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SANTA CRUZ

THE DIGITAL EURIPIDES  
(Translating *Medea* into a media rich world)

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Stephen Richter

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The Thesis of Stephen Richter  
is approved by

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Professor Patty Gallagher, Chair

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Professor James Bierman

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Professor Mary-Kay Gamel

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Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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## THE DIGITAL EURIPIDES

(Translating Medea into a media rich world)

Stephen Richter

### ABSTRACT

*Maria - a Telenovela for the Stage* is more than an adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*. It is multi-media, transtemporal conversation between a variety of literary and cultural works, framed and within a contemporary context. From *The Tempest*, with stagings that reverse the gender and race of the characters, to the Latin American telenovela, with the genre's objectification of the female body through media imagery that reproduces ideals of femininity in *el mundo latino*, *Maria* challenges the canonical character of *Medea* and attempts to make her actions / motivations sympathetic to a contemporary audience. This thesis is an extended translator's note to *Maria - a telenovela for the stage* and a paratextual commentary for our times, examining *Medea's* various permutations across time, genre, media, and technologies. It is my intention to point out how a story that has endured over 2,800 years of cultural variation continues to speak to our present moment and to ask what it means to digitize and adapt Euripides' *Medea* as a Latin American Telenovela for the stage.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

After a year of research, months of character studies, scenarios, and outlines, I sat around a table with fifteen other playwrights in a seminar I had plotted my way into with Machiavellian patience, over a two year period. My outline and notes were in my Moleskine. I had visual aids, family trees, taxonomies, and timelines printed in a folder in front of me. I was as ready as I would ever be. The course was taught by professor James Bierman, an iconic playwright and scholar, whose work and career I had followed since before my arrival in Santa Cruz. He was the one person I believed would not consider my idea too ambitious. Everyone took turns explaining their script ideas around the table until the floor was finally mine.

“And what is your play about, Stephen?”

Everyone waited for my response. It was a complicated question. I had rehearsed every line of my presentation in front of the mirror, all week long, but I was suddenly at a loss. My heart raced. There were so many ways to answer the question. I looked down at my plot-line. I started to speak then stopped. Finally, I closed my Moleskine and set my pencil down on the table in front of me.

“A man who has nothing pledges his love and makes a promise to a woman who has everything to lose,” I began. I looked around the table. Blank faces stared back at me. “...and she believes him because he has two young sons in his care and why would he put their lives in potential danger if he were only playing with her head?”

A few people nodded. I continued.

"The woman agrees to help the man steal something then leave the country with him. And as all of her bridges burn on the horizon behind them, she stands on the deck of a boat with her new family and this man whom she is now very much in love with, and she is happy for the first time in her life. They arrive in their new country as immigrants but they have a plan. It involves a wealthy businessman, the most powerful person in the country. Their plan is successful and everybody is going to be rich and happy until the businessman decides the man would make a better match for his daughter, who is ten years younger than the woman. The man agrees and they all conspire to have the woman deported... but she has no intention of going out so easily."

"I like her already," said someone.

"This is the story of Medea, of *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*," I said.

It was a simplification. How could I even begin to explain the year-long journey I had embarked on with Medea, how she had enchanted me along the way and somehow returned with me as Maria Douvier? The script for Maria was awarded the 2014 Humanities Dean's Award and the 2014 Dharma Grace Award in playwriting. It would be produced by the Theater Arts Department at the University of California Santa Cruz, yet there was something essential missing: the gaps. The unseen content that occupies the spaces between things had not been articulated. The content of the spaces between the research and writing, between my writing and the writings of

Shakespeare, Pausanias, and Ovid, between Ovid and Apollonius Rhodius, Euripides, Hesiod, and Eumelus before them, reaching all the way back to *the Odyssey*, the Homeric hymns, and possibly beyond. What was missing also occupies the spaces in between languages, dialects, signs, and symbols, all speaking to one another across time and space, transforming each other as they travel from one context to the next, or crossing the threshold to the present only to remain in their difference. These gaps in translation (as I broadly define translation) are paratextual, the unseen ancillary materials filling notebooks, interviews, documents, and the margins of libretti, casting their long shadows over my own telling of Medea, and in some cases, even more so than the events that take place on the page and onstage. Like Hemingway's iceberg, *Maria* is an exercise in omission. Only a fraction of the whole is visible above the surface of the text. But rather than omission that creates distance from the characters, in *Maria*, omission is being used to create space for closeness, for empathy and intimacy with a woman rather than an archetype, a woman like you and I or the woman I might be if I were in Medea's circumstances. This paper is an extended translator's note to *Maria - a telenovela for the stage* and a paratextual commentary for our present moment. By examining Medea's various permutations across time, genre, media, and technologies, we will revisit the process behind the decisions that were made in bringing *Maria* to the stage. To navigate the decision making process behind *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*, a series of guiding questions will be asked that comprise the section titles and subject matter of this paper: Why Medea? Which

Medea? What is Medea doing? and *¿Cómo se dice Medea?* Some of these questions have concrete answers. Others have multiple or conflicting answers. Some only lead to more questions. It is my intention to point out how a story that has endured over 2,800 years of cultural variation continues to speak to our present moment and to ask what it means to digitize and adapt Euripides' *Medea* as a Latin American Telenovela for the stage. Euripides' *Medea* is an important text within the Western canon, but the story of Medea has special importance to the theater and to the birth of democracy itself.

## 2.0 WHY MEDEA?

### (Medea as a catalytic foundation myth)

After examining mountains of texts and images about Medea, I've come to realize that men have been trying to take advantage of Medea for thousands of years. The reason Greek men in particular wanted to take advantage of Medea, was that as a descendant of divine royalty from the East with magic or oracular abilities, Medea could be used to establish divine, ordained-by-the-gods connections between Greek rulers and the foreign lands they wanted to occupy. In the Homeric times, the story of Jason and the Argo was used to make Greek ancestral claims to new lands revealed by Greek exploration of the Black Sea (Gantz 340). Eumelos' *Corinthica* makes Greek ancestral claims to Corinth. Pindar's fourth Pythian Ode blatantly uses a prophetic monologue by Medea to make a divine connection between the Greek king Arkesilas and the Hellenic colony of Kyrene in Africa.

Medea is an important myth to Euripides and western theater for the same reason. Euripides, like other poets before him (poets as Aristotle would define poets) also used Medea to make divine ancestral claims, this time to the foundation of the Athenian state. Especially in light of being produced the year the Peloponnesian War began. This is one of the purposes for using the character, Aigeus, king of Athens in Euripides' play. Medea is a keystone figure in the events that lead to the foundation of Athenian theater and the festival of Dionysus. Medea's connection to Athens is

integral to Euripides' play. The foundation myths surrounding the festival of Dionysus in Athens and the birth of the theater itself stem from a metatextual narrative set into motion by Medea leaving Corinth to marry Aigeus, the king of Athens, and her attempts to orchestrate the death of Aigeus' son Theseus, who goes on to become the founding hero of the Athenian state.

In *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides*, Ruby Blondell points out how Medea's history of "cleverness" in particular the role she plays in the murders of her brother Apsyrtos, Jason's uncle Pelias, and her attempted murder of Theseus complicate the mythological persona of Medea in light of Athenian values and culture. "Medea tried to poison Theseus, the greatest Athenian hero, son and heir of Aigeus, king of Athens. In classical Athens this event was memorialized in ritual. On a metatheatrical level, the chorus are asking how Athens, in light of its most cherished values, can incorporate the story of this murderess into the civic body by and for whom the play was first performed" (Blondell 149). Medea is an important figure in the foundation myths of the Athenian state. It is in Athens that Medea recognizes Theseus before Aigeus does. Portrayed as the wicked stepmother from the east who wants her own son, Medos to sit on the throne, Medea offers Theseus a poisoned cup of wine. Aigeus has a moment of anagnorisis during their dinner at the Dolphin Temple. He recognizes either the sandals or sword Theseus is wearing, realizes Theseus is his son, and just before Theseus drinks the deadly poison, Aigeus dashes his cup to the floor. The spot where the cup fell is still shown, barred off from the rest

of the Temple of Apollo Delphinios in Athens (Graves 196). This is a crucial moment in Greek mythology where the barbarous ancient world of warring clans and hero cults begins to give way to a new era of the unified city-state.

Medea, who symbolizes the spoils and dangers of the Heroic age of Jason and Herakles is expelled from Athens and replaced by Theseus, a hero of the people, who will unite the clans under one banner and usher in the conditions for Greek democracy to take root. After her plans to orchestrate Theseus' death fail, Medea flees Athens with her son, Medos (either Aigeus' son with Medea or, according to Hesiod's *Theogony*, the son of Medea and Jason). According to Greek mythology, Medea and Medos travel to Persia (Iraq) where they become the founding heroes of the tribe of the Medes, one of the royal tribes of Persia. This is an interesting footnote since it makes Greek ancestral claims to the foundation myth of the most powerful enemy Greece would ever know: the Persian Empire (Gantz 373). With Medea and her son gone, Theseus, now reinstated as heir to the throne of Athens, either volunteers or is chosen by lottery to travel to Crete as an offering to the Minotaur with plans to defeat and slay it (Gantz 263-264).

On Crete, Ariadne, the daughter of Minos, falls in love with Theseus and just like Medea before her, she betrays her father, family, and homeland by telling Theseus the secrets of Daedalus' labyrinth. Theseus, like Jason before him, promises to take Ariadne back home with him and make her his wife. Theseus kills the minotaur and flees Crete with Ariadne. Shortly after, he abandons Ariadne sleeping on the beach on

the island of Naxos then sails off for Athens without her. The *Ehoiai*, part of the Hesiodic Corpus, and the *Aigimios* claim that Theseus broke his oath to Ariadne after falling in love with Aigle, daughter of Panopeus, and / or Hippe (Gantz 268). Other stories point to Dionysus as the reason for Theseus' flight. "Others again say that Dionysus, appearing to Theseus in a dream, threateningly demanded Ariadne for himself, and that, when Theseus noticed Dionysus's fleet bearing down on Dia, he weighed anchor in sudden terror; Dionysus having cast a spell which made him forget his promise to Ariadne and even her very existence" (Graves 98).

Whichever the case, when Ariadne awoke to find Theseus gone, she wept with regret then became filled with rage. "She now invoked the whole universe for vengeance, and Father Zeus nodded in assent. Then, gently and sweetly, Dionysus with his merry train of satyrs and maenads came to Ariadne's rescue. He married her without delay, setting Thetis's crown upon her head, and she bore him many children. Of these only Thoas and Oenopion are sometimes called Theseus's sons" (Graves 98). If two of Ariadne and Dionysus' sons were sometimes called Theseus', it was more than likely a source of ire for the god of wine.

When Theseus returned to Crete, he killed Deucalion in the inner chamber of his palace at Cnossus and the Cretan throne then passed to Ariadne. During the absence of Dionysus, Athens and Crete entered into a peace treaty through a union of the two crowns, meaning Theseus and Ariadne effectively married, and Theseus and Ariadne once more set sail for Athens together. Already pregnant by Theseus, Ariadne had to

be put ashore on Cyprus for fear of miscarrying on the stormy sea. Homer reports on the indignation of Dionysus when he discovered that Theseus and Ariadne had lain together because Dionysus was already her rightful husband (Graves 98). The Cypriots, who still celebrate Ariadne's festival on the second day of September, also testify to Dionysus' anger. "They say that Dionysus, so far from marrying Ariadne, was indignant that she and Theseus had profaned his Naxos grotto, and complained to Artemis, who killed her in childbirth with merciless shafts; but some say that she hanged herself for fear of Artemis" (Graves 98). Ariadne died for her infidelity to Dionysus and Theseus was to blame. When Dionysus and his army of maenads and satyrs returned, Theseus offered them hospitality in Athens and they became part of the civic fabric and remain so to this day. Theseus instituted the Festival of the Grape Boughs, honoring both Dionysus and Ariadne. "The carrying of fruit-laden boughs in Ariadne's honor, and Dionysus's, and her suicide by hanging, 'because she feared Artemis', suggest that Ariadne-dolls were attached to these boughs" (Graves 98). The Festival of Grape Boughs, the festival of Dionysus, and the Theater of Dionysus became permanent fixtures of Athenian culture.

A story that began with Medea betraying father, family, and country for the man she loved who promised to take her away and make her his bride resulted in years of exile, persecution, and loss, until Medea fled Athens after nearly killing Theseus, who like Jason, went on to make a similar promise to another princess, who betrays her father, family, and nation for the man she loves only to be betrayed as well. This

chain of events leads to the birth of western theater and the conditions that allowed for the development of Athenian democracy once Theseus united the clans of the Attic peninsula into a political state with Athens at its center, introducing various civic rituals honoring Dionysus. None of these events would have occurred had Medea been successful at poisoning Theseus. This is the point where mythology becomes history and history becomes mythology since Athens does consider Theseus the first king of a unified Athens.

When Euripides was approaching his telling of Medea, Medea was already known to have a history of filicide among other treacheries in her past. This knowledge would bring Euripides' audience certain expectations when the play opened at the Dionysia festival in 431 BC. Even though Medea's reputation would have preceded her, there was no way the audience could have anticipated just how far Euripides' Medea would go, in order to seek justice and to exact her revenge on Jason. The image of Medea as a murdering sorceress however, does not originate with Euripides. In some versions of Medea's story she doesn't murder anyone at all. Her only fault is falling in love with a one-sandaled Grecian hero. The further I researched literary and artistic sources, the more I had to ask myself which version of Medea's story would I tell?

### **3.0 WHICH MEDEA?**

#### **(A chronology of literary and artistic sources (850 BC - 2014))**

As a tragedian, Euripides had many versions of Medea's story to draw from based on the heroic myths and divine legends of the Archaic period before him. Euripides' play is the first detailed account that deals exclusively with the Corinthian portion of the myth of Medea. The Athenian audience would have also been familiar with other versions of Medea's story associated with the locations where events in the myth take place (Mastronade 2002). Both pre- and post-Euripidean versions of Medea draw from four basic movements in the overarching story:

1. Medea in Colchis: In Colchis, Medea is portrayed as the helper-maiden of Jason. These versions of the story focus on how Jason and the Argonauts arrive in Colchis, how Medea falls in love with Jason and betrays both her father and her country by using magic to help Jason obtain the Golden Fleece.

2. Medea in Iolcus: After fleeing Colchis, Medea and Jason arrive in Iolcus and deliver the fleece to Jason's uncle, Pelias. Medea uses her magic again to trick Pelias' daughters into killing their own father. Deceived by Medea, they cut Pelias into pieces and boil his body with the intention of restoring him to his former youth.

3. Medea in Corinth: Medea and Jason flee Iolcus and live in exile in Corinth where their children are killed.

4. Medea in Athens: Medea flees Corinth and becomes the wife of Aigeus, the king of Athens. She then tries to arrange the death of Aigeus' son, Theseus, before Aigeus recognizes him as his son and heir.

### 3.1 MEDEA OF COLCHIS

The story of Medea is inextricable from the epic of Jason and the Argonauts and their quest for the Golden Fleece. One of the earliest references to Jason and the Argo is found in the *Odyssey* (XII .70). Odysseus is advised by Kirke to follow a route between Scylla and Charybdis instead of braving the Clashing Rocks of the Planctae as Jason did with the Argo on his way back from the land of Aietes:

οἴη δὴ κείνῃ γε παρέπλω ποντοπόρος νηὺς  
Ἀργῶ πᾶσι μέλουσα, παρ' Αἰήταο πλέουσα·  
καὶ νύ κε τὴν ἐνθ' ὧκα βάλεν μεγάλας ποτὶ πέτρας,  
ἀλλ' Ἥρη παρέπεμψεν, ἐπεὶ φίλος ἦεν Ἴησων.

“The only sea-going ship that sailed past by that route was Argo known to all, sailing away from Aeetes; and even that would have swiftly struck against the mighty rocks, but Hera sent it on its way, since Jason was dear to her” (Od. 12.69-72).

This passage positions the story of Jason and the Argo as “known to all,” or at least known to the poet of the *Odyssey*. Pelias and Aeson, Jason's father, are also mentioned in an earlier passage (OD. 11.254-260) suggesting that the story of Jason and the Argonauts arose from the poetic tradition of the Homeric age and was already an old and popular story by the eighth century BC. (Gantz 341) (Johnston 3). Medea

first enters the myth by name in Hesiod's *Theogony*. The Granddaughter of the "tireless Helios" and the "glorious Oceanid Perseis," daughter of Aietes, the "son of Helios who shines on mortals" and the "fair-cheeked" nymph, Idyia, Medea, "with her well-turned ankles," was born in Colchis and "Mastered in love" by Jason, "thanks to golden Aphrodite" (*Theogony* 963-69). Hesiod elaborates further on Jason and Medea's union in lines 1000 - 1010:

And Jason son of Aison led off from Aietes,  
A king fostered by Zeus, Aietes' daughter,  
By the eternal gods' will, after he completed  
The many hard labors the outrageously arrogant,  
Presumptuous bully, King Pelias, set for him.  
The son of Aison suffered through the labors  
And sailed to Iolkos with the dancing-eyed girl  
And made her his wife, and in her bloom  
She was mastered by Jason, shepherd of the people,  
And bore a child, Medeios, whom the centaur Chiron  
Phillyrides raised in the hills. And Zeus' will was done.

Some versions of the story attribute Medea's son to Aigeus, others to Jason, but either way, it was the will of Zeus that Medea would travel to Greece. The only complete pre-Euripidean version of the story of Jason and the Argonauts is found in Pindar's fourth Pythian Ode. He describes the story of Pelias and his brother, Aeson,

Jason's father. Jason's story, like many other Greek heroes, is one of return. Pelias usurps his brother's throne and Jason returns to reclaim it. Pelias offers to return the throne to Jason if he is able to retrieve the golden fleece from Colchis. Aphrodite provides Jason with a love mojo, a charm to fill Medea with a "longing for Hellas" and to "drive her by persuasion's lash, her heart afire with love" (Pindar Pythian IV) back to Iolcus with the fleece in tow.

