

UNMERCIFUL
GOOD
FORTUNE

Edwin Sánchez

UNMERCIFUL GOOD FORTUNE
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edwin Sánchez's productions include *CLEAN* (Kennedy Center's Fund for New American Plays, nominated by the American Theater Critics Association as Best New Play 1995) produced by Hartford Stage; *TRAFFICKING IN BROKEN HEARTS* at the Atlantic Theater Company in New York; *FLOORSHOW: DOÑA SOL AND HER TRAINED DOG* at Latino Chicago (all to be published by Broadway Play Publishing Inc in a collection entitled *PLAYS BY EDWIN SÁNCHEZ*); and *FATTY TISSUE*, produced by Theater by Design of Chicago. His work has been workshopped at the Mark Taper Forum, Seattle Repertory Company, and South Coast Repertory, for whom he is currently commissioned to write a new play.

He is the recipient of a 1995 Berrilla Kerr Foundation Award, the 1994 Princess Grace Playwriting Award, the 1994 ASCAP Cole Porter Award, the 1993 Barrie Stavis Playwriting Fellowship, the 1993 Eugene O'Neill Scholarship, the 1992 George Pierce Baker Scholarship, the 1991 William Morris Agency Fellowship, and a 1989 Artists Fellowship in Playwriting presented by the New York State Arts Council. He participated in 1995's Sundance Screenwriting Lab and is a 1994 graduate of the Yale School of Drama. Mr Sanchez is a member of the Dramatists Guild and New Dramatists.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

UNMERCIFUL GOOD FORTUNE premiered in Chicago in January of 1996 as a co-production of Northlight Theater (Russell Vandembroucke, Artistic Director; Richard Friedman, Managing Director) and Victory Gardens Theater (Dennis Zacek, Artistic Director; John Walker, Managing Director), and as winner of the A T & T Onstage New Play Award. The cast and creative contributors were:

MARITZA CRUZ Sol Miranda
LUZ Carmen Roman
PITO Ernesto Gasco
PAUL LESLIE Jim Cantafio
JEREMY KIRKWOOD Clifton Williams
FATIMA GARCIA Denise Casano
Director Susana Tubert
Scenic design Mary Griswold
Costume design Claudia Boddy
Lighting design Todd Hensley
Sound design/original music Lindsay Jones
Production stage manager Amy A Field

