

Migdalia Cruz
from *El Grito del Bronx*

ACT ONE/SCENE 2

In the Colón apartment in the Bronx, 1977. A dog is in the alley singing a la mexicana, which is a high-pitched howling.

MARIA is decorating all the bathroom fixtures with adhesive paper dots—orange and black for Halloween.

JOSÉ is playing the harmonica so the dog has musical accompaniment. HE raises his hand and the dog howls at a higher pitch.

JOSÉ

Canta, perra. Canta, Papito. Canta para los ángeles.

MARIA

I love when Halloween comes, because then they all come—Thanksgiving, Christmas, Trés Reyes—one after another—like pum-pum-pum.

JOSÉ

What about Labor Day? Why can't it start there? The pum-pum-pum? September gives you even more time to celebrate.

MARIA

Don't make fun of me, José.

(Making a pattern on the wall with the colored dots)

Where's Jesús? I need him to bring me the ladder.

JOSÉ

He's acting out the war for independence with his sister.

MARIA

The what??

JOSÉ

El Grito De Lares. They've been talking about this being like that all over again. On the news. Because of those kids who took over the statue. Even the English stations.

MARIA

I haven't put the tv on yet. Doña Clara said I should try to watch only at night because it's better for my nerves. Things that aren't true make you calmer. You always gotta go to sleep with some lies you know are lies so you don't get nightmares.

JOSÉ

Have you seen my hammer?

MARIA

I threw it out.

JOSÉ

Again?! You know I'll just go buy a new one.

(JOSÉ walks out slamming the door, but then opens the door and throws a shoe at MARIA, exiting again.)

MARIA

NIÑOS!!

(No response)

Coño! I'm always alone.

(In JESÚS's bedroom. JESÚS plays "Don Cheo" and MAGDALENA plays "Don Aurelio" in the play *El Grito De Lares* by Luis Lloréns Torres. THEY both wear their father's clothes as costumes. MAGDALENA hobbles around on her cast. JESÚS pulls her up onto the bed as they continue reading their play out loud from the same tattered book. JESÚS holds the book and shows a page to MAGDALENA when it's her turn to speak.)

JESÚS as DON CHEO

So, once more.

MAGDALENA as DON AURELIO

Again. And what's new? How are things?

JESÚS as DON CHEO

Vegetating. We only vegetate. Before, at least, one conspired—today one emotion, tomorrow another. But now, the most unbearable monotony.

MAGDALENA as DON AURELIO

Are there no longer secret societies? Nothing is plotted?

JESÚS as DON CHEO

If there are, I'm not aware. I already know you never had full confidence in me. Who doesn't see that! Because of my relationship with Frasquito...

MAGDALENA

Who's Frasquito? I never heard that name before.

JESÚS

Just keep reading.

MAGDALENA

If I don't understand what I'm talking about how can I be a good actor?

JESÚS

You'll be a good actor because I'm a good actor. I raise you up. Stop worrying.

MAGDALENA

You're not so good neither. I'm tired of this game. My leg hurts.

(MAGDALENA goes to the TV and turns it on, sitting herself right in front of it)

JESÚS

Come on, Maggie. It's like dreaming awake.

MAGDALENA

I don't like to dream.

JESÚS

Why'd you jump out that window anyway?

MAGDALENA

I'm gonna get outta here. As soon as I can.

JESÚS

What d'you mean?

MAGDALENA

I mean I got to get outta this house.

JESÚS

Papi better—

MAGDALENA

You know what I dream about? That I wake up and he ain't here no more.

(Turning up the volume)

Listen.

VOICE of female TV NEWSCASTER

We are now on hour four of the occupation by Puerto Rican Nationalists of the Statue of Liberty. They demand that the United States end Puerto Rico's commonwealth status and allow it to become independent. Bill Stover is live from Battery Park. Bill?

VOICE of male TV NEWSCASTER

Thank you, Jenny. I'm here across the river from one of the most controversial takeovers in the history of Lady Liberty. The Puerto Ricans are not the first to take over her copper crown but they are the most vocal. In fact, you can hear the shouting from here. Let's see how some Puerto Rican New Yorkers are reacting to this takeover:
Sir? Sir, how does this political action make you feel?

VOICE of PUERTO RICAN MAN on TV

Beautiful. I never seen the bandera like that—so high. With Miss Liberty and everything. I think it should stay like that. Beautiful. Then I'd have something to look at.

MAGDALENA

You see? You see how important it is to be free?

JESÚS

Yeah. Now I see.

(MAGDALENA & JESÚS look at each other. JESÚS reaches out to touch her wounded leg as the lights cross to PAPO's prison cell.)