With a heart afire with love for Jason, Medea mixes a magical fire retardant body butter so Jason can yoke a pair of fire-breathing oxen, plough a field and sow it with dragon's teeth then defeat the grizzly harvest of skeleton warriors that rises up from the soil. After Jason does just that, Aietes, amazed and exhausted, finally tells Jason that yes, he actually does have a golden fleece lying around the kingdom somewhere. And that Jason is more than welcome to it if he can manage to wrench it from the jaws of a terrible dragon that never sleeps. Jason agrees. Aietes turns around and walks back to the palace shaking his head. With the help of Medea, "the stranger maiden skilled in all pharmacy," Jason defeats the dragon and takes the fleece. "The glaring speckled dragon, O Arkesilas, he [Jason] slew by subtlety, and by her own aid he stole away Medea, the murderess of Pelias. And they went down into the deep of Ocean and into the Red Sea, and to the Lemnian race of husbandslaying wives; there also they had games and wrestled for a prize of vesture, and lay with the women of the land" (Pindar IV). Pindar claims that after the Argonauts escaped Colchis, they laid with the amazonian women, founding the bloodline of King Arkesilas, who

colonized the Lybian city of Kyrene from ancient city of Thera on the island of Kalliste (Myers iv). “And then it was that in a stranger womb, by night or day, the fateful seed was sown of the bright fortune of thy race. For there began the generations of Euphemos, which should be thenceforth without end. And in time mingling among the homes of Lakedaimonian men they made their dwelling in the isle that once was Kalliste and thence the son of Leto gave thy race the Libyan plain to till it and to do honour therein to your gods, and to rule the divine city of golden-throned Kyrene with devising of the counsels of truth” (Pindar IV).

This passage is a very political piece of poetry making an ancestral claim for a Greek king to “the divine city of golden-throned Kyrene.” Pindar wrote his fourth Pythian Ode in Thebes in 466 B.C. when he was fifty-six years old. It was to be recited afterwards in Kyrene (Myers iv). Pindar’s fourth Pythian and ninth Olympian odes describe Medea as an oracular muse invoked by Pindar to inspire his poetry, a maiden princess skilled in all pharmacy, deeply in love, who arranges a marriage for herself against her father’s wishes, the murderess of Pelais, and as the savior of the Argo and her crew. The only other literary source that covers the Colchian portion of the myth is found in Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*, written in 250 B.C. an epic tale that provides a detailed account of the quest for the golden fleece. Though it was written after Euripides *Medea*, both works reference some of the same story elements.

Hera and Athena convince Aphrodite to send Eros to shoot Medea with his arrows and cause her to fall madly in love with Jason. After giving Jason a magic talisman to

protect him from the fire-breathing oxen and a sleeping potion to defeat the dragon guarding the fleece, the willing Medea escapes with the crew of the Argo while Aietes and Medea's brother, Apsyrtus race after them in swift ships. The Argo reaches the island of Artemis and Jason sets a trap for the Colchians using Medea as bait. Jason captures and kills Medea's brother, Apsyrtus and cuts off all of his limbs and throws them into a river so Aietes and his men have to give up the chase and search for all the severed parts of Apsyrtus' body so he might receive a proper burial. According to Pherecydes, Medea killed her brother, Apsyrtus, herself and cut off his limbs to aid in their escape, so desperate she was to leave with Jason because of the burning arrow wounds from Eros. Either way, Medea turns her back on Colchis and returns with Jason to Iolcus to deliver the golden fleece to Jason's uncle, Pelais.

### **3.2 MEDEA IN IOLCUS**

There is practically no remaining textual evidence describing what happened after Jason and Medea arrived in Iolcus with the fleece. Cosmetic jars and other pottery have been found from the Archaic period with the scene of Medea boiling a ram in a cauldron in front of Pelais' daughters (Harvard 1960). Medea's cauldron of rejuvenation was a well known motif before the time of Euripides and was perhaps even used to market ancient rejuvenation creams. The portion of the myth concerning Medea in Iolcus basically paints Medea as being responsible for the death of Pelais.

### 3.3 MEDEA IN CORINTH

The story of Medea in Corinth is referenced in the poetry of Eumelos from the eighth century B.C. (Gantz 368). In Eumelos' *Korinthika*, Medea is summoned to Corinth when the Corinthian throne is left without an heir. Through her father, Aietes, Medea is pronounced queen of Corinth and Jason as her regent and co-ruler. Medea averts a famine in Corinth by sacrificing to Demeter and the Lemnian Nymphai. Zeus takes notice then falls in love with Medea but she resists the aegis bearer's advances out of respect for Hera. As a reward, Hera promises to make Medea's children immortal but for some reason she doesn't make good on her promise. As each of Medea's children are born, Medea places them in the sanctuary of Hera Akraia and leaves them there waiting on the goddess. The children die and Jason refuses to forgive Medea and returns to Iolcus. Medea passes the kingship to Sisyphus (Gantz 368). The Scholia to Euripides *Medea*, points to the Corinthians themselves as the murderers of Medea and Jason's children. Parmeniskos, a grammarian of the second / first century BC, paints a tale of an unhappy Corinthian public that does not like the idea of having a foreigner for a ruler, especially a foreign woman who is skilled in magic. There are two variations of this portion of the story. In the first version, the people of Corinth plot to oust Medea and kill her children: seven girls and seven boys. The children take shelter in the sanctuary of Hera Akraia but the Corinthians burst in and butcher them on the altar anyway. A plague follows and the Corinthians

make penance by sending seven girls and seven boys each year to volunteer in the service of Hera Akraia.

The other story is attributed to Kreophylos, who may either be a seventh century poet or a fourth century historian. Either way, in the Kreophylos version, Medea is just a resident of Corinth and kills Kreon, the king of the city, with poisonous drugs (pharmaka). Medea, now afraid of retaliation by Kreon's friends and family members, flees to Athens but leaves her children behind because they are too young to make the journey. To keep them safe, Medea places them on the altar of Hera Akraia but the friends of Kreon find the children and murder them and then spread a rumor that Medea did the deed herself (Gantz 369). In the Corinthian stories of the Archaic period, either Medea inadvertently kills her children or the Corinthians do it intentionally. The idea that Medea deliberately killed her own children to revenge herself on Jason has no literary evidence that predates Euripides' *Medea*. In both versions however, Medea leaves Corinth and flees to Athens.

### **3.4 MEDEA IN ATHENS**

As mentioned earlier, Medea goes on to marry Aigeus, the king of Athens. When Theseus arrives Medea tries to poison him and prevent Theseus from becoming recognized as Aigeus heir. In the Athenian portion of the story, Medea is portrayed as the wicked stepmother who nearly destroys the future of the Athenian state.

These were the possible pasts, the stories and palette I would draw from and adapt into a plot for *Maria Medea*. I decided to focus the narrative into two locations and split the story between Colchis and Corinth, focusing on the relationship of Jason and Medea before and during their exile in Corinth, to raise the emotional stakes between them. Before any work began on the plot, I wanted to determine in my own terms the sort of work Medea seemed to be doing in Euripides' play and how or if that role would translate into a contemporary Caracas / Ciudad de Mexico context. It was time to decide what sort of work Medea would perform in our adaptation.

#### 4.0 WHAT IS MEDEA DOING?

From feminist readings of Medea that position Medea as ethnic and/or engendered other, or reading Medea as embodying male, Greek, heroic / aristocratic ideals, there are numerous ways to explain the sort of work Medea is doing or the function of her character within Euripides' play. Aristotle was not a fan of Euripides' *Medea* and referred to it in the *Poetics* as an example of poor dramatic craft, since Medea acts from an irrational space, or what one might even call madness. Yet if one were to attribute Medea's actions to a male character, such as an Achilles or Herakles, her behavior could easily be read as heroic, at least defined by male, Greek, heroic / aristocratic ideals such as helping friends and harming enemies. Medea's final words to Jason are a testament to the male, Greek, heroic value system, "[M]y grief is gain when you cannot mock it" (Warner 44). In the Euripides' tragedy, *Herakles*, Herakles is possessed by madness sent to him by Hera and murders his own wife and children, yet there is no mention by Aristotle nor any record of the Athenian audience, who saw the play in 422 BC, as being outraged by Herakles' actions (Spranger 55). The myth was very well known to the Athenians, and for his actions Herakles was ordered to perform his famous twelve labors. Yet for a woman to exact such vengeance willingly, and to display the kind of calculative cunning exhibited by Medea, was indeed shocking and incongruent with the expectations placed upon women in Greek society. Only a barbarian woman would perform such deeds, and in in this respect,

Euripides' *Medea* could even be read as a xenophobic, cautionary tale of miscegenation and Greek nationalism. Jason curses his decision to marry a foreigner saying, "There is no Greek woman who would have dared such a thing, yet I deemed you worthy of a marriage above them, and a deadly and hateful wedlock it is to me" (1323-1321). Medea's actions were completely foreign to the Athenian audience. Though her actions were no worse than the murderous actions resulting from the madness or hubris of Herakles or Agamemnon, Medea represented a dangerous outsider to a male dominated, Greek society: a *clever* woman, "on the loose," striding with wide open legs, making oaths, marriage contracts, eliminating rivals, arranging her own destiny, and severing patrilineal lines of succession for no reason other than sexual jealousy. In Kimberly B. Stratton's book, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World*, under the chapter titled, "Barbarians, Magic, and Construction of the Other," Stratton cites Jason's speech to demonstrate how Medea represents the "ultimate other," existing outside everything Greek society holds sacred.

Several critical themes emerge in this quotation. The first and most striking is Medea's foreignness. Twice, Jason emphasizes that Medea is a barbarian whom he took from her barbarian home and brought to a Greek house. She betrayed her father and murdered her brother - two things a Greek woman would never do, if for no reason other than self-interest since she depended on her natal *oikos* for legal protection and support. Finally, she murdered her own children 'because of sex and the marriage bed' (*eunes hekati kai lechous*). (Stratton 54).

Though Medea acts as any aristocratic Greek male hero would have if the family of a royal made such an audacious proposal to his wife and publicly humiliated him, the Trojan war is a perfect example of this. Yet because of Medea's gender and foreignness, her status as a barbarian strips her of all justifiable recourse.

#### **4.1 Medea as Xenos / barbaros / or ethnic other.**

In the introduction to Ruby Blondell's translation of Medea, Blondell points out that up until Euripides' play, Medea was commonly referred to as being from northern Greece or Corinth (Blondell 152). In Euripides' play, Medea is definitely not Greek, but a barbarian from the distant land of Colchis. This "barbarization" of Medea, and her status as an immigrant other, somehow trumps Medea's aristocratic origins once she finds herself in Corinth with no political power whatsoever. The "barbarization"

of Medea was an important detail I wanted to translate, in semiotic terms, into our Latin American world of the telenovela. I decided to take the word *barbaros* at its face value, implying “hairy.” In the world of *Maria*, hair becomes a semiotic marker of difference.

Jairo “El Peludo” Rossi, our Jason figure, is an extremely hairy Argentinian-born Italian, who despite his status as a futbol star, is a foreigner in both Venezuela and Mexico. Jairo is considered to be a base, pedestrian, brute by the wealthy and educated television executives whose world Jairo is trying to be accepted into and to receive recognition from. The chorus members (Lalo and Pati) are gossip talk show hosts who constantly use the expression “Que barbaridad!” when covering the various scandals surrounding Maria and her unruly lover. When video footage of Maria’s unwaxed legs is broadcast across the nation of Venezuela, Maria decides that perhaps she will listen to Jairo and help him steal Raul Goldstein de la Garza’s highly anticipated teleplay, “the Golden Fleece,” then run off to Mexico City to produce it.

Ultimately it is the pressure of Maria’s difference, her “barbaridad,” and the “enormity” of her public humiliation that pushes her away from Colchis / Venezuela and into the arms and plans of Jairo / Jason. Enormity is another meaning of barbaridad, which in Spanish could be translated as, “surprisingly bad or exaggerated”, atrocious, bestial or violent, among other meanings, depending on the context. Although the audience is constantly reminded of Maria’s otherness, I also

wanted the audience to remain aware of Maria's aristocratic status and her personal agency.

Despite her predicament, Medea exhibits a great deal of agency in Euripides' play as well as in the other Medea muthoi. She may be smitten by Jason, but the actual course of their destiny is plotted by Medea's actions, not Jason's. From the moment they meet, it is Medea's actions that determine what will happen to them from that point on. In *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*, I wanted to emphasize that despite the fact Jairo comes up with some pretty bad ideas and proves to be a bad influence on Maria, the plot is driven and propelled forward by the decisions Maria makes. In this sense, in both the Euripidean version as well as my own, it could be argued that Medea plays the role of the hero.

#### **4.2 Medea embodying male, Greek, heroic / aristocratic ideals.**

Medea was undoubtedly an aristocrat. As the granddaughter of Helios and a princess of Colchis, she was well schooled in the social politics of court life and very adept in rhetoric and in dealing with powerful men. After all, Medea negotiates her own marriage twice, outwits two kings as well as Jason, and even when she has no political currency left, she still manages to find the means to avenge her injured, aristocratic pride, escape a nearly impossible situation, and essentially become the queen of Athens in the process. In *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*, Maria chooses to stay and struggle alongside Jairo. As Martin (Aigeus) tells her, "You come from a

great family, Maria. You have talent, you're still young... You need to ask yourself what are you really doing here? Are you being made to suffer or are you just choosing to?" (Richter 85). The fact that Maria chooses to stay and fight for her new found family in Mexico City, or how she returns for Jairo and the boys rather than flee with the CEO of Univision to Miami alone, speaks to Maria's nobility and was another means of conveying the aristocratic values of ancient Greece that are embodied in the motif of gold in Euripides' play. The golden fleece, the golden dress Medea sends as a wedding gift to Creon's daughter Glauke are other examples.

Gold doesn't change, it represents not only wealth, but the filial bonds and oaths that are central to Greek aristocratic society and their value system. Another way I attempted to semiotically reinforce Maria's nobility of birth and spirit with gold, is when she buys each of the boys (Carlos and Daniel) a corona triumphalis at the museum store. The balance of noble aristocrat and immigrant / ethnic other, makes both Maria and Medea complex and ambiguous characters. But rather than project male, aristocratic / heroic need for vengeance into Medea, I wanted to focus on the heartbreak and pain of Maria as a woman, who is still very much in love and trying desperately to keep her family from being torn apart, even though she is free to leave. This type of self sacrifice is a more contemporary and common form of heroism performed by modern womanhood, especially in *el mundo Latino*.

The societal pressures and expectations contemporary women have are reaching new heights. Not only are women expected to pursue education and a career, but there

is still a great deal of cultural pressure to carry the weight of the “oikos” and maintain home and hearth, as well as the responsibilities of raising children. Heart failure, hypertension, and other stress related diseases for women have reached an all time high. I decided to use this form of double pressure that constitutes the “modern female heroic,” to replace the wounded classical, Greek, male heroic pride of Euripides’ *Medea* that drives Medea to kill her own children.

## 5.0 ¿CÓMO SE DICE MEDEA?

**(How does one say Medea, here, now, today?)**

Like Aristotle, I had a difficult time believing that Medea would willingly murder her own children out of sexual jealousy. I could understand the act from a classical, male, aristocratic perspective. Look what Agamemnon did to Iphigenia, yet, when constructing the character of Maria, I just could not imagine her committing such acts and still find her character believable. Even if it was believable, I definitely wanted to illicit much more empathy for her character. If one only looks at the timeframe covered by the *plot* in Euripides' play, the audience arrives at the second turning point in a much larger *story* that spans over 800 years of poetic tradition. My point is that the audience arrives on the scene right at the breaking-up of Medea and Jason's relationship. This goes far beyond arriving *en medias res*. The audience missed all of the Bonnie and Clyde excitement, the romance of the couple "on the road" together, the near escapes, cooking disasters, comic relief, starting a family... Medea and Jason had quite a history between them before arriving in Corinth. When looking at the entire story as a whole, I could not help but read it as an epic, tragic, love story. Every time I would return to Euripides' text, I continually found myself asking, "where is the love?" Love was the crucial element that was missing for me, an element that I believed would create exponentially more empathy and pathos for an audience if it were present onstage. Allowing Jason and Medea to still love each other, and giving

the audience just enough time with them while they were happy, to experience the relationship before things fell apart, would offer an opportunity to take the plot to the same inevitable conclusion as in Euripides' *Medea*: children dead, Jason left behind, Medea flying off to Athens with Aiegeus, yet at the same time, produce a heartbreaking sense of loss and ambiguity toward who was "at fault" or responsible for the tragedy. Relationships are complex and messy and it definitely takes two to tango. Even when one person seems clearly responsible for the end of a relationship, it is never that simple. Euripides' *Medea*, in my opinion, let both Jason and Medea off the hook too easily, especially in light of the length of their relationship, the children involved, and what was at stake. Rather than the tragedy being the result of revenge, in *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*, tragedy would stem from misunderstanding and miscommunication on both parts (*hamartia*) where everyone and yet no one could be held completely responsible. This was the reason I decided to return to the Corinthian versions of the *Medea muthoi*, where Medea is forced to flee the country and the people of Corinth murder her children in the temple of Hera Akira. Medea is blamed for the murders as rumors and gossip spread to slander her for the historical record. The Corinthian ending seemed to fit seamlessly into the sensational world of *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*. Choices concerning plot and story, *fabula* and *syuzhet*, would be guided by the decision to extend the plot further back to Colchis and establish Maria and Jairo's relationship as well as what would be at stake in the play. As Roland Barthes explains in "Death of the Author," a text is a multifaceted

manifestation of different cultures, ideas, languages, beliefs, theologies, philosophies, and more. The self-proclaimed author has borrowed everything from all of the previously existing texts that he or she is aware of. In *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*, I would borrow details from almost every version of the Medea myth I had read. This synthesis, spanning centuries, allowed many authors and voices to speak through the text. New meanings and contexts began to emerge through a sort of anachronistic, clairvoyance, or at least the connections and conversations that were already present between the various texts began to surface and became more evident once all of the texts were sitting on the same bookshelf together.