CHARACTERS AND SETTING

MARITZA CRUZ, 26, *single, assistant to the Bronx D A*

LUZ, 42, *MARITZA's mother. She is bedridden.*

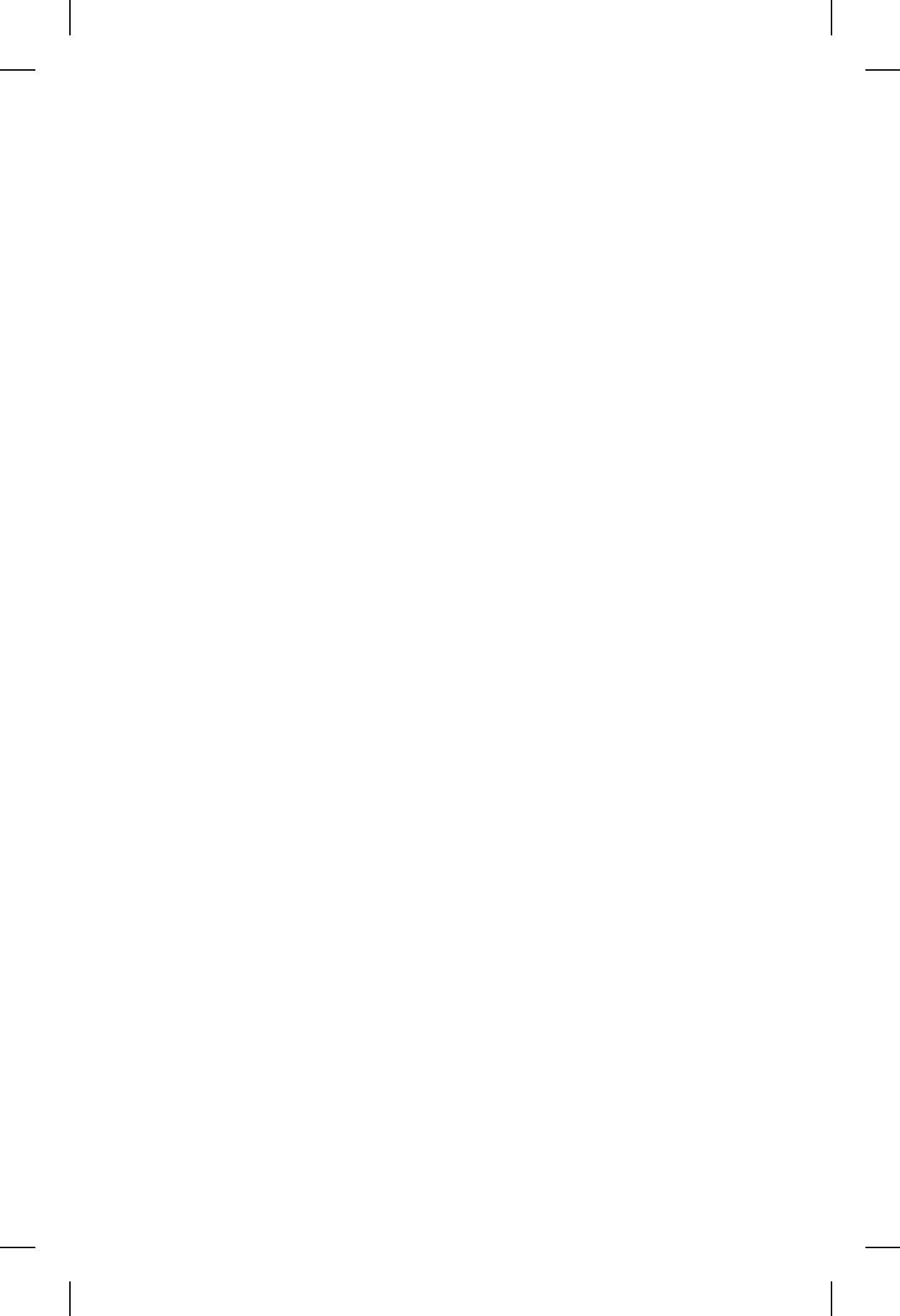
PITO, 77, *MARITZA's father.*

PAUL LESLIE, *Bronx D A*

JEREMY KIRKWOOD, *Assistant Bronx D A*

FATIMA GARCIA, 28

The scenes take place in the Bronx D A's office, the interrogation room, LUZ's bedroom, and the living room.



ACT ONE

(FATIMA, a woman of about 28, wearing a fast food uniform, complete with hat, blankly faces the audience.)

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

(Lights up on MARITZA. She is wearing a full slip and brushing her hair. LUZ is in her bed, staring straight ahead. Music begins to play softly in the background. MARITZA tries to feed LUZ, who refuses to open her mouth.)

MARITZA: Come on, Mami. Just one. You ate for Leyda.

(Enter PITO, looking for his granddaughter. He has a newspaper under his arm.)

PITO: Marisol?

(MARITZA hurries to the door, where she calls out.)

MARITZA: Marisol. Grandpa's ready to take you to school now. Hurry up.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

(PITO sits by LUZ. He takes her hand and kisses it. She does not react. MARITZA goes to her purse where she takes out some money. PITO begins to read the paper to LUZ, who takes the paper from him and hits him with it. PITO gently laughs.)

MARITZA: Papi, here. Marisol needed money for school. I forget for what.

(PITO takes the money. MARITZA is about to move the tray. She asks LUZ.)

MARITZA: Do you want anymore?

PITO: She looks much better today.

(LUZ begins to hum to herself. MARITZA gets her dress.)

PITO: Ah, and Marisol is going to need money for lunch. She doesn't like the lunch you made for her.

(MARITZA, with the dress half on, finishes putting it on as she goes for her purse. She gives PITO more money. LUZ laughs to herself.)

