love were the only solution! Just remember that these last months were the happiest of his life.

CORDELIA. I'll miss him. *She starts crying.*

JAMES. Me too.

CORDELIA. Now he can't return my love anymore.

*Pause.*

JAMES, *trying to cheer her up.* He taught me how to enjoy diversity.

*CORDELIA smiles weakly through her tears.*

CORDELIA. He was the greatest Grandpa in the world!

JAMES. I'll always remember him the way he was the day before we went to Florida. Won't you? I really enjoyed it. I've even started writing a play about all this. You didn't want to leave him, and I had the clever idea of taking him to...

*They relive their memories as time flashes back through the eyes of the playwright. BERNABE opens the garage door. He is well dressed and happy, as in the prime of his life. The more real he appears, the better.*

BERNABE. A vacation at a hospital—why don't I go to Florida and you stay to enjoy the emergency room? The nurses are pretty, and the food is delicious. You can watch TV if you pay a reasonable fee, but only at certain hours. They will pamper you with all kinds of tests and injections.

*They laugh.*

JAMES. It's just for five days.

BERNABE. Great! I'm so well trained I can survive even in a hospital. They can't beat me! I'm healthy, yet not immortal. But I can stage any sickness you can imagine. Mexicans, you know, are born actors!

CORDELIA. But you're too energetic to be admitted to a public hospital today.

JAMES. Let's have a rehearsal. I'm a doctor, and Cordelia is a pretty nurse.

BERNABE. Mind your manners, I'm keeping an eye on you!

JAMES, *as a professional M.D.* Open your mouth... you eat too much. The ear... you hear much more than you should, even gossip. Your heart... still with space for loving. Your lungs... Do you smoke?

BERNABE. When I have the money to buy cigarettes.

JAMES. That's why you have such clean lungs. Any hereditary diseases?

BERNABE. Laziness.

JAMES. That won't kill you.

CORDELIA, *stopping the role-playing.* They won't believe us. Papá Totote is as healthy as a cow.

BERNABE. As a Mexican cow, with lower cholesterol.

CORDELIA. Stop this nonsense. We can't take him to a hospital because he isn't sick.

JAMES. I know how. Remember the officer that brought grandpa back. He can take him away now.

CORDELIA. But he's clever enough to see through this gimmick.

BERNABE. You don't know me. I'm not the poor old man you think. I just pretended to be in order to see my granddaughter. I have money which you will inherit. See, I even have a health insurance card. *He shows a set of credit cards.* Take me to a good hospital, and then go to Florida. There you can stay at my house at the sea shore.

CORDELIA. Are you still playing roles?

BERNABE. See, I'm a good actor. Let's do the script. Cordelia phones our friend the policeman. *She dials.* I'll be on the sofa near death, with a heart attack or something. *He lies down on the sofa.* James opens the door when the policeman come. *The POLICEMAN seems to know his role.*

POLICEMAN. Where is the dying man?

JAMES. On the sofa.

CORDELIA. Please handle him with care.

POLICEMAN. I'll take him to the best hospital in town!

*Lights fade completely.*

BERNABE, *with the lights off.* How do I know that you aren't going to leave me at the hospital forever?

JAMES. Because you are healthy.

CORDELIA. Because I love you.

*Lights suddenly return. BERNABE's image and the POLICEMAN have disappeared. CORDELIA and JAMES are center-stage in the same position as they were before the flash-back.*

JAMES. You never answered my question. Would you marry me?

CORDELIA. I asked for time to think... James, would you marry, not a feminist but almost an... anarchist?

JAMES. With one condition.

CORDELIA. What?

JAMES. That we love not only with a Mexican heart, but also with a Gringo mind.

CORDELIA. Is that possible?

JAMES. Yes, if we learn how to enjoy diversity... while becoming one.

CORDELIA. I promise to do my best. *They kiss.*

JAMES. *Joking.* Are you sure that I have already met all your Mexican relatives?

CORDELIA. Not all, someday I will introduce you to a Chicano baby.

JAMES. I don't know what he... (*Cordelia nods smiling*) or she would be, but our baby has to belong to a new race, one without barriers and sorrows.

CORDELIA. There is no such a world.

JAMES. I know, but we can invent it. *The couple kiss each other while the lights dim. FINAL CURTAIN.*