Maria's speech that bookends *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*, is Prospero's "farewell to magic" from Shakespeare's *the Tempest*. Prospero's speech is being ventriloquized by Medea's speech in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medea's speech in Ovid is being ventriloquized by Pindar's Pythian Ode (Pythian IV 250) and Pindar is being ventriloquized by the homeric hymns. The fact the Prospero's speech is being given by a woman, in *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*, puts the opening and closing scenes in conversation with Julie Taymor's Prospera from her 2010 adaptation of Shakespeare's *the Tempest*, which created a new tradition for our female protagonist to use to say goodbye to the stage and to the bloodshed and tears it took to reach its pinnacle. *Maria a telenovela for the stage* is a polyvocal construction of framed narratives borrowed from previously existing texts, all in conversation with or ventriloquizing each other (See Framed Narratives diagram 1). By writing the play, I

was given an opportunity to participate in a dialogue spanning over 2,800 years. Within my addition to the Medea conversation, I can hear the voices of the many people I have listened to and learned from along the course of my own life, all I have read, all I have seen, everyone I have ever known are part of this ongoing conversation, part of the text. They all have left a trace, most of which I did not realize until it was pointed out by others. The theater of Dionysus celebrates a god who must die only to be reborn again and again. This cycle of death and rebirth that renews the earth was facilitated by many ecstatic people who gathered together in secret. As one of many authors, I too passed away, or out of the way, so that Maria might live through the efforts of the many ecstatic people who gathered together in secret to bring *Maria - a telenovela* to the stage.

*Maria* was produced by the Theater Arts Department of the University of California Santa Cruz and premiered on the 20th of February 2015. I have included production photos and various images and diagrams from the preproduction and research process within this text. It is my profound desire that Medea will indeed find new life, to successfully rewrite her own past, as I have been able to rewrite mine, and clear her good name as she lives on as *Maria - a telenovela for the stage*.

Stephen Richter

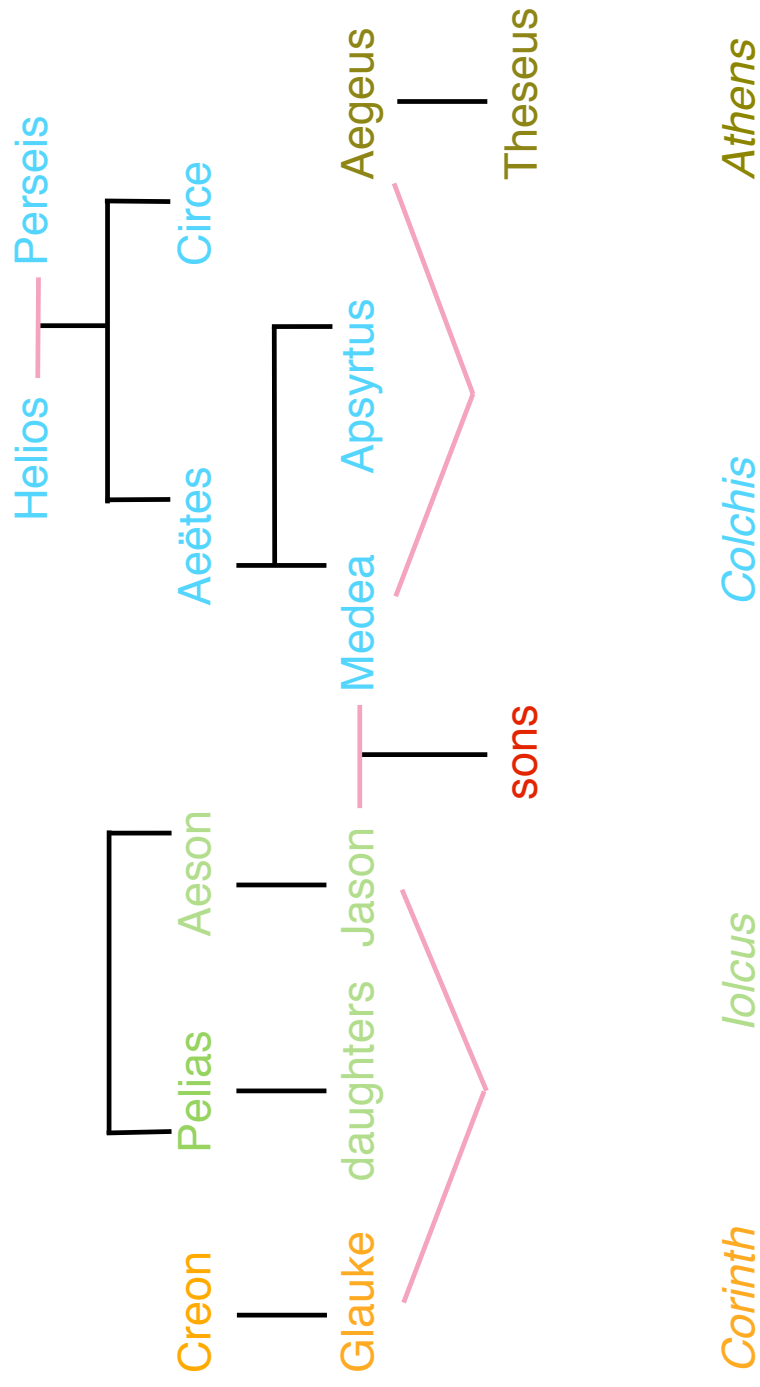
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# Family Tree



The UCSC Theater Arts Department presents

# MARIA

*A telenovela  
for the stage*

Directed by UCSC Student  
**Quest Zeidler**

Written by the winner of the  
Dharma-Grace Playwriting Award  
& UCSC's 2014 Humanities  
Dean's Award

**Stephen Richter**

**Feb. 20—22 &  
Feb. 26—March 1**  
Experimental Theater  
UC Santa Cruz

*Thurs-Fri-Sat at 7:30 pm  
(Sundays at 3:00 pm)*

**This production contains adult content**

**Talk-backs after both Saturday  
performances 2/22 & 2/28**

**\$12 general, \$11 seniors 62+ and students w/ ID** (UCSC undergrads w/ valid ID: 1 free ticket)  
santacruztickets.com, UCSC ticket office (831-459-2159), SC Civic Auditorium Box Office (831-420-5260)  
UCSC SPECIAL: (in person purchase only) UCSC Staff, faculty & Alumni Assoc. members with valid ID may  
purchase up to (2) tickets at student price. *parking \$4*



2015



*Theater Arts also thanks all UCSC undergraduates for their support of  
this production via the Theater Arts fee, SUA Measure 11.*





[Link to Maria Theatrical Outro](#)



*Maria*

*© a telenovela for the stage ©*

*Stephen Richter*

Act 1

*Caracas Venezuela*

(Colchis)



## Cast:

Maria - Medea (& Morgana the priestess in *La Encantadora*) Jairo -  
Jason  
Raul Goldstein de la Garza - (Aietes)  
Daniel - Jairo's youngest son  
Carlos - Jairo's son  
Ramon Noriega - Producer Venevisión  
Louis - (Director) of *La Encantadora*  
Pipa Martinez - Miss Venezuela  
Pati Chapín - Host of *Balconiando*  
Lalo "El Niño" Sanchez - Host of *Balconiando* Priest - character from *La Encantadora*  
Marco - character from *La Encantadora* Roxanna - character from *La Encantadora* Reporter#1  
Reporter#2  
Reporter#3  
Cameraman  
Man at Table  
Woman at Table

SCENE ONE.

Television studio soundstage - set of La Encantadora. Television cameras, studio audience (working cameras to capture close ups of actors and audience members for projection on overhead screen / monitors.) A vine-covered mound with an altar rests at center stage. Tribal drums play. Men and women dressed in white enter, dancing, in a Santa Ria procession. They Carry a shrine with a statue of a saint before them. The procession circles the altar mound. A young man drops to the floor, convulsing in a state of trance. A woman in a white skirt and turban climbs to the top of the altar. She carries a staff. A leather pouch is secured to her waist. She stands on the altar, looking out over the audience. The drumming intensifies. The woman dances furiously. The dancing procession circles below her. A priest, a bride, and a groom enter and stand at the corner of the stage. They look up at the dancing priestess with defiance. They commence their ceremony, shouting over the chanting, singing, and drums. The priest opens his bible.

PRIEST

Do you, Marco Antonio, take this woman, Roxana, to be your lawfully wedded wife?!

MARCO

Yes, I do!

PRIEST

And do you, Roxana, take-

ROXANA

I do! Yes, in the name of God!

PRIEST

What?!

MARCO

Sí, padre, she does! Hurry, before it's too late!

PRIEST

By the power vested in me!...

(The drumming and chanting reach a fevered pitch. Large electric fans blow a windstorm across the stage.)

PRIEST

I now pronounce you!...

ROXANA

Say it, padre, quickly!

PRIEST

Man and wife! Kiss her, Marco Antonio! Kiss her now!

(They kiss. The drumming stops.)

PRIESTESS

No!

MARCO

It's over, Morgana. Ya basta!

(The priest and the bride exit.)

PRIESTESS

It will never be over.

MARCO

It's over!

PRIESTESS

Not for me! Not for me. Look how much I do for you. All this...

MARCO

Goodbye, Morgana.

(Exit Marco and the dancers. Morgana watches Marco go, long after he is gone. She wipes away her tears and returns to the altar. She looks down at the staff then takes it in her

hand.)

MORGANA (PRIESTESS)

With your aid I have bedimmed the noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds, and 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault set roaring war-

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT (JAIRO)

(seated in audience)

That's not in the script.

DIRECTOR

What is she doing?

GOLDSTEIN

It's Prospero.

MORGANA

To the dread rattling thunder have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak with his own bolt!

LOUIS (DIRECTOR)

Who the hell is Prospero? Why is she doing this to me, Raul?

MORGANA

Graves at my command have waked their sleepers and let them forth, by my so potent art.

(A producer enters the theater with a woman wearing a Miss Venezuela sash. An entourage of reporters and paparazzi follow behind them. They walk down the aisle to the foot of the stage.)

MORGANA

But this rough magic-

RAMON (PRODUCER)

Cut! That's enough. We're done here. Thank you all for a wonderful season-

LOUIS

What's the meaning of this, Ramon?!

RAMON

We need to strike this set yesterday, people! Have the property master to bring me the backdrop for Plantation of Desire, the one with miss-

LOUIS

Ramon!... Talk to him, Raul, before I have a meltdown.

(Louis climbs on stage and talks with Maria, gesturing. Maria removes her turban and begins to transform her costume into civilian attire. She fixes her hair and makeup in a compact. Stage hands disassemble the set of La Encantadora. Raul Goldstein de la Garza, legendary Venezuelan television writer, is helped up onto the stage. Reporters and paparazzi press forward.

RAMON

Not now, Goldstein, we're going live to the entire nation in five minutes.

GOLDSTEIN

Ramon, how did you ever become such a philistine? It was the final scene!

RAMON

(addresses audience)

Okay, we're done here. The studio audience is dismissed... Come on, people... What the hell is wrong with these people? Why aren't they listening to me?

JAIRO

(from seat in audience)

They're in the union. They have to work a full day.

RAMON

You're killing me, Jairo. Well at least make yourselves useful and give us a nice warm aplauso for the star of Plantation of Desire, this year's Miss Venezuela, Pipa Martinez!

(Applause)

RAMON

Wait till we're rolling, people, come on! It's not that hard. Alright, Jairo, bring her up here.

(Stage hands set up four director's chairs. Jairo escorts Pippa on stage. Reporters gather in the aisles.)

REPORTERS

Pippa! Hey, Pippa, over here! Pippa how does it feel?! Pippa, give us a vuelta! Vuel-ta! Vuel-ta! Vuel-ta! Vuel-ta!

(Pippa turns in a circle, giving them a look, then sits down.)

GOLDSTEIN

You could have at least waited until the body was cold, Ramon. It's necrophilia.

(Goldstein and Ramon take their seats. Louis takes the last empty director's chair. Makeup and hair artists put bibs on everyone and begin to work. Jairo watches Maria apply her own lipstick from across the stage. She notices him. Jairo walks over to her.)

REPORTER #1

Mr. Goldstein, now that La Encantadora is cancelled, what will you do with next season's script?

GOLDSTEIN

I should burn it.

RAMON

You'll do nothing! I own it I control it. Read your contract.

JAIRO

Excuse me, miss Douvier, I'm Jairo the-

MARIA

Production assistant.

JAIRO

Junior producer.

MARIA

I thought the junior producer was some famous futbolista from Real Madrid.

JAIRO

I am.

MARIA

(laughs)

Por favor.

JAIRO

I was the goalkeeper. Look, it's not important. I just wanted to tell you that you were fantastic today.

MARIA

Thank you.

GOLDSTEIN

Upon completion of the last episode, Ramon!

RAMON

The Golden Fleece is my property now! It's part of a trilogy, Goldstein. I hired you to write it. I am not obligated to produce it.

(the hair and makeup session is becoming a fiasco)

GOLDSTEIN

You've turned my work into a circus! Now you cancel the show before-

LOUIS

We're not even finished filming!

RAMON

Read your contract.

LOUIS

I don't have one. I'm just cleaning up the mess your last director -

RAMON

Exactly. And you, my friend, are legally bound to deliver a final draft of The Golden Fleece to me upon completion of La Encantadora. I want my pound of flesh, Goldstein. I don't give a shit how you feel.

(Goldstein snatches his makeup artist's power puff and throws it at Ramon.)

JAIRO

I'm a huge fan. I've loved you ever since I was a little-

MARIA

A little what?

JAIRO

A little... while now, I've... I saw you with another man in a magazine.

MARIA

Another man?

JAIRO

With Goldstein. He was looking at you like he wanted to eat you, he was so excited. You could just- I'm making an ass out of myself.

MARIA

What are you trying to say?

JAIRO

I think Goldstein's in love with you.

MARIA

(laughs)

I stand in for every woman who's hurt his feelings, that's all. The woman who must be punished.

REPORTER #1

Pipa! How does it feel replace Maria Douvier as Venevisión's new star?

PIPA MARTINEZ

Maria's retiring creates a vacuum for fresh young faces to rise up and no one else can properly fill that void right now. I got the total package, you know, the curves, the rhythm, and the voice. I'm just-

MARIA

So what will you do?

JAIRO

Now that I'm unemployed?

MARIA

Yes.

JAIRO

I have no idea.

CAMERAMAN

Two minutes till we're live!

JAIRO

Hey, mind if I get your autograph? My son's a big fan too.

MARIA

How old is he?

JAIRO

Six, my oldest is eight.

MARIA

And your wife?

JAIRO

Left us for an Italian movie producer.

MARIA

I heard about that.

GOLDSTEIN

And now you expect me to hand over the finest thing I have ever written just so you can bury it?! I'll sue your ass!

LOUIS

You cancel my show, I haven't been paid! Now you want me to do a publicity junket and smile, Ramon? I'll sue your ass!

RAMON

Hey, let's not be hasty, amigos. Nobody wants to throw the baby out with the bath water. Right, Jairo? Jairo!

MARIA

I have to go.

JAIRO

Wait.

(Jairo catches Maria by the wrist. She looks at him.)

JAIRO

I'm sorry, I just... I'm afraid I'll never see you again.

MARIA

Let go of my wrist.

JAIRO

I'm sorry.

MARIA

Give me your hand.

(Maria looks at Jairo's hand very closely then turns it over.)

JAIRO

You gonna tell my fortune?

CAMERAMAN

One minute and we're live!

(Stage hands frantically set up the backdrop behind the director's chairs.

It looks like the cover of a romance novel. A bare-chested man in breeches and riding boots stands behind a ten foot high Pipa Martinez. She wears a dress with a bustle and a Miss Venezuela sash across her chest. A plantation burns in the background behind them. Across the stage, Maria writes something on the palm of Jairo's hand with an ink pen.)

JAIRO

What's this?

MARIA

Goodbye, Jairo.

(Exit Maria, down the aisle and out the doors of the theatre. Jairo steps off the stage. He looks down at the palm of his hand and smiles.)

CAMERAMAN

Thirty seconds!

RAMON

(looking over his shoulder at the backdrop)

Oh my god! Who the hell painted the sash on Pipa's backdrop?! Jairo, get over here and help me, goddamnit! You still owe me two hours! Jairo!

(Exit Jairo. He walks up the aisle and out of the theater)

CAMERAMAN

And we're on in four...three...two...

(Hear a loud POP. SPARKS flash. The theatre lights go out.)

RAMON

Aw, shit.

(end scene)

(Projection on screen: Celebrity Alert - Balconeando  
Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - DAY

(A good morning TV show-type set: living room decor with sofas and a coffee table. Pati Chapín and Lalo, "El Niño" Sanchez are seated on a sofa, drinking coffee and gossiping. Theme MUSIC ends.)

PATI

Good evening, Ciudad de México! Our top story of the night comes from Caracas Venezuela.

LALO

Qué barbaridad, Pati. Ask me if the rumors are true.

PATI

Are the rumors really-

LALO

They are all true! Maria Douvier, former Venezuelan beauty queen and superestrella de telenovelas has been officially forced into retirement-

PATI

No me digas! At the tender age of thirty-three? Qué horror! Qué barbaridad,

LALO

Not so tender, Pati, as the truth, we see, begins to surface. Mira, We caught a glimpse of the former actriz with our Balconeando-cam this afternoon.

(A video plays footage of Maria pacing on her balcony wearing sunglasses and a bath robe. She is having a heated phone conversation.)

PATI

Qué barbaridad, Who is she talking to?

LALO

We don't know, but whoever it was, she should have told them to wait. Look. Freeze frame and pan down please. There! Look at the leg.