MARITZA: She can buy lunch at school but please don't buy her anything when she gets out.

PITO: Sí, sí.

(PITO kisses LUZ and MARITZA and exits.)

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

MARITZA: *(Calling through the door)* Marisol! *(To LUZ)* Did I give you this much trouble when I was growing up?

(LUZ does not answer. With one hand she very gently touches her own face.)

MARITZA: I'm late, Mami.

LUZ: Adiosito.

MARITZA: I'll try to be back early.

LUZ: Adiosito.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

(MARITZA exits. At work, she stands in the doorway to her office. PAUL LESLIE is seated at her desk.)

MARITZA: You wanted to see me, Sir?

(PAUL studies her a moment.)

MARITZA: Maritza Cruz. Assistant District Attorney. First year. This is my office.

PAUL: I wanted to see you yesterday.

MARITZA: I was in court all day.

PAUL: I'm sure you were very busy. Ms Cruz, what I have here is a complaint filed by one of your colleagues. This first-year punk felt you were interfering in the handling of his case. Unfortunately, he is the son of a friend of mine.

MARITZA: The suspect's mother was crying. I was (trying to help.)

PAUL: I don't like it when a rookie pulls some strings so that I have to get involved. I should never have to get involved, Cruz, and neither should you. There are twelve levels of management between us. Twelve. I only have to see you when I rubber stamp your hiring and when I'm reintroduced to you at the Christmas party. Now, I don't want to have to bury you in the library and I don't think you want that either. You're a very bright young woman, Cruz. Are you smirking at me?

MARITZA: No, Sir. *(Pause)* He was disrespectful, Sir.

PAUL: He was also dealing with a high-priority case. Do I have to define what that is for you?

MARITZA: I know what a high-priority case is, Sir.

PAUL: Good day, Cruz. *(He turns to leave.)*

MARITZA: The suspect was being tried, not his mother. And even though she's not one of your friends she still deserves to be treated with some respect. I'm sorry, Sir. I was out of line. I apologize.

(PAUL picks up his phone and dials an in-house number.)

PAUL: *(Into phone)* Jeremy, Maritza Cruz will be coming down to see you at the end of the day. Set her up in the library. No, it's okay. She volunteered. *(He hangs up. To MARITZA:)* Anything else?

MARITZA: No, Sir.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

(PAUL exits. MARITZA goes to her desk. She puts her folders and her briefcase down. She picks up her briefcase and throws it on her desk. JEREMY enters with two coffees. She sees that he has witnessed her little outburst.)

MARITZA: I'm sorry.

JEREMY: Please. In fact, take the one with the caffeine. You're a lot more fun when you got a little kick to you. So what'd you do? Word is you're persona non grata upstairs.

MARITZA: I was called on the carpet. No big deal.

JEREMY: It is a big deal. I was here for three years before he knew my name. And that's just the way I liked it. Don't make enemies, Maritza.

MARITZA: I would never be disrespectful to him, he's my superior. I wasn't raised that way.

JEREMY: Okay, so you just do your penance, a couple of days in library hell, and he'll hopefully forget all about it and then we can plot some way to put you back in his good graces.

MARITZA: I don't care if I'm in his good graces.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

JEREMY: Maritza, I'm just trying to be your friend here. I know your mother has been, is very sick but learn where to take your aggression out. Don't commit career suicide. Never insult the big guy. He always wins. He will always win. You want to take it out on somebody, take it out on me.

MARITZA: Thank you. *(Silence)*

JEREMY: How is she?

MARITZA: The same. She lies in her bed mixing memories and fantasies all day long until I don't know what's what. She'll tell me things she expects me to remember and she's so sure of them that I begin to think that maybe I've forgotten pieces of my life.

JEREMY: Which pieces?

MARITZA: The fun pieces that only she can remember.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

(LUZ's bedroom. LUZ is, as always, in bed. She is a very attractive woman of 42.)

LUZ: Why don't you ever come to see me?

MARITZA: I was here this morning, Mami. I fed you breakfast.

LUZ: Leyda fed me breakfast.

MARITZA: Let's change your clothes, Mami. Get you into something nice for dinner.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

MARITZA: Comb out your hair. *(Laughs)* I remember when you used my lint brush on your hair. Remember, Mami?

LUZ: Of course I remember.

MARITZA: What do you want to wear tonight?

LUZ: I want Leyda to dress me.

MARITZA: Leyda's not here, Mami.

LUZ: She's the fun one. I want her to dress me. And to brush my hair. I love you, Maritza, but you depress me.

MARITZA: Mami, I'm not in the mood for Leyda tonight.

LUZ: You go get her, I'll wait.

(MARITZA puts her head in her hands.)

MARITZA: I'm so tired.

LUZ: You too? Even with all this bed rest—

LUZ & MARITZA: I'm so tired.

(MARITZA raises her head. She has "become" Leyda for LUZ.)

MARITZA: Okay, girlfriend, we've got to get you ready for tonight. The sailors are in port and honey, they are screaming out your name.

LUZ: (*Laughs*) Oh, they are not.

MARITZA: Come on, you old whore. Let's get you into something with cleavage. Something that whispers "shore leave".

LUZ: You go by yourself.

MARITZA: I can't handle all those men by myself, Luz. You gotta help me.

LUZ: You think they still want me?

MARITZA: They all want you. (*She very gently begins to undress LUZ.*) No matter where you go you're always the center of attention.

(LUZ laughs. She grimaces in pain when MARITZA raises one of her arms.)

MARITZA: Sorry.

LUZ: Maybe we'll meet an admiral. He'll invite us back on the ship and give a party for us. I'd love to be able to say I danced on water. Do you have a lot of boyfriends?

MARITZA: Do you want to take a rest now?

LUZ: No, it's okay. Do men like you?

MARITZA: Like mother, like daughter. You are looking at 100% man candy. Men throw themselves at my feet. Well, the ones with bad aim do. The bright ones go for

the bull's eye. Men would kill for us, Mami. It's our curse. So young, so beautiful.

LUZ: Maritza doesn't like men, you know? She can have any man she wants. I mean, she's pretty. Not like you and me, of course, but intelligent pretty.

MARITZA: Yeah, she's a bright one.

LUZ: Talk to her. Whenever I bring it up with her she gets so angry, you know? (*Laughs*) She's ruining our track record.

MARITZA: I'll be right back.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

LUZ: Aren't you going to brush my hair? Give me a couple of spit curls.

MARITZA: Yeah, yeah. I gotta see about dinner. You practice leaning against lamp posts or something.

(*MARITZA exits to living room. Her father, PITO, is sitting on the sofa. He is 77 to LUZ's 42. He is dressed formally and sits with his hat in his lap.*)

MARITZA: La bendición.

PITO: Dios me la bendiga.

MARITZA: Where's Marisol?

PITO: She's in her room. I bought her some pizza.

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

MARITZA: I was going to make dinner for her.

PITO: Now you don't have to. How's your mother?

MARITZA: I'm taking a Mami break.

PITO: Can I feed her?

MARITZA: She's on the Leyda jag. She only wants Leyda tonight.

PITO: You're a good daughter. You can't see it now, I know, but Luz was the prettiest girl in Isabela. So shy. She would walk through the town square with her sisters. All of them dressed in white. Like angels.

MARITZA: Have you eaten yet?

PITO: I was considered by everyone to be a very serious, very honorable man—No, but I'm not really hungry—I was forty-seven years old. Divorced. Used to living alone, and this—

MARITZA: I'm making stew for Mami. You want some?

PITO: Are you going to let me finish my story? Young girl enters my life. This angel sent to me from God himself to end my loneliness. And now God wants her back. (*He begins to cry.*) Why does God put us on earth to suffer?

MARITZA: Papi, come on. Look, I'm going to start dinner. Why don't you come into the kitchen with me and tell me stories about when you were growing up in Puerto Rico. Come on.

PITO: Are you finished with your mother?