(The video zooms in on Maria's calf, frozen mid-stride, peeking out from the folds of her bathrobe. The calf is as hairy as a man's.)

PATI

Qué barbaridad,!

LALO

Qué barbada! We interviewed her maid who confirms Maria hasn't been waxed in over a month, Pati.

(In the video, Maria ends her phone call. She removes her sunglasses and stares directly into the surveillance camera unknowingly. Pain and anguish show on her face. CUT TO:)

PATI

Maybe she been spending too much time with you know who...

LALO

Jairo "El Peludo" Rossi, ex futbolista de Real Madrid! Qué barbaridad.

PATI

Well, whatever lies in store for the hairy pair, they are not alone. The curse of La Encantadora has affected every member of its cast and crew.

LALO

Also among the unemployed rich and famous is television writer, Raul Goldstein. Goldstein refuses to give Venevisión the heavily anticipated script to next season's telenovela "the Golden Fleece."

PATI

¡Qué emoción! The tension is nauseating, Niño, I can barely stand it.

LALO

Are you suffering from nervous stomach, Pati ? If you are, then you should buy-

PATI

(holding up yogurt container)

Yogurt Colchis, greek yogurt with probiotics.

(Pati takes a taste with a spoon.)

PATI

Mmmm Colchis.

LALO

Venevisión executive producer Ramon Noriega gives us an exclusive balconazo on the situation. Adelante, Bill...

(A video plays. Ramon is in the middle of a press conference on the front steps of the Venevisión TV studio.)

RAMON

Yeah, sure, I understand all that, gentlemen. All I'm saying right now is exactly what I've been saying every freaking day, for the last month, ok, but no one seems to understand. The Golden Fleece belongs to me. I bought it I own it I control it. It is my property and if Goldstein wants to go to court, let's go. Bring it on. I will sue-

LALO

Qué barbaridad. Well, that is all the time we have tonight, Ciudad de México.

(Theme MUSIC plays.)

PATI

And don't forget, when you are hiding on that balcony, estamos!....

EVERYONE

Balconeando!

(Credits roll. Music fades. Projection stops. The stage is now set as a cafe: outdoor tables, couples eating, drinking, engaged in conversation. Jairo is seated at one of the tables with his two sons - Carlos (eight years old) and Daniel (six). Jairo looks at his watch. Carlos walks behind Jairo's chair and steals a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from an adjacent table. He slips them into his pocket and returns to his seat while the unsuspecting owner reads the morning paper. Jairo wears sunglasses and nervously eyes the two reporters seated near the bar watching Balconeando.)

JAIRO

Sons-of-their-filthy-whore-mothers I'm gonna pass a kidney stone over this shit.

CARLOS

You said whore.

DANIEL

Can we go now?

CARLOS

...and shit.

JAIRO

Hey! Watch your mouth. We can leave once Maria shows up alright, Dani.

DANIEL

What's a kidney stone?

CARLOS

She's not even our mom. Plus she has a hairy back.

JAIRO

Don't start.

DANIEL

(crying)

I don't want a mom with a hairy back!

JAIRO

See what you did! Now calm him down.

CARLOS

I don't care! She's not my mom and I don't want to meet her! And she is hairy, dad, everybody knows it!

(The man at the adjacent table searches for his cigarettes. He pats his pockets then looks around himself. Maria enters the cafe wearing black and white Chanel with a hat, veil, and sunglasses underneath. She notices Jairo and the boys then walks over to join them. Jairo stands. He elbows Carlos. Carlos stands. Daniel continues to cry.)

JAIRO

Hola, mi amor, you look fantastic. Doesn't she, Carlos?

MARIA

Nice to meet you, Carlos.

CARLOS

You're not my mom.

(Daniel continues to cry. Maria looks around the cafe.)

MARIA

Maybe we should just meet later, Jairo.

JAIRO

Why don't you take your brother to the little gentlemen's room and tidy up a bit, Carlos.

CARLOS

He's old enough to go by himself.

(Jairo pinches Carlos on the back of the tricep.)

CARLOS

Ow! Come on, Dani...

(The boys leave. Jairo pulls out a chair for Maria. She sits and removes her sunglasses.)

JAIRO

I'm sorry, Maria-

MARIA

It was bad enough to be replaced and fired in front of the entire nation, but now, I'm being humiliated on a daily basis-

JAIRO

I know. It's terrible.

MARIA

You don't know anything and it's all your fault.

JAIRO

How is it all my-

MARIA

Oh, please. Jairo "El Peludo" Rossi? Now I'm the laughing stock of my entire country because of your hairy ass!

JAIRO

What did I do?!

MARIA

You ruined my life, Jairo.

JAIRO

I'm not the one who didn't shave my legs.

(Maria slaps Jairo across the face. People notice them.)

MARIA

You wouldn't even be in this country right now if it weren't for me.

JAIRO

This isn't my fault. Besides, I'm in love with you.

MARIA

Bullshit.

JAIRO

I do. Look at my cheek. See how flushed it is and swollen with passion?

(Maria laughs.)

I'm quivering with desire.

MARIA

I can't take this anymore, Jairo, plus it's a terrible situation for your sons to be involved in. They need supervision and some kind of discipline. Caracas is the worst place in the world for them right now.

JAIRO

What are you talking about? I'm a responsible father. Don't tell me how to raise my sons. They're doing just fine.

(Maria points. Across the room, Carlos lights up a cigarette. Danny fights with him over the lighter.)

JAIRO

Hey! Come here! Alright, maybe you have a point. You want to get out of here. We all need to get back to work... What if I knew a way we could do both but it meant getting a little dirty?

MARIA

How dirty?

JAIRO

Nothing to lose sleep over. Just dinner and some photographs.

MARIA

Photographs?

JAIRO

Spy photographs, like Barbarella.

(Maria and Jairo look at one another. The Balconeando footage of Maria's leg plays on the television set above the

bar. The show cuts to Ramon's press conference.)

RAMON (V.O.)

The Golden Fleece belongs to me. I own it I control it.

(Maria searches Jairo's face with her eyes, trying to read him.)

RAMON (V.O.)

If Goldstein wants to go to court, let's go.

(A look of recognition passes over Maria's face. She shakes her head then stands. Jairo catches Maria's wrist.)

JAIRO

No one will get hurt.

RAMON (V.O.)

It's stealing, okay? The man wants to steal what is rightfully mine.

MARIA

Why me? What do you want from me, Jairo?

JAIRO

I want you to leave the country with us.

RAMON (V.O.)

I mean, this is Venezuela, people, not some banana republic where someone can just steal the next man's property. It's egregious.

MARIA

I don't trust you.

JAIRO

If we take the script to México City I can get it made.

RAMON (V.O.)

egregious.

JAIRO

You'll be a star again.

MARIA

Why would they do business with Jairo Rossi in México ?

(Jairo shows Maria his hands.)

JAIRO

I'm the reason they got into the semifinals in the last Mundial. México / Argentina three to two. I'm a national hero there.

MARIA

And you're in love with me.

JAIRO

Correct.

MARIA

You're a very romantic man, Jairo.

JAIRO

You think this is a game?!

(Jairo pulls Maria into an urgent kiss. Cameras FLASH. Reporters take photographs. Daniel takes a glass of Absinthe from a table and runs off laughing. A waiter chases him.)

WOMAN

That's mine!

MARIA

I'll do it.

MAN AT TABLE

Hey, you little thief, that's my lighter!

(The man grabs Carlos' wrist.)

JAIRO

Get your hands off my son!

(Jairo and the man grapple. The man overpowers Jairo. A crowd gathers. Daniel is crying. Maria grabs Carlos by the collar, pulling him out of the way before the two men crash into a table and begin rolling on the floor.)

MARIA

Jairo stop!

(Jairo has the man in a headlock. The man's arms fall limp at his sides. Jairo continues to choke him.)

MARIA

Jairo!

(Jairo releases the unconscious man then jumps to his feet.)

JAIRO

What the hell is wrong with you people?!

(Cameras flash. Jairo looks around. Maria holds Daniel. Carlos stands beside her. Jairo removes his wallet and drops a wad of cash onto the unconscious man's chest. Jairo takes Daniel from Maria's arms. Carlos takes Maria's hand. Maria looks back at the crowd of people in the cafe. A camera flashes. Maria exits with Jairo and the boys.)

RAMON (V.O.)

You can't just steal someone's property and expect to get away with it. There are consequences. That's all I have to say.

(end scene)

(Projection on screen: Celebrity Alert - Balconeando  
Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - EVENING

PATI

Good evening, Ciudad de México! Once again our top story comes to us from Caracas Venezuela.

LALO

Qué barbaridad, Pati, ask me who's getting deported ...

PATI

Who is getting-

LALO

Jairo "El Peludo" Rossi, ex futbolista and now the Raging Bull of Caracas Venezuela, is being deported for assaulting a priest, while streetfighting in downtown Caracas. Adelante, Bill...

(Jairo's face appears on the screen with several microphones in front of him. He has a black eye.)

JAIRO

That was no priest.

PATI

Qué horror. And that's not all, Niño, Maria Douvier, La Seductora-

LALO

Former Seductora-

PATI

Former La Seductora actriz, Maria Douvier paid her lover's bail and the judge released Señor Rossi into her custody. Television writer, Raul Goldstein de la Garza appeared on miss Douvier's behalf.

LALO

Qué emoción. Our Balconeando-cam caught up with Maria Douvier on the balcony of Mr. Goldstein's mountain home.

PATI

Qué barbaridad.

(Maria stands at a window, staring unknowingly into the surveillance camera. The stage lights come on. The stage is now the set of Goldstein's mountain home. Maria stands at a window. Goldstein wears white linen. He returns from the bar and brings Maria a Martini. She turns away from the windows and takes her cocktail.)

MARIA

Thank you, Raul.

GOLDSTEIN

Sweetheart, when will you ever listen?

MARIA

How does it feel to always be right?

GOLDSTEIN

Maria, you're not a little girl anymore.

MARIA

Everyone keeps reminding me.

GOLDSTEIN

You give too much to people who haven't the decency to consider your most precious asset.

MARIA

My good name?

GOLDSTEIN

Your dignity. That's the difference between you and I. You care what people think. I care what people do to me, what they do to you, Maria.

MARIA

You're a lovely man, Raul.

GOLDSTEIN

No, I'm not. But I still worry about you. Salud.

MARIA

Cheers.

(They toast. Maria walks to a bookcase, stage right.)

MARIA

So many books.

(Goldstein walks up behind Maria. His hands tremble. He reaches for Maria's hips then hesitates. Maria doesn't notice him. She takes a book from the shelf.)

MARIA

The Argonautica?

(Maria turns around, nearly catching Goldstein pull his hands away.)

GOLDSTEIN

Jason and the Argonauts.

MARIA

(sighs)

I feel like I was born to play Madea Martinez, Raul. I only read the first ten pages of The Fleece and I felt so... Oh, Raul. I should go.

GOLDSTEIN

You felt so what?

(Maria walks across the room.)

GOLDSTEIN

You can't just say something like that then walk away.

(Maria reaches the door.)

GOLDSTEIN

What was it that you- Maria, wait. What did you feel?!

(Maria stops, her hand on the doorknob . She turns around.)

MARIA

Loved.

GOLDSTEIN

I'm old enough to be your grandfather, you know.

(Maria walks back to him.)

MARIA

I never imagined melodrama could be so beautiful, Raul.

GOLDSTEIN

Wait till you see what comes next.

(Goldstein offers Maria his hand. She takes it. They walk past the bar. Goldstein presses a button beneath the counter. Music plays. He leads Maria to the center of the room. Nat King Cole sings Stardust.

NAT KING COLE (V.O.)

Sometimes I wonder, how I spend, the lonely nights...

(They dance. Maria rests her head on Raul's shoulder.)

MARIA

My only regret is not reading the entire script.

GOLDSTEIN

How did it make you feel? Honestly.

MARIA

It scared me, Raul.

GOLDSTEIN

Rome is burning, Maria.

MARIA

Is that why it's so hot?

(Goldstein leads Maria to a couch. They recline against the cushions. Goldstein leans in closer to her. Maria passes him an empty Martini glass.)

MARIA

Would you mind mixing me another drink?

GOLDSTEIN

Of course.

(Goldstein returns to the bar and prepares another round of cocktails. Maria notices a file folder full of papers, sitting on the coffee table. She keeps her eyes on Goldstein as she sneaks a quick peek of the folder's contents. Disappointed, Maria reclines back into the couch. Jairo peeks his head up from behind the couch. He's wearing a beanie.)

JAIRO

(whispers)

Is that why it's so hot?!

(Maria screams. Jairo ducks back down behind the couch.)

GOLDSTEIN

What happened?

MARIA

Oh, Raul! I can't take it anymore. I want you to give it to me.

GOLDSTEIN

Well, I'll certainly try, my dear.

(He returns with the cocktails.)

MARIA

I want you to read to me, Raul. I want you to read the Golden Fleece to me all night long. I want to see if you had it in you to kill me at the end.

GOLDSTEIN

We all die in the end, Maria. But "the time has come," the Walrus said, "To talk of many things..."

(He hands Maria a martini.)

MARIA

(laughs)

Of shoes--and ships--and sealing-wax-- Of cabbages--and kings!

(They toast and drink. They sink into the couch, side by side.)

GOLDSTEIN

I'm going to miss you, funny bunny. And it perturbs me to no end to see you sleeping with that hairy pedestrian, "El peludo" Rossi.

MARIA

I'm done with him, Raul. Jairo's brought me nothing but shame.

(Jairo Peeks his head above the back of the couch. His beanie is now pulled down over his face as a ski mask with two crude eyeholes and a mouth slit.)

GOLDSTEIN

The man should be ashamed of himself. He's a menace, Maria, an obtuse, foreign menace.

MARIA

(notices Jairo)

Oh, my god.

GOLDSTEIN

What is it?

(Goldstein nearly looks up at Jairo. Maria grabs Goldstein's face between her hands.)

MARIA

Look at me, Raul. Look into my eyes so you know I'm telling you the truth.

(Jairo pulls his head back down.)

GOLDSTEIN

What is it?

MARIA

Look at me, damnit! Don't you see? I have nothing left here but you... you're the great mind of our times, Venezuela's national treasure, you're our Kafka, Raul, our Borges.

GOLDSTEIN

Borges? Oh, Maria.

MARIA

(points)

Now go.

GOLDSTEIN

Go where?

MARIA

Bring me the Golden Fleece, Raul. I want you read it to me. I want to hear the words washing over my naked body in the moonlight.

GOLDSTEIN

Oh my word. I'll get it right now.

(Raul runs offstage to the kitchen. The sound of rummaging follows. Jairo and Maria leap to their feet.)

MARIA

(whisper)

What are you doing here?!

JAIRO

(whisper)

What are you doing here! Naked in the moonlight?!

MARIA

(whisper)

Get out!

(Jairo dives behind the couch. Goldstein returns in a silk kimono. He holds up a frost-covered freezer bag.)

GOLDSTEIN (O.S.)

I have it, Darling! Are you ready for some Borges?!

MARIA

Yes, Raul! Raul, what is that?

(Goldstein pulls a script from the freezer bag.)

GOLDSTEIN

I keep it on ice, under the empanadas.

(Maria reclines on the couch and crosses her legs. She brushes her hair over her shoulder and places the back of her hand to her forehead.)

MARIA

I'm ready, Raul.

(Goldstein sits on the couch and puts on his reading glasses.)

GOLDSTEIN

Yes, well... Act one. The outline of a ship sails black against the rising sun. A sentry with a machine gun and black sunglasses points to the silhouette, from the deck of a temporary pier, made of pontoons and aluminum.

(Jairo stands. He snatches the script from Goldstein's hands. Maria screams.)

JAIRO

I'm tired of this shit.

GOLDSTEIN

You'll never get away with this, Ramon!

(Jairo and Maria look at each other.)

JAIRO

(terrible imitation of Ramon)

I own it I control it, Goldstein.

GOLDSTEIN

You're not Ramon... Who are you?

MARIA

Get out of here!

(Jairo takes off the ski mask.)

JAIRO

The foreign menace.

GOLDSTEIN

Rossi?! Maria, are you... and....?

JAIRO

Surprise, you pompous asshole.

MARIA

Jairo, let's go!

(Goldstein looks at Maria. He clutches his chest.)

GOLDSTEIN

Ouch. Oh, Maria...

(He collapses to the floor.)

MARIA

Raul!

JAIRO

Goldstein, are you alright, come on man!

MARIA

Call an ambulance!

JAIRO

Here! Take the script. Go get the boys and head to the airport. I'll call an ambulance.

(Jairo runs to the bar and picks up the telephone.)

MARIA

Raul, Raul, come on, please....oh Please....

JAIRO

Go! Bueno? Yes, I need an ambulance quickly!

(Maria runs for the door. She looks back then exits. Jairo watches her go.)

JAIRO

Yes, the address is...

(Jairo makes sure Maria is gone then places the phone back onto its cradle. He walks over to Goldstein. Goldstein grabs Jairo's ankle as he labors with short panting breaths. He looks up at Jairo. Jairo looks down at Goldstein. Goldstein dies. Jairo closes his eyes. He takes a deep breath then looks down at

Goldstein again.)

JAIRO

It's mine now.

NAT KING COLE (V.O.)

My stardust melody, the memory of love's refrain....

(Jairo walks to the bar and turns out the lights. His shadowed figure exits stage left. Projection on screen: A Mexicana Airlines Boeing 737 takes to the air. MUSIC plays. SEVERAL SHOTS:

1) A map. A red arrow leaves Caracas moving north. It touches down on México City.

2) Time-lapse footage of México City: POV from a car racing down la Avenida de los Insurgentes, the Paseo de la Reforma then around the Angel of Independence monument.

3) Shot of the Hotel de México, Zócalo, and Chapultepec Castle. Music fades. CUT TO:

Celebrity Alert - Balconeando Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - MORNING

(Pati wears a black Hermès scarf around her neck. Lalo wears a black armband over the sleeve of his cream Brooks Brothers Jacket.)

PATI

Good morning, Ciudad de México.

LALO

A tragedy last night in Caracas, Venezuela...

PATI

Raul Goldstein de la Garza was found dead in his mountain home in the sierra Avila after our Balconeando-cam captured footage of Maria Douvier having drinks with the beloved author of Venezeulan telenovelas.

LALO

Goldstein's works include La Usurpadora, La Encantadora, La Trepadora, and the highly anticipated Golden Fleece. We have an exclusive balconazo with Goldstein's recently discovered life-partner and executive producer, Ramon Noriega. Adelante, Bill...

(CUT TO: Ramon standing in the middle of Goldstein's living room wearing a black suit. He is surrounded by reporters and microphones. Ramon walks away from them to a coffee table. He looks through a file folder.)

BILL (REPORTER#1)

Mr. Noriega, how is it that one knew about your relationship with señor Goldstein before today?

RAMON

Raul was a very private man and I've always respected his wishes. Excuse me, gentlemen.

(Ramon walks to the bar. He continues to search for something.)

REPORTER #2

Mr. Noriega, does your wife and children know about the affair?

(Ramon digs through drawers under the counter. He looks up, exasperated, on the verge of tears.)

RAMON

(breaking down)

Where did he put it? I just... I only wanted it so I could hear Raul's voice. I-Hey! Where the hell you think you're going with that?! Nothing leaves this house without my permission, you understand me?!

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - MORNING

LALO

Qué barbaridad.

PATI

Where is the Golden Fleece now, Niño? That is the question on everyone's lips en el mundo latino today.

LALO

And what has become of the former enchantress, Maria Douvier?

PATI

And our hairy Bombón, el Bizcocho Argentino, "El Peludo" Rossi, Qué no?

LALO

¡Cómo no!, Pati. The rumors and tension are making my neck stiff.

PATI

Are you feeling tense, Niño? If you are, you should probably stop by-

LALO

(shirtless with towel around his neck)

Corinthian Springs, sauna y day spa, Cuernavaca.

(Lalo reclines in his chair. A pair of hands place cucumber slices over Lalo's eyes. He smiles.)

LALO

Corinthian Springs... Relájate mejor.

PATI

Qué padre. Well, that is all the time we have left tonight, Ciudad de México.

LALO

(wearing suit again)

And don't forget, when you are hiding on that balcony, estamos!....

EVERYONE

Balconeando!

(Credits roll. Music fades. Projection stops. The stage is now the set of a swank Colonia Condesa artist loft: open space, a desk, diner table, bookcases, open kitchen, a raised bed - a bohemian dream pad. The lights of the city shine through the floor to ceiling windows. The SOUND of several locks turning. The front door opens. Maria, Carlos, and Daniel enter laughing. They are well dressed and carrying shopping bags. Carlos helps Maria out of her coat and hangs it on the coat rack.)

MARIA

Merci, Carlos.

CARLOS

Je vous en prie.

DANIEL

Papá!

MARIA

Très bien, Carlos.

(Enter Jairo, wearing only soccer shorts and an apron. He has a bottle of wine under his arm. A kitchen timer alarm goes off.)

JAIRO

Hello, my darlings! How was the museum?

DANIEL

It was amazing!

CARLOS

It was more than amazing! The Aztecs had a giant city-

DANIEL

And we're standing right on top of it, Papá!

CARLOS

And they used to cut out people's hearts!

(Jairo and Maria smile at each other. Maria raises her eyebrows.)

MARIA

Nice shorts there, Rossi...

JAIRO

Te gustan?

DANIEL

And there was a statue of a snake!

(Jairo takes Maria into his arms and kisses her.)

DANIEL

Hey! Let her go! I'll save you, Maria!

(Jairo and Maria laugh as Daniel tries to separate them.  
The kitchen timer continues to beep.)

JAIRO

Mm! The food!

(Jairo runs offstage.)

MARIA

What are you making?!

JAIRO (O.S.)

Chimmichurri!

(a smoke detector goes off. A puff of black smoke comes from backstage. Jairo reenters holding a cake pan with charred piece of meat in it. Maria and the boys laugh.)

JAIRO

It's not funny.

DANIEL

You look funny, Papá.

CARLOS

Yeah, like the drawings at the museum. The painted guys who get their hearts cut out-

JAIRO

(laughing)

I'll show you who gets their heart cut out!

(Jairo, the boys, and Maria chase one other around the loft. Everyone is laughing.)

MARIA

Come back here, Peludo!

(Maria tackles Jairo onto the bed. The boys dog-pile on top of them.)

JAIRO

You're too late! All of you!

DANIEL

We're not too late!

(Jairo pretends to go limp. He closes his eyes. The boys stand. Maria pretends to revive Jairo.)

MARIA

Oh, no!

DANIEL

How come we're too late, papá?

(Maria looks down at Jairo. Jairo opens his eyes. They

gaze at one another.)

JAIRO

Because someone's already taken my heart, Dani.

(Maria smiles. She leans down to kiss Jairo when... the sound of KNOCKING on the front door interrupts them. Everyone freezes. They all stare at the door. Someone knocks again.)

MARIA

Un momentito...!

(Maria tiptoes to the door. Jairo wraps an arm around each of his sons. Maria looks through the peep-hole. She exhales with relief then unlocks it.

MARIA

Pásele, Lorena, buenas noches.

JAIRO

Good grief, Lorena, you knock like the Federales.

LORENA (NURSE)

(watching Jairo)

Ay, señor Rossi, put some clothes on! I'm a decent woman... bien... pero bien...bien decente... señor- Ay!!!

(Jairo pinches Lorena's butt on his way to the kitchen.)

LORENA

(to Maria)

El señor Rossi es italiano, no?

MARIA

Argentino.

LORENA

Ah, por eso. Okay, chicos, let's get you washed up for dinner. Mom and dad have to work late tonight. Apúrate, and I'll make us some flan.

CARLOS & DANIEL

Yea! Thanks, Lorena!

(Carlos, Daniel, and Lorena exit.)

MARIA

Are you ready to do this?

JAIRO

Like Maradona.

(Jairo pulls a typewriter from a cabinet. He places it on top of the desk. Maria opens the freezer. The sound of KNOCKING on the door causes them to freeze.)

JAIRO

Momento!...

(Jairo returns the typewriter to its hiding place. The knocking continues.)

JAIRO

Un momento, por favor!

(Jairo walks to the door and peers through the peephole. He looks back at Maria and shrugs his shoulders. Maria points to the door, shaking her head. Jairo unlocks it. Two large and intimidating men enter the loft - Cuauhtémoc and Hugo.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

No manches, mi brother, you never just open a door up like that. This is México City, Güerito.

HUGO

Lorenita?! Habla tu hermano! Si, mi güero, you have to be careful.

LORENA

What are you doing here?!

MARIA

Are these are the two brothers you're always speaking so fondly of, Lorena?

HUGO

Fondly?

CUAUHTÉMOC

Ay-ay-ay. You're a very nice lady. I've seen you somewhere before, no?

LORENA

Get out!

JAIRO

No, Lorena. It's alright. We'd love to meet your family.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Órale, mi güero. You guys are nice people.

MARIA

Please, come in.

HUGO

Gracias senorita.

MARIA

He's a smart boy.

(everyone laughs.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

Senorita...

(Cauhtémoc shakes Maria's hand and kisses her cheek.  
Hugo and Cauhtémoc remove their baseball hats.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

We just needed to speak with Lorena for a moment.

JAIRO

(walking to kitchen)

Sure, go right ahead. Can I offer you something to drink? A glass of wine?  
Cerveza?

HUGO

No, gracias.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Una cervecita, mi güero, gracias.

LORENA

No! You two come with me.

(Lorena grabs Cuauhtémoc and Hugo by their earlobes and heads for the front door. Carlos and Daniel return in their pajamas. Maria shoots Jairo a sober glare. Jairo shrugs, questioning her.)

DANIEL

Papá, can we stay up and watch the novela with you tonight?

MARIA

(smiles)

No son of mine is growing up to be a novelero.

DANIEL

I'm your son, now? Really, Maria?

MARIA

I...

CUAUHTÉMOC

Mira, look at the little chavitos! They look just like you, mi güero.

(Jairo nods and smiles. He raises his glass of wine. By the doorway, Lorena speaks with her brothers in hushed voices.)

LORENA

What are you doing here?

CUAUHTÉMOC

Prestame una lana, hermanita, no?

HUGO

Yeah, Lorena, just 500 pesos that's it.

CUAUHTÉMOC

We just wanted to pick up some tortas on the way home. We'll leave you alone, hermanita, we promise.

HUGO

Just tortas, we promise.

(Lorena looks back at Jairo, Maria, and the boys. Jairo raises his wine glass again and smiles at them.)

LORENA

Órale, güey. Stay here.

(Lorena walks offstage. Lorena's absence is long and palpable. Jairo keeps toasting and smiling without drinking. Lorena's brothers keep smiling and nodding. Maria picks up Daniel. Carlos yawns and stretches. Lorena returns with her purse. She gives Cuauhtémoc 500 pesos then opens the door.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

Gracias señorita, buenas noches.

MARIA

Buenas noches, muchachos.

LORENA

And goodnight!

(Lorena closes the door and locks all of the locks. Maria walks over to Lorena, angry.)

MARIA

Mira, Lorena, I-

LORENA

Ay, señor Rossi, perdóname. I am so sorry about that.

JAIRO

Well, Lorena you can't just-

LORENA

Si, señor Rossi, it will never happen again. Disculpe la molestia.

MARIA

Lorena, I'm speaking to you.

LORENA

I'll take the boys to bed, señor Rossi, so you two can get back to work. Con permiso, señora.

(Lorena takes the boys offstage.)

MARIA

Señora? Jairo, why didn't you say something to her? You're supposed to be my Greek hero and you just let the nursemaid walk all over you.

JAIRO

She didn't walk all over me. I'm just trying to figure this place out, that's all. I barely understand what anyone's saying half the time.

MARIA

Mi amor, I love you, but this is not fútbol. The people we are about to meet with tomorrow have money, power, education, and they are a lot more pushy than Lorena and her brothers. So, I need to know that you have my back if I give you "the look" next time, okay?

(Jairo takes a drink of his wine.)

MARIA

Mi amor?

JAIRO

Orale, mi güero?

MARIA

That's what they say.

JAIRO

But why do they say it to me?

(Maria laughs. They kiss.)

MARIA

I don't know, mi amor.

JAIRO

Should we do our homework first and watch tonight's episode or should we get back to the revision?

MARIA

Si, güerito...

(Jairo chases Maria to the couch. They snuggle up and turn on the television. Projection on screen:

Cueva de Víboras - Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays. Louis Miguel sings.)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Esta noche, en el gran final de Cueva de Víboras....

(A woman in a maid's uniform embraces a handsome wealthy-looking gentleman in the shadows of El Paseo de la Reforma, at night.)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

El engaño es temporal...

(A beautiful young woman in a fur coat watches them from behind a tree. Tears roll down her cheeks.)

BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN  
(GABI)

(through teeth)

Malditos!

(She raises a cellphone to her ear.)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

La traición es instantánea...

GABI

Juan Claudio is the last man she will ever steal, comadre, Adios.

(Gabi ends her phone call and draws a pistol from her purse.)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

y sus consecuencias son devastadoras...

(The maid and the gentleman embrace again.)

MAID

It can never be, Alberto.

GABI

(pointing pistol)

Es mi marido, babosa, claro que no puede ser!

(Gabi FIRES the pistol.)

(Lorena screams. Jairo and Maria jump to their feet.  
Lorena stands behind them with her hands covering her  
mouth, trembling.)

JAIRO

Lorena, what is it?!

MARIA

Lorena?!

(Lorena walks over to Jairo, buries her face in his chest,  
and begins to cry.)

LORENA

Ay, señor Rossi, she killed her.

MARIA

Who?!

(Lorena points to the LED monitor without removing her  
face from Jairo's chest.)

LORENA

La Fabiola!

MARIA

From Cueva de Víboras?!

LORENA

Si, señor Rossi, Disculpe, pero lo que pasa es que me afecta tanto...

(Maria gives Jairo "the look.")

JAIRO

Alright, Lorena, that's enough, now. Here we go. Come on...

(Jairo leads Lorena to the door.)

JAIRO

Why don't you just take the rest of the night off.

LORENA

Disculpe, señor Rossi...

JAIRO

It's quite all right, Lorena. No te preocupes. Buenas noches.

LORENA

Buenas noches, señor.

(Jairo closes and locks the door behind her.)

JAIRO

Maybe we should just get some sleep. We have a big day tomorrow anyway.

MARIA

Nice work, señor Rossi.

(Maria wraps her arms around Jairo's neck.)

JAIRO

What?

MARIA

My hero.

JAIRO

You ready for this?

MARIA

Are you?

JAIRO

Everything changes tomorrow.

MARIA

Only if we want it to. It's not too late to cancel.

JAIRO

I want this. I want this for us.

MARIA

I love you, Jairo.

JAIRO

I love you more.

(They kiss)

MARIA

Let's go to bed.

(Jairo and Maria walk to the raised bed and lie down together. Jairo spoons himself against Maria's body. Maria pulls Jairo's arm around her into an embrace. Jairo sits up in bed then claps his hands twice. The lights go out.)

MARIA

That light is so naco, mi amor.

(Jairo laughs.)

MARIA

It is.

(End Scene)

Projection on screen: Balconeando Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - AFTERNOON

(Pati wears green a green Chanel dress with a white gauze top. Lalo wears electric green Tom Ford.)

PATI

Good afternoon, Ciudad de México.

LALO

Welcome to our Cueva de Víboras gran final edition of Balconeando!

(applause)

PATI

Qué barbaridad, Niño, after a record-breaking season, Cueva de Víboras ended last night in un gran espectáculo with career-making performances by Gabriela Reyes, daughter of León Reyes Mendiola, owner of TV Azteca.

(CUT TO:

A beautiful young woman in a fur coat watching the maid and the gentleman embrace. Tears roll down her cheeks.)

GABI (BEAUTIFUL YOUNG  
WOMAN)

(through teeth)

Malditos!

(Gabi raises a cellphone to her ear.)

GABI

Juan Claudio is the last man she will ever steal, comadre. Adios.

(Gabi ends her phone call and draws a pistol from her purse.)

LALO

Guau, Pati. Gabi Reyes was amazing.

PATI

And so natural, Niño, Mira.

GABI

(pointing pistol)

Es mi marido, babosa, claro que no puede ser!

LALO

Que poder tiene esta niña...

PATI

She is powerful, Niño, and young, not to mention beautiful, and I'm not just saying that because her father owns the station either.

LALO

Talent is talent, no Pati?

PATI

Como no. And speaking of talent, you'll never guess who we caught walking into the building with our Balconeando-cam today, Niño.

LALO

Former Encantadora, Maria Douvier.

PATI

And how did she look, up close, Niño?

LALO

Guapísima.

PATI

Sin peludo?

LALO

Con Peludo, Pati. Jairo "El Peludo" Rossi is here with Maria Douvier at Studios Azteca. Let's see if Bill is can get us an exclusive balconazo with this year's hottest and most controversial couple in telenovelas, adelante Bill...

(A very well dressed Maria and Jairo stand in front of a white backdrop covered in TV Azteca logos. Bill holds up a microphone. CUTTING BACK AND FORTH:

PATI

Hola, Maria, welcome to México City.

MARIA

Gracias, Pati. It's very nice to be here.

LALO

And, Mr. Rossi, México welcomes you, señor. Had you not missed Humberto Sanchez's penalty kick, we would have never made it to the final round of the world cup. Gracias, señor.

PATI

(scolding)

Niño...

JAIRO

(smiles, pumping fist)

Mé-xi-co-Mé-xi-co-Mé-xi-co...

(Maria gives Jairo "the look." He stops.)

MARIA

Thank you both for having us on the show. Gracias, Pati. See you soon.

(Maria and Jairo walk off camera.)

PATI

Qué barbaridad, Niño, She does look good - very well preserved. Maria and Jairo are having lunch with TV Azteca's owner León Reyes Mendiola this afternoon.

LALO

If only I were a fly on the wall at that luncheon. Well, Ciudad de México, that's all the time we have left today!

(Theme MUSIC plays.)

PATI

And don't forget, when you are hiding on that balcony, estamos!....

EVERYONE

Balconeando!

(Credits roll. Music fades. Projection stops. The stage is

now set as the office of León Reyes Mendiola. The walls are covered in framed film and television playbills from around the world. Maria sits in León's leather-backed chair at his desk. León and a group of well-dressed producers stand in a semicircle around Maria, laughing and talking with her. Jairo sits on an upholstered bench in the corner of the room, drinking a mineral water. He looks down at the manuscript folder in his hand. A young woman wearing jeans and a t-shirt enters the room. She looks at the group of men talking with Maria, sighs, then sits down on the bench next to Jairo.)

GABI

Who are you?

JAIRO

(offers hand)

Jairo.

GABI

Jairo Rossi?

JAIRO

Si.

GABI

You don't remember me do you?

(Jairo looks at Gabi, uncertain.)

GABI

I used to go out with Beto when you played for Real Madrid.

JAIRO

Gabi! Oh, my god. I didn't even put it together. Now you play on-

GABI

Cueva de Víboras? Yeah, or I did, at least until last night.

JAIRO

I watched. You were really good.

GABI

So, what have you been up to?

JAIRO

Writing, and just trying to get to know the city.

GABI

I didn't know you were a writer.

JAIRO

I'm not really. I just...

GABI

(points)

It that something you wrote?

JAIRO

This?

(Jairo looks at Maria amid her circle of admirers. León offers Maria a cigarette. She takes one.)

MARIA

Ay, León, you are just awful. No, I only stayed with the Godards if my parents were in Europe for the summer. I didn't live with Godard.