MARITZA: She can wait a little bit, just for tonight. You can help me cook.

PITO: Men don't cook.

MARITZA: Okay, you can watch. And talk to me, Papi.

LUZ: (*V/O*) Leyda—

FATIMA: Will you be having fries with that?

LUZ: (*V/O*) Leyda, come brush my hair.

(*The office area. MARITZA is already at work. JEREMY enters.*)

JEREMY: Thank me later. Grab your things, we're outta her.

MARITZA: Wait a second, what do you mean?

JEREMY: We're going to an arraignment. I need somebody who speaks Spanish and I can't find a translator.

MARITZA: Santiago is in his cubicle.

JEREMY: Goodness me, I must have missed him. So again, all the translators were out, so I had to take you.

MARITZA: I'm not going to lie.

JEREMY: That's okay, I'll lie for both of us. They just brought in a girl who worked in a fast food restaurant and poisoned the burgers.

MARITZA: She did what?

JEREMY: She worked at "Country Joe's Burgers" off Fordham Road. She had been there for a little less than a week. Got there extra early, most days. Kept to herself. We don't know how she did it, but she managed to lace a batch of hamburgers with poison. We are waiting for more info on the poison. Twelve people reported dead since yesterday. The papers are going to eat her up. I think I saw Paul actually crack a smile. This could be a major case for the man so he's probably in a real forgiving mood right now.

MARITZA: And?

JEREMY: And? You're welcome.

(The interrogation room. FATIMA is seated, wearing handcuffs. PAUL, MARITZA, and JEREMY sit at a table, a few feet away from her.)

PAUL: What is she? Twelve?

JEREMY: Twenty?

MARITZA: Twenty-eight.

(FATIMA smiles at this last number.)

JEREMY: An old woman neighbor of hers kept crossing herself and telling us she's a witch.

MARITZA: (*Dismissively*) Oh, God.

PAUL: (*To MARITZA*) You live in the Bronx, Ms Cruz, have you ever seen her around?

MARITZA: (*She rolls her eyes.*) No, Sir.

PAUL: She offered no resistance on her arrest. Just raised her hands and said—

FATIMA: (*Under PAUL line*) Ya era hora.

PAUL: "It's about time" in Spanish.

JEREMY: How did the police even find out?

PAUL: The mother of a little girl who died called in.

MARITZA: A little girl?

PAUL: Eight years old. (*Pause*) Ask her if she wants to speak to you in Spanish.

MARITZA: (*To FATIMA*) ¿Quieres hablar conmigo en Español? (*No reply from FATIMA.*) Soy Maritza Cruz.

FATIMA: (*Offering her hand*) Gimme your hand. (*MARITZA does not.*) Gimme your hand.

(*MARITZA still does not. PAUL intercedes and offers his hand.*)

PAUL: Paul Leslie. District Attorney for the Bronx.

(*PAUL and FATIMA shake hands. PAUL motions to JEREMY, who rises and joins them.*)

JEREMY: Jeremy Kirkwood, deputy district attorney.

(*JEREMY and FATIMA shake hands. FATIMA again offers her hand to MARITZA. There is an awkward pause. MARITZA slowly offers her hand. MARITZA and FATIMA barely touch hands.*)

FATIMA: Why you? You're not like me. You are nothing like me!

(JEREMY enters MARITZA's work area.)

JEREMY: Why is it, no matter what time I get here, you always beat me?

MARITZA: It's the only time I can do my prep work. It's quiet.

JEREMY: Tell me about it. I got three kids.

MARITZA: My daughter's six years old and she can already zone me out. Last night I'm tucking her in and she faced the wall.

JEREMY: I would have flipped the mattress over with the little rug rat on it. Bet you cried.

MARITZA: Yeah, well. She wants to go live with her father.

(The interrogation room. FATIMA is seated at a table with two chairs facing each other. JEREMY enters.)

JEREMY: What's your Legal Aid counselor doing outside?

FATIMA: Oh, is he outside?

JEREMY: He won't come in.

FATIMA: We made a deal.

JEREMY: I can't talk to you unless he's here.

FATIMA: It's okay. I trust you.

JEREMY: Yeah, well, my boss wouldn't feel too comfortable about this.

FATIMA: He's an asshole.

JEREMY: Uh, I have to tape everything you say.

(JEREMY places a small tape recorder on the table. FATIMA picks it up and speaks directly into it.)

FATIMA: Your boss is an asshole. Too bad this thing can't record you nodding.

JEREMY: (*Reprimanding her*) Fatima.

FATIMA: (*Imitating him*) Jeremy. (*Pause*) So, is it always noisy like this?

JEREMY: You get used to it. It becomes a hum.

FATIMA: Oh, I like it. It's the quiet that sucks. I need noise around me. Noise at least means people are around. Too quiet, you think too much. Hey, can you get me a T V?

JEREMY: There's one in the community room.

FATIMA: Yeah, well, they're always watching soaps. They get into fights about whether it should be in English or Spanish.

JEREMY: I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do.

FATIMA: Cool. (*Pause*) So who gets these tapes? Your boss?

JEREMY: Everything we say, he knows.

(FATIMA *smiles.*)

FATIMA: Cool.

JEREMY: Do you want to talk to me?

FATIMA: I want to talk to Maritza.

JEREMY: I thought you didn't like her.

FATIMA: Maritza or nobody.

JEREMY: Let's get this straight from this point forward, okay? I like being a nice guy, and I'd rather we did this nice but if we have to do it the other way, that's fine too. You're in no position to be laying down rules. The rules are made by me, period. You got a problem with that? I'll just talk to your Legal Aid rep.

FATIMA: No you won't. You know why? 'Cause I'm the one who's gonna get you a promotion and Mr Asshole a lot of free press. Something he really likes, you know. It's all in your hands. But the only person I'll talk to is Maritza. You wanna see a trick, sure you do. Gimme your hand.

(JEREMY awkwardly does. FATIMA turns off the recorder.)

JEREMY: Look, it doesn't really make me look too great with my boss if I have you calling the shots. Whatever you want to tell her you can tell me.

(He reaches for the recorder in order to turn it on.

FATIMA pulls it out of his reach.)

FATIMA: If you don't break up with this woman you're seeing she's going to get pregnant. Your wife already suspects something, but she's playing it real cool. This other woman is going to wreck your life if you let her.

(JEREMY jerks his hand away and stares at her.)

FATIMA: I didn't think the recorder should be on for that. That's nobody's business but yours. Her name is Wanda.

(JEREMY slowly stands. FATIMA hands him the recorder.)

FATIMA: See what you can do about getting me Maritza. Oh, and like this, with no guards. Girl talk don't need no chaperone.

(JEREMY stumbles out. FATIMA makes a gun out of her hand, fires it after him, and blows on it. Lights dim. In the background MARITZA is picking up Marisol's toys.)

MARITZA: Marisol. Marisol, come pick up your toys. I'm not going to clean up your messes anymore. You make them, you clean them up. Marisol!

(The interrogation room. PAUL enters carrying a portable T V.)

PAUL: A little...loan for you. Thought you might like to have your own T V for awhile. You know, there are a lot of privileges you can earn with the right cooperation. You are a very bright young woman, Fatima. Did I say your name right? (FATIMA *does not answer.*) You really gave old Jeremy a fright, didn't you? He's a real stickler for rules. I'm a little more flexible. Especially for the right person. For instance, you. You talk directly to me and I become Mr Cooperation. Have we got a deal? (FATIMA *does not answer.*) I take that to mean that you don't care to see Ms Cruz, either.

(FATIMA *finally looks at him.*)

PAUL: Deal directly with me, talk directly with me, and I'll allow you to see Ms Cruz. What do you say? Shall we shake on it?

(*They do.* FATIMA *pushes the T V, screen first, to the floor, where it shatters.*)

PAUL: Are you out of your fucking mind?!

FATIMA: Maritza. Oh, and by the way, you'll be completely bald by the time you're fifty-seven.