LEÓN REYES

I'll never forget the picture of you on Fellini's knee. That little dress. Maria es un gran placer. I am so pleased you have come to visit us like this.

GABI

(gestures to script)

May I?

JAIRO

What?

GABI

Mind if I look?

JAIRO

Oh....Claro.

(Gabi looks at the cover page)

GABI

Maria - a telenovela for the stage?

JAIRO

It's a working title.

GABI

You wrote this for Maria Douvier?

JAIRO

Had to pry it from a dying man's hands first.

(Gabi laughs. She punches Jairo in the arm.)

GABI

You are so crazy. Same old "Peludo" Rossi. How's Carmen?

JAIRO

Haven't seen her in three years.

GABI

I miss Madrid. So what's it about?

JAIRO

What do you mean?

GABI

The story.

JAIRO

It's about risking everything to get what you've always wanted and about a woman who risks everything for love.

GABI

Would you mind if I read it?

(Jairo looks at Maria and her circle of admirers.)

JAIRO

Sure, Gabi. It's really good to see you.

GABI

Igualmente.

LEÓN REYES

Gabi! Come over here, my dear. Have I a treat for you! It is my pleasure to introduce you to Maria Douvier.

(Gabi and Maria shake hands.)

GABI

I'm such an admirer of your work, Miss Douvier. It's a pleasure.

MARIA

Igualmente, Gabriela. I saw the final episode of Cueva de Viboras last night. You were wonderful.

GABI

Thank you. That means so much to me coming from you.

LEÓN

How long are you intending on staying in México, miss Douvier?

MARIA

Not long. I had an idea I wanted to speak with you about before I left though.

LEÓN

Por supuesto. Are you free tomorrow morning?

MARIA

I can be.

LEÓN

Wonderful. Why don't we meet for breakfast, then. I'll send a driver for you.

MARIA

Perfect.

LEÓN

Where are you staying?

MARIA

In this lovely bohemian artist loft, en la Colonia... Jairo, como se llama?

JAIRO

(from bench)

Condesa.

MARIA

Eso, la Condesa. Me encanta.

LEÓN

Oh, I love la Condesa! I used to live there when I was a producer at Televisa. Gabriela lives there now, in my old apartment.

MARIA

I'm having such a lovely time, León. The city is so beautiful.

LEÓN

Well, I hope we may convince you to stay longer then. México loves you, Maria.

GABI

And México loves you too, Peludo Rossi.

LEÓN

We adore señor Rossi!

PRODUCER #2

Como Los Niños Héroe!

PRODUCER #1

We salute you, señor!

(Everyone is laughing except for Jairo. Eventually, they fall silent. Everyone notes Jairo's deadpan expression.)

JAIRO

(smiles, pumping fist)

Mé-xi-co-Mé-xi-co-Mé-xi-co...

(Maria gives Jairo "the look." The men cheer. They slap Jairo on the back. León has one of the producers open a bottle of champagne. Another producer hands out flutes. Maria Smiles. Gabi brings Jairo his champagne. They all raise their glasses.)

LEÓN

To Maria and Jairo. Bienvenidos a México!

EVERYONE

Bienvenidos a México!

(The producers say their good-byes to Maria.)

LEÓN

(kisses Maria's hand)

Thank you for coming, Miss Douvier. Hasta mañana entonces.

MARIA

Hasta mañana, señor Reyes.

GABI

It's good seeing you again, Jairo. Hasta luego.

JAIRO

Ciao, Gabi.

(Gabi kisses Jairo on the cheek. Maria notices them, the script in Gabi's hand. Gabi and Maria kiss each other on each cheek.)

GABI

It's been such an honor to meet you.

MARIA

Igualmente.

(Exit Jairo and Maria.)

Projection on screen: Balconeando Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays, this time with an awards show twist.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - NIGHT

(Pati wears a black Valentino dress. Lalo wears a black tuxedo with a white shirt and black skinny tie.)

PATI

Good evening, Ciudad de México!

LALO

Tonight on Balconeando we are adding up the besos and bodies to see who is favored for this weekend's Premios TV y Novelas!

PATI

Qué barbaridad. Niño. Well, if it comes down to bodies there can only be two real choices this season, que no?

LALO

Como no, Pati. The first contender is Gertrudis Morillo from NO BORRA LA HUELLA - Pura Sangre 2.

(CUT TO:

A beautiful, young woman in boots and riding pants grabs the shoulder of a wealthy elderly woman dressed in black. She spins the elderly woman around into a dramatic TV closeup.)

SEñORA SARMIENTO

How dare you?

GERTRUDIS

Señora Sarmiento, my husband loves me. He would never lower himself to sleep with the housemaid!

(Señora Sarmiento looks into the camera with undiluted sarcasm.)

PATI (V.O.)

Guau! Que cuerpazo! What a body, Niño.

LALO

Like a wasp!

PATI

Her cintura de avispa doesn't come cheap though.

LALO

No me digas!

PATI

Gertrudis had to remove two ribs to get that waistline.

LALO

And lipo.

PATI

Lipo, chin job, nose job, pompis...

LALO

(gestures)

Pompis?

PATI

You didn't know?

LALO

Our next contender, Pati, is none other than the crown princess of TV Azteca, the star of *Vestido de Veneno* and now nominated for this year's "best actriz" for her role in *Cueva de Víboras*...

PATI

Gabi Reyes!

(Video clip of Gabi in a fur coat watching the maid and the distinguished gentleman embrace in the shadows of el Paseo de la Reforma.)

(Gabi raises a cellphone to her ear.)

COMADRE (V.O.)

Comadre, has she stolen him yet? What do you see?!

GABI

Juan Claudio is the last man she will ever steal, comadre. Adios.

COMADRE (V.O.)

Comadre, wait! Wait for me!

(Gabi ends her phone call and draws a pistol from her purse. She opens her fur coat and lets it fall to the ground. Gabi wears a tight black dress and heels. She marches towards the unsuspecting couple.)

MAID

It can never be, Alberto.

GABI

(pointing pistol)

Es mi marido, babosa, claro que no puede ser!

(Gabi FIRES the pistol. The maid's eyes go wide with

realization. She falls backwards, in slow motion. Her face contorts in anguish. FREEZE FRAME. Stage lights come on. The stage is now set as the artist loft. Lorena stands in front of the TV, holding a remote control, staring up at the screen. She presses "fast-forward."

The maid in the novela lies on her back now, gasping for breath. She looks up at Gabi and grabs a hold of Gabi's ankle.)

MAID

I deserve... to be happy too.

(The maid dies.)

GABI

He's mine.

LORENA

(watching screen)

Maldita.

DANIEL

I'm hungry, Lorena.

(Lorena screams, jumping with surprise.)

CARLOS

What are you watching?

(Lorena turns off the television.)

LORENA

Nothing, chicos. What would you like to have for dinner?

(Lorena begins to take out cooking supplies. Daniel follows her around the kitchen. He looks up at Lorena with concern.)

DANIEL

What's wrong?

LORENA

(tearing up)

Ay, Dani. You're such a good boy.

CARLOS

(takes Lorena's hand)

Why are you crying, Lorena?

LORENA

(dries eyes)

I deserve to be happy too, Carlitos.

DANIEL

(hugs Lorena)

We all do!

CARLOS

Don't we make you happy, Lorena?

(Lorena wraps her arms around Carlos and Daniel. She holds them close to her, caressing their hair.)

LORENA

Oh, my boys... You make me so happy.

(A loud KNOCKING on the door startles everyone. Lorena motions for the boys to remain still. She walks to the door and looks through the peephole. The knocking resumes. Lorena jumps back. Jairo and Maria burst into the room, their arms loaded with gifts, goodies, and champagne. They are drunk.)

JAIRO

Gooooooooooool! Un golazo by numero diez, Maria Douvier, La Encantadora is back!

MARIA

We are back!

JAIRO

(beaming)

We are back.

MARIA

Come and give momma a kiss. I brought you something, Dani.

CARLOS

What about me?

MARIA

You too, Carlitos. Look what I brought for you, mi amor...

LORENA

You've been drinking, señora Dou-

MARIA

Señorita.

JAIRO

Señorita Douvier just secured your future employment today, Lorena, so I would show a little gratitude if I were you.

(Maria smiles at Jairo.)

LORENA

(embraces Jairo)

Oh, señor Rossi, is it true?

MARIA

Hold on, nothing is certain yet.

JAIRO

But it went great, Lorena! Señor Reyes is meeting with Maria tomorrow morning to discuss the details.

(Maria gives Jairo "the look.")

JAIRO

And we're celebrating! You're invited too, Lorena. I hope you brought your dancing shoes!

LORENA

Ay, señor Rossi, dance with you?

JAIRO

Here, help me with the bags.

MARIA

(to boys)

I bought these at the museum store. I remember how much you wanted them.

(Maria produces two gilded crowns of laurel leaves. She places them on Daniel and Carlos' heads.)

MARIA

It's a corona triumphalis. Do you like them?

CARLOS

I love it! Pa! Look at my crown!

DANIEL

(embraces Maria)

I love you, Mamá. Thank you for the crown.

MARIA

(kisses Daniel's hair)

Mi Piccolo Principe...

(Jairo turns on the stereo. MUSIC plays. Jairo and Lorena begin to dance. Maria dances with Carlos and Daniel.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

Éso mi, Güero!

HUGO

You really should keep this front door locked, Güerito.

(Hugo and Cuauhtémoc walk through the open front door. Cuauhtémoc starts dancing. He inches towards Maria and the boys. Everybody is laughing. Everybody is dancing.)

JAIRO

Cuauhtémoc, open the champagne!

(They drink and laugh and dance until only Maria and Jairo are now left slow dancing in the middle of the room. The boys are asleep on the couch. Lorena gestures to Hugo and Cuauhtémoc. They carry the boys behind Lorena, offstage to bed. Jairo and Maria continue to dance.)

JAIRO

I'm so proud of you.

MARIA

Where is the script, Jairo?

JAIRO

Gabi asked if I'd let her read it.

MARIA

And you gave it to her?

JAIRO

Why ask me questions you already know the answer to?

MARIA

Because I am afraid.

JAIRO

I would never betray you, Maria.

MARIA

Then why do I keep feeling like you already have?

(Hugo and Cuauhtémoc return.)

HUGO

They're sleeping like little lambs. The fiesta was just too much for them.

(Maria and Jairo stop dancing. Maria kisses Hugo on the cheek.)

MARIA

Thank you for celebrating with us.

CUAUHTÉMOC

(to Jairo)

Hey, Güero, no tienes quinientos pesos que me prestes?

JAIRO

(reaches for wallet)

500 pesos? Let me see...

LORENA

(whispers)

Cuauhtémoc! I'm sorry, señor Rossi...

(Lorena grabs Cuauhtémoc by the earlobe and drags him towards the door. Cuauhtémoc swats her hand away. Lorena almost falls.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

I'm sick of you doing that!

LORENA

How dare you come in here asking people for money?! This is my job, Cuauhtémoc! Why do you always have to ruin everything?! Why?!

(the room falls silent. Cuauhtémoc and Lorena glare at each other.)

MARIA

It's alright, Lorena.

LORENA

(breathing heavily)

No it isn't, señora.

JAIRO

(takes out 500 Pesos)

Here, Cuauhtémoc. It's alright, brother.

CUAUHTÉMOC

Gracias, Güerito.

(Hugo leads Cuauhtémoc to the door. Cuauhtémoc stops.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

I only wanted it to buy you a birthday present, Lorena.

(Cuauhtémoc leaves)

LORENA

My birthday was two months ago!

HUGO

Buenas noches.

MARIA

(caressing Lorena's back)

Buenas noches, Hugo.

LORENA

Just leave me alone!

(Exit Hugo. Maria locks the door behind him. She turns back around. Lorena is crying into Jairo's chest.)

LORENA

I'm so tired of it, señor Rossi. I...

MARIA

It's alright, Lorena. It isn't your fault.

(Jairo escorts Lorena to the door. He opens his wallet. Lorena stops him.)

LORENA

No señor Rossi. That was more than my day's pay you just gave to my brother.

MARIA

(gives Lorena money)

This is your money, Lorena. You've earned it. Thank you so much for taking care of the boys today.

LORENA

Gracias, señorita.

(Jairo and Maria smile at each other. Jairo opens the door.)

JAIRO

Buenas noches, Lorena.

LORENA

God bless you, señor Rossi.

MARIA

Goodnight.

(Jairo locks the door. Maria places empty champagne flutes on the kitchen counter then dims the lights. Jairo

turns on the stereo. The music is romantic.)

JAIRO

What a night, huh?

MARIA

What a day.

JAIRO

Care to dance?

MARIA

Me encantaria.

(Jairo and Maria dance. Maria rests her head on Jairo's chest.)

JAIRO

I love you, Maria.

(They kiss, dance, and kiss some more. Jairo scoops Maria into his arms. She shrieks with happiness. Jairo carries Maria to the elevated bed. Things get passionate. Maria's dress falls to the floor. She wears a creme silk chemise. Maria rips Jairo's t-shirt open, exposing a very hairy chest.)

JAIRO

Guau!

(Maria pushes Jairo onto his back and straddles him. They kiss passionately and pull the blankets over themselves. Maria crawls away from Jairo and peeks her head out of the blankets at the foot of the bed.)

MARIA

Oh, mi amor...

(Maria rises to her knees and grabs hold of the headboard. Jairo slips up behind Maria and embraces her. He kisses

her neck and shoulders... working his way down over her spine... Jairo places his head underneath Maria's silk chemise.)

DANIEL

What are you doing to my Mamá?

(Daniel stands near the kitchen in his pajamas holding a stuffed rhinoceros. Jairo pulls his head from Maria's silk chemise.)

JAIRO

Her back is hurt.

(Jairo massages Maria vigorously. Maria motions for him to stop.)

MARIA

Que paso, mi amor?

DANIEL

I'm scared.

(Maria sits up in bed.)

MARIA

(pats bed beside her)

Come on.

(Daniel climbs into the bed between them and cuddles close to Maria. She caresses Daniel's hair.)

MARIA

It's alright, Dani. Go to sleep, mi amor.

(Jairo smiles at them. He snuggles in closer to his son and falls asleep. Maria caresses Jairo's hair.)

MARIA

Mi, Peludo...

(The music ends. Maria looks down at her sleeping boys and smiles. She claps her hands twice. The lights go out.)

(end scene)

Projection on screen: Balconeando Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - MORNING

(Pati wears yellow and white Chanel. Lalo wears a turtle neck and a blazer.)

PATI

Good morning, Ciudad de México!

LALO

Our top story is last night's unexpected upset at the Premios TV y Novela.

PATI

Gertrudis Morillo from NO BORRA LA HUELLA - Pura Sangre 2 brought home the gold last night as "best actriz in a telenovela."

LALO

Qué barbaridad, Pati. Everyone expected Gabi Reyes to win for her performance in Cueva de Víboras. but it just wasn't enough to convince the judges.

PATI

Poor Gabi, this is the second year in a row she has been passed over for the premio, Niño.

LALO

First for Vestido de Veneno, now Cueva de Víboras, and you know what they say, Pati.

PATI

Three passes and the career is over.

LALO

That's exactly what they say. Gabi better find the role of her lifetime by next season's awards or she too may be joining the ranks of the unemployed rich and famous.

PATI

¡Qué vergüenza!

LALO

Do you have any embarrassing baggage you would rather keep in the closet, Pati?

PATI

No, Niño, but if I did I would call Cofres y Armarios Cípselo.

(Lalo holds up a skeleton key.)

LALO

Cípselo - king of luxury cedar chests and closets. That's all the time we have left, Ciudad de México. And don't forget...

PATI

When you're hiding on that balcony, Ciudad de México!

LALO

Estamos...

EVERYONE

Balconeando!

(Credits roll. Music fades. Projection stops. The stage is now set as the office of León Reyes Mendiola. León looks at his watch. He goes to the windows and looks down at the street. He returns to his desk, straightens his tie, then smooths out his hair. There is a knock at the door.)

LEÓN

Come in.

(Maria enters the room. She looks magnificent.)

LEÓN

You look magnificent.

MARIA

(removing gloves)

Thank you, señor Reyes.

LEÓN

Please, me llamo León.

MARIA

León, then.

LEÓN

(gestures to couch)

Maria, may I call you Maria?

MARIA

(sits)

Yes, of course.

LEÓN

Maria, I have been watching your career since its beginnings... Mira.

(León points out various playbills on the wall.)

LEÓN

La Usurpadora. "There is no heart she cannot usurp."

(Maria laughs)

LEÓN

And here... La Trepadora "No wall is too high for love to climb."

MARIA

You flatter me.

LEÓN

I don't have a poster for La Encantadora but I remember the logline by heart:  
"Once bewitched, a man will stop at nothing."

MARIA

That wasn't the logline.

LEÓN

But it's true, Maria. I had a vision of the future last night, a vision of your  
future, here in México...

(Leon signals with a finger. He hurries into an adjoining  
room.)

MARIA

Actually, that's what I wanted to speak with you about, León...

LEÓN (O.S.)

Go on. I'm listening.

(Hear the sound of water running in a sink.)

MARIA

I've been working on a script with señor Rossi.

LEÓN (O.S.)

That pedestrian?

MARIA

Yes, well, actually Jairo's had some very good ideas for the-

LEÓN (O.S.)

What's the story?

MARIA

It's about a man who risks everything to get what he's always wanted and a woman who risks everything for love.

LEÓN (O.S.)

I love it!

MARIA

(relieved / hopeful)

It is a compelling story, León. The woman, you see, she's never really had a family before and she meets this man-

LEÓN (O.S.)

The man who is willing to risk everything for her?

(the water stops running)

MARIA

Yes, exactly! And the man-

LEÓN (O.S.)

Wait! I see where it's going... There's a moment of recognition, where the man promises the woman that despite his humble origins, he will provide for her, take her away from all her problems, and that they will live happily ever after in a land across the sea?

MARIA

Well, yes, but it's more complicated than that.

LEÓN

You are much more complicated than that, Maria.

(León returns wearing a bathrobe. He carries a serving tray with a cocktail shaker, two martini glasses, and a freezer bag on top of it. He sets everything down on an end table, pours two martinis, then hands one to Maria.)

LEÓN

And I am ten times the man that Peludo Rossi could ever dream of being.

MARIA

León, what is that?

LEÓN

To prove to you how serious I am, that I am a man willing to do anything for you, Maria...

(León opens the freezer bag and removes a multi-page document.)

LEÓN

A three novela contract, Maria.

MARIA

In your freezer?

LEÓN

Just like my heart - frozen, surrounded by cold flesh...

(León sits on the couch next to Maria and takes her hand.)

LEÓN

waiting for you to come into my life to... defrost it...

(he attempts to guide Maria's hand inside his robe. She pulls away.)

MARIA

León, don't.

LEÓN

Here, read it. Look at the amount.

MARIA

I don't want to, León.

(She scoots away from him, backing into the corner of León's casting couch.)

LEÓN

I'll do whatever you want. You want me to get down on my knees?

MARIA

I want to go.

LEÓN

See? I'll do it... You like to watch powerful men bend to your will?

(León places a hand on each of Maria's knees and attempts to open her legs.)

MARIA

Stop!

LEÓN

Maria, wait, it's alright...

(They struggle. León is hell-bent on getting Maria's panties off, they finally tear free as Maria kicks León in the chest. León falls over backwards. Maria jumps up and kicks León in the face, splitting his cheek open.)

LEÓN

Whore! I can have you arrested. No one will believe a word you say because you're a foreign whore! Do you have any idea who I am?!

(Leon clutches his face with both hands. Blood oozes between his fingers. Maria snatches her panties back then heads for the door.)

MARIA

Go to hell.

LEÓN

You'll never work in this town again! You hear me!

(Exit Maria)

LEÓN

Over my dead body!

Projection on screen: Balconeando Opening titles roll /  
Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - AFTERNOON

(Pati wears yellow and white Chanel. Lalo wears a turtle  
neck and a blazer.)

PATI

Good afternoon, Ciudad de México!

LALO

This is a balconazo super-estrella special bulletin! Adelante, Bill...

(cut to: a high angle of Maria running out of the TV  
Azteca building carrying her high heels under her arm. She  
flags down a taxi.)

PATI (V.O.)

Qué barbaridad, Niño. Somebody had a long night.

LALO (V.O.)

Maybe it was a long audition.

(The taxi drives away)

PATI (V.O.)

That's not funny, Niño.

(Video continues CUT TO:

INT. TAXI CAB - EVENING

(Maria puts on her sun glasses and lights a cigarette. She  
looks out at the city rolling by, outside. A tear rolls down  
her cheek. The cab driver looks up at his rearview mirror.)

TAXI DRIVER

Aren't you La Encantadora?

(Maria doesn't answer. She continues to smoke and watch the city roll by.)

TAXI DRIVER

You play the enchantress on TV.

MARIA

Not anymore.

(Music fades. Projection stops. The stage is now set as the artist loft. Carlos and Daniel are eating at the table. Lorena clears away dishes. Jairo paces the floor. He looks at his watch.)

JAIRO

Where is she?

LORENA

Señor Rossi, please sit down and eat.

JAIRO

How can I? This is the most important day of my life, Lorena.

(There is a knocking at the door. Jairo rushes over to answer it. Gabi enters the room holding the script to her chest. Lorena can't believe her eyes. She touches her own chest, visibly rocked by the sight of Gabi.)

GABI

I need to talk to you.

JAIRO

Gabi, what is it?

GABI

Alone.

JAIRO

Lorena, take the boys upstairs.

(Lorena escorts the boys offstage. Her eyes burn at Gabi as she walks past.)

JAIRO

Gabi, what's going on?

GABI

I just finished reading it and...

JAIRO

What?

GABI

(wipes eyes)

Oh, Jairo... I never knew how deeply you felt. It was so sad, so beautiful...

JAIRO

You like it?

GABI

I was such an idiot. You were right there in front of me the whole time and I let Beto run me out of Madrid. Maria Ramirez, is Carmen, isn't she?

JAIRO

I'm not sure, Gabi.

GABI

(steps closer)

I always wanted to play Carmen, Jairo. I just never realized it until now. We could really make a great team, you know.

(Lorena peeks her head around the corner. Gabi places the script into Jairo's hands. Their fingers touch.)

GABI

I was born to play this role, Jairo. I want to buy the rights to the script.

JAIRO

Gabi, I don't know what to say... I...

GABI

Say yes.

(Jairo stares off in thought.)

GABI

Think about it. I'll be at Studios Azteca until noon, tomorrow. I hope to see you there.

(Gabi embraces Jairo. She gives him a kiss on the cheek. Jairo smiles. Maria walks through the door. She stops cold in her tracks. Gabi turns around and smiles.)

GABI

Hola, miss Douvier, I just stopped by to drop off... a script. Are you alright?

(Maria and Jairo stare at each other in silence. Maria marches offstage.)

GABI

Con permiso.

(Exit Gabi. Maria returns with a closet pole. Jairo runs.)

JAIRO

What are you doing!

MARIA

What are you doing, Jairo?!

JAIRO

What's the matter with you?!

MARIA

You think I don't know what's happening?!

(Maria swings the closet pole and misses Jairo.)

LORENA

Señorita wait!

(Jairo catches the end of the closet pole. Carlos and Daniel enter running.)

CARLOS

Leave her alone!

DANIEL

What are you doing to my mamá?!

JAIRO

(drops pole)

She's doing it to me, damnit!

LORENA

That Gabi woman is evil and she has bad intentions towards you, señor Rossi! What decent woman comes into a home with children in it and acts the way she did with you?

MARIA

You see, Jairo? Even Lorena can see it. Come here, Dani. I'm sorry. Don't cry.

JAIRO

Nothing is going on! She came over because she liked the script.

MARIA

The script I wrote!

JAIRO

It doesn't matter who wrote it! She wants to buy it. I mean, didn't you and Reyes talk about it?

MARIA

Give it to me.

(Jairo hands Maria the script. She opens it to the title page. Her face goes pale. She looks back at Jairo.)

MARIA

Gabriela - a telenovela for the stage?

JAIRO

What?

MARIA

It says, "Gabriela - a telenovela for the stage!"

(Maria beats Jairo with the script. She throws it at him as he ducks behind the couch. Daniel is crying. Lorena holds Carlos back from getting between Jairo and Maria.)

JAIRO

Listen to me!

MARIA

I trusted you!

JAIRO

Maria, we are running out of money!

MARIA

I don't care!

JAIRO

Well you better start caring because we're almost broke.

MARIA

I'm not going to just give the script to that little trollop so she can run off and have the role of her career!

JAIRO

What are we supposed to do, Maria?! We are in Mexico! We have to survive!

MARIA

Haven't I sacrificed enough, Jairo? Now you want my pride too?

JAIRO

Pride aside, at the end of the day it's only about you, me, the boys, Lorena here, and our survival. That's all that matters to me. I love you, Maria, and I will do whatever it takes to keep this family from going under.

LORENA

Oh, Señor Rossi...

(Maria holds Daniel close. She carries him to the bed and lies him down.)

JAIRO

We've come too far to turn back now.

(Maria smooths out Daniel's hair. She kisses him on the forehead. Jairo turns on the stereo. Billy Holiday sings.)

JAIRO

Care to dance?

MARIA

Not now, Jairo.

JAIRO

(offers hand)

Come on, mi amor.

(Jairo and Maria slow dance. Lorena smiles and dries her eyes. She takes Carlos by the hand and leads him off to bed.)

LORENA

(to herself)

That woman will pay for her intentions against our home.

CARLOS

What?

LORENA

Nothing, mi amor.

(She carries Carlos the rest of the way, offstage. Maria rests her head on Jairo's chest. They continue to dance.)

MARIA

Do you love me?

JAIRO

With all my heart.

MARIA

Do you think we're cursed?

JAIRO

I think we just need to sell this thing and get the hell out of here.

MARIA

Promise?

JAIRO

I promise. We're not cursed, trust me.

(The song ends. A new song begins. Maria looks into Jairo's eyes, searching. Jairo leans forward to kiss her... Nat King Cole sings Stardust.)

NAT KING COLE (V.O.)

Sometimes I wonder, how I spend, the lonely nights...

(Maria freezes. A look of recognition passes between them. Maria steps away from Jairo.)

MARIA

Please turn that off. I'm going to bed.

(Maria lifts Daniel's sleeping body from the bed and carries him offstage. Jairo stands in the middle of the room, alone. He runs a hand through his hair.)

NAT KING COLE (V.O.)

My stardust melody, the memory of love's refrain....

(Jairo walks to the bar and turns out the lights. His shadowed figure exits stage left.

(end scene)

Projection on screen: Balconeando Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - NIGHT

(Pati wears black Halston. Lalo wears dark Italian wool.)

PATI

Good evening, Ciudad de México.

LALO

Our top story is just a rumor but...

PATI

Gabi Reys may have broken the curse effecting every member of the cast and crew of Vestido de Veneno who's careers have literally gone up in flames since its gran final, just over two years ago.

LALO

Except for Rafa Sanchez. She works at Televisa now.

PATI

Si, Niño, but she was kidnapped last year.

LALO

That's true.

PATI

An anonymous source has confirmed that team Gabi has been working around the clock since the premios to revive the Vestido de Veneno actress' fading career.

LALO

You notice how Gabi's starting to get those, como se llama, right by the corners of the eyes?

PATI

Patas de gallo, Niño, yes, I noticed that too. And she's so young!

LALO

Team Gabi may possibly include Jairo "El Cerebro" Rossi, ex futbolista and breakout guionista. Apparently Jairo studied under the late great Venezuelan television writer Raul Goldstein de la Garza and some are even claiming he may be the new inheritor of Goldstein's signature style.

PATI

Qué barbaridad, Niño.

(Music fades. Projection stops. The stage is now set as León's Office. Jairo and Gabi are watching Balconeando play on a television screen on the wall of her father's office.)

JAIRO

Oh no!

GABI

What do you think?

JAIRO

Gabi that's too much. I thought we were just going to talk about selling the script.

GABI

I'm not that kind of girl, Jairo. I require commitment.

JAIRO

What are you talking about?

GABI

I don't know how you guys do things in Venezuela, but in México, the script changes daily. I'll need you on set with me at all times, ready to go with a revisions at a moments notice.

(Enter León. A large white bandage covers his cheek.  
Other than the bandage, León is dressed impeccably.)

LEÓN

(extends hand)

Welcome to team Gabi, Señor Rossi.

JAIRO

Señor, Reyes, what happen-

LEÓN

I was robbed last night. It's nothing. The show must go on. Which leads me to the purpose of our meeting today. Please, have a seat.

(Jairo sits. León takes his seat in the leather-backed chair,  
behind his desk . He pulls a folder and paperwork from a  
drawer. Gabi sits on the corner of her father's desk.)

LEÓN

Mr. Rossi, I am prepared to offer you 900,000 pesos as the author of-

GABI

Gabriela - a Telenovela for the stage!

LEÓN

Gabriela - La Telenovela.

GABI

I tried, Jairo.

LEÓN

Listen to me, Señor Rossi. Writing a great script does not make you a great writer. I'm not interested in cinema obscura. I produce novelas. Who in their right mind would pay money to see a telenovela on the stage? Piénsalo, cabrón.

GABI

Daddy!

LEÓN

I'm sorry, Gabi, but me desespera este peludo.

JAIRO

Hey, wait a minute. I just-

LEÓN

I've had enough of you, mister Rossi. I try to be polite for Gabi's sake because she thinks highly of you. But I know who you really are.

JAIRO

(stands)

Who am I really, then, Señor Reyes?!

GABI

Papá!

LEÓN

You are a foreigner, without money or even visas for your two bastard sons, who is currently on bail for assaulting a priest in Caracas. And now you are causing trouble in my city.

JAIRO

What trouble have I caused? I haven't done anything.

LEÓN

You've involved me in that pagan orgy of a script of yours.

JAIRO

Orgy?

LEÓN

It's a collaboration.

GABI

Papá hates collaborations.

LEÓN

Collaborate sounds too much like "conspire" to me. And if there is anything I despise in this world, it is someone who conspires against his fellow man. It's deplorable.

JAIRO

I agree.

LEÓN

That is precisely why Maria must leave México.

GABI

It's for the best, Jairo.

LEÓN

I cannot afford to have someone out there harbouring bad intentions for Gabi with a claim to our story. I will not risk un escándalo that may jeopardize Gabi's chance at next year's premios.

JAIRO

(to Gabi)

So, what are you saying?

GABI

We pay you 900,000 pesos, get visas for you and your sons. Maria gets deported to Venezuela, we put you on staff Monday, then Wednesday we announce our engagement on Balconeando.

JAIRO

Engagement?

LEÓN

Just for the publicity.

(Gabi winks at Jairo.)

GABI

(mouths)

I love you.

JAIRO

What if for some reason I can't do this?

(Gabi and León laugh for an uncomfortably long time.)

LEÓN

There are worse things than getting deported, Señor Rossi, me explico?

JAIRO

Yes.

(Gabi claps her hands with excitement then embraces Jairo. Jairo stares over Gabi's shoulder with a blank expression.

León arranges paperwork on the desk in front of Jairo. He sends a producer for champagne. León uncaps a gold Mont Blanc and hands the pen to Jairo. Junior producers and secretaries stand by, watching. A champagne cork POPS. Everyone claps. Jairo sits there, holding the pen in his hand. He looks at León. León nods. Jairo looks up at Gabi. She nods. Jairo looks out at the audience. His eyes implore them. He looks back down at the paperwork on the desk.... Lights fade.)

(end scene)

Projection on screen: Balconeando Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - NIGHT

(Pati and Lalo wear venetian carnival masks.)

PATI

Good evening, Ciudad de México!

LALO

Happy Mardi Gras! Several places celebrating in the city tonight. Pati and I will be at "Medusas," in Polanco, for the TV Azteca party.

PATI

And, even though we may be...

LALO

(smiles)

Antreando.

PATI

We are always Balconeando, que no, Niño?

LALO

Como no, Pati. Tonight we have confirmation that That TV Azteca will be producing Gabi Reyes' next project: Gabriela. This comes as no surprise after the many rumors surrounding the script rumored to be one of the greatest tragedies of our time. The project is already attracting star power from all over el mundo latino.

PATI

Superestrella Shakira and husband Gerard Pique were seen leaving Studios Azteca today, apparently auditioning for the roles of the tragic futbolista and the actress who loves him and then loses it all.

LALO

(looks off screen)

That's our ride, Pati. It's time to go. Be safe tonight, Ciudad de México!

PATI

Be safe! It's a little crazy out there pero estamos!

EVERYONE

Balconeando!

(Confetti flies. Pati and Lalo exit, waving. Music fades. Projection stops. The stage is now set as the artist loft. Lorena and Maria stare blankly at the TV screen as the credits roll.)

LORENA

Señor Rossi would never betray us. It must be... He just-

(Maria screams, the scream becomes a wail and then the wail becomes a sorrowful moan.)

LORENA

Señorita! Señorita are you alright?

MARIA

No, Lorena. I'm not.

LORENA

But what about the boys? What will happen to you? What's going to become of our family, Señorita?!

MARIA

I don't know, Lorena.

LORENA

Maldita, desgraciada! She did this. What are you going to do about it, Señorita?

MARIA

I don't know.

(Enter Jairo.)

JAIRO

Hello, Maria.

MARIA

Hello, Jairo.

(They stare at each other in silence. Neither can find the

words to say.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

Que honda, mi, Güero?!

(Cauhtémoc and Hugo enter through the open front door. Lorena beats them into silence then pulls them aside. She whispers to them. Cauhtémoc and Hugo nod their heads. They seem happy to hear what Lorena tells them.)

MARIA

Is there something you want to tell me?

(Lorena takes all of the money from her purse and gives it to Hugo. She rushes them both out the Loft.)

JAIRO

I love you Maria.

MARIA

Then show me! Say to hell with that pig, Reyes, take me and the boys and let's just run as far as we can, away from this place, away from "the Fleece."

JAIRO

It's not the fleece!

MARIA

The pages are covered in blood, Jairo. No good can ever come of it. We should just walk away and be grateful we've at least found love. Do you know how lucky we are? Don't you see how happy our sons have been ever since-

JAIRO

I have to do what's right for them. I have to do what's right for everyone.

MARIA

How do you expect to pull it off?! These people are not idiots, Jairo. You will be found out and the whole thing will come crashing down around you. Think of Carlos and Daniel! (beat) But you won't, will you?

JAIRO

I have to do what's right.

MARIA

Stop saying that! What's wrong with you?

JAIRO

I have to, goddamnit!

(Maria looks at Jairo. She shakes her head then runs out the door. Jairo walks to the stereo and cranks up the volume. Nessun Dorma plays. He runs to the cupboard and removes the typewriter from its hiding place. He sets it up on the table. Jairo looks frantically for a sheet of paper. He cranks a sheet into the carriage then begins to type, slowly, clumsily, hitting the keys one at a time, sounding out words. He grows more and more flustered. Grunting and pecking, Jairo bangs away at the keys. The music approaches its climax. Jairo stands. He lifts the typewriter overhead.)

OPERA TENOR (V.O.)

All'alba vincerò!

JAIRO

I can't even fucking type!!!!

OPERA TENOR (V.O.)

Vincerò, vincerò!

(Jairo smashes the typewriter to bits, beating it like an enraged chimpanzee.)

(end scene)

(Moody guitar plays. Projection on screen:

A SEQUENCE OF SHOTS:

1. Maria walks down a busy city street at night, alone in

the crowd, lost in thought.

2. Gabi takes out her keys to open the front door of her apartment building. Cuauhtémoc and Hugo watch her from across the street.

3. León watches recordings of Maria as La Encantadora on his flat screen TV. He touches the bandage on his cheek.

4. Jairo, Carlos, and Daniel sit at the table in the artist loft in silence. Jairo's hand is bandaged. Lorena watches them, heartbroken.

Projection stops. The stage is now set as a cafe in the Zona Rosa. Maria enters and orders a coffee. She sits at a table and lifts the cup to her lips when a very dashing and distinguished gentleman approaches her table.)

MARTÍN

Maria Douvier? Is that you?

MARIA

Martín? Oh, my god, you look so...

MARTÍN

Distinguished?

MARIA

Well, that too. What are you doing in Mexico?

MARTÍN

Univision owns an affiliate here, so I fly in from Miami once and a while to handle some business.

MARIA

And how is fair Athens?

MARTÍN

Humid, great food, same old Miami. Mind if I sit down? Fair Athens. You're such an actress, Maria. In another life we could have made great "soap operas" together.

MARIA

What's a soap opera?

MARTÍN

Novelas.

MARIA

Maybe we still can.

MARTÍN

Stop teasing me, Maria, what's... what's going on? Is everything okay?

MARIA

No, it's not.

MARTÍN

Do you want to talk about it?

MARIA

No. Not really. It's too embarrassing... too...

(Maria dries the corners of her eyes with a napkin.)

MARTÍN

Well, if it makes you feel any better, I'm not really here on business either. I'm in a pretty embarrassing situation myself.

MARIA

You're just trying to make me feel better.

MARTÍN

No, it's true. I'm only here because a friend told me they have a very good botanical healer in Mexico City that might be able to help me with my problem.

MARIA

What problem?

MARTÍN

(smiles)

That's the embarrassing part.

MARIA

Now you've made me curious. I see why they made you President of Networks, Martín, you really know how to get people's attention, don't you?

MARTÍN

(laughs)

That's what makes it even more embarrassing!

MARIA

What is it?

MARTÍN

I can't believe I'm almost about to say this to you.

MARIA

Tell me and get it over with!

MARTÍN

Did you ever meet my ex wife Juno?

MARIA

No.

MARTÍN

She talked me into getting a vasectomy last year.

MARIA

That's nothing to be embarrassed about.

MARTÍN

She took me to my appointment, made sure I was nice and comfortable in the waiting room, then told me she was going to go buy me some hot soup, to make me feel better for afterwards. They say 98% of this stuff is mental. You know what I mean?

MARIA

No.

MARTÍN

Well, she leaves to "go get my soup" then has two sheriffs wait for me in the lobby of the clinic to serve me divorce papers, the minute I came out of the procedure. The whole thing turned out to be some sort of a parting shot.

MARIA

Oh, my god.

MARTÍN

I didn't see it coming. Juno knew she was going to divorce me, obviously, She just wanted to be sure that I wouldn't have any other children, other than our own, even though she was divorcing me.

MARIA

That's terrible.

MARTÍN

That's how people are, Maria.

MARIA

Well, it's reversible, you know.

MARTÍN

I had the procedure reversed. That's the problem...

(He leans in and lowers his voice.)

MARTÍN

Once you clip a man, he is never the same again, because he knows it.

MARIA

That is pretty bad.

MARTÍN

Isn't it? So I've come here looking for a natural remedy to what should only be a psychological problem now. But I'm still... I don't know.

MARIA

Take some Muira Puama.

MARTÍN

Muira Puama?

MARIA

It's from Brazil.

MARTÍN

What's it for?

MARIA

For what you're talking about.

MARTÍN

And it works?

MARIA

That's what they say in Brazil.

MARTÍN

(laughing)

I believe it then! So now that you've had a good laugh, would you like to confide in an old friend and tell me what's going on?

(Maria nods her head. Martín listens intently. Maria talks, gesturing with her hands. Servers come and go. Music plays. The cafe is now empty except for Maria, Martín, and the last of the meseros.)

MARTÍN

Why don't you just come to Miami, then? They love you in the United States, Maria. You're casting pearls before swine here. I could even get you on at ABC. Look how things turned out for Sofia Vergara, y es una corriente. You come from a great family, Maria. You have talent, you're still young... You need to ask yourself what are you really doing here? Are you being made to suffer or are you just choosing to?

(Maria stares off in thought.)

MARIA

Do you have a cell phone I can use?

MARTÍN

Claro.

(Maria excuses herself. She steps aside and dials a phone number. Martín pays the bill and waits for her. Hear the sound of a phone ringing. Lights fade.)

(Projection on screen: CLOSE ON a cell phone, vibrating on a table. The phone number (305) 777-9311 flashes on its display. The camera slowly pulls back to reveal Jairo and Lorena packing a couple of overnight bags for Carlos and Daniel in the artist loft. Daniel is crying. Jairo and Lorena seem to argue for a moment then Jairo takes the boys and walks out the door. Lorena notices the phone and rushes over to answer it.)

LORENA

Bueno?! Bueno?...

(Lorena looks at the missed call and sighs. She places the phone back on the table. Projection stops. The stage is now set as a city park: a park bench, lovers strolling by, pedestrian traffic crosses back and forth across the stage. An ice cream vendor sells paletas off to one corner. Jairo and the boys enter and sit on the bench, waiting.)

DANIEL

What have you done to my mamá?!

JAIRO

Dani, please!

CARLOS

It's not fair!

(Enter Gabi. She sees Jairo and the boys and waves.)

JAIRO

Here comes Gabi. I need you both to behave, me entiendes?!

GABI

Buenas tardes, mi amor. You have to hurry. Papá gets very impatient. He hates when people are late. Hola muchachitos!

(The boys glare at Gabi.)

JAIRO

This is a very bad time, Gabi. Are you sure we have to do the interview today?

GABI

You need to be at the studio in forty-five minutes, Jairo! Just go. I can handle the boys.

DANIEL

No! Papá don't go! Don't leave me with her!

JAIRO

Dani, please!

DANIEL

Take me with you, Papá...

(Daniel begins to cry again.)

CARLOS

Can't we have a paleta Pa?

JAIRO

Christ! Alright, alright, wait here.

(Jairo runs over to the paleta vendor on the corner and orders two popsicles. Jairo digs through his pockets for change. Across the stage, two men in ski masks grab Gabi and the boys and rush them offstage.

A couple people in the crowd point for a moment then life returns to normal, the stream of pedestrians continues to flow back and forth across the stage. Jairo returns to the empty park bench carrying the popsicles. He looks around in a panic, screaming at the top of his lungs for Gabi and his sons. Jairo drops the popsicles and runs offstage.

Projection on screen: Balconeando Opening titles roll / Graphics / Theme MUSIC plays. Pictures of Gabi, Carlos, and Daniel appear on the screen. A red banner with the word "Secuestrado" is stamped across each photo with a sound effect.)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - NIGHT

LALO

Buenas noches, Ciudad de México. This is a Duro y Directo edition of Balconeando.

PATI

Tragedy struck the first family of Mexican telenovelas today, when former Vestido de Veneno superstar Gabi Reyes was abducted in el Bosque de Chapultepec. The news has devastated TV Azteca president León Reyes Mendiola who has still refused to comment on the situation.

LALO

Among the secuestrados are Carlos y Daniel Rossi Martinez, sons of futbolista / guionista Jairo Rossi and Carmen Martinez de Berlusconi (third wife of TeleMilano founder don Pier Silvio Berlusconi).

PATI

It is still unclear what or if any demands have been made to negotiate the trio's safe return.

LALO

Carmen Martinez de Berlusconi appeared on Italian television, at a press conference scheduled for Fashion Week Milan, to comment on the situation, Adelante Bill...

(Video clip of a very well dressed and groomed young woman wearing dark sunglasses and pearls. She approaches the microphones and reads from a piece of paper in careful, stilted English.)

CARMEN

I could feel it in my stomach. A mother knows when something is wrong with her children and I could just feel that something had happened to my boys. It was so strong, I had to leave the Balenciaga show to be treated for dizziness. That's when I heard the news... Ay, mis hijos! My poor sons!

(Carmen turns away from the microphones and answers a phone call. Bodyguards step forward and cover the microphones with large hands.)

PATI

A mother knows, Niño.

LALO

A mother always knows, Pati. Ciudad de México, we will keep you posted on the situation as it develops, with up to the minute balconazos until this tragedy has been resolved. And now we return you to our regularly scheduled programming.

(Projection stops. The stage is now set as the artist loft. Lorena stands in front of the TV, wringing her hands.)

LORENA

Oh, god. Oh, my god... Oh, god...

(Jairo burst into the room, out of breath, his hair is wild and his clothes are soaked with sweat. He leaves the door open.)

JAIRO

Lorena!!! Lorena, please, you have to help me!

LORENA

Oh, Señor Rossi!

JAIRO

Has anyone called?! Where the hell is Maria?! No one will help me or tell me anything!!!

LORENA

Señor Rossi, Please! We have to calm down. Think of the boys. If we stay calm, I'm sure they won't harm them.

JAIRO

(crying)

No! Who would do such a thing? They're just...

MARIA

Jairo?

JAIRO

You!

(Jairo rushes at Maria. Lorena steps between them and gets head-butted in the face. They all fall to the floor.)

LORENA

Señor Rossi, wait!

MARIA

Jairo! Listen to me. I can get help!

LEÓN

Nobody move! Arrest them both!

(Enter León and a group of policia Judicial. Lorena backs away from Jairo and Maria. The officers tackle Jairo to the ground. Jairo kicks and fights against them.)

JAIRO

What are you doing?! You should be out there looking for my sons! Arrrgh!  
PUTA MADRE que te apareció!!!

MARIA

Let go of him!

(León's cell phone rings.)

LEÓN

Wait! It's them again! Everyone silent! It's them!

(People crowd around León in a semi-circle. Two officers hold Jairo between them. Maria and Lorena look at each other.)

LEÓN

León Reyes speaking.

(He puts the phone on speaker.)

CUAUHTÉMOC (V.O.)

Escuchame bien, mi Sansón.

LEÓN

León.

CUAUHTÉMOC (V.O.)

Cabrón! No mames. Your daughter's life is on the line and you want to argue with me?

LEÓN

What do you want?

(Lorena begins to inch her way towards the door. Maria notices.)

CUAUHTÉMOC (V.O.)

Did you do what I told you?

LEÓN

Yes. We are here at Jairo and Maria Douvier's loft.

CUAUHTÉMOC (V.O.)

Órale, güey. Good job. Now give the money to Maria. If I see anyone else waiting at the drop, I'll kill your little güerita.

(Eyes look to Maria with suspicion, scorn, and downright murderous intent. Lorena exits unnoticed by all except Maria. Maria realizes what is going on. She recognizes Cuauhtémoc's voice.)

MARIA

Oh God...

(Maria runs for the door.)

JAIRO

She's getting away!

LEÓN

(covering mouthpiece)

After her! Go!

(Officers run out the door in pursuit.)

LEÓN

Look, I am doing everything I possibly can! Please. I'm begging you.

CUAUHTÉMOC (V.O.)

You better find Maria, cabrón. I don't trust any of you. Noveleros are worse than narcos when it comes to la lana, güey. You've got thirty minutes.

(The call ends.)

JAIRO

I know that voice! Let go of me. I think I know where they're at.

LEÓN

Vámonos! Let him go!

(Jairo and Leon run out offstage followed by the Judiciales.)

(Projection on screen: Opening titles roll / Graphics flashing "Balconeando Alert")

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - NIGHT

LALO

Good evening, Ciudad de México, we're going live to the drama unfolding in the Reyes / Rossi kidnappings. Adelante Bill...

(A video clip plays: aerial camera shot of Maria running down a residential street, pursued by a group of police officers on foot.)

PATI

Qué barbaridad, You know what they say, Niño...

LALO

Only the guilty run.

PATI

Ay, mira!

(A black Lincoln Town Car speeds past the officers and drives alongside Maria. The backseat door opens. A male hand extends a long scarf, like a rope towards Maria. It flaps in the wind, just beyond Maria's grasp. Maria reaches out. She grabs hold of the scarf and dives into the backseat!)

PATI & LALO

Qué barbaridad!

(The Town Car pulls away from Maria's pursuers and speeds down the road. Officers stop running. They walk it

off, trying to regain their breath.)

LALO

Once again, Maria Douvier pulls off the impossible, Pati!

PATI

She was rescued by Hermès, Niño! Who else could make such an exit?!

LALO

I saw everything, Pati, and even if Maria turns out to be guilty-

PATI

She has impeccable taste.

LALO

Impeccable.

PATI

Now we can only pray, for the safety of Gabi Reyes y los niños Rossi.

LALO

Si, Pati.

(They bow their heads. Projection stops. Dim lights come on. The stage is now set as Lorena's apartment: a couch, TV, chairs... a pair of woman's legs are protruding from behind the couch. A little boy's legs are just visible from beyond the other side of the couch. Gabi and Carlos are blindfolded and tied back to back on a pair of chairs. Cuauhtémoc sits on the couch. He lights up a crack pipe. A bloodied baseball bat sits on the floor at his feet. Hugo watches Balconeando on a television set in the corner. He adjusts the rabbit ears trying to get better reception.)

LALO (V.O.)

(static)

Maria Douvier has escaped!.... all over, Pati... Only...

(Hugo notices Cuauhtémoc smoking and flips out.)

HUGO

You've killed us, Cuauhtémoc! They're coming! Look what you did!! Oh, my god!

CUAUHTÉMOC

Me vale verga, hijo de tu puta madre! You want some of this!!!

(Cuauhtémoc jumps to his feet and grabs the baseball bat. Gabi and Carlos are screaming. Hugo runs for the door but Cuauhtémoc gets there first.)

HUGO

Stay away from me!

CUAUHTÉMOC

A poco si, puto? Come here, Hugo... You want to talk to me like mamá?

HUGO

You killed Lorena, Cuauhtémoc!

(Cuauhtémoc rushes at Hugo. Hugo runs. He trips over Lorena and falls behind the couch. Cuauhtémoc leaps behind the couch after him. He swings the bat again and again (Sickening SoundFX). Hugo's legs twitch then fall still. Cuauhtémoc is winded from his labor and covered in blood. He looks over at Gabi and Carlos. Cuauhtémoc walks over and lifts Gabi out of her chair by her arms. He leads her screaming offstage to the bedroom. Carlos remains alone, blindfolded and hyperventilating in his chair. Hear a loud THUD from the bedroom. Carlos breaths even harder.)

CARLOS

(whimpering)

Mamá.... mamá....

(After what seems like an eternity, Cuauhtémoc returns. He watches Carlos for a moment then walks over and

leads him away, offstage. After a minute...

The front door opens slowly. Enter Maria. She creeps into the room, notices Lorena's legs and claps a hand over her own mouth to keep herself from screaming. Cuauhtémoc returns. Maria's Chest heaves with her breathing.)

CUAUHTÉMOC

Hola, señorita.

MARIA

Cuauhtémoc...?

CUAUHTÉMOC

(breaking a bit)

Lo que pasa es que...

(Martín and his bodyguards enter the room. The bodyguards are big and armed. They all react to the carnage, cursing. They all look at Cuauhtémoc. He runs back offstage into the bedroom. The bodyguards follow him. Hear struggling and shouting then a GUNSHOT. All the while Maria walks slowly to the couch and looks behind it. She falls to her knees beside the little legs of Daniel, weeping and wailing.)

MARIA

Tata filili!... Oh, my boy... my boy...

(Hear sirens in the background. Martín touches Maria's shoulder. She stands, clutching a little bloodstained long sleeved shirt to her chest. Martín leads her away. Maria stops. She folds the shirt then places it on the couch. The sirens grow louder.)

MARTÍN

Maria, we have to go. Take my hand.

(Maria leaves with Martín and his bodyguards. MUSIC

plays. Jairo, León, and the police arrive. León and Jairo scream with grief and shock. HEAR helicopter rotors outside.

Projection on screen: video clip of a helicopter lifting off into the night sky.)

JAIRO

(shakes fists at sky)

Maria!!!!!!

(Lights fade. Projection of video continues. A map. A red arrow leaves Mexico City moving north then east. It touches down on Miami then continues on to Key West. Piano MUSIC continues, leaving the strings behind. Waves break gently in front of a luxury beach home.

Projection stops. The stage is now set as a balcony with open french doors. White gauze curtains blow gently in the breeze. The sound of the piano is now mixed with the sounds of cocktails and socializing going on inside. The song being played on the piano is Stardust. Maria walks slowly onto the balcony in a white dress. She carries a tattered document in her hand.)

MARIA

The pine and cedar; graves at my command  
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth  
By my so potent art.

(Maria crouches down by the fire pit beside the lounge chairs. She turns up the flame, stands, and sighs.)

MARIA

But this rough magic  
I here abjure, and when I have required  
Some heavenly music, which even now I do,  
To work mine end upon their senses that  
This airy charm is for...

(Maria opens the tattered script and looks through the pages. Memories flood her senses, causing her to close it.)

MARIA

I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,

(Maria tosses the script into the fire pit.)

MARIA

And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.

(The fire glows brighter then begins to fade. Enter Martín in rolled up pants and a linen shirt. He walks up behind Maria with a blanket and wraps it around her shoulders, embracing her.)

MARTÍN

Prosperá.

MARIA

I hope so.

MARTÍN

Come on. Your guests are waiting. Let's go back inside.

(Exit Maria and Martín. Lights fade. Projection on screen: A Television set, playing Balconeando, slowly recedes into the background, shrinking as it plays...)

INT. SET OF BALCONEANDO - NIGHT

LALO

(somber)

Infanticidio, nothing is more tragic than the death of an innocent child.

PATI

Was Maria responsible for the death of the two children?

LALO

Or does the responsibility fall on the fathers who placed their children in harm's way?

PATI

Who is the real author of this tragedy? Only time will tell and time often lies. Until then...

LALO

Estamos...

PATTI & LALO

Balconeando.

(The TV shrinks to the vanishing point then disappears.)

(Fin.)