(PAUL *catches himself as his hand involuntarily goes up to his head.*)

FATIMA: Part it on the other side. It'll disguise it better.

PAUL: Kiss daylight goodbye, Ms Garcia.

FATIMA: So tell me, why you still in the Bronx, Paul?

PAUL: There's a car outside waiting to take you to Riker's.

FATIMA: It's not fair that someone as good as you should be wasting themselves here. It's almost a sin. I'm gonna get you out of the Bronx. Me. I'm gonna make it so that six days from now the higher ups are gonna have to eat your shit for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

PAUL: I think you're confusing yourself with someone who matters.

FATIMA: You called Morris, your boss, two days ago and today was when he finally got around to returning your phone call. You don't think that's disrespectful? He's afraid of you and he's gonna do everything he can to keep you down. But he don't have me, you do, and you only get me once in a lifetime, Paul. So what you gonna do, use me or waste me?

PAUL: What do you want?

FATIMA: To meet with Maritza. Alone.

(PAUL reaches the door.)

PAUL: Have a good life, Ms Garcia.

FATIMA: "Crusading Bronx D A Fights Evil". That'll be your first headline. Six days of them, Paul. The next one will have your name in it. Like it?

(PAUL looks at her, picks up the box of the broken T V, and exits.)

FATIMA: Yeah, well, I thought you would.

(The interrogation room)

JEREMY: What I got was exactly what you heard on the tape. What I'm saying is that this is going to be a major case and I think we should have as much information going into the court room as possible, and if talking to Maritza loosens this nut case's tongue, well then fine. Let's go with it.

PAUL: Why do you think she wants to see you?

MARITZA: I don't know, Sir.

PAUL: Okay, Ms Cruz, have a first meeting with her tomorrow. Maritza, this comes under the heading of "high priority". *(He exits.)*

MARITZA: Are you okay about this?

JEREMY: Yeah, sure. She took my hand and she knew me. I mean she knew me. It was like I was feeding her information about me. She knew everything.

(LUZ's bedroom. MARITZA is giving her a sponge bath.)

LUZ: Nothing she ever did bothered me as much as when she got herself pregnant.

MARITZA: Who?

LUZ: Maritza, who else? Falls for the first man to look at her sweetly. For pete's sakes, where's the girl's brain?

MARITZA: Maybe she was in love, Luz.

LUZ: Que love ni love. We can fall in love every night, can't we, Leyda?

MARITZA: You said it, Luz.

LUZ: If you're gonna get swept off your feet every time a man sweet talks to you, forget about it. I wanted her to live, have boyfriends. Not wake up one day with a screaming kid on her hip and no taste of life. Ay, Leyda. You and me are the smart ones. Never let a man own you. And the second he says he loves you, drop him.

MARITZA: Amen to that, Luz.

LUZ: You know, I wish I could talk to your sister like this, but she won't let me. Her face gets tight, then it closes up and she's judging. She, who hasn't lived, is judging me. Leyda, you and me are gonna go away.

MARITZA: Oh yeah, where to?

LUZ: Anywhere but here. And you know, I'll never come back to the Bronx again. Not even to visit. But we won't take Maritza with us. She just don't know how to have a good time. I would do everything differently. Ven acá, you know what really makes me angry about Maritza?

ACT ONE

17

MARITZA: No, what?

LUZ: She settled. First man, first job. No sense of adventure. She's just like her father.

PITO: I killed myself to make a safe place for my little family. Worked and worked and worked.

LUZ: I want to be an evil woman. You'll be my partner in crime, huh, Leyda?

MARITZA: New York watch out.

LUZ: Que New York. The world better watch out.

(MARITZA *exits.*)

LUZ: All those other ladies will have to eat my dust as my five-inch sling backs tear up the dance floor. Rumba, Mambo, Cha Cha Cha. The back of my neck is sopping wet, I push my hair up, and every man is staring at me as it cascades down my naked and glistening neck. I dare them not to want me.

PITO: My little virgin in white.

(*The interrogation room. FATIMA is seated. PAUL and MARITZA enter